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Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam

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**Of His Holiness
Pope John Paul II
To The Bishops
Priests And Deacons
Men And Women
In The Consecrated Life
And All The Lay Faithful
On The Eucharist
In Its Relationship To The Church**

INTRODUCTION

1. The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the Church. In a variety of ways she joyfully experiences the constant fulfilment of the promise: “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20), but in the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord, she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope.

The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is “the source and summit of the Christian life”.¹ “For the most holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our passover and living bread. Through his own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he offers life to men”.² Consequently the gaze of the Church is constantly turned to her Lord, present in the Sacrament of the Altar, in which she discovers the full manifestation of his boundless love.

2. During the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 I had an opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist in the Cenacle of Jerusalem where, according to tradition, it was first celebrated by Jesus himself. The Upper Room was where this most holy Sacrament was instituted. It is there that Christ took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: “Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you” (cf. Mk 26:26; Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). Then he took the cup of wine and said to them: “Take this, all of you and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all, so that sins may be forgiven” (cf. Mt 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). I am grateful to the Lord Jesus for allowing me to repeat in that same place, in obedience to his command: “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19), the words which he spoke two thousand years ago.

Did the Apostles who took part in the Last Supper understand the meaning of the words spoken by Christ? Perhaps not. Those words would only be fully clear at the end of the Triduum sacrum, the time from Thursday evening to Sunday morning. Those days embrace the mysterium paschale; they also embrace the mysterium eucharisticum.

3. The Church was born of the paschal mystery. For this very reason the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding way the sacrament of the paschal mystery, stands at the centre of the Church’s life. This is already clear from the earliest images of the Church found in the Acts of the Apostles: “They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42). The “breaking of the bread” refers to the Eucharist. Two thousand years later, we continue to relive that primordial image of the Church. At every celebration of the Eucharist, we are spiritually brought back to the paschal Triduum: to the events of the evening of Holy Thursday, to the Last Supper and to what followed it. The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the events which were about to take place, beginning with the agony in Gethsemane. Once again we see Jesus as he leaves the Upper Room, descends with his disciples to the Kidron valley and goes to the Garden of Olives. Even today that Garden shelters some very ancient olive trees. Perhaps they witnessed what happened beneath their shade that evening, when Christ in prayer was filled with anguish “and his sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground” (cf. Lk 22:44). The blood which shortly before he had given to the Church as the drink of salvation in the sacrament of the Eucharist, began to be shed; its outpouring would then be completed on Golgotha to become the means of our redemption: “Christ... as high priest of the good things to come..., entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb 9:11- 12).

4. The hour of our redemption. Although deeply troubled, Jesus does not flee before his "hour". "And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, for this purpose I have come to this hour" (Jn 12:27). He wanted his disciples to keep him company, yet he had to experience loneliness and abandonment: "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Mt 26:40-41). Only John would remain at the foot of the Cross, at the side of Mary and the faithful women. The agony in Gethsemane was the introduction to the agony of the Cross on Good Friday. The holy hour, the hour of the redemption of the world. Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated at the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem, there is an almost tangible return to his "hour", the hour of his Cross and glorification. Every priest who celebrates Holy Mass, together with the Christian community which takes part in it, is led back in spirit to that place and that hour.

"He was crucified, he suffered death and was buried; he descended to the dead; on the third day he rose again". The words of the profession of faith are echoed by the words of contemplation and proclamation: "This is the wood of the Cross, on which hung the Saviour of the world. Come, let us worship". This is the invitation which the Church extends to all in the afternoon hours of Good Friday. She then takes up her song during the Easter season in order to proclaim: "The Lord is risen from the tomb; for our sake he hung on the Cross, Alleluia".

5. "Mysterium fidei! - The Mystery of Faith!". When the priest recites or chants these words, all present acclaim: "We announce your death, O Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection, until you come in glory".

In these or similar words the Church, while pointing to Christ in the mystery of his passion, also reveals her own mystery: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. By the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Church was born and set out upon the pathways of the world, yet a decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. Her foundation and wellspring is the whole Triduum paschale, but this is as it were gathered up, foreshadowed and "concentrated" for ever in the gift of the Eucharist. In this gift Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church the perennial making present of the paschal mystery. With it he brought about a mysterious "oneness in time" between that Triduum and the passage of the centuries.

The thought of this leads us to profound amazement and gratitude. In the paschal event and the Eucharist which makes it present throughout the centuries, there is a truly enormous "capacity" which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption. This amazement should always fill the Church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist. But in a special way it should fill the minister of the Eucharist. For it is he who, by the authority given him in the sacrament of priestly ordination, effects the consecration. It is he who says with the power coming to him from Christ in the Upper Room: "This is my body which will be given up for you This is the cup of my blood, poured out for you...". The priest says these words, or rather he puts his voice at the disposal of the One who spoke these words in the Upper Room and who desires that they should be repeated in every generation by all those who in the Church ministerially share in his priesthood.

6. I would like to rekindle this Eucharistic "amazement" by the present Encyclical Letter, in continuity with the Jubilee heritage which I have left to the Church in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and its

Marian crowning, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the "programme" which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization. To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a "mystery of light".³ Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (Lk 24:31).

7. From the time I began my ministry as the Successor of Peter, I have always marked Holy Thursday, the day of the Eucharist and of the priesthood, by sending a letter to all the priests of the world. This year, the twenty-fifth of my Pontificate, I wish to involve the whole Church more fully in this Eucharistic reflection, also as a way of thanking the Lord for the gift of the Eucharist and the priesthood: "Gift and Mystery".⁴ By proclaiming the Year of the Rosary, I wish to put this, my twenty-fifth anniversary, under the aegis of the contemplation of Christ at the school of Mary. Consequently, I cannot let this Holy Thursday 2003 pass without halting before the "Eucharistic face" of Christ and pointing out with new force to the Church the centrality of the Eucharist.

From it the Church draws her life. From this "living bread" she draws her nourishment. How could I not feel the need to urge everyone to experience it ever anew?

8. When I think of the Eucharist, and look at my life as a priest, as a Bishop and as the Successor of Peter, I naturally recall the many times and places in which I was able to celebrate it. I remember the parish church of Niegowi*, where I had my first pastoral assignment, the collegiate church of Saint Florian in Krakow, Wavel Cathedral, Saint Peter's Basilica and so many basilicas and churches in Rome and throughout the world. I have been able to celebrate Holy Mass in chapels built along mountain paths, on lakeshores and seacoasts; I have celebrated it on altars built in stadiums and in city squares... This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of

praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest who by the blood of his Cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the *mysterium fidei* which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ.

9. The Eucharist, as Christ's saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession which the Church can have in her journey through history. This explains the lively concern which she has always shown for the Eucharistic mystery, a concern which finds authoritative expression in the work of the Councils and the Popes. How can we not admire the doctrinal expositions of the Decrees on the Most Holy Eucharist and on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass promulgated by the Council of Trent? For centuries those Decrees guided theology and catechesis, and they are still a dogmatic reference-point for the continual renewal and growth of God's People in faith and in love for the Eucharist. In times closer to our own, three Encyclical Letters should be mentioned: the Encyclical *Mirae Caritatis* of Leo XIII (28 May 1902), 5 the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII (20 November 1947)⁶ and the Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* of Paul VI (3 September 1965).⁷

The Second Vatican Council, while not issuing a specific document on the Eucharistic mystery, considered its various aspects throughout its documents, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

I myself, in the first years of my apostolic ministry in the Chair of Peter, wrote the Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cenerae* (24 February 1980), 8 in which I discussed some aspects of the Eucharistic mystery and its importance for the life of those who are its ministers. Today I take up anew the thread of that argument, with even greater emotion and gratitude in my heart, echoing as it were the word of the Psalmist: "What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord" (Ps 116:12-13).

10. The Magisterium's commitment to proclaiming the Eucharistic mystery has been matched by interior growth within the Christian community. Certainly the liturgical reform inaugurated by the Council has greatly contributed to a more conscious, active and fruitful participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar on the part of the faithful. In many places, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is also an important daily practice and becomes an inexhaustible source of holiness. The devout participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic procession on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is a grace from the Lord which yearly brings joy to those who take part in it.

Other positive signs of Eucharistic faith and love might also be mentioned.

Unfortunately, alongside these lights, there are also shadows. In some places the practice of Eucharistic adoration has been almost completely abandoned. In various parts of the Church abuses have occurred, leading to confusion with regard to sound faith and Catholic doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament. At times one encounters an extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. Stripped of its sacrificial meaning, it is celebrated as if it were simply a fraternal banquet. Furthermore, the necessity of the ministerial priesthood, grounded in apostolic succession, is at times obscured and the sacramental nature of the Eucharist is reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation. This has led here and there to ecumenical initiatives which, albeit well-intentioned, indulge in Eucharistic practices contrary to the discipline by which the Church expresses her faith. How can we not express profound grief at all this? The Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation.

It is my hope that the present Encyclical Letter will effectively help to banish the dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice, so that the Eucharist will continue to shine forth in all its radiant mystery.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

11. "The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed" (1 Cor 11:23) instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and his blood. The words of the Apostle Paul bring us back to the dramatic setting in which the Eucharist was born. The Eucharist is indelibly marked by the event of the Lord's passion and death, of which it is not only a reminder but the sacramental re-presentation. It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages.⁹ This truth is well expressed by the words with which the assembly in the Latin rite responds to the priest's proclamation of the "Mystery of Faith": "We announce your death, O Lord".

The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift – however precious – among so many others, but as the gift par excellence, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work. Nor does it remain confined to the past, since "all that Christ is – all that he did and suffered for all men – participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times".¹⁰

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and "the work of our redemption is carried out".¹¹ This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only after he had left us a means of sharing in it as if we had been present there. Each member of the faithful can thus take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits. This is the faith from which generations of Christians down the ages have lived. The Church's Magisterium has constantly reaffirmed this faith with joyful gratitude for its inestimable gift.¹² I wish once more to recall this truth

and to join you, my dear brothers and sisters, in adoration before this mystery: a great mystery, a mystery of mercy. What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes “to the end” (cf. Jn 13:1), a love which knows no measure.

12. This aspect of the universal charity of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is based on the words of the Saviour himself. In instituting it, he did not merely say: “This is my body”, “this is my blood”, but went on to add: “which is given for you”, “which is poured out for you” (Lk 22:19-20). Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and his blood; he also expressed its sacrificial meaning and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all. “The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood”.¹³

The Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice; she approaches it not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since this sacrifice is made present ever anew, sacramentally perpetuated, in every community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister. The Eucharist thus applies to men and women today the reconciliation won once for all by Christ for mankind in every age. “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice”.¹⁴ Saint John Chrysostom put it well: “We always offer the same Lamb, not one today and another tomorrow, but always the same one. For this reason the sacrifice is always only one... Even now we offer that victim who was once offered and who will never be consumed”.¹⁵

The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it.¹⁶ What is repeated is its memorial celebration, its “commemorative representation” (*memoralis demonstratio*),¹⁷ which makes Christ's one, definitive redemptive sacrifice always present in time. The sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic mystery cannot therefore be understood as something separate, independent of the Cross or only indirectly referring to the sacrifice of Calvary.

13. By virtue of its close relationship to the sacrifice of Golgotha, the Eucharist is a sacrifice in the strict sense, and not only in a general way, as if it were simply a matter of Christ's offering himself to the faithful as their spiritual food. The gift of his love and obedience to the point of giving his life (cf. Jn 10:17-18) is in the first place a gift to his Father. Certainly it is a gift given for our sake, and indeed that of all humanity (cf. Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; Jn 10:15), yet it is first and foremost a gift to the Father: “a sacrifice that the Father accepted, giving, in return for this total self-giving by his Son, who 'became obedient unto death' (Phil 2:8), his own paternal gift, that is to say the grant of new immortal life in the resurrection”.¹⁸

In giving his sacrifice to the Church, Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ. This is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning all the faithful: “Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it”.¹⁹

14. Christ's passover includes not only his passion and death, but also his resurrection. This is recalled by the assembly's acclamation following the consecration: “We proclaim your resurrection”. The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Saviour's passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice. It is as the living and risen One that Christ can become in the Eucharist the “bread of life” (Jn 6:35, 48), the “living bread” (Jn 6:51). Saint Ambrose reminded the newly-initiated that the Eucharist applies the event of the resurrection to their lives: “Today Christ is yours, yet each day he rises again for you”.²⁰ Saint Cyril of Alexandria also makes clear that sharing in the sacred mysteries “is a true confession and a remembrance that the Lord died and returned to life for us and on our behalf”.²¹

15. The sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, crowned by the resurrection, in the Mass involves a most special presence which – in the words of Paul VI – “is called 'real' not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were 'not real', but because it is a presence in the fullest sense: a substantial presence whereby Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present”.²² This sets forth once more the perennially valid teaching of the Council of Trent: “the consecration of the bread and wine effects the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. And the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called this change transubstantiation”.²³ Truly the Eucharist is a *mysterium fidei*, a mystery which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith, as is often brought out in the catechesis of the Church Fathers regarding this divine sacrament: “Do not see – Saint Cyril of Jerusalem exhorts – in the bread and wine merely natural elements, because the Lord has expressly said that they are his body and his blood: faith assures you of this, though your senses suggest otherwise”.²⁴

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas, we shall continue to sing with the Angelic Doctor. Before this mystery of love, human reason fully experiences its limitations. One understands how, down the centuries, this truth has stimulated theology to strive to understand it ever more deeply.

These are praiseworthy efforts, which are all the more helpful and insightful to the extent that they are able to join critical thinking to the “living faith” of the Church, as grasped especially by the Magisterium's “sure charism of truth” and the “intimate sense of spiritual realities”²⁵ which is attained above all by the saints. There remains the boundary indicated by Paul VI: “Every theological explanation which seeks some understanding of this mystery, in order to be in accord with Catholic faith, must firmly maintain that in objective reality, independently of our mind, the bread and

wine have ceased to exist after the consecration, so that the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus from that moment on are really before us under the sacramental species of bread and wine".²⁶

16. The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realized when the Lord's body and blood are received in communion. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through communion; we receive the very One who offered himself for us, we receive his body which he gave up for us on the Cross and his blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). We are reminded of his words: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (Jn 6:57). Jesus himself reassures us that this union, which he compares to that of the life of the Trinity, is truly realized. The Eucharist is a true banquet, in which Christ offers himself as our nourishment. When for the first time Jesus spoke of this food, his listeners were astonished and bewildered, which forced the Master to emphasize the objective truth of his words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life within you" (Jn 6:53). This is no metaphorical food: "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (Jn 6:55).

17. Through our communion in his body and blood, Christ also grants us his Spirit. Saint Ephrem writes: "He called the bread his living body and he filled it with himself and his Spirit... He who eats it with faith, eats Fire and Spirit... Take and eat this, all of you, and eat with it the Holy Spirit. For it is truly my body and whoever eats it will have eternal life".²⁷ The Church implores this divine Gift, the source of every other gift, in the Eucharistic epiclesis. In the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, for example, we find the prayer: "We beseech, implore and beg you: send your Holy Spirit upon us all and upon these gifts... that those who partake of them may be purified in soul, receive the forgiveness of their sins, and share in the Holy Spirit".²⁸ And in the Roman Missal the celebrant prays: "grant that we who are nourished by his body and blood may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ".²⁹ Thus by the gift of his body and blood Christ increases within us the gift of his Spirit, already poured out in Baptism and bestowed as a "seal" in the sacrament of Confirmation.

18. The acclamation of the assembly following the consecration appropriately ends by expressing the eschatological thrust which marks the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. 1 Cor 11:26): "until you come in glory". The Eucharist is a straining towards the goal, a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ (cf. Jn 15:11); it is in some way the anticipation of heaven, the "pledge of future glory".³⁰ In the Eucharist, everything speaks of confident waiting "in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ".³¹ Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: they already possess it on earth, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality. For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54). This pledge of the future resurrection comes from the fact that the flesh of the Son of Man, given as food, is his body in its glorious state after the resurrection. With the Eucharist we digest, as it were, the "secret" of the resurrection. For this reason Saint Ignatius of Antioch rightly defined the Eucharistic Bread as "a medicine of immortality, an antidote to death".³²

19. The eschatological tension kindled by the Eucharist expresses and reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven. It is not by chance that the Eastern Anaphoras and the Latin Eucharistic Prayers honour Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, the angels, the holy apostles, the glorious martyrs and all the saints. This is an aspect of the Eucharist which merits greater attention: in celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb, we are united to the heavenly "liturgy" and become part of that great multitude which cries out: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.

20. A significant consequence of the eschatological tension inherent in the Eucharist is also the fact that it spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of "new heavens" and "a new earth" (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today.³³ I wish to reaffirm this forcefully at the beginning of the new millennium, so that Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world. Theirs is the task of contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan.

Many problems darken the horizon of our time. We need but think of the urgent need to work for peace, to base relationships between peoples on solid premises of justice and solidarity, and to defend human life from conception to its natural end. And what should we say of the thousand inconsistencies of a "globalized" world where the weakest, the most powerless and the poorest appear to have so little hope! It is in this world that Christian hope must shine forth! For this reason too, the Lord wished to remain with us in the Eucharist, making his presence in meal and sacrifice the promise of a humanity renewed by his love. Significantly, in their account of the Last Supper, the Synoptics recount the institution of the Eucharist, while the Gospel of John relates, as a way of bringing out its profound meaning, the account of the "washing of the feet", in which Jesus appears as the teacher of communion and of service (cf. Jn 13:1-20). The Apostle Paul, for his part, says that it is "unworthy" of a Christian community to partake of the Lord's Supper amid division and indifference towards the poor (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-22, 27-34).³⁴

Proclaiming the death of the Lord "until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely "Eucharistic". It is this fruit of a

transfigured existence and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with the Gospel which splendidly illustrates the eschatological tension inherent in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the Christian life as a whole: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

CHAPTER TWO

THE EUCHARIST BUILDS THE CHURCH

21. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the celebration of the Eucharist is at the centre of the process of the Church's growth. After stating that "the Church, as the Kingdom of Christ already present in mystery, grows visibly in the world through the power of God", 35 then, as if in answer to the question: "How does the Church grow?", the Council adds: "as often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our pasch is sacrificed' (1 Cor 5:7) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out. At the same time in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of the faithful, who form one body in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:17), is both expressed and brought about".36

A causal influence of the Eucharist is present at the Church's very origins. The Evangelists specify that it was the Twelve, the Apostles, who gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper (cf. Mt 26:20; Mk 14:17; Lk 22:14). This is a detail of notable importance, for the Apostles "were both the seeds of the new Israel and the beginning of the sacred hierarchy".37 By offering them his body and his blood as food, Christ mysteriously involved them in the sacrifice which would be completed later on Calvary. By analogy with the Covenant of Mount Sinai, sealed by sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood, 38 the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper laid the foundations of the new messianic community, the People of the New Covenant.

The Apostles, by accepting in the Upper Room Jesus' invitation: "Take, eat", "Drink of it, all of you" (Mt 26:26-27), entered for the first time into sacramental communion with him. From that time forward, until the end of the age, the Church is built up through sacramental communion with the Son of God who was sacrificed for our sake: "Do this in remembrance of me... Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24-25; cf. Lk 22:19).

22. Incorporation into Christ, which is brought about by Baptism, is constantly renewed and consolidated by sharing in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, especially by that full sharing which takes place in sacramental communion. We can say not only that each of us receives Christ, but also that Christ receives each of us. He enters into friendship with us: "You are my friends" (Jn 15:14). Indeed, it is because of him that we have life: "He who eats me will live because of me" (Jn 6:57). Eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual "abiding" of Christ and each of his followers: "Abide in me, and I in you" (Jn 15:4).

By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a "sacrament" for humanity, 39 a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13-16), for the redemption of all.40 The Church's mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21). From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both the source and the summit of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.41

23. Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ. Saint Paul refers to this unifying power of participation in the banquet of the Eucharist when he writes to the Corinthians: "The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16-17). Saint John Chrysostom's commentary on these words is profound and perceptive: "For what is the bread? It is the body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ – not many bodies but one body. For as bread is completely one, though made of up many grains of wheat, and these, albeit unseen, remain nonetheless present, in such a way that their difference is not apparent since they have been made a perfect whole, so too are we mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ".42 The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism through the gift of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:13, 27).

The joint and inseparable activity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, which is at the origin of the Church, of her consolidation and her continued life, is at work in the Eucharist. This was clearly evident to the author of the Liturgy of Saint James: in the epiclesis of the Anaphora, God the Father is asked to send the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and upon the offerings, so that the body and blood of Christ "may be a help to all those who partake of it... for the sanctification of their souls and bodies".43 The Church is fortified by the divine Paraclete through the sanctification of the faithful in the Eucharist.

24. The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in Eucharistic communion superabundantly fulfils the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal. Through her communion with the body of Christ the Church comes to be ever more

profoundly “in Christ in the nature of a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate unity with God and of the unity of the whole human race”.⁴⁴

The seeds of disunity, which daily experience shows to be so deeply rooted in humanity as a result of sin, are countered by the unifying power of the body of Christ. The Eucharist, precisely by building up the Church, creates human community.

25. The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church. This worship is strictly linked to the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The presence of Christ under the sacred species reserved after Mass – a presence which lasts as long as the species of bread and of wine remain ⁴⁵ – derives from the celebration of the sacrifice and is directed towards communion, both sacramental and spiritual.⁴⁶ It is the responsibility of Pastors to encourage, also by their personal witness, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species.⁴⁷

It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the “art of prayer”, ⁴⁸ how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brother and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support!

This practice, repeatedly praised and recommended by the Magisterium, ⁴⁹ is supported by the example of many saints. Particularly outstanding in this regard was Saint Alphonsus Liguori, who wrote: “Of all devotions, that of adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the greatest after the sacraments, the one dearest to God and the one most helpful to us”.⁵⁰ The Eucharist is a priceless treasure: by not only celebrating it but also by praying before it outside of Mass we are enabled to make contact with the very wellspring of grace. A Christian community desirous of contemplating the face of Christ in the spirit which I proposed in the Apostolic Letters *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* cannot fail also

to develop this aspect of Eucharistic worship, which prolongs and increases the fruits of our communion in the body and blood of the Lord.

CHAPTER THREE

THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE EUCHARIST AND OF THE CHURCH

26. If, as I have said, the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist, it follows that there is a profound relationship between the two, so much so that we can apply to the Eucharistic mystery the very words with which, in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, we profess the Church to be “one, holy, catholic and apostolic”. The Eucharist too is one and catholic. It is also holy, indeed, the Most Holy Sacrament. But it is above all its apostolicity that we must now consider.

27. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in explaining how the Church is apostolic – founded on the Apostles – sees three meanings in this expression. First, “she was and remains built on ‘the foundation of the Apostles’ (Eph 2:20), the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself”.⁵¹ The Eucharist too as its foundation in the Apostles, not in the sense that it did not originate in Christ himself, but because it was entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and has been handed down to us by them and by their successors. It is in continuity with the practice of the Apostles, in obedience to the Lord's command, that the Church has celebrated the Eucharist down the centuries.

The second sense in which the Church is apostolic, as the Catechism points out, is that “with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching, the ‘good deposit’, the salutary words she has heard from the Apostles”.⁵² Here too the Eucharist is apostolic, for it is celebrated in conformity with the faith of the Apostles. At various times in the two-thousand-year history of the People of the New Covenant, the Church's Magisterium has more precisely defined her teaching on the Eucharist, including its proper terminology, precisely in order to safeguard the apostolic faith with regard to this sublime mystery. This faith remains unchanged and it is essential for the Church that it remain unchanged.

28. Lastly, the Church is apostolic in the sense that she “continues to be taught, sanctified and guided by the Apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of Bishops assisted by priests, in union with the Successor of Peter, the Church's supreme pastor”.⁵³ Succession to the Apostles in the pastoral mission necessarily entails the sacrament of Holy Orders, that is, the uninterrupted sequence, from the very beginning, of valid episcopal ordinations.⁵⁴ This succession is essential for the Church to exist in a proper and full sense.

The Eucharist also expresses this sense of apostolicity. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, “the faithful join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood”, ⁵⁵ yet it is the ordained priest who, “acting in the person of Christ, brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people”.⁵⁶ For this reason, the Roman Missal prescribes that only the priest should recite the Eucharistic Prayer, while the people participate in faith and in silence.⁵⁷

29. The expression repeatedly employed by the Second Vatican Council, according to which “the ministerial priest, acting in the person of Christ, brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice”, 58 was already firmly rooted in papal teaching.⁵⁹ As I have pointed out on other occasions, the phrase *in persona Christi* “means more than offering ‘in the name of’ or ‘in the place of’ Christ. *In persona* means in specific sacramental identification with the eternal High Priest who is the author and principal subject of this sacrifice of his, a sacrifice in which, in truth, nobody can take his place”.⁶⁰ The ministry of priests who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders, in the economy of salvation chosen by Christ, makes clear that the Eucharist which they celebrate is a gift which radically transcends the power of the assembly and is in any event essential for validly linking the Eucharistic consecration to the sacrifice of the Cross and to the Last Supper. The assembly gathered together for the celebration of the Eucharist, if it is to be a truly Eucharistic assembly, absolutely requires the presence of an ordained priest as its president. On the other hand, the community is by itself incapable of providing an ordained minister. This minister is a gift which the assembly receives through episcopal succession going back to the Apostles. It is the Bishop who, through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, makes a new presbyter by conferring upon him the power to consecrate the Eucharist. Consequently, “the Eucharistic mystery cannot be celebrated in any community except by an ordained priest, as the Fourth Lateran Council expressly taught”.⁶¹

30. The Catholic Church's teaching on the relationship between priestly ministry and the Eucharist and her teaching on the Eucharistic Sacrifice have both been the subject in recent decades of a fruitful dialogue in the area of ecumenism. We must give thanks to the Blessed Trinity for the significant progress and convergence achieved in this regard, which lead us to hope one day for a full sharing of faith. Nonetheless, the observations of the Council concerning the Ecclesial Communities which arose in the West from the sixteenth century onwards and are separated from the Catholic Church remain fully pertinent: “The Ecclesial Communities separated from us lack that fullness of unity with us which should flow from Baptism, and we believe that especially because of the lack of the sacrament of Orders they have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the Eucharistic mystery. Nevertheless, when they commemorate the Lord's death and resurrection in the Holy Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and they await his coming in glory”.⁶²

The Catholic faithful, therefore, while respecting the religious convictions of these separated brethren, must refrain from receiving the communion distributed in their celebrations, so as not to condone an ambiguity about the nature of the Eucharist and, consequently, to fail in their duty to bear clear witness to the truth. This would result in slowing the progress being made towards full visible unity. Similarly, it is unthinkable to substitute for Sunday Mass ecumenical celebrations of the word or services of common prayer with Christians from the aforementioned Ecclesial Communities, or even participation in their own liturgical services. Such celebrations and services, however praiseworthy in certain situations, prepare for the goal of full communion, including Eucharistic communion, but they cannot replace it.

The fact that the power of consecrating the Eucharist has been entrusted only to Bishops and priests does not represent any kind of belittlement of the rest of the People of God, for in the communion of the one body of Christ which is the Church this gift redounds to the benefit of all.

31. If the Eucharist is the centre and summit of the Church's life, it is likewise the centre and summit of priestly ministry. For this reason, with a heart filled with gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, I repeat that the Eucharist “is the principal and central *raison d'être* of the sacrament of priesthood, which effectively came into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist”.⁶³

Priests are engaged in a wide variety of pastoral activities. If we also consider the social and cultural conditions of the modern world it is easy to understand how priests face the very real risk of losing their focus amid such a great number of different tasks. The Second Vatican Council saw in pastoral charity the bond which gives unity to the priest's life and work. This, the Council adds, “flows mainly from the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is therefore the centre and root of the whole priestly life”.⁶⁴ We can understand, then, how important it is for the spiritual life of the priest, as well as for the good of the Church and the world, that priests follow the Council's recommendation to celebrate the Eucharist daily: “for even if the faithful are unable to be present, it is an act of Christ and the Church”.⁶⁵ In this way priests will be able to counteract the daily tensions which lead to a lack of focus and they will find in the Eucharistic Sacrifice – the true centre of their lives and ministry – the spiritual strength needed to deal with their different pastoral responsibilities. Their daily activity will thus become truly Eucharistic.

The centrality of the Eucharist in the life and ministry of priests is the basis of its centrality in the pastoral promotion of priestly vocations. It is in the Eucharist that prayer for vocations is most closely united to the prayer of Christ the Eternal High Priest. At the same time the diligence of priests in carrying out their Eucharistic ministry, together with the conscious, active and fruitful participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, provides young men with a powerful example and incentive for responding generously to God's call. Often it is the example of a priest's fervent pastoral charity which the Lord uses to sow and to bring to fruition in a young man's heart the seed of a priestly calling.

32. All of this shows how distressing and irregular is the situation of a Christian community which, despite having sufficient numbers and variety of faithful to form a parish, does not have a priest to lead it. Parishes are communities of the baptized who express and affirm their identity above all through the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. But this requires the presence of a presbyter, who alone is qualified to offer the Eucharist *in persona Christi*. When a community lacks a priest, attempts are rightly made somehow to remedy the situation so that it can continue its Sunday

celebrations, and those religious and laity who lead their brothers and sisters in prayer exercise in a praiseworthy way the common priesthood of all the faithful based on the grace of Baptism. But such solutions must be considered merely temporary, while the community awaits a priest.

The sacramental incompleteness of these celebrations should above all inspire the whole community to pray with greater fervour that the Lord will send labourers into his harvest (cf. Mt 9:38). It should also be an incentive to mobilize all the resources needed for an adequate pastoral promotion of vocations, without yielding to the temptation to seek solutions which lower the moral and formative standards demanded of candidates for the priesthood.

33. When, due to the scarcity of priests, non-ordained members of the faithful are entrusted with a share in the pastoral care of a parish, they should bear in mind that – as the Second Vatican Council teaches – “no Christian community can be built up unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist”.⁶⁶ They have a responsibility, therefore, to keep alive in the community a genuine “hunger” for the Eucharist, so that no opportunity for the celebration of Mass will ever be missed, also taking advantage of the occasional presence of a priest who is not impeded by Church law from celebrating Mass.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EUCHARIST AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

34. The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 saw in the concept of an “ecclesiology of communion” the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council.⁶⁷ The Church is called during her earthly pilgrimage to maintain and promote communion with the Triune God and communion among the faithful. For this purpose she possesses the word and the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, by which she “constantly lives and grows”⁶⁸ and in which she expresses her very nature. It is not by chance that the term communion has become one of the names given to this sublime sacrament.

The Eucharist thus appears as the culmination of all the sacraments in perfecting our communion with God the Father by identification with his only-begotten Son through the working of the Holy Spirit. With discerning faith a distinguished writer of the Byzantine tradition voiced this truth: in the Eucharist “unlike any other sacrament, the mystery [of communion] is so perfect that it brings us to the heights of every good thing: here is the ultimate goal of every human desire, because here we attain God and God joins himself to us in the most perfect union”.⁶⁹ Precisely for this reason it is good to cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist. This was the origin of the practice of “spiritual communion”, which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life. Saint Teresa of Jesus wrote: “When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by the love of God will be greatly impressed on you”.⁷⁰

35. The celebration of the Eucharist, however, cannot be the starting-point for communion; it presupposes that communion already exists, a communion which it seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection. The sacrament is an expression of this bond of communion both in its invisible dimension, which, in Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit, unites us to the Father and among ourselves, and in its visible dimension, which entails communion in the teaching of the Apostles, in the sacraments and in the Church's hierarchical order. The profound relationship between the invisible and the visible elements of ecclesial communion is constitutive of the Church as the sacrament of salvation.⁷¹ Only in this context can there be a legitimate celebration of the Eucharist and true participation in it. Consequently it is an intrinsic requirement of the Eucharist that it should be celebrated in communion, and specifically maintaining the various bonds of that communion intact.

36. Invisible communion, though by its nature always growing, presupposes the life of grace, by which we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), and the practice of the virtues of faith, hope and love. Only in this way do we have true communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nor is faith sufficient; we must persevere in sanctifying grace and love, remaining within the Church “bodily” as well as “in our heart”; ⁷² what is required, in the words of Saint Paul, is “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6).

Keeping these invisible bonds intact is a specific moral duty incumbent upon Christians who wish to participate fully in the Eucharist by receiving the body and blood of Christ. The Apostle Paul appeals to this duty when he warns: “Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Cor 11:28). Saint John Chrysostom, with his stirring eloquence, exhorted the faithful: “I too raise my voice, I beseech, beg and implore that no one draw near to this sacred table with a sullied and corrupt conscience. Such an act, in fact, can never be called 'communion', not even were we to touch the Lord's body a thousand times over, but 'condemnation', 'torment' and 'increase of punishment’”.⁷³

Along these same lines, the Catechism of the Catholic Church rightly stipulates that “anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion”.⁷⁴ I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church there remains in force, now and in the future, the rule by which the Council of Trent gave concrete expression

to the Apostle Paul's stern warning when it affirmed that, in order to receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner, "one must first confess one's sins, when one is aware of mortal sin".⁷⁵

37. The two sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance are very closely connected. Because the Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuating it sacramentally, it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion, for a personal response to the appeal made by Saint Paul to the Christians of Corinth: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). If a Christian's conscience is burdened by serious sin, then the path of penance through the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The Code of Canon Law refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" are not to be admitted to Eucharistic communion.⁷⁶

38. Ecclesial communion, as I have said, is likewise visible, and finds expression in the series of "bonds" listed by the Council when it teaches: "They are fully incorporated into the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her whole structure and all the means of salvation established within her, and within her visible framework are united to Christ, who governs her through the Supreme Pontiff and the Bishops, by the bonds of profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government and communion".⁷⁷

The Eucharist, as the supreme sacramental manifestation of communion in the Church, demands to be celebrated in a context where the outward bonds of communion are also intact. In a special way, since the Eucharist is "as it were the summit of the spiritual life and the goal of all the sacraments", ⁷⁸ it requires that the bonds of communion in the sacraments, particularly in Baptism and in priestly Orders, be real. It is not possible to give communion to a person who is not baptized or to one who rejects the full truth of the faith regarding the Eucharistic mystery. Christ is the truth and he bears witness to the truth (cf. Jn 14:6; 18:37); the sacrament of his body and blood does not permit duplicity.

39.

Furthermore, given the very nature of ecclesial communion and its relation to the sacrament of the Eucharist, it must be recalled that "the Eucharistic Sacrifice, while always offered in a particular community, is never a celebration of that community alone. In fact, the community, in receiving the Eucharistic presence of the Lord, receives the entire gift of salvation and shows, even in its lasting visible particular form, that it is the image and true presence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church".⁷⁹ From this it follows that a truly Eucharistic community cannot be closed in upon itself, as though it were somehow self-sufficient; rather it must persevere in harmony with every other Catholic community.

The ecclesial communion of the Eucharistic assembly is a communion with its own Bishop and with the Roman Pontiff. The Bishop, in effect, is the visible principle and the foundation of unity within his particular Church.⁸⁰ It would therefore be a great contradiction if the sacrament par excellence of the Church's unity were celebrated without true communion with the Bishop. As Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote: "That Eucharist which is celebrated under the Bishop, or under one to whom the Bishop has given this charge, may be considered certain".⁸¹ Likewise, since "the Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the Bishops and of the multitude of the faithful", ⁸² communion with him is intrinsically required for the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Hence the great truth expressed which the Liturgy expresses in a variety of ways: "Every celebration of the Eucharist is performed in union not only with the proper Bishop, but also with the Pope, with the episcopal order, with all the clergy, and with the entire people. Every valid celebration of the Eucharist expresses this universal communion with Peter and with the whole Church, or objectively calls for it, as in the case of the Christian Churches separated from Rome".⁸³

40. The Eucharist creates communion and fosters communion. Saint Paul wrote to the faithful of Corinth explaining how their divisions, reflected in their Eucharistic gatherings, contradicted what they were celebrating, the Lord's Supper. The Apostle then urged them to reflect on the true reality of the Eucharist in order to return to the spirit of fraternal communion (cf. 1 Cor 11:17- 34). Saint Augustine effectively echoed this call when, in recalling the Apostle's words: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12: 27), he went on to say: "If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord's table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery".⁸⁴ And from this observation he concludes: "Christ the Lord... hallowed at his table the mystery of our peace and unity. Whoever receives the mystery of unity without preserving the bonds of peace receives not a mystery for his benefit but evidence against himself".⁸⁵

41. The Eucharist's particular effectiveness in promoting communion is one of the reasons for the importance of Sunday Mass. I have already dwelt on this and on the other reasons which make Sunday Mass fundamental for the life of the Church and of individual believers in my Apostolic Letter on the sanctification of Sunday Dies Domini.⁸⁶ There I recalled that the faithful have the obligation to attend

Mass, unless they are seriously impeded, and that Pastors have the corresponding duty to see that it is practical and possible for all to fulfil this precept.⁸⁷ More recently, in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in setting forth

the pastoral path which the Church must take at the beginning of the third millennium, I drew particular attention to the Sunday Eucharist, emphasizing its effectiveness for building communion. "It is" – I wrote – "the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, the Lord's Day also becomes the Day of the Church, when she can effectively exercise her role as the sacrament of unity".⁸⁸

42. The safeguarding and promotion of ecclesial communion is a task of each member of the faithful, who finds in the Eucharist, as the sacrament of the Church's unity, an area of special concern. More specifically, this task is the particular responsibility of the Church's Pastors, each according to his rank and ecclesiastical office. For this reason the Church has drawn up norms aimed both at fostering the frequent and fruitful access of the faithful to the Eucharistic table and at determining the objective conditions under which communion may not be given. The care shown in promoting the faithful observance of these norms becomes a practical means of showing love for the Eucharist and for the Church.

43. In considering the Eucharist as the sacrament of ecclesial communion, there is one subject which, due to its importance, must not be overlooked: I am referring to the relationship of the Eucharist to ecumenical activity. We should all give thanks to the Blessed Trinity for the many members of the faithful throughout the world who in recent decades have felt an ardent desire for unity among all Christians. The Second Vatican Council, at the beginning of its Decree on Ecumenism, sees this as a special gift of God.⁸⁹ It was an efficacious grace which inspired us, the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church and our brothers and sisters from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to set forth on the path of ecumenism.

Our longing for the goal of unity prompts us to turn to the Eucharist, which is the supreme sacrament of the unity of the People of God, in as much as it is the apt expression and the unsurpassable source of that unity.⁹⁰ In the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice the Church prays that God, the Father of mercies, will grant his children the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that they may become one body and one spirit in Christ.⁹¹ In raising this prayer to the Father of lights, from whom comes every good endowment and every perfect gift (cf. Jas 1:17), the Church believes that she will be heard, for she prays in union with Christ her Head and Spouse, who takes up this plea of his Bride and joins it to that of his own redemptive sacrifice.

44. Precisely because the Church's unity, which the Eucharist brings about through the Lord's sacrifice and by communion in his body and blood, absolutely requires full communion in the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical governance, it is not possible to celebrate together the same Eucharistic liturgy until those bonds are fully re-established. Any such concelebration would not be a valid means, and might well prove instead to be an obstacle, to the attainment of full communion, by weakening the sense of how far we remain from this goal and by introducing or exacerbating ambiguities with regard to one or another truth of the faith. The path towards full unity can only be undertaken in truth. In this area, the prohibitions of Church law leave no room for uncertainty, ⁹² in fidelity to the moral norm laid down by the Second Vatican Council.⁹³

I would like nonetheless to reaffirm what I said in my Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* after having acknowledged the impossibility of Eucharistic sharing: "And yet we do have a burning desire to join in celebrating the one Eucharist of the Lord, and this desire itself is already a common prayer of praise, a single supplication. Together we speak to the Father and increasingly we do so 'with one heart'".⁹⁴

45. While it is never legitimate to concelebrate in the absence of full communion, the same is not true with respect to the administration of the Eucharist under special circumstances, to individual persons belonging to Churches or Ecclesial Communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church. In this case, in fact, the intention is to meet a grave spiritual need for the eternal salvation of an individual believer, not to bring about an intercommunion which remains impossible until the visible bonds of ecclesial communion are fully re-established.

This was the approach taken by the Second Vatican Council when it gave guidelines for responding to Eastern Christians separated in good faith from the Catholic Church, who spontaneously ask to receive the Eucharist from a Catholic minister and are properly disposed.⁹⁵ This approach was then ratified by both Codes, which also consider – with necessary modifications – the case of other non-Eastern Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church.⁹⁶

46. In my Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* I expressed my own appreciation of these norms, which make it possible to provide for the salvation of souls with proper discernment: "It is a source of joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer the sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church but who greatly desire to receive these sacraments, freely request them and manifest the faith which the Catholic Church professes with regard to these sacraments. Conversely, in specific cases and in particular circumstances, Catholics too can request these same sacraments from ministers of Churches in which these sacraments are valid".⁹⁷

These conditions, from which no dispensation can be given, must be carefully respected, even though they deal with specific individual cases, because the denial of one or more truths of the faith regarding these sacraments and, among these, the truth regarding the need of the ministerial priesthood for their validity, renders the person asking improperly disposed to legitimately receiving them. And the opposite is also true: Catholics may not receive communion in those communities which lack a valid sacrament of Orders.⁹⁸

The faithful observance of the body of norms established in this area 99 is a manifestation and, at the same time, a guarantee of our love for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, for our brothers and sisters of different Christian confessions – who have a right to our witness to the truth – and for the cause itself of the promotion of unity.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DIGNITY OF THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

47. Reading the account of the institution of the Eucharist in the Synoptic Gospels, we are struck by the simplicity and the “solemnity” with which Jesus, on the evening of the Last Supper, instituted this great sacrament. There is an episode which in some way serves as its prelude: the anointing at Bethany. A woman, whom John identifies as Mary the sister of Lazarus, pours a flask of costly ointment over Jesus' head, which provokes from the disciples – and from Judas in particular (cf. Mt 26:8; Mk 14:4; Jn 12:4) – an indignant response, as if this act, in light of the needs of the poor, represented an intolerable “waste”. But Jesus' own reaction is completely different. While in no way detracting from the duty of charity towards the needy, for whom the disciples must always show special care – “the poor you will always have with you” (Mt 26, 11; Mk 14:7; cf. Jn 12:8) – he looks towards his imminent death and burial, and sees this act of anointing as an anticipation of the honour which his body will continue to merit even after his death, indissolubly bound as it is to the mystery of his person.

The account continues, in the Synoptic Gospels, with Jesus' charge to the disciples to prepare carefully the “large upper room” needed for the Passover meal (cf. Mk 14:15; Lk 22:12) and with the narration of the institution of the Eucharist. Reflecting at least in part the Jewish rites of the Passover meal leading up to the singing of the Hallel (cf. Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26), the story presents with sobriety and solemnity, even in the variants of the different traditions, the words spoken by Christ over the bread and wine, which he made into concrete expressions of the handing over of his body and the shedding of his blood. All these details are recorded by the Evangelists in the light of a praxis of the “breaking of the bread” already well-established in the early Church. But certainly from the time of Jesus on, the event of Holy Thursday has shown visible traces of a liturgical “sensibility” shaped by Old Testament tradition and open to being reshaped in Christian celebrations in a way consonant with the new content of Easter.

48. Like the woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany, the Church has feared no “extravagance”, devoting the best of her resources to expressing her wonder and adoration before the unsurpassable gift of the Eucharist. No less than the first disciples charged with preparing the “large upper room”, she has felt the need, down the centuries and in her encounters with different cultures, to celebrate the Eucharist in a setting worthy of so great a mystery. In the wake of Jesus' own words and actions, and building upon the ritual heritage of Judaism, the Christian liturgy was born. Could there ever be an adequate means of expressing the acceptance of that self-gift which the divine Bridegroom continually makes to his Bride, the Church, by bringing the Sacrifice offered once and for all on the Cross to successive generations of believers and thus becoming nourishment for all the faithful? Though the idea of a “banquet” naturally suggests familiarity, the Church has never yielded to the temptation to trivialize this “intimacy” with her Spouse by forgetting that he is also her Lord and that the “banquet” always remains a sacrificial banquet marked by the blood shed on Golgotha. The Eucharistic Banquet is truly a “sacred” banquet, in which the simplicity of the signs conceals the unfathomable holiness of God: *O sacrum convivium, in quo Christus sumitur!* The bread which is broken on our altars, offered to us as wayfarers along the paths of the world, is *panis angelorum*, the bread of angels, which cannot be approached except with the humility of the centurion in the Gospel: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof” (Mt 8:8; Lk 7:6).

49. With this heightened sense of mystery, we understand how the faith of the Church in the mystery of the Eucharist has found historical expression not only in the demand for an interior disposition of devotion, but also in outward forms meant to evoke and emphasize the grandeur of the event being celebrated. This led progressively to the development of a particular form of regulating the Eucharistic liturgy, with due respect for the various legitimately constituted ecclesial traditions. On this foundation a rich artistic heritage also developed. Architecture, sculpture, painting and music, moved by the Christian mystery, have found in the Eucharist, both directly and indirectly, a source of great inspiration.

Such was the case, for example, with architecture, which witnessed the transition, once the historical situation made it possible, from the first places of Eucharistic celebration in the *domus* or “homes” of Christian families to the solemn basilicas of the early centuries, to the imposing cathedrals of the Middle Ages, and to the churches, large and small, which gradually sprang up throughout the lands touched by Christianity. The designs of altars and tabernacles within Church interiors were often not simply motivated by artistic inspiration but also by a clear understanding of the mystery. The same could be said for sacred music, if we but think of the inspired Gregorian melodies and the many, often great, composers who sought to do justice to the liturgical texts of the Mass. Similarly, can we overlook the enormous quantity of artistic production, ranging from fine craftsmanship to authentic works of art, in the area of Church furnishings and vestments used for the celebration of the Eucharist?

It can be said that the Eucharist, while shaping the Church and her spirituality, has also powerfully affected “culture”, and the arts in particular.

50. In this effort to adore the mystery grasped in its ritual and aesthetic dimensions, a certain “competition” has taken place between Christians of the West and the East. How could we not give particular thanks to the Lord for the contributions to Christian art made by the great architectural and artistic works of the Greco-Byzantine tradition and of the whole geographical area marked by Slav culture? In the East, sacred art has preserved a remarkably powerful sense of mystery, which leads artists to see their efforts at creating beauty not simply as an expression of their own talents, but also as a genuine service to the faith. Passing well beyond mere technical skill, they have shown themselves docile and open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The architectural and mosaic splendours of the Christian East and West are a patrimony belonging to all believers; they contain a hope, and even a pledge, of the desired fullness of communion in faith and in celebration. This would presuppose and demand, as in Rublëv's famous depiction of the Trinity, a profoundly Eucharistic Church in which the presence of the mystery of Christ in the broken bread is as it were immersed in the ineffable unity of the three divine Persons, making of the Church herself an “icon” of the Trinity.

Within this context of an art aimed at expressing, in all its elements, the meaning of the Eucharist in accordance with the Church's teaching, attention needs to be given to the norms regulating the construction and decor of sacred buildings. As history shows and as I emphasized in my Letter to Artists, 100 the Church has always left ample room for the creativity of artists. But sacred art must be outstanding for its ability to express adequately the mystery grasped in the fullness of the Church's faith and in accordance with the pastoral guidelines appropriately laid down by competent Authority. This holds true both for the figurative arts and for sacred music.

51. The development of sacred art and liturgical discipline which took place in lands of ancient Christian heritage is also taking place on continents where Christianity is younger. This was precisely the approach supported by the Second Vatican Council on the need for sound and proper “inculturation”. In my numerous Pastoral Visits I have seen, throughout the world, the great vitality which the celebration of the Eucharist can have when marked by the forms, styles and sensibilities of different cultures. By adaptation to the changing conditions of time and place, the Eucharist offers sustenance not only to individuals but to entire peoples, and it shapes cultures inspired by Christianity.

It is necessary, however, that this important work of adaptation be carried out with a constant awareness of the ineffable mystery against which every generation is called to measure itself. The “treasure” is too important and precious to risk impoverishment or compromise through forms of experimentation or practices introduced without a careful review on the part of the competent ecclesiastical authorities.

Furthermore, the centrality of the Eucharistic mystery demands that any such review must be undertaken in close association with the Holy See. As I wrote in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, “such cooperation is essential because the Sacred Liturgy expresses and celebrates the one faith professed by all and, being the heritage of the whole Church, cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church”.¹⁰¹

52. All of this makes clear the great responsibility which belongs to priests in particular for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is their responsibility to preside at the Eucharist in persona Christi and to provide a witness to and a service of communion not only for the community directly taking part in the celebration, but also for the universal Church, which is a part of every Eucharist. It must be lamented that, especially in the years following the post-conciliar liturgical reform, as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation there have been a number of abuses which have been a source of suffering for many. A certain reaction against “formalism” has led some, especially in certain regions, to consider the “forms” chosen by the Church's great liturgical tradition and her Magisterium as non-binding and to introduce unauthorized innovations which are often completely inappropriate.

I consider it my duty, therefore to appeal urgently that the liturgical norms for the celebration of the Eucharist be observed with great fidelity. These norms are a concrete expression of the authentically ecclesial nature of the Eucharist; this is their deepest meaning. Liturgy is never anyone's private property, be it of the celebrant or of the community in which the mysteries are celebrated. The Apostle Paul had to address fiery words to the community of Corinth because of grave shortcomings in their celebration of the Eucharist resulting in divisions (schismata) and the emergence of factions (haireseis) (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34). Our time, too, calls for a renewed awareness and appreciation of liturgical norms as a reflection of, and a witness to, the one universal Church made present in every celebration of the Eucharist. Priests who faithfully celebrate Mass according to the liturgical norms, and communities which conform to those norms, quietly but eloquently demonstrate their love for the Church. Precisely to bring out more clearly this deeper meaning of liturgical norms, I have asked the competent offices of the Roman Curia to prepare a more specific document, including prescriptions of a juridical nature, on this very important subject. No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands: it is too great for anyone to feel free to treat it lightly and with disregard for its sacredness and its universality.

CHAPTER SIX

AT THE SCHOOL OF MARY, “WOMAN OF THE EUCHARIST”

53. If we wish to rediscover in all its richness the profound relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, we cannot neglect Mary, Mother and model of the Church. In my Apostolic Letter *Rosarium*

Virginis Mariae, I pointed to the Blessed Virgin Mary as our teacher in contemplating Christ's face, and among the mysteries of light I included the institution of the Eucharist.¹⁰² Mary can guide us towards this most holy sacrament, because she herself has a profound relationship with it.

At first glance, the Gospel is silent on this subject. The account of the institution of the Eucharist on the night of Holy Thursday makes no mention of Mary. Yet we know that she was present among the Apostles who prayed "with one accord" (cf. Acts 1:14) in the first community which gathered after the Ascension in expectation of Pentecost. Certainly Mary must have been present at the Eucharistic celebrations of the first generation of Christians, who were devoted to "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42).

But in addition to her sharing in the Eucharistic banquet, an indirect picture of Mary's relationship with the Eucharist can be had, beginning with her interior disposition. Mary is a "woman of the Eucharist" in her whole life. The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery.

54. *Mysterium fidei!* If the Eucharist is a mystery of faith which so greatly transcends our understanding as to call for sheer abandonment to the word of God, then there can be no one like Mary to act as our support and guide in acquiring this disposition. In repeating what Christ did at the Last Supper in obedience to his command: "Do this in memory of me!", we also accept Mary's invitation to obey him without hesitation: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). With the same maternal concern which she showed at the wedding feast of Cana, Mary seems to say to us: "Do not waver; trust in the words of my Son. If he was able to change water into wine, he can also turn bread and wine into his body and blood, and through this mystery bestow on believers the living memorial of his passover, thus becoming the 'bread of life'".

55. In a certain sense Mary lived her Eucharistic faith even before the institution of the Eucharist, by the very fact that she offered her virginal womb for the Incarnation of God's Word. The Eucharist, while commemorating the passion and resurrection, is also in continuity with the incarnation. At the Annunciation Mary conceived the Son of God in the physical reality of his body and blood, thus anticipating within herself what to some degree happens sacramentally in every believer who receives, under the signs of bread and wine, the Lord's body and blood.

As a result, there is a profound analogy between the Fiat which Mary said in reply to the angel, and the Amen which every believer says when receiving the body of the Lord. Mary was asked to believe that the One whom she conceived "through the Holy Spirit" was "the Son of God" (Lk 1:30-35). In continuity with the Virgin's faith, in the Eucharistic mystery we are asked to believe that the same Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, becomes present in his full humanity and divinity under the signs of bread and wine.

"Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45). Mary also anticipated, in the mystery of the incarnation, the Church's Eucharistic faith. When, at the Visitation, she bore in her womb the Word made flesh, she became in some way a "tabernacle" – the first "tabernacle" in history – in which the Son of God, still invisible to our human gaze, allowed himself to be adored by Elizabeth, radiating his light as it were through the eyes and the voice of Mary. And is not the enraptured gaze of Mary as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ and cradled him in her arms that unparalleled model of love which should inspire us every time we receive Eucharistic communion?

56. Mary, throughout her life at Christ's side and not only on Calvary, made her own the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. When she brought the child Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem "to present him to the Lord" (Lk 2:22), she heard the aged Simeon announce that the child would be a "sign of contradiction" and that a sword would also pierce her own heart (cf. Lk 2:34-35). The tragedy of her Son's crucifixion was thus foretold, and in some sense Mary's Stabat Mater at the foot of the Cross was foreshadowed. In her daily preparation for Calvary, Mary experienced a kind of "anticipated Eucharist" – one might say a "spiritual communion" – of desire and of oblation, which would culminate in her union with her Son in his passion, and then find expression after Easter by her partaking in the Eucharist which the Apostles celebrated as the memorial of that passion.

What must Mary have felt as she heard from the mouth of Peter, John, James and the other Apostles the words spoken at the Last Supper: "This is my body which is given for you" (Lk 22:19)? The body given up for us and made present under sacramental signs was the same body which she had conceived in her womb! For Mary, receiving the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers and reliving what she had experienced at the foot of the Cross.

57. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). In the "memorial" of Calvary all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present. Consequently all that Christ did with regard to his Mother for our sake is also present. To her he gave the beloved disciple and, in him, each of us: "Behold, your Son!". To each of us he also says: "Behold your mother!" (cf. Jn 19: 26-27).

Experiencing the memorial of Christ's death in the Eucharist also means continually receiving this gift. It means accepting – like John – the one who is given to us anew as our Mother. It also means taking on a commitment to be conformed to Christ, putting ourselves at the school of his Mother and allowing her to accompany us. Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist. This is one reason why, since ancient times, the commemoration of Mary has always been part of the Eucharistic celebrations of the Churches of East and West.

58. In the Eucharist the Church is completely united to Christ and his sacrifice, and makes her own the spirit of Mary. This truth can be understood more deeply by re-reading the Magnificat in a Eucharistic key. The Eucharist, like the Canticle of Mary, is first and foremost praise and thanksgiving. When Mary exclaims: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour", she already bears Jesus in her womb. She praises God "through" Jesus, but she also praises him "in" Jesus and "with" Jesus. This is itself the true "Eucharistic attitude".

At the same time Mary recalls the wonders worked by God in salvation history in fulfilment of the promise once made to the fathers (cf. Lk 1:55), and proclaims the wonder that surpasses them all, the redemptive incarnation. Lastly, the Magnificat reflects the eschatological tension of the Eucharist. Every time the Son of God comes again to us in the "poverty" of the sacramental signs of bread and wine, the seeds of that new history wherein the mighty are "put down from their thrones" and "those of low degree are exalted" (cf. Lk 1:52), take root in the world. Mary sings of the "new heavens" and the "new earth" which find in the Eucharist their anticipation and in some sense their programme and plan. The Magnificat expresses Mary's spirituality, and there is nothing greater than this spirituality for helping us to experience the mystery of the Eucharist. The Eucharist has been given to us so that our life, like that of Mary, may become completely a Magnificat!

CONCLUSION

59. Ave, verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine! Several years ago I celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of my priesthood. Today I have the grace of offering the Church this Encyclical on the Eucharist on the Holy Thursday which falls during the twenty-fifth year of my Petrine ministry. As I do so, my heart is filled with gratitude. For over a half century, every day, beginning on 2 November 1946, when I celebrated my first Mass in the Crypt of Saint Leonard in Wawel Cathedral in Krakow, my eyes have gazed in recollection upon the host and the chalice, where time and space in some way "merge" and the drama of Golgotha is re-presented in a living way, thus revealing its mysterious "contemporaneity". Each day my faith has been able to recognize in the consecrated bread and wine the divine Wayfarer who joined the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened their eyes to the light and their hearts to new hope (cf. Lk 24:13-35).

Allow me, dear brothers and sisters, to share with deep emotion, as a means of accompanying and strengthening your faith, my own testimony of faith in the Most Holy Eucharist. Ave verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine, vere passum, immolatum, in cruce pro homine! Here is the Church's treasure, the heart of the world, the pledge of the fulfilment for which each man and woman, even unconsciously, yearns. A great and transcendent mystery, indeed, and one that taxes our mind's ability to pass beyond appearances. Here our senses fail us: visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur, in the words of the hymn *Adoro Te Devote*; yet faith alone, rooted in the word of Christ handed down to us by the Apostles, is sufficient for us. Allow me, like Peter at the end of the Eucharistic discourse in John's Gospel, to say once more to Christ, in the name of the whole Church and in the name of each of you: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68).

60. At the dawn of this third millennium, we, the children of the Church, are called to undertake with renewed enthusiasm the journey of Christian living. As I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio*

Ineunte, "it is not a matter of inventing a 'new programme'. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition; it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem".¹⁰³ The implementation of this programme of a renewed impetus in Christian living passes through the Eucharist.

Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church's mission, every work of pastoral planning, must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination. In the Eucharist we have Jesus, we have his redemptive sacrifice, we have his resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience and love of the Father. Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency?

61. The mystery of the Eucharist – sacrifice, presence, banquet – does not allow for reduction or exploitation; it must be experienced and lived in its integrity, both in its celebration and in the intimate converse with Jesus which takes place after receiving communion or in a prayerful moment of Eucharistic adoration apart from Mass. These are times when the Church is firmly built up and it becomes clear what she truly is: one, holy, catholic and apostolic; the people, temple and family of God; the body and bride of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit; the universal sacrament of salvation and a hierarchically structured communion.

The path taken by the Church in these first years of the third millennium is also a path of renewed ecumenical commitment. The final decades of the second millennium, culminating in the Great Jubilee, have spurred us along this path and called for all the baptized to respond to the prayer of Jesus "ut unum sint" (Jn 17:11). The path itself is long and strewn with obstacles greater than our human resources alone can overcome, yet we have the Eucharist, and in its presence we can hear in the depths of our hearts, as if they were addressed to us, the same words heard by the Prophet Elijah: "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you" (1 Kg 19:7). The treasure of the Eucharist, which the Lord places before us, impels us towards the goal of full sharing with all our brothers and sisters to whom we are joined

by our common Baptism. But if this treasure is not to be squandered, we need to respect the demands which derive from its being the sacrament of communion in faith and in apostolic succession.

By giving the Eucharist the prominence it deserves, and by being careful not to diminish any of its dimensions or demands, we show that we are truly conscious of the greatness of this gift. We are urged to do so by an uninterrupted tradition, which from the first centuries on has found the Christian community ever vigilant in guarding this “treasure”. Inspired by love, the Church is anxious to hand on to future generations of Christians, without loss, her faith and teaching with regard to the mystery of the Eucharist.

There can be no danger of excess in our care for this mystery, for “in this sacrament is recapitulated the whole mystery of our salvation”.¹⁰⁴

62. Let us take our place, dear brothers and sisters, at the school of the saints, who are the great interpreters of true Eucharistic piety. In them the theology of the Eucharist takes on all the splendour of a lived reality; it becomes “contagious” and, in a manner of speaking, it “warms our hearts”. Above all, let us listen to Mary Most Holy, in whom the mystery of the Eucharist appears, more than in anyone else, as a mystery of light. Gazing upon Mary, we come to know the transforming power present in the Eucharist. In her we see the world renewed in love. Contemplating her, assumed body and soul into heaven, we see opening up before us those “new heavens” and that “new earth” which will appear at the second coming of Christ. Here below, the Eucharist represents their pledge, and in a certain way, their anticipation: “Veni, Domine Iesu!” (Rev 22:20).

In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope. If, in the presence of this mystery, reason experiences its limits, the heart, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, clearly sees the response that is demanded, and bows low in adoration and unbounded love.

Let us make our own the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an eminent theologian and an impassioned poet of Christ in the Eucharist, and turn in hope to the contemplation of that goal to which our hearts aspire in their thirst for joy and peace:

Bone pastor, panis vere, Iesu, nostri miserere...

Come then, good Shepherd, bread divine,

Still show to us thy mercy sign;

Oh, feed us, still keep us thine;

So we may see thy glories shine

in fields of immortality.

O thou, the wisest, mightiest, best,

Our present food, our future rest,

Come, make us each thy chosen guest,

Co-heirs of thine, and comrades blest

With saints whose dwelling is with thee.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 17 April, Holy Thursday, in the year 2003, the Twenty- fifth of my Pontificate, the Year of the Rosary.

IOANNES PAULUS II

NOTES

¹Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11. Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

²Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

³Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (16 October 2002), 21: AAS 95 (2003), 19.

⁴This is the title which I gave to an autobiographical testimony issued for my fiftieth anniversary of priestly ordination.

⁵Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, XXII (1903), 115-136.

⁶AAS 39 (1947), 521-595.

⁷AAS 57 (1965), 753-774.

⁸AAS 72 (1980), 113-148.

⁹Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47: “... our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and blood, in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout time, until he should return”.

¹⁰Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1085.

¹¹Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

12Cf. Paul VI, Solemn Profession of Faith, 30 June 1968, 24: AAS 60 (1968), 442; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cena* (24 February 1980), 12: AAS 72 (1980), 142.

13Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1382.

14Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1367.

15In *Epistolam ad Hebraeos Homiliae*, Hom. 17, 3: PG 63, 131.

16Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XXII, *Doctrina de ss. Missae Sacrificio*, Chapter 2: DS 1743: “It is one and the same victim here offering himself by the ministry of his priests, who then offered himself on the Cross; it is only the manner of offering that is different”.

17Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947): AAS 39 (1947), 548.

18John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (15 March 1979), 20: AAS 71 (1979), 310.

19Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

20De *Sacramentis*, V, 4, 26: CSEL 73, 70.

21In *Ioannis Evangelium*, XII, 20: PG 74, 726.

22Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965): AAS 57 (1965), 764.

23Session XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Chapter 4: DS 1642.

24Mystagogical Catecheses, IV, 6: SCh 126, 138.

25Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 8.

26Solemn Profession of Faith, 30 June 1968, 25: AAS 60 (1968), 442-443.

27Sermo IV in *Hebdomadam Sanctam*: CSCO 413/Syr. 182, 55.

28Anaphora.

29Eucharistic Prayer III.

30Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Second Vespers, Antiphon to the Magnificat.

31Missale Romanum, Embolism following the Lord's Prayer.

32Ad *Ephesios*, 20: PG 5, 661.

33Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

34“Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food', and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me'... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger. Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well”: Saint John Chrysostom, In *Evangelium S. Matthaei*, hom. 50:3-4: PG 58, 508-509; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 31: AAS 80 (1988), 553-556.

35Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

36Ibid.

37Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 5.

38“Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said: 'Behold the blood of the Covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'” (Ex 24:8).

39Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

40Cf. *ibid.*, 9.

41Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5. The same Decree, in No. 6, says: “No Christian community can be built up which does not grow from and hinge on the celebration of the most holy Eucharist”.

42In *Epistolam I ad Corinthios Homiliae*, 24, 2: PG 61, 200; Cf. *Didache*, IX, 4: F.X. Funk, I, 22; Saint Cyprian, Ep. LXIII, 13: PL 4, 384.

43PO 26, 206.

44Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

45Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Canon 4: DS 1654.

46Cf. *Rituale Romanum*: De sacra communione et de cultu mysterii eucharistici extra Missam, 36 (No. 80).

47Cf. *ibid.*, 38-39 (Nos. 86-90).

48John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 32: AAS 93 (2001), 288.

49“In the course of the day the faithful should not omit visiting the Blessed Sacrament, which in accordance with liturgical law must be reserved in churches with great reverence in a prominent place. Such visits are a sign of gratitude, an expression of love and an acknowledgment of the Lord's presence”: Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965): AAS 57 (1965), 771.

50Visite al SS. Sacramento e a Maria Santissima, Introduction: *Opere Ascetiche*, Avellino, 2000, 295.

51No. 857.

52Ibid.

53Ibid.

54Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter Sacerdotium Ministeriale (6 August 1983), III.2: AAS 75 (1983), 1005.

55Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 10.

56Ibid.

57Cf. *Institutio Generalis: Editio typica tertia*, No. 147.

58Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 10 and 28; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2.

59“‘The minister of the altar acts in the person of Christ inasmuch as he is head, making an offering in the name of all the members’”: Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947): AAS 39 (1947), 556; cf. Pius X, Apostolic Exhortation *Haerent Animo* (4 August 1908): *Acta Pii X*, IV, 16; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* (20 December 1935): AAS 28 (1936), 20.

60Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cena*e (24 February 1980), 8: AAS 72 (1980), 128-129.

61Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter Sacerdotium Ministeriale (6 August 1983), III.4: AAS 75 (1983), 1006; cf. Fourth Lateran Ecumenical Council, Chapter 1, Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Firmiter Credimus*: DS 802.

62Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22.

63Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cena*e (24 February 1980), 2: AAS 72 (1980), 115.

64Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14.

65Ibid., 13; cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 904; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 378.

66Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6.

67Cf. Final Report, II.C.1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1985, 7.

68Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 26.

69Nicolas Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, IV, 10: *SC*h 355, 270.

70Camino de Perfección, Chapter 35.

71Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio Notio* (28 May 1992), 4: AAS 85 (1993), 839-840.

72Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 14.

73Homiliae in *Isaiam*, 6, 3: PG 56, 139.

74No. 1385; cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 916; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 711.

75Address to the Members of the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary and the Penitentiaries of the Patriarchal Basilicas of Rome (30 January 1981): AAS 73 (1981), 203. Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Sess. XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Chapter 7 and Canon 11: DS 1647, 1661.

76Canon 915; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 712. 77Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 14.

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78Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 73, a. 3c.

79Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio Notio* (28 May 1992), 11: AAS 85 (1993), 844.

80Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 23.

81Ad *Smyrnaeos*, 8: PG 5, 713.

82Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 23.

83Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio Notio* (28 May 1992), 14: AAS 85 (1993), 847.

84Sermo 272: PL 38, 1247.

85Ibid., 1248.

86Cf. Nos. 31-51: AAS 90 (1998), 731-746.

87Cf. *ibid.*, Nos. 48-49: AAS 90 (1998), 744.

88No. 36: AAS 93 (2001), 291-292.

89Cf. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.

90Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 11.

91“Join all of us, who share the one bread and the one cup, to one another in the communion of the one Holy Spirit”: Anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil.

92Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 908; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 702; Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Ecumenical Directory*, 25 March 1993, 122-125, 129-131: AAS 85 (1993), 1086-1089; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Ad Exsequendam*, 18 May 2001: AAS 93 (2001), 786.

93“Divine law forbids any common worship which would damage the unity of the Church, or involve formal acceptance of falsehood or the danger of deviation in the faith, of scandal, or of indifferentism”: Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 26.

94No. 45: AAS 87 (1995), 948.

95Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 27.

96Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 844 §§ 3-4; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 671 §§ 3-4.

97No. 46: AAS 87 (1995), 948.

98Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22.

99Code of Canon Law, Canon 844; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 671.

100Cf. AAS 91 (1999), 1155-1172.

101No. 22: AAS 92 (2000), 485.

102Cf. No. 21: AAS 95 (2003), 20.

103No. 29: AAS 93 (2001), 285.

104Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 83, a. 4c.

ENCYCLICAL LETTER
OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF
JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
ON THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

My Venerable Brother Bishops, Health and the Apostolic Blessing!

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth-in a word, to know himself-so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves (cf. Ex 33:18; Ps 27:8-9; 63:2-3; Jn 14:8; 1 Jn 3:2).

INTRODUCTION

“KNOW YOURSELF”

1. In both East and West, we may trace a journey which has led humanity down the centuries to meet and engage truth more and more deeply. It is a journey which has unfolded-as it must-within the horizon of personal self-consciousness: the more human beings know reality and the world, the more they know themselves in their uniqueness, with the question of the meaning of things and of their very existence becoming ever more pressing. This is why all that is the object of our knowledge becomes a part of our life. The admonition Know yourself was carved on the temple portal at Delphi, as testimony to a basic truth to be adopted as a minimal norm by those who seek to set themselves apart from the rest of creation as “human beings”, that is as those who “know themselves”.

Moreover, a cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different parts of the world, with their different cultures, there arise at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life: Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?

These are the questions which we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the preaching of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. They are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart. In fact, the answer given to these questions decides the direction which people seek to give to their lives.

2.

The Church is no stranger to this journey of discovery, nor could she ever be. From the moment when, through the Paschal Mystery, she received the gift of the ultimate truth about human life, the Church has made her pilgrim way along the paths of the world to proclaim that Jesus Christ is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). It is her duty to serve humanity in different ways, but one way in particular imposes a responsibility of a quite special kind: the diakonia of the truth.(1) This mission on the one hand makes the believing community a partner in humanity's shared struggle to arrive at truth; (2) and on the other hand it obliges the believing community to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully” (1 Cor 13:12).

3.

Men and women have at their disposal an array of resources for generating greater knowledge of truth so that their lives may be ever more human. Among these is philosophy, which is directly concerned with asking the question of life's meaning and sketching an answer to it. Philosophy emerges, then, as one of noblest of human tasks. According to its Greek etymology, the term philosophy means “love of wisdom”. Born and nurtured when the human being first asked questions about the reason for things and their purpose, philosophy shows in different modes and forms that the desire for truth is part of human nature itself. It is an innate property of human reason to ask why things are as they are, even though the answers which gradually emerge are set within a horizon which reveals how the different human cultures are complementary.

Philosophy's powerful influence on the formation and development of the cultures of the West should not obscure the influence it has also had upon the ways of understanding existence found in the East. Every people has its own native and seminal wisdom which, as a true cultural treasure, tends to find voice and develop in forms which are genuinely philosophical. One example of this is the basic form of philosophical knowledge which is evident to this day in the postulates which inspire national and international legal systems in regulating the life of society.

4.

Nonetheless, it is true that a single term conceals a variety of meanings. Hence the need for a preliminary clarification. Driven by the desire to discover the ultimate truth of existence, human beings seek to acquire those universal elements of knowledge which enable them to understand themselves better and to advance in their own self-realization. These fundamental elements of knowledge spring from the wonder awakened in them by the contemplation of creation: human beings are astonished to discover themselves as part of the world, in a relationship with others like them, all sharing a common destiny. Here begins, then, the journey which will lead them to discover ever new frontiers of knowledge. Without wonder, men and women would lapse into deadening routine and little by little would become incapable of a life which is genuinely personal.

Through philosophy's work, the ability to speculate which is proper to the human intellect produces a rigorous mode of thought; and then in turn, through the logical coherence of the affirmations made and the organic unity of their content, it produces a systematic body of knowledge. In different cultural contexts and at different times, this process has yielded results which have produced genuine systems of thought. Yet often enough in history this has brought with it the temptation to identify one single stream with the whole of philosophy. In such cases, we are clearly dealing with a "philosophical pride" which seeks to present its own partial and imperfect view as the complete reading of all reality. In effect, every philosophical system, while it should always be respected in its wholeness, without any instrumentalization, must still recognize the primacy of philosophical enquiry, from which it stems and which it ought loyally to serve.

Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all. These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. It is as if we had come upon an implicit philosophy, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference-point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, *orthós logos*, *recta ratio*.

5. On her part, the Church cannot but set great value upon reason's drive to attain goals which render people's lives ever more worthy. She sees in philosophy the way to come to know fundamental truths about human life. At the same time, the Church considers philosophy an indispensable help for a deeper understanding of faith and for communicating the truth of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it.

Therefore, following upon similar initiatives by my Predecessors, I wish to reflect upon this special activity of human reason. I judge it necessary to do so because, at the present time in particular, the search for ultimate truth seems often to be neglected. Modern philosophy clearly has the great merit of focusing attention upon man. From this starting-point, human reason with its many questions has developed further its yearning to know more and to know it ever more deeply. Complex systems of thought have thus been built, yielding results in the different fields of knowledge and fostering the development of culture and history. Anthropology, logic, the natural sciences, history, linguistics and so forth—the whole universe of knowledge has been involved in one way or another. Yet the positive results achieved must not obscure the fact that reason, in its one-sided concern to investigate human subjectivity, seems to have forgotten that men and women are always called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them. Sundered from that truth, individuals are at the mercy of caprice, and their state as person ends up being judged by pragmatic criteria based essentially upon experimental data, in the mistaken belief that technology must dominate all. It has happened therefore that reason, rather than voicing the human orientation towards truth, has wilted under the weight of so much knowledge and little by little has lost the capacity to lift its gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being. Abandoning the investigation of being, modern philosophical research has concentrated instead upon human knowing. Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned.

This has given rise to different forms of agnosticism and relativism which have led philosophical research to lose its way in the shifting sands of widespread scepticism. Recent times have seen the rise to prominence of various doctrines which tend to devalue even the truths which had been judged certain. A legitimate plurality of positions has yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid, which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth. Even certain conceptions of life coming from the East betray this lack of confidence, denying truth its exclusive character and assuming that truth reveals itself equally in different doctrines, even if they contradict one another. On this understanding, everything is reduced to opinion; and there is a sense of being adrift. While, on the one hand, philosophical thinking has succeeded in coming closer to the reality of human life and its forms of expression, it has also tended to pursue issues—existential, hermeneutical or linguistic—which ignore the radical question of the truth about personal existence, about being and about God. Hence we see among the men and women of our time, and not just in some philosophers, attitudes of widespread distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge. With a false modesty, people rest content with partial and provisional

truths, no longer seeking to ask radical questions about the meaning and ultimate foundation of human, personal and social existence. In short, the hope that philosophy might be able to provide definitive answers to these questions has dwindled.

6. Sure of her competence as the bearer of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Church reaffirms the need to reflect upon truth. This is why I have decided to address you, my venerable Brother Bishops, with whom I share the mission of “proclaiming the truth openly” (2 Cor 4:2), as also theologians and philosophers whose duty it is to explore the different aspects of truth, and all those who are searching; and I do so in order to offer some reflections on the path which leads to true wisdom, so that those who love truth may take the sure path leading to it and so find rest from their labours and joy for their spirit.

I feel impelled to undertake this task above all because of the Second Vatican Council's insistence that the Bishops are “witnesses of divine and catholic truth”.(3) To bear witness to the truth is therefore a task entrusted to us Bishops; we cannot renounce this task without failing in the ministry which we have received. In reaffirming the truth of faith, we can both restore to our contemporaries a genuine trust in their capacity to know and challenge philosophy to recover and develop its own full dignity.

There is a further reason why I write these reflections. In my Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, I drew attention to “certain fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine which, in the present circumstances, risk being distorted or denied”.(4) In the present Letter, I wish to pursue that reflection by concentrating on the theme of truth itself and on its foundation in relation to faith. For it is undeniable that this time of rapid and complex change can leave especially the younger generation, to whom the future belongs and on whom it depends, with a sense that they have no valid points of reference. The need for a foundation for personal and communal life becomes all the more pressing at a time when we are faced with the patent inadequacy of perspectives in which the ephemeral is affirmed as a value and the possibility of discovering the real meaning of life is cast into doubt. This is why many people stumble through life to the very edge of the abyss without knowing where they are going. At times, this happens because those whose vocation it is to give cultural expression to their thinking no longer look to truth, preferring quick success to the toil of patient enquiry into what makes life worth living. With its enduring appeal to the search for truth, philosophy has the great responsibility of forming thought and culture; and now it must strive resolutely to recover its original vocation. This is why I have felt both the need and the duty to address this theme so that, on the threshold of the third millennium of the Christian era, humanity may come to a clearer sense of the great resources with which it has been endowed and may commit itself with renewed courage to implement the plan of salvation of which its history is part.

CHAPTER I

THE REVELATION OF GOD'S WISDOM

Jesus, revealer of the Father

7. Underlying all the Church's thinking is the awareness that she is the bearer of a message which has its origin in God himself (cf. 2 Cor 4:1-2). The knowledge which the Church offers to man has its origin not in any speculation of her own, however sublime, but in the word of God which she has received in faith (cf. 1 Th 2:13). At the origin of our life of faith there is an encounter, unique in kind, which discloses a mystery hidden for long ages (cf. 1 Cor 2:7; Rom 16:25-26) but which is now revealed: “In his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph 1:9), by which, through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature”.(5) This initiative is utterly gratuitous, moving from God to men and women in order to bring them to salvation. As the source of love, God desires to make himself known; and the knowledge which the human being has of God perfects all that the human mind can know of the meaning of life.

8.

Restating almost to the letter the teaching of the First Vatican Council's Constitution *Dei Filius*, and taking into account the principles set out by the Council of Trent, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution *Dei Verbum* pursued the age-old journey of understanding faith, reflecting on Revelation in the light of the teaching of Scripture and of the entire Patristic tradition. At the First Vatican Council, the Fathers had stressed the supernatural character of God's Revelation. On the basis of mistaken and very widespread assertions, the rationalist critique of the time attacked faith and denied the possibility of any knowledge which was not the fruit of reason's natural capacities. This obliged the Council to reaffirm emphatically that there exists a knowledge which is peculiar to faith, surpassing the knowledge proper to human reason, which nevertheless by its nature can discover the Creator. This knowledge expresses a truth based upon the very fact of God who reveals himself, a truth which is most certain, since God neither deceives nor wishes to deceive.(6)

9.

The First Vatican Council teaches, then, that the truth attained by philosophy and the truth of Revelation are neither identical nor mutually exclusive: “There exists a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only as regards their source, but also as regards their object. With regard to the source, because we know in one by natural reason, in the other by

divine faith. With regard to the object, because besides those things which natural reason can attain, there are proposed for our belief mysteries hidden in God which, unless they are divinely revealed, cannot be known".(7) Based upon God's testimony and enjoying the supernatural assistance of grace, faith is of an order other than philosophical knowledge which depends upon sense perception and experience and which advances by the light of the intellect alone. Philosophy and the sciences function within the order of natural reason; while faith, enlightened and guided by the Spirit, recognizes in the message of salvation the "fullness of grace and truth" (cf. Jn 1:14) which God has willed to reveal in history and definitively through his Son, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Jn 5:9; Jn 5:31-32).

10.

Contemplating Jesus as revealer, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stressed the salvific character of God's Revelation in history, describing it in these terms: "In this Revelation, the invisible God (cf. Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17), out of the abundance of his love speaks to men and women as friends (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar 3:38), so that he may invite and take them into communion with himself. This plan of Revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this Revelation, then, the deepest truth about God and human salvation is made clear to us in Christ, who is the mediator and at the same time the fullness of all Revelation".(8)

11.

God's Revelation is therefore immersed in time and history. Jesus Christ took flesh in the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4); and two thousand years later, I feel bound to restate forcefully that "in Christianity time has a fundamental importance".(9) It is within time that the whole work of creation and salvation comes to light; and it emerges clearly above all that, with the Incarnation of the Son of God, our life is even now a foretaste of the fulfilment of time which is to come (cf. Heb 1:2).

The truth about himself and his life which God has entrusted to humanity is immersed therefore in time and history; and it was declared once and for all in the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth. The Constitution *Dei Verbum* puts it eloquently: "After speaking in many places and varied ways through the prophets, God 'last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son' (Heb 1:1-2). For he sent his Son, the eternal Word who enlightens all people, so that he might dwell among them and tell them the innermost realities about God (cf. Jn 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, sent as 'a human being to human beings', 'speaks the words of God' (Jn 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. Jn 5:36; 17:4). To see Jesus is to see his Father (Jn 14:9). For this reason, Jesus perfected Revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious Resurrection from the dead and finally his sending of the Spirit of truth".(10)

For the People of God, therefore, history becomes a path to be followed to the end, so that by the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 16:13) the contents of revealed truth may find their full expression. This is the teaching of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* when it states that "as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly progresses towards the fullness of divine truth, until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her".(11)

12. History therefore becomes the arena where we see what God does for humanity. God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily, the things of our everyday life, apart from which we cannot understand ourselves.

In the Incarnation of the Son of God we see forged the enduring and definitive synthesis which the human mind of itself could not even have imagined: the Eternal enters time, the Whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face. The truth communicated in Christ's Revelation is therefore no longer confined to a particular place or culture, but is offered to every man and woman who would welcome it as the word which is the absolutely valid source of meaning for human life. Now, in Christ, all have access to the Father, since by his Death and Resurrection Christ has bestowed the divine life which the first Adam had refused (cf. Rom 5:12-15). Through this Revelation, men and women are offered the ultimate truth about their own life and about the goal of history. As the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* puts it, "only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light".(12) Seen in any other terms, the mystery of personal existence remains an insoluble riddle. Where might the human being seek the answer to dramatic questions such as pain, the suffering of the innocent and death, if not in the light streaming from the mystery of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection?

Reason before the mystery

13. It should nonetheless be kept in mind that Revelation remains charged with mystery. It is true that Jesus, with his entire life, revealed the countenance of the Father, for he came to teach the secret things of God.(13) But our vision of the face of God is always fragmentary and impaired by the limits of our understanding. Faith alone makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently.

The Council teaches that "the obedience of faith must be given to God who reveals himself".(14) This brief but dense statement points to a fundamental truth of Christianity. Faith is said first to be an obedient response to God. This implies that God be acknowledged in his divinity, transcendence and supreme freedom. By the authority of his absolute

transcendence, God who makes himself known is also the source of the credibility of what he reveals. By faith, men and women give their assent to this divine testimony.

This means that they acknowledge fully and integrally the truth of what is revealed because it is God himself who is the guarantor of that truth. They can make no claim upon this truth which comes to them as gift and which, set within the context of interpersonal communication, urges reason to be open to it and to embrace its profound meaning. This is why the Church has always considered the act of entrusting oneself to God to be a moment of fundamental decision which engages the whole person. In that act, the intellect and the will display their spiritual nature, enabling the subject to act in a way which realizes personal freedom to the full.⁽¹⁵⁾ It is not just that freedom is part of the act of faith: it is absolutely required. Indeed, it is faith that allows individuals to give consummate expression to their own freedom. Put differently, freedom is not realized in decisions made against God. For how could it be an exercise of true freedom to refuse to be open to the very reality which enables our self-realization? Men and women can accomplish no more important act in their lives than the act of faith; it is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth and chooses to live in that truth.

To assist reason in its effort to understand the mystery there are the signs which Revelation itself presents. These serve to lead the search for truth to new depths, enabling the mind in its autonomous exploration to penetrate within the mystery by use of reason's own methods, of which it is rightly jealous. Yet these signs also urge reason to look beyond their status as signs in order to grasp the deeper meaning which they bear. They contain a hidden truth to which the mind is drawn and which it cannot ignore without destroying the very signs which it is given.

In a sense, then, we return to the sacramental character of Revelation and especially to the sign of the Eucharist, in which the indissoluble unity between the signifier and signified makes it possible to grasp the depths of the mystery. In the Eucharist, Christ is truly present and alive, working through his Spirit; yet, as Saint Thomas said so well, "what you neither see nor grasp, faith confirms for you, leaving nature far behind; a sign it is that now appears, hiding in mystery realities sublime".⁽¹⁶⁾ He is echoed by the philosopher Pascal: "Just as Jesus Christ went unrecognized among men, so does his truth appear without external difference among common modes of thought. So too does the Eucharist remain among common bread".⁽¹⁷⁾

In short, the knowledge proper to faith does not destroy the mystery; it only reveals it the more, showing how necessary it is for people's lives: Christ the Lord "in revealing the mystery of the Father and his love fully reveals man to himself and makes clear his supreme calling",⁽¹⁸⁾ which is to share in the divine mystery of the life of the Trinity.⁽¹⁹⁾

14. From the teaching of the two Vatican Councils there also emerges a genuinely novel consideration for philosophical learning. Revelation has set within history a point of reference which cannot be ignored if the mystery of human life is to be known. Yet this knowledge refers back constantly to the mystery of God which the human mind cannot exhaust but can only receive and embrace in faith. Between these two poles, reason has its own specific field in which it can enquire and understand, restricted only by its finiteness before the infinite mystery of God.

Revelation therefore introduces into our history a universal and ultimate truth which stirs the human mind to ceaseless effort; indeed, it impels reason continually to extend the range of its knowledge until it senses that it has done all in its power, leaving no stone unturned. To assist our reflection on this point we have one of the most fruitful and important minds in human history, a point of reference for both philosophy and theology: Saint Anselm. In his *Proslogion*, the Archbishop of Canterbury puts it this way: "Thinking of this problem frequently and intently, at times it seemed I was ready to grasp what I was seeking; at other times it eluded my thought completely, until finally, despairing of being able to find it, I wanted to abandon the search for something which was impossible to find. I wanted to rid myself of that thought because, by filling my mind, it distracted me from other problems from which I could gain some profit; but it would then present itself with ever greater insistence... Woe is me, one of the poor children of Eve, far from God, what did I set out to do and what have I accomplished? What was I aiming for and how far have I got? What did I aspire to and what did I long for?... O Lord, you are not only that than which nothing greater can be conceived (*non solum es quo maius cogitari nequit*), but you are greater than all that can be conceived (*quiddam maius quam cogitari possit*)... If you were not such, something greater than you could be thought, but this is impossible".⁽²⁰⁾

15. The truth of Christian Revelation, found in Jesus of Nazareth, enables all men and women to embrace the "mystery" of their own life. As absolute truth, it summons human beings to be open to the transcendent, whilst respecting both their autonomy as creatures and their freedom. At this point the relationship between freedom and truth is complete, and we understand the full meaning of the Lord's words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32).

Christian Revelation is the true lodestar of men and women as they strive to make their way amid the pressures of an immanentist habit of mind and the constrictions of a technocratic logic. It is the ultimate possibility offered by God for the human being to know in all its fullness the seminal plan of love which began with creation. To those wishing to know the truth, if they can look beyond themselves and their own concerns, there is given the possibility of taking full and harmonious possession of their lives, precisely by following the path of truth. Here the words of the Book of Deuteronomy are pertinent: "This commandment which I command you is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear and do it?' But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that you can do it" (30:11-14). This text

finds an echo in the famous dictum of the holy philosopher and theologian Augustine: “Do not wander far and wide but return into yourself. Deep within man there dwells the truth” (Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi. In interiore homine habitat veritas).(21)

These considerations prompt a first conclusion: the truth made known to us by Revelation is neither the product nor the consummation of an argument devised by human reason. It appears instead as something gratuitous, which itself stirs thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love. This revealed truth is set within our history as an anticipation of that ultimate and definitive vision of God which is reserved for those who believe in him and seek him with a sincere heart. The ultimate purpose of personal existence, then, is the theme of philosophy and theology alike. For all their difference of method and content, both disciplines point to that “path of life” (Ps 16:11) which, as faith tells us, leads in the end to the full and lasting joy of the contemplation of the Triune God.

CHAPTER II

CREDO UT INTELLEGAM

“Wisdom knows all and understands all” (Wis 9:11)

16. Sacred Scripture indicates with remarkably clear cues how deeply related are the knowledge conferred by faith and the knowledge conferred by reason; and it is in the Wisdom literature that this relationship is addressed most explicitly. What is striking about these biblical texts, if they are read without prejudice, is that they embody not only the faith of Israel, but also the treasury of cultures and civilizations which have long vanished. As if by special design, the voices of Egypt and Mesopotamia sound again and certain features common to the cultures of the ancient Near East come to life in these pages which are so singularly rich in deep intuition.

It is no accident that, when the sacred author comes to describe the wise man, he portrays him as one who loves and seeks the truth: “Happy the man who meditates on wisdom and reasons intelligently, who reflects in his heart on her ways and ponders her secrets. He pursues her like a hunter and lies in wait on her paths. He peers through her windows and listens at her doors. He camps near her house and fastens his tent-peg to her walls; he pitches his tent near her and so finds an excellent resting-place; he places his children under her protection and lodges under her boughs; by her he is sheltered from the heat and he dwells in the shade of her glory” (Sir 14:20-27).

For the inspired writer, as we see, the desire for knowledge is characteristic of all people. Intelligence enables everyone, believer and non-believer, to reach “the deep waters” of knowledge (cf. Prov 20:5). It is true that ancient Israel did not come to knowledge of the world and its phenomena by way of abstraction, as did the Greek philosopher or the Egyptian sage. Still less did the good Israelite understand knowledge in the way of the modern world which tends more to distinguish different kinds of knowing. Nonetheless, the biblical world has made its own distinctive contribution to the theory of knowledge.

What is distinctive in the biblical text is the conviction that there is a profound and indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason and the knowledge of faith. The world and all that happens within it, including history and the fate of peoples, are realities to be observed, analysed and assessed with all the resources of reason, but without faith ever being foreign to the process. Faith intervenes not to abolish reason's autonomy nor to reduce its scope for action, but solely to bring the human being to understand that in these events it is the God of Israel who acts. Thus the world and the events of history cannot be understood in depth without professing faith in the God who is at work in them. Faith sharpens the inner eye, opening the mind to discover in the flux of events the workings of Providence. Here the words of the Book of Proverbs are pertinent: “The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps” (16:9). This is to say that with the light of reason human beings can know which path to take, but they can follow that path to its end, quickly and unhindered, only if with a rightly tuned spirit they search for it within the horizon of faith. Therefore, reason and faith cannot be separated without diminishing the capacity of men and women to know themselves, the world and God in an appropriate way.

17.

There is thus no reason for competition of any kind between reason and faith: each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action. Again the Book of Proverbs points in this direction when it exclaims: “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out” (Prov 25:2). In their respective worlds, God and the human being are set within a unique relationship. In God there lies the origin of all things, in him is found the fullness of the mystery, and in this his glory consists; to men and women there falls the task of exploring truth with their reason, and in this their nobility consists. The Psalmist adds one final piece to this mosaic when he says in prayer: “How deep to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I try to count them, they are more than the sand. If I come to the end, I am still with you” (139:17-18). The desire for knowledge is so great and it works in such a way that the human heart, despite its experience of insurmountable limitation, yearns for the infinite riches which lie beyond, knowing that there is to be found the satisfying answer to every question as yet unanswered.

18.

We may say, then, that Israel, with her reflection, was able to open to reason the path that leads to the mystery. With the Revelation of God Israel could plumb the depths of all that she sought in vain to reach by way of reason. On the

basis of this deeper form of knowledge, the Chosen People understood that, if reason were to be fully true to itself, then it must respect certain basic rules. The first of these is that reason must realize that human knowledge is a journey which allows no rest; the second stems from the awareness that such a path is not for the proud who think that everything is the fruit of personal conquest; a third rule is grounded in the “fear of God” whose transcendent sovereignty and provident love in the governance of the world reason must recognize.

In abandoning these rules, the human being runs the risk of failure and ends up in the condition of “the fool”. For the Bible, in this foolishness there lies a threat to life. The fool thinks that he knows many things, but really he is incapable of fixing his gaze on the things that truly matter. Therefore he can neither order his mind (Prov 1:7) nor assume a correct attitude to himself or to the world around him. And so when he claims that “God does not exist” (cf. Ps 14:1), he shows with absolute clarity just how deficient his knowledge is and just how far he is from the full truth of things, their origin and their destiny.

19.

The Book of Wisdom contains several important texts which cast further light on this theme. There the sacred author speaks of God who reveals himself in nature. For the ancients, the study of the natural sciences coincided in large part with philosophical learning. Having affirmed that with their intelligence human beings can “know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements... the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars, the natures of animals and the tempers of wild beasts” (Wis 7:17, 19-20)-in a word, that he can philosophize-the sacred text takes a significant step forward. Making his own the thought of Greek philosophy, to which he seems to refer in the context, the author affirms that, in reasoning about nature, the human being can rise to God: “From the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wis 13:5). This is to recognize as a first stage of divine Revelation the marvellous “book of nature”, which, when read with the proper tools of human reason, can lead to knowledge of the Creator. If human beings with their intelligence fail to recognize God as Creator of all, it is not because they lack the means to do so, but because their free will and their sinfulness place an impediment in the way.

20.

Seen in this light, reason is valued without being overvalued. The results of reasoning may in fact be true, but these results acquire their true meaning only if they are set within the larger horizon of faith: “All man's steps are ordered by the Lord: how then can man understand his own ways?” (Prov 20:24). For the Old Testament, then, faith liberates reason in so far as it allows reason to attain correctly what it seeks to know and to place it within the ultimate order of things, in which everything acquires true meaning. In brief, human beings attain truth by way of reason because, enlightened by faith, they discover the deeper meaning of all things and most especially of their own existence. Rightly, therefore, the sacred author identifies the fear of God as the beginning of true knowledge: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7; cf. Sir 1:14).

“Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding” (Prov 4:5)

21. For the Old Testament, knowledge is not simply a matter of careful observation of the human being, of the world and of history, but supposes as well an indispensable link with faith and with what has been revealed. These are the challenges which the Chosen People had to confront and to which they had to respond. Pondering this as his situation, biblical man discovered that he could understand himself only as “being in relation”-with himself, with people, with the world and with God. This opening to the mystery, which came to him through Revelation, was for him, in the end, the source of true knowledge. It was this which allowed his reason to enter the realm of the infinite where an understanding for which until then he had not dared to hope became a possibility.

For the sacred author, the task of searching for the truth was not without the strain which comes once the limits of reason are reached. This is what we find, for example, when the Book of Proverbs notes the weariness which comes from the effort to understand the mysterious designs of God (cf. 30:1-6). Yet, for all the toil involved, believers do not surrender. They can continue on their way to the truth because they are certain that God has created them “explorers” (cf. Qoh 1:13), whose mission it is to leave no stone unturned, though the temptation to doubt is always there. Leaning on God, they continue to reach out, always and everywhere, for all that is beautiful, good and true.

22. In the first chapter of his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul helps us to appreciate better the depth of insight of the Wisdom literature's reflection. Developing a philosophical argument in popular language, the Apostle declares a profound truth: through all that is created the “eyes of the mind” can come to know God. Through the medium of creatures, God stirs in reason an intuition of his “power” and his “divinity” (cf. Rom 1:20). This is to concede to human reason a capacity which seems almost to surpass its natural limitations. Not only is it not restricted to sensory knowledge, from the moment that it can reflect critically upon the data of the senses, but, by discoursing on the data provided by the senses, reason can reach the cause which lies at the origin of all perceptible reality. In philosophical terms, we could say that this important Pauline text affirms the human capacity for metaphysical enquiry.

According to the Apostle, it was part of the original plan of the creation that reason should without difficulty reach beyond the sensory data to the origin of all things: the Creator. But because of the disobedience by which man and woman chose to set themselves in full and absolute autonomy in relation to the One who had created them, this ready access to God the Creator diminished.

This is the human condition vividly described by the Book of Genesis when it tells us that God placed the human being in the Garden of Eden, in the middle of which there stood “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (2:17). The symbol is clear: man was in no position to discern and decide for himself what was good and what was evil, but was constrained to appeal to a higher source. The blindness of pride deceived our first parents into thinking themselves sovereign and autonomous, and into thinking that they could ignore the knowledge which comes from God. All men and women were caught up in this primal disobedience, which so wounded reason that from then on its path to full truth would be strewn with obstacles. From that time onwards the human capacity to know the truth was impaired by an aversion to the One who is the source and origin of truth. It is again the Apostle who reveals just how far human thinking, because of sin, became “empty”, and human reasoning became distorted and inclined to falsehood (cf. Rom 1:21-22). The eyes of the mind were no longer able to see clearly: reason became more and more a prisoner to itself. The coming of Christ was the saving event which redeemed reason from its weakness, setting it free from the shackles in which it had imprisoned itself.

23. This is why the Christian's relationship to philosophy requires thorough-going discernment. In the New Testament, especially in the Letters of Saint Paul, one thing emerges with great clarity: the opposition between “the wisdom of this world” and the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The depth of revealed wisdom disrupts the cycle of our habitual patterns of thought, which are in no way able to express that wisdom in its fullness.

The beginning of the First Letter to the Corinthians poses the dilemma in a radical way. The crucified Son of God is the historic event upon which every attempt of the mind to construct an adequate explanation of the meaning of existence upon merely human argumentation comes to grief. The true key-point, which challenges every philosophy, is Jesus Christ's death on the Cross. It is here that every attempt to reduce the Father's saving plan to purely human logic is doomed to failure. “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the learned? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor 1:20), the Apostle asks emphatically. The wisdom of the wise is no longer enough for what God wants to accomplish; what is required is a decisive step towards welcoming something radically new: “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise...; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to reduce to nothing things that are” (1 Cor 1:27-28). Human wisdom refuses to see in its own weakness the possibility of its strength; yet Saint Paul is quick to affirm: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). Man cannot grasp how death could be the source of life and love; yet to reveal the mystery of his saving plan God has chosen precisely that which reason considers “foolishness” and a “scandal”. Adopting the language of the philosophers of his time, Paul comes to the summit of his teaching as he speaks the paradox: “God has chosen in the world... that which is nothing to reduce to nothing things that are” (cf. 1 Cor 1:28). In order to express the gratuitous nature of the love revealed in the Cross of Christ, the Apostle is not afraid to use the most radical language of the philosophers in their thinking about God. Reason cannot eliminate the mystery of love which the Cross represents, while the Cross can give to reason the ultimate answer which it seeks. It is not the wisdom of words, but the Word of Wisdom which Saint Paul offers as the criterion of both truth and salvation.

The wisdom of the Cross, therefore, breaks free of all cultural limitations which seek to contain it and insists upon an openness to the universality of the truth which it bears. What a challenge this is to our reason, and how great the gain for reason if it yields to this wisdom! Of itself, philosophy is able to recognize the human being's ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth; and, with the assistance of faith, it is capable of accepting the “foolishness” of the Cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising. The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up, but it is also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth. Here we see not only the border between reason and faith, but also the space where the two may meet.

CHAPTER III

INTELLEGO UT CREDAM

Journeying in search of truth

24. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Evangelist Luke tells of Paul's coming to Athens on one of his missionary journeys. The city of philosophers was full of statues of various idols. One altar in particular caught his eye, and he took this as a convenient starting-point to establish a common base for the proclamation of the kerygma. “Athenians,” he said, “I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22-23). From this starting-point, Saint Paul speaks of God as Creator, as the One who transcends all things and gives life to all. He then continues his speech in these terms: “From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him-though indeed he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27).

The Apostle accentuates a truth which the Church has always treasured: in the far reaches of the human heart there is a seed of desire and nostalgia for God. The Liturgy of Good Friday recalls this powerfully when, in praying for those who do not believe, we say: "Almighty and eternal God, you created mankind so that all might long to find you and have peace when you are found".(22) There is therefore a path which the human being may choose to take, a path which begins with reason's capacity to rise beyond what is contingent and set out towards the infinite.

In different ways and at different times, men and women have shown that they can articulate this intimate desire of theirs. Through literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture and every other work of their creative intelligence they have declared the urgency of their quest. In a special way philosophy has made this search its own and, with its specific tools and scholarly methods, has articulated this universal human desire.

25. "All human beings desire to know", (23) and truth is the proper object of this desire. Everyday life shows how concerned each of us is to discover for ourselves, beyond mere opinions, how things really are. Within visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing but who knows that he knows, and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives. People cannot be genuinely indifferent to the question of whether what they know is true or not. If they discover that it is false, they reject it; but if they can establish its truth, they feel themselves rewarded. It is this that Saint Augustine teaches when he writes: "I have met many who wanted to deceive, but none who wanted to be deceived".

(24) It is rightly claimed that persons have reached adulthood when they can distinguish independently between truth and falsehood, making up their own minds about the objective reality of things. This is what has driven so many enquiries, especially in the scientific field, which in recent centuries have produced important results, leading to genuine progress for all humanity.

No less important than research in the theoretical field is research in the practical field-by which I mean the search for truth which looks to the good which is to be performed. In acting ethically, according to a free and rightly tuned will, the human person sets foot upon the path to happiness and moves towards perfection. Here too it is a question of truth. It is this conviction which I stressed in my Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*: "There is no morality without freedom... Although each individual has a right to be respected in his own journey in search of the truth, there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known".(25)

It is essential, therefore, that the values chosen and pursued in one's life be true, because only true values can lead people to realize themselves fully, allowing them to be true to their nature. The truth of these values is to be found not by turning in on oneself but by opening oneself to apprehend that truth even at levels which transcend the person. This is an essential condition for us to become ourselves and to grow as mature, adult persons.

26. The truth comes initially to the human being as a question: Does life have a meaning? Where is it going? At first sight, personal existence may seem completely meaningless. It is not necessary to turn to the philosophers of the absurd or to the provocative questioning found in the Book of Job in order to have doubts about life's meaning. The daily experience of suffering-in one's own life and in the lives of others-and the array of facts which seem inexplicable to reason are enough to ensure that a question as dramatic as the question of meaning cannot be evaded.(26) Moreover, the first absolutely certain truth of our life, beyond the fact that we exist, is the inevitability of our death. Given this unsettling fact, the search for a full answer is inescapable. Each of us has both the desire and the duty to know the truth of our own destiny. We want to know if death will be the definitive end of our life or if there is something beyond-if it is possible to hope for an after-life or not. It is not insignificant that the death of Socrates gave philosophy one of its decisive orientations, no less decisive now than it was more than two thousand years ago. It is not by chance, then, that faced with the fact of death philosophers have again and again posed this question, together with the question of the meaning of life and immortality.

27. No-one can avoid this questioning, neither the philosopher nor the ordinary person. The answer we give will determine whether or not we think it possible to attain universal and absolute truth; and this is a decisive moment of the search. Every truth-if it really is truth-presents itself as universal, even if it is not the whole truth. If something is true, then it must be true for all people and at all times. Beyond this universality, however, people seek an absolute which might give to all their searching a meaning and an answer-something ultimate, which might serve as the ground of all things. In other words, they seek a final explanation, a supreme value, which refers to nothing beyond itself and which puts an end to all questioning. Hypotheses may fascinate, but they do not satisfy. Whether we admit it or not, there comes for everyone the moment when personal existence must be anchored to a truth recognized as final, a truth which confers a certitude no longer open to doubt.

Through the centuries, philosophers have sought to discover and articulate such a truth, giving rise to various systems and schools of thought. But beyond philosophical systems, people seek in different ways to shape a "philosophy" of their own-in personal convictions and experiences, in traditions of family and culture, or in journeys in search of life's meaning under the guidance of a master. What inspires all of these is the desire to reach the certitude of truth and the certitude of its absolute value.

The different faces of human truth

28.

The search for truth, of course, is not always so transparent nor does it always produce such results. The natural limitation of reason and the inconstancy of the heart often obscure and distort a person's search. Truth can also drown in a welter of other concerns. People can even run from the truth as soon as they glimpse it because they are afraid of its demands. Yet, for all that they may evade it, the truth still influences life. Life in fact can never be grounded upon doubt, uncertainty or deceit; such an existence would be threatened constantly by fear and anxiety. One may define the human being, therefore, as the one who seeks the truth.

29.

It is unthinkable that a search so deeply rooted in human nature would be completely vain and useless. The capacity to search for truth and to pose questions itself implies the rudiments of a response. Human beings would not even begin to search for something of which they knew nothing or for something which they thought was wholly beyond them. Only the sense that they can arrive at an answer leads them to take the first step. This is what normally happens in scientific research. When scientists, following their intuition, set out in search of the logical and verifiable explanation of a phenomenon, they are confident from the first that they will find an answer, and they do not give up in the face of setbacks. They do not judge their original intuition useless simply because they have not reached their goal; rightly enough they will say that they have not yet found a satisfactory answer.

The same must be equally true of the search for truth when it comes to the ultimate questions. The thirst for truth is so rooted in the human heart that to be obliged to ignore it would cast our existence into jeopardy. Everyday life shows well enough how each one of us is preoccupied by the pressure of a few fundamental questions and how in the soul of each of us there is at least an outline of the answers. One reason why the truth of these answers convinces is that they are no different in substance from the answers to which many others have come. To be sure, not every truth to which we come has the same value. But the sum of the results achieved confirms that in principle the human being can arrive at the truth.

30.

It may help, then, to turn briefly to the different modes of truth. Most of them depend upon immediate evidence or are confirmed by experimentation. This is the mode of truth proper to everyday life and to scientific research. At another level we find philosophical truth, attained by means of the speculative powers of the human intellect. Finally, there are religious truths which are to some degree grounded in philosophy, and which we find in the answers which the different religious traditions offer to the ultimate questions.(27)

The truths of philosophy, it should be said, are not restricted only to the sometimes ephemeral teachings of professional philosophers. All men and women, as I have noted, are in some sense philosophers and have their own philosophical conceptions with which they direct their lives. In one way or other, they shape a comprehensive vision and an answer to the question of life's meaning; and in the light of this they interpret their own life's course and regulate their behaviour. At this point, we may pose the question of the link between, on the one hand, the truths of philosophy and religion and, on the other, the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. But before tackling that question, one last datum of philosophy needs to be weighed.

31.

Human beings are not made to live alone. They are born into a family and in a family they grow, eventually entering society through their activity. From birth, therefore, they are immersed in traditions which give them not only a language and a cultural formation but also a range of truths in which they believe almost instinctively. Yet personal growth and maturity imply that these same truths can be cast into doubt and evaluated through a process of critical enquiry. It may be that, after this time of transition, these truths are "recovered" as a result of the experience of life or by dint of further reasoning. Nonetheless, there are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification. Who, for instance, could assess critically the countless scientific findings upon which modern life is based? Who could personally examine the flow of information which comes day after day from all parts of the world and which is generally accepted as true? Who in the end could forge anew the paths of experience and thought which have yielded the treasures of human wisdom and religion? This means that the human being-the one who seeks the truth-is also the one who lives by belief.

32.

In believing, we entrust ourselves to the knowledge acquired by other people. This suggests an important tension. On the one hand, the knowledge acquired through belief can seem an imperfect form of knowledge, to be perfected gradually through personal accumulation of evidence; on the other hand, belief is often humanly richer than mere evidence, because it involves an interpersonal relationship and brings into play not only a person's capacity to know but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others, to enter into a relationship with them which is intimate and enduring.

It should be stressed that the truths sought in this interpersonal relationship are not primarily empirical or philosophical. Rather, what is sought is the truth of the person-what the person is and what the person reveals from deep within. Human perfection, then, consists not simply in acquiring an abstract knowledge of the truth, but in a dynamic relationship of faithful self-giving with others. It is in this faithful self-giving that a person finds a fullness of certainty and security. At the same time, however, knowledge through belief, grounded as it is on trust between persons, is linked to truth: in the act of believing, men and women entrust themselves to the truth which the other declares to them.

Any number of examples could be found to demonstrate this; but I think immediately of the martyrs, who are the most authentic witnesses to the truth about existence. The martyrs know that they have found the truth about life in the encounter with Jesus Christ, and nothing and no-one could ever take this certainty from them. Neither suffering nor violent death could ever lead them to abandon the truth which they have discovered in the encounter with Christ. This is why to this day the witness of the martyrs continues to arouse such interest, to draw agreement, to win such a hearing and to invite emulation. This is why their word inspires such confidence: from the moment they speak to us of what we perceive deep down as the truth we have sought for so long, the martyrs provide evidence of a love that has no need of lengthy arguments in order to convince. The martyrs stir in us a profound trust because they give voice to what we already feel and they declare what we would like to have the strength to express.

33. Step by step, then, we are assembling the terms of the question. It is the nature of the human being to seek the truth. This search looks not only to the attainment of truths which are partial, empirical or scientific; nor is it only in individual acts of decision-making that people seek the true good. Their search looks towards an ulterior truth which would explain the meaning of life. And it is therefore a search which can reach its end only in reaching the absolute.(28) Thanks to the inherent capacities of thought, man is able to encounter and recognize a truth of this kind. Such a truth-vital and necessary as it is for life-is attained not only by way of reason but also through trusting acquiescence to other persons who can guarantee the authenticity and certainty of the truth itself. There is no doubt that the capacity to entrust oneself and one's life to another person and the decision to do so are among the most significant and expressive human acts.

It must not be forgotten that reason too needs to be sustained in all its searching by trusting dialogue and sincere friendship. A climate of suspicion and distrust, which can beset speculative research, ignores the teaching of the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical enquiry.

From all that I have said to this point it emerges that men and women are on a journey of discovery which is humanly unstoppable-a search for the truth and a search for a person to whom they might entrust themselves. Christian faith comes to meet them, offering the concrete possibility of reaching the goal which they seek. Moving beyond the stage of simple believing, Christian faith immerses human beings in the order of grace, which enables them to share in the mystery of Christ, which in turn offers them a true and coherent knowledge of the Triune God. In Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, faith recognizes the ultimate appeal to humanity, an appeal made in order that what we experience as desire and nostalgia may come to its fulfilment.

34.

This truth, which God reveals to us in Jesus Christ, is not opposed to the truths which philosophy perceives. On the contrary, the two modes of knowledge lead to truth in all its fullness. The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning, as the principle of non-contradiction makes clear. Revelation renders this unity certain, showing that the God of creation is also the God of salvation history. It is the one and the same God who establishes and guarantees the intelligibility and reasonableness of the natural order of things upon which scientists confidently depend, (29) and who reveals himself as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This unity of truth, natural and revealed, is embodied in a living and personal way in Christ, as the Apostle reminds us: "Truth is in Jesus" (cf. Eph 4:21; Col 1:15-20). He is the eternal Word in whom all things were created, and he is the incarnate Word who in his entire person (30) reveals the Father (cf. Jn 1:14, 18). What human reason seeks "without knowing it" (cf. Acts 17:23) can be found only through Christ: what is revealed in him is "the full truth" (cf. Jn 1:14-16) of everything which was created in him and through him and which therefore in him finds its fulfilment (cf. Col 1:17).

35.

On the basis of these broad considerations, we must now explore more directly the relationship between revealed truth and philosophy. This relationship imposes a twofold consideration, since the truth conferred by Revelation is a truth to be understood in the light of reason. It is this duality alone which allows us to specify correctly the relationship between revealed truth and philosophical learning. First, then, let us consider the links between faith and philosophy in the course of history. From this, certain principles will emerge as useful reference-points in the attempt to establish the correct link between the two orders of knowledge.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

Important moments in the encounter of faith and reason

36.

The Acts of the Apostles provides evidence that Christian proclamation was engaged from the very first with the philosophical currents of the time. In Athens, we read, Saint Paul entered into discussion with "certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" (17:18); and exegetical analysis of his speech at the Areopagus has revealed frequent allusions to popular beliefs deriving for the most part from Stoicism. This is by no means accidental. If pagans were to understand them, the first Christians could not refer only to "Moses and the prophets" when they spoke. They had to point as well

to natural knowledge of God and to the voice of conscience in every human being (cf. Rom 1:19-21; 2:14-15; Acts 14:16-17). Since in pagan religion this natural knowledge had lapsed into idolatry (cf. Rom 1:21-32), the Apostle judged it wiser in his speech to make the link with the thinking of the philosophers, who had always set in opposition to the myths and mystery cults notions more respectful of divine transcendence.

One of the major concerns of classical philosophy was to purify human notions of God of mythological elements. We know that Greek religion, like most cosmic religions, was polytheistic, even to the point of divinizing natural things and phenomena. Human attempts to understand the origin of the gods and hence the origin of the universe find their earliest expression in poetry; and the theogonies remain the first evidence of this human search. But it was the task of the fathers of philosophy to bring to light the link between reason and religion. As they broadened their view to include universal principles, they no longer rested content with the ancient myths, but wanted to provide a rational foundation for their belief in the divinity. This opened a path which took its rise from ancient traditions but allowed a development satisfying the demands of universal reason. This development sought to acquire a critical awareness of what they believed in, and the concept of divinity was the prime beneficiary of this. Superstitions were recognized for what they were and religion was, at least in part, purified by rational analysis. It was on this basis that the Fathers of the Church entered into fruitful dialogue with ancient philosophy, which offered new ways of proclaiming and understanding the God of Jesus Christ.

37.

In tracing Christianity's adoption of philosophy, one should not forget how cautiously Christians regarded other elements of the cultural world of paganism, one example of which is gnosticism. It was easy to confuse philosophy—understood as practical wisdom and an education for life—with a higher and esoteric kind of knowledge, reserved to those few who were perfect. It is surely this kind of esoteric speculation which Saint Paul has in mind when he puts the Colossians on their guard: “See to it that no-one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ” (2:8). The Apostle's words seem all too pertinent now if we apply them to the various kinds of esoteric superstition widespread today, even among some believers who lack a proper critical sense. Following Saint Paul, other writers of the early centuries, especially Saint Irenaeus and Tertullian, sound the alarm when confronted with a cultural perspective which sought to subordinate the truth of Revelation to the interpretation of the philosophers.

38.

Christianity's engagement with philosophy was therefore neither straight-forward nor immediate. The practice of philosophy and attendance at philosophical schools seemed to the first Christians more of a disturbance than an opportunity. For them, the first and most urgent task was the proclamation of the Risen Christ by way of a personal encounter which would bring the listener to conversion of heart and the request for Baptism. But that does not mean that they ignored the task of deepening the understanding of faith and its motivations. Quite the contrary. That is why the criticism of Celsus—that Christians were “illiterate and uncouth”(31)—is unfounded and untrue. Their initial disinterest is to be explained on other grounds. The encounter with the Gospel offered such a satisfying answer to the hitherto unresolved question of life's meaning that delving into the philosophers seemed to them something remote and in some ways outmoded.

That seems still more evident today, if we think of Christianity's contribution to the affirmation of the right of everyone to have access to the truth. In dismantling barriers of race, social status and gender, Christianity proclaimed from the first the equality of all men and women before God. One prime implication of this touched the theme of truth. The elitism which had characterized the ancients' search for truth was clearly abandoned. Since access to the truth enables access to God, it must be denied to none. There are many paths which lead to truth, but since Christian truth has a salvific value, any one of these paths may be taken, as long as it leads to the final goal, that is to the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

A pioneer of positive engagement with philosophical thinking—albeit with cautious discernment—was Saint Justin. Although he continued to hold Greek philosophy in high esteem after his conversion, Justin claimed with power and clarity that he had found in Christianity “the only sure and profitable philosophy”.

(32) Similarly, Clement of Alexandria called the Gospel “the true philosophy”, (33) and he understood philosophy, like the Mosaic Law, as instruction which prepared for Christian faith (34) and paved the way for the Gospel.(35) Since “philosophy yearns for the wisdom which consists in rightness of soul and speech and in purity of life, it is well disposed towards wisdom and does all it can to acquire it. We call philosophers those who love the wisdom that is creator and mistress of all things, that is knowledge of the Son of God”.(36) For Clement, Greek philosophy is not meant in the first place to bolster and complete Christian truth. Its task is rather the defence of the faith: “The teaching of the Saviour is perfect in itself and has no need of support, because it is the strength and the wisdom of God. Greek philosophy, with its contribution, does not strengthen truth; but, in rendering the attack of sophistry impotent and in disarming those who betray truth and wage war upon it, Greek philosophy is rightly called the hedge and the protective wall around the vineyard”.(37)

39.

It is clear from history, then, that Christian thinkers were critical in adopting philosophical thought. Among the early examples of this, Origen is certainly outstanding. In countering the attacks launched by the philosopher Celsus, Origen

adopts Platonic philosophy to shape his argument and mount his reply. Assuming many elements of Platonic thought, he begins to construct an early form of Christian theology. The name "theology" itself, together with the idea of theology as rational discourse about God, had to this point been tied to its Greek origins. In Aristotelian philosophy, for example, the name signified the noblest part and the true summit of philosophical discourse. But in the light of Christian Revelation what had signified a generic doctrine about the gods assumed a wholly new meaning, signifying now the reflection undertaken by the believer in order to express the true doctrine about God. As it developed, this new Christian thought made use of philosophy, but at the same time tended to distinguish itself clearly from philosophy. History shows how Platonic thought, once adopted by theology, underwent profound changes, especially with regard to concepts such as the immortality of the soul, the divinization of man and the origin of evil.

40.

In this work of christianizing Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, the Cappadocian Fathers, Dionysius called the Areopagite and especially Saint Augustine were important. The great Doctor of the West had come into contact with different philosophical schools, but all of them left him disappointed. It was when he encountered the truth of Christian faith that he found strength to undergo the radical conversion to which the philosophers he had known had been powerless to lead him. He himself reveals his motive: "From this time on, I gave my preference to the Catholic faith. I thought it more modest and not in the least misleading to be told by the Church to believe what could not be demonstrated-whether that was because a demonstration existed but could not be understood by all or whether the matter was not one open to rational proof-rather than from the Manichees to have a rash promise of knowledge with mockery of mere belief, and then afterwards to be ordered to believe many fabulous and absurd myths impossible to prove true".

(38) Though he accorded the Platonists a place of privilege, Augustine rebuked them because, knowing the goal to seek, they had ignored the path which leads to it: the Word made flesh.(39) The Bishop of Hippo succeeded in producing the first great synthesis of philosophy and theology, embracing currents of thought both Greek and Latin. In him too the great unity of knowledge, grounded in the thought of the Bible, was both confirmed and sustained by a depth of speculative thinking. The synthesis devised by Saint Augustine remained for centuries the most exalted form of philosophical and theological speculation known to the West. Reinforced by his personal story and sustained by a wonderful holiness of life, he could also introduce into his works a range of material which, drawing on experience, was a prelude to future developments in different currents of philosophy.

41.

The ways in which the Fathers of East and West engaged the philosophical schools were, therefore, quite different. This does not mean that they identified the content of their message with the systems to which they referred. Consider Tertullian's question: "What does Athens have in common with Jerusalem? The Academy with the Church?".(40) This clearly indicates the critical consciousness with which Christian thinkers from the first confronted the problem of the relationship between faith and philosophy, viewing it comprehensively with both its positive aspects and its limitations. They were not naive thinkers. Precisely because they were intense in living faith's content they were able to reach the deepest forms of speculation. It is therefore minimalizing and mistaken to restrict their work simply to the transposition of the truths of faith into philosophical categories. They did much more. In fact they succeeded in disclosing completely all that remained implicit and preliminary in the thinking of the great philosophers of antiquity.(41) As I have noted, theirs was the task of showing how reason, freed from external constraints, could find its way out of the blind alley of myth and open itself to the transcendent in a more appropriate way. Purified and rightly tuned, therefore, reason could rise to the higher planes of thought, providing a solid foundation for the perception of being, of the transcendent and of the absolute.

It is here that we see the originality of what the Fathers accomplished. They fully welcomed reason which was open to the absolute, and they infused it with the richness drawn from Revelation. This was more than a meeting of cultures, with one culture perhaps succumbing to the fascination of the other. It happened rather in the depths of human souls, and it was a meeting of creature and Creator. Surpassing the goal towards which it unwittingly tended by dint of its nature, reason attained the supreme good and ultimate truth in the person of the Word made flesh. Faced with the various philosophies, the Fathers were not afraid to acknowledge those elements in them that were consonant with Revelation and those that were not. Recognition of the points of convergence did not blind them to the points of divergence.

42.

In Scholastic theology, the role of philosophically trained reason becomes even more conspicuous under the impulse of Saint Anselm's interpretation of the *intellectus fidei*. For the saintly Archbishop of Canterbury the priority of faith is not in competition with the search which is proper to reason. Reason in fact is not asked to pass judgement on the contents of faith, something of which it would be incapable, since this is not its function. Its function is rather to find meaning, to discover explanations which might allow everyone to come to a certain understanding of the contents of faith. Saint Anselm underscores the fact that the intellect must seek that which it loves: the more it loves, the more it desires to know. Whoever lives for the truth is reaching for a form of knowledge which is fired more and more with love for what it knows, while having to admit that it has not yet attained what it desires: "To see you was I conceived; and I have yet to conceive that for which I was conceived (*Ad te videndum factus sum; et nondum feci propter quod factus sum*)".(42)

The desire for truth, therefore, spurs reason always to go further; indeed, it is as if reason were overwhelmed to see that it can always go beyond what it has already achieved. It is at this point, though, that reason can learn where its path will lead in the end: "I think that whoever investigates something incomprehensible should be satisfied if, by way of reasoning, he reaches a quite certain perception of its reality, even if his intellect cannot penetrate its mode of being... But is there anything so incomprehensible and ineffable as that which is above all things? Therefore, if that which until now has been a matter of debate concerning the highest essence has been established on the basis of due reasoning, then the foundation of one's certainty is not shaken in the least if the intellect cannot penetrate it in a way that allows clear formulation. If prior thought has concluded rationally that one cannot comprehend (*rationabiliter comprehendit incomprehensibile esse*) how supernal wisdom knows its own accomplishments..., who then will explain how this same wisdom, of which the human being can know nothing or next to nothing, is to be known and expressed?".(43) The fundamental harmony between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of philosophy is once again confirmed. Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents.

The enduring originality of the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas

43. A quite special place in this long development belongs to Saint Thomas, not only because of what he taught but also because of the dialogue which he undertook with the Arab and Jewish thought of his time. In an age when Christian thinkers were rediscovering the treasures of ancient philosophy, and more particularly of Aristotle, Thomas had the great merit of giving pride of place to the harmony which exists between faith and reason. Both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God, he argued; hence there can be no contradiction between them.(44)

More radically, Thomas recognized that nature, philosophy's proper concern, could contribute to the understanding of divine Revelation. Faith therefore has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it. Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to fulfilment, (45) so faith builds upon and perfects reason. Illumined by faith, reason is set free from the fragility and limitations deriving from the disobedience of sin and finds the strength required to rise to the knowledge of the Triune God. Although he made much of the supernatural character of faith, the Angelic Doctor did not overlook the importance of its reasonableness; indeed he was able to plumb the depths and explain the meaning of this reasonableness. Faith is in a sense an "exercise of thought"; and human reason is neither annulled nor debased in assenting to the contents of faith, which are in any case attained by way of free and informed choice.(46)

This is why the Church has been justified in consistently proposing Saint Thomas as a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology. In this connection, I would recall what my Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, wrote on the occasion of the seventh centenary of the death of the Angelic Doctor: "Without doubt, Thomas possessed supremely the courage of the truth, a freedom of spirit in confronting new problems, the intellectual honesty of those who allow Christianity to be contaminated neither by secular philosophy nor by a prejudiced rejection of it. He passed therefore into the history of Christian thought as a pioneer of the new path of philosophy and universal culture. The key point and almost the kernel of the solution which, with all the brilliance of his prophetic intuition, he gave to the new encounter of faith and reason was a reconciliation between the secularity of the world and the radicality of the Gospel, thus avoiding the unnatural tendency to negate the world and its values while at the same time keeping faith with the supreme and inexorable demands of the supernatural order".(47)

44. Another of the great insights of Saint Thomas was his perception of the role of the Holy Spirit in the process by which knowledge matures into wisdom. From the first pages of his *Summa Theologiae*, (48) Aquinas was keen to show the primacy of the wisdom which is the gift of the Holy Spirit and which opens the way to a knowledge of divine realities. His theology allows us to understand what is distinctive of wisdom in its close link with faith and knowledge of the divine. This wisdom comes to know by way of *connaturalitas*; it presupposes faith and eventually formulates its right judgement on the basis of the truth of faith itself: "The wisdom named among the gifts of the Holy Spirit is distinct from the wisdom found among the intellectual virtues. This second wisdom is acquired through study, but the first 'comes from on high', as Saint James puts it. This also distinguishes it from faith, since faith accepts divine truth as it is. But the gift of wisdom enables judgement according to divine truth".(49)

Yet the priority accorded this wisdom does not lead the Angelic Doctor to overlook the presence of two other complementary forms of wisdom-philosophical wisdom, which is based upon the capacity of the intellect, for all its natural limitations, to explore reality, and theological wisdom, which is based upon Revelation and which explores the contents of faith, entering the very mystery of God.

Profoundly convinced that "whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit" (*omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*) (50) Saint Thomas was impartial in his love of truth. He sought truth wherever it might be found and gave consummate demonstration of its universality. In him, the Church's Magisterium has seen and recognized the passion for truth; and, precisely because it stays consistently within the horizon of universal, objective and transcendent truth, his thought scales "heights unthinkable to human intelligence".(51) Rightly, then, he may be called an "apostle of the truth".(52) Looking unreservedly to truth, the realism of Thomas could recognize the objectivity of truth and produce not merely a philosophy of "what seems to be" but a philosophy of "what is".

The drama of the separation of faith and reason

45.

With the rise of the first universities, theology came more directly into contact with other forms of learning and scientific research. Although they insisted upon the organic link between theology and philosophy, Saint Albert the Great and Saint Thomas were the first to recognize the autonomy which philosophy and the sciences needed if they were to perform well in their respective fields of research. From the late Medieval period onwards, however, the legitimate distinction between the two forms of learning became more and more a fateful separation. As a result of the exaggerated rationalism of certain thinkers, positions grew more radical and there emerged eventually a philosophy which was separate from and absolutely independent of the contents of faith. Another of the many consequences of this separation was an ever deeper mistrust with regard to reason itself. In a spirit both sceptical and agnostic, some began to voice a general mistrust, which led some to focus more on faith and others to deny its rationality altogether.

In short, what for Patristic and Medieval thought was in both theory and practice a profound unity, producing knowledge capable of reaching the highest forms of speculation, was destroyed by systems which espoused the cause of rational knowledge sundered from faith and meant to take the place of faith.

46.

The more influential of these radical positions are well known and high in profile, especially in the history of the West. It is not too much to claim that the development of a good part of modern philosophy has seen it move further and further away from Christian Revelation, to the point of setting itself quite explicitly in opposition. This process reached its apogee in the last century. Some representatives of idealism sought in various ways to transform faith and its contents, even the mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, into dialectical structures which could be grasped by reason. Opposed to this kind of thinking were various forms of atheistic humanism, expressed in philosophical terms, which regarded faith as alienating and damaging to the development of a full rationality. They did not hesitate to present themselves as new religions serving as a basis for projects which, on the political and social plane, gave rise to totalitarian systems which have been disastrous for humanity.

In the field of scientific research, a positivistic mentality took hold which not only abandoned the Christian vision of the world, but more especially rejected every appeal to a metaphysical or moral vision. It follows that certain scientists, lacking any ethical point of reference, are in danger of putting at the centre of their concerns something other than the human person and the entirety of the person's life. Further still, some of these, sensing the opportunities of technological progress, seem to succumb not only to a market-based logic, but also to the temptation of a quasi-divine power over nature and even over the human being.

As a result of the crisis of rationalism, what has appeared finally is nihilism. As a philosophy of nothingness, it has a certain attraction for people of our time. Its adherents claim that the search is an end in itself, without any hope or possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth. In the nihilist interpretation, life is no more than an occasion for sensations and experiences in which the ephemeral has pride of place. Nihilism is at the root of the widespread mentality which claims that a definitive commitment should no longer be made, because everything is fleeting and provisional.

47. It should also be borne in mind that the role of philosophy itself has changed in modern culture. From universal wisdom and learning, it has been gradually reduced to one of the many fields of human knowing; indeed in some ways it has been consigned to a wholly marginal role. Other forms of rationality have acquired an ever higher profile, making philosophical learning appear all the more peripheral. These forms of rationality are directed not towards the contemplation of truth and the search for the ultimate goal and meaning of life; but instead, as "instrumental reason", they are directed-actually or potentially-towards the promotion of utilitarian ends, towards enjoyment or power.

In my first Encyclical Letter I stressed the danger of absolutizing such an approach when I wrote: "The man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces, that is to say from the result of the work of his hands and, even more so, of the work of his intellect and the tendencies of his will. All too soon, and often in an unforeseeable way, what this manifold activity of man yields is not only subject to 'alienation', in the sense that it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, but rather it turns against man himself, at least in part, through the indirect consequences of its effects returning on himself. It is or can be directed against him. This seems to make up the main chapter of the drama of present-day human existence in its broadest and universal dimension. Man therefore lives increasingly in fear. He is afraid of what he produces-not all of it, of course, or even most of it, but part of it and precisely that part that contains a special share of his genius and initiative-can radically turn against himself".(53)

In the wake of these cultural shifts, some philosophers have abandoned the search for truth in itself and made their sole aim the attainment of a subjective certainty or a pragmatic sense of utility. This in turn has obscured the true dignity of reason, which is no longer equipped to know the truth and to seek the absolute.

48. This rapid survey of the history of philosophy, then, reveals a growing separation between faith and philosophical reason. Yet closer scrutiny shows that even in the philosophical thinking of those who helped drive faith and reason further apart there are found at times precious and seminal insights which, if pursued and developed with mind and heart rightly tuned, can lead to the discovery of truth's way. Such insights are found, for instance, in penetrating analyses of perception and experience, of the imaginary and the unconscious, of personhood and intersubjectivity, of

freedom and values, of time and history. The theme of death as well can become for all thinkers an incisive appeal to seek within themselves the true meaning of their own life. But this does not mean that the link between faith and reason as it now stands does not need to be carefully examined, because each without the other is impoverished and enfeebled. Deprived of what Revelation offers, reason has taken side-tracks which expose it to the danger of losing sight of its final goal. Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so run the risk of no longer being a universal proposition. It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to weak reasoning, might be more penetrating; on the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition. By the same token, reason which is unrelated to an adult faith is not prompted to turn its gaze to the newness and radicality of being.

This is why I make this strong and insistent appeal-not, I trust, untimely-that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy. The parrhesia of faith must be matched by the boldness of reason.

CHAPTER V

THE MAGISTERIUM'S INTERVENTIONS IN PHILOSOPHICAL MATTERS

The Magisterium's discernment as diakonia of the truth

49.

The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others.(54) The underlying reason for this reluctance is that, even when it engages theology, philosophy must remain faithful to its own principles and methods. Otherwise there would be no guarantee that it would remain oriented to truth and that it was moving towards truth by way of a process governed by reason. A philosophy which did not proceed in the light of reason according to its own principles and methods would serve little purpose. At the deepest level, the autonomy which philosophy enjoys is rooted in the fact that reason is by its nature oriented to truth and is equipped moreover with the means necessary to arrive at truth. A philosophy conscious of this as its "constitutive status" cannot but respect the demands and the data of revealed truth.

Yet history shows that philosophy-especially modern philosophy-has taken wrong turns and fallen into error. It is neither the task nor the competence of the Magisterium to intervene in order to make good the lacunas of deficient philosophical discourse. Rather, it is the Magisterium's duty to respond clearly and strongly when controversial philosophical opinions threaten right understanding of what has been revealed, and when false and partial theories which sow the seed of serious error, confusing the pure and simple faith of the People of God, begin to spread more widely.

50.

In the light of faith, therefore, the Church's Magisterium can and must authoritatively exercise a critical discernment of opinions and philosophies which contradict Christian doctrine.(55) It is the task of the Magisterium in the first place to indicate which philosophical presuppositions and conclusions are incompatible with revealed truth, thus articulating the demands which faith's point of view makes of philosophy. Moreover, as philosophical learning has developed, different schools of thought have emerged. This pluralism also imposes upon the Magisterium the responsibility of expressing a judgement as to whether or not the basic tenets of these different schools are compatible with the demands of the word of God and theological enquiry.

It is the Church's duty to indicate the elements in a philosophical system which are incompatible with her own faith. In fact, many philosophical opinions-concerning God, the human being, human freedom and ethical behaviour- engage the Church directly, because they touch on the revealed truth of which she is the guardian. In making this discernment, we Bishops have the duty to be "witnesses to the truth", fulfilling a humble but tenacious ministry of service which every philosopher should appreciate, a service in favour of *recta ratio*, or of reason reflecting rightly upon what is true.

51.

This discernment, however, should not be seen as primarily negative, as if the Magisterium intended to abolish or limit any possible mediation. On the contrary, the Magisterium's interventions are intended above all to prompt, promote and encourage philosophical enquiry. Besides, philosophers are the first to understand the need for self-criticism, the correction of errors and the extension of the too restricted terms in which their thinking has been framed. In particular, it is necessary to keep in mind the unity of truth, even if its formulations are shaped by history and produced by human reason wounded and weakened by sin. This is why no historical form of philosophy can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth, nor to be the complete explanation of the human being, of the world and of the human being's relationship with God.

Today, then, with the proliferation of systems, methods, concepts and philosophical theses which are often extremely complex, the need for a critical discernment in the light of faith becomes more urgent, even if it remains a daunting task. Given all of reason's inherent and historical limitations, it is difficult enough to recognize the inalienable powers proper to it; but it is still more difficult at times to discern in specific philosophical claims what is valid and fruitful

from faith's point of view and what is mistaken or dangerous. Yet the Church knows that "the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden in Christ (Col 2:3) and therefore intervenes in order to stimulate philosophical enquiry, lest it stray from the path which leads to recognition of the mystery.

52.

It is not only in recent times that the Magisterium of the Church has intervened to make its mind known with regard to particular philosophical teachings. It is enough to recall, by way of example, the pronouncements made through the centuries concerning theories which argued in favour of the pre-existence of the soul, (56) or concerning the different forms of idolatry and esoteric superstition found in astrological speculations, (57) without forgetting the more systematic pronouncements against certain claims of Latin Averroism which were incompatible with the Christian faith.(58)

If the Magisterium has spoken out more frequently since the middle of the last century, it is because in that period not a few Catholics felt it their duty to counter various streams of modern thought with a philosophy of their own. At this point, the Magisterium of the Church was obliged to be vigilant lest these philosophies developed in ways which were themselves erroneous and negative. The censures were delivered even-handedly: on the one hand, fideism (59) and radical traditionalism, (60) for their distrust of reason's natural capacities, and, on the other, rationalism (61) and ontologism (62) because they attributed to natural reason a knowledge which only the light of faith could confer. The positive elements of this debate were assembled in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, in which for the first time an Ecumenical Council—in this case, the First Vatican Council—pronounced solemnly on the relationship between reason and faith. The teaching contained in this document strongly and positively marked the philosophical research of many believers and remains today a standard reference-point for correct and coherent Christian thinking in this regard.

53.

The Magisterium's pronouncements have been concerned less with individual philosophical theses than with the need for rational and hence ultimately philosophical knowledge for the understanding of faith. In synthesizing and solemnly reaffirming the teachings constantly proposed to the faithful by the ordinary Papal Magisterium, the First Vatican Council showed how inseparable and at the same time how distinct were faith and reason, Revelation and natural knowledge of God. The Council began with the basic criterion, presupposed by Revelation itself, of the natural knowability of the existence of God, the beginning and end of all things, (63) and concluded with the solemn assertion quoted earlier: "There are two orders of knowledge, distinct not only in their point of departure, but also in their object".(64) Against all forms of rationalism, then, there was a need to affirm the distinction between the mysteries of faith and the findings of philosophy, and the transcendence and precedence of the mysteries of faith over the findings of philosophy. Against the temptations of fideism, however, it was necessary to stress the unity of truth and thus the positive contribution which rational knowledge can and must make to faith's knowledge: "Even if faith is superior to reason there can never be a true divergence between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals the mysteries and bestows the gift of faith has also placed in the human spirit the light of reason. This God could not deny himself, nor could the truth ever contradict the truth".(65)

54.

In our own century too the Magisterium has revisited the theme on a number of occasions, warning against the lure of rationalism. Here the pronouncements of Pope Saint Pius X are pertinent, stressing as they did that at the basis of Modernism were philosophical claims which were phenomenist, agnostic and immanentist.(66) Nor can the importance of the Catholic rejection of Marxist philosophy and atheistic Communism be forgotten.(67)

Later, in his Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII warned against mistaken interpretations linked to evolutionism, existentialism and historicism. He made it clear that these theories had not been proposed and developed by theologians, but had their origins "outside the sheepfold of Christ".(68) He added, however, that errors of this kind should not simply be rejected but should be examined critically: "Catholic theologians and philosophers, whose grave duty it is to defend natural and supernatural truth and instill it in human hearts, cannot afford to ignore these more or less erroneous opinions. Rather they must come to understand these theories well, not only because diseases are properly treated only if rightly diagnosed and because even in these false theories some truth is found at times, but because in the end these theories provoke a more discriminating discussion and evaluation of philosophical and theological truths".(69)

In accomplishing its specific task in service of the Roman Pontiff's universal Magisterium, (70) the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith has more recently had to intervene to re-emphasize the danger of an uncritical adoption by some liberation theologians of opinions and methods drawn from Marxism.(71)

In the past, then, the Magisterium has on different occasions and in different ways offered its discernment in philosophical matters. My revered Predecessors have thus made an invaluable contribution which must not be forgotten.

55. Surveying the situation today, we see that the problems of other times have returned, but in a new key. It is no longer a matter of questions of interest only to certain individuals and groups, but convictions so widespread that they have become to some extent the common mind. An example of this is the deep-seated distrust of reason which has surfaced in the most recent developments of much of philosophical research, to the point where there is talk at times of

“the end of metaphysics”. Philosophy is expected to rest content with more modest tasks such as the simple interpretation of facts or an enquiry into restricted fields of human knowing or its structures.

In theology too the temptations of other times have reappeared. In some contemporary theologies, for instance, a certain rationalism is gaining ground, especially when opinions thought to be philosophically well founded are taken as normative for theological research. This happens particularly when theologians, through lack of philosophical competence, allow themselves to be swayed uncritically by assertions which have become part of current parlance and culture but which are poorly grounded in reason.(72)

There are also signs of a resurgence of fideism, which fails to recognize the importance of rational knowledge and philosophical discourse for the understanding of faith, indeed for the very possibility of belief in God. One currently widespread symptom of this fideistic tendency is a “biblicism” which tends to make the reading and exegesis of Sacred Scripture the sole criterion of truth. In consequence, the word of God is identified with Sacred Scripture alone, thus eliminating the doctrine of the Church which the Second Vatican Council stressed quite specifically. Having recalled that the word of God is present in both Scripture and Tradition, (73) the Constitution *Dei Verbum* continues emphatically: “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture comprise a single sacred deposit of the word of God entrusted to the Church. Embracing this deposit and united with their pastors, the People of God remain always faithful to the teaching of the Apostles”.(74) Scripture, therefore, is not the Church's sole point of reference. The “supreme rule of her faith” (75) derives from the unity which the Spirit has created between Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church in a reciprocity which means that none of the three can survive without the others.(76)

Moreover, one should not underestimate the danger inherent in seeking to derive the truth of Sacred Scripture from the use of one method alone, ignoring the need for a more comprehensive exegesis which enables the exegete, together with the whole Church, to arrive at the full sense of the texts. Those who devote themselves to the study of Sacred Scripture should always remember that the various hermeneutical approaches have their own philosophical underpinnings, which need to be carefully evaluated before they are applied to the sacred texts.

Other modes of latent fideism appear in the scant consideration accorded to speculative theology, and in disdain for the classical philosophy from which the terms of both the understanding of faith and the actual formulation of dogma have been drawn. My revered Predecessor Pope Pius XII warned against such neglect of the philosophical tradition and against abandonment of the traditional terminology.(77)

56. In brief, there are signs of a widespread distrust of universal and absolute statements, especially among those who think that truth is born of consensus and not of a consonance between intellect and objective reality. In a world subdivided into so many specialized fields, it is not hard to see how difficult it can be to acknowledge the full and ultimate meaning of life which has traditionally been the goal of philosophy. Nonetheless, in the light of faith which finds in Jesus Christ this ultimate meaning, I cannot but encourage philosophers—be they Christian or not—to trust in the power of human reason and not to set themselves goals that are too modest in their philosophizing. The lesson of history in this millennium now drawing to a close shows that this is the path to follow: it is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search. It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true. Faith thus becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason.

The Church's interest in philosophy

57. Yet the Magisterium does more than point out the misperceptions and the mistakes of philosophical theories. With no less concern it has sought to stress the basic principles of a genuine renewal of philosophical enquiry, indicating as well particular paths to be taken. In this regard, Pope Leo XIII with his Encyclical Letter *Æterni Patris* took a step of historic importance for the life of the Church, since it remains to this day the one papal document of such authority devoted entirely to philosophy. The great Pope revisited and developed the First Vatican Council's teaching on the relationship between faith and reason, showing how philosophical thinking contributes in fundamental ways to faith and theological learning.(78) More than a century later, many of the insights of his Encyclical Letter have lost none of their interest from either a practical or pedagogical point of view—most particularly, his insistence upon the incomparable value of the philosophy of Saint Thomas. A renewed insistence upon the thought of the Angelic Doctor seemed to Pope Leo XIII the best way to recover the practice of a philosophy consonant with the demands of faith. “Just when Saint Thomas distinguishes perfectly between faith and reason”, the Pope writes, “he unites them in bonds of mutual friendship, conceding to each its specific rights and to each its specific dignity”.(79)

58.

The positive results of the papal summons are well known. Studies of the thought of Saint Thomas and other Scholastic writers received new impetus. Historical studies flourished, resulting in a rediscovery of the riches of Medieval thought, which until then had been largely unknown; and there emerged new Thomistic schools. With the use of historical method, knowledge of the works of Saint Thomas increased greatly, and many scholars had courage enough to introduce the Thomistic tradition into the philosophical and theological discussions of the day. The most influential Catholic theologians of the present century, to whose thinking and research the Second Vatican Council was much indebted, were products of this revival of Thomistic philosophy. Throughout the twentieth century, the Church has been served by a powerful array of thinkers formed in the school of the Angelic Doctor.

59.

Yet the Thomistic and neo-Thomistic revival was not the only sign of a resurgence of philosophical thought in culture of Christian inspiration. Earlier still, and parallel to Pope Leo's call, there had emerged a number of Catholic philosophers who, adopting more recent currents of thought and according to a specific method, produced philosophical works of great influence and lasting value. Some devised syntheses so remarkable that they stood comparison with the great systems of idealism. Others established the epistemological foundations for a new consideration of faith in the light of a renewed understanding of moral consciousness; others again produced a philosophy which, starting with an analysis of immanence, opened the way to the transcendent; and there were finally those who sought to combine the demands of faith with the perspective of phenomenological method. From different quarters, then, modes of philosophical speculation have continued to emerge and have sought to keep alive the great tradition of Christian thought which unites faith and reason.

60.

The Second Vatican Council, for its part, offers a rich and fruitful teaching concerning philosophy. I cannot fail to note, especially in the context of this Encyclical Letter, that one chapter of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* amounts to a virtual compendium of the biblical anthropology from which philosophy too can draw inspiration. The chapter deals with the value of the human person created in the image of God, explains the dignity and superiority of the human being over the rest of creation, and declares the transcendent capacity of human reason.⁽⁸⁰⁾ The problem of atheism is also dealt with in *Gaudium et Spes*, and the flaws of its philosophical vision are identified, especially in relation to the dignity and freedom of the human person.⁽⁸¹⁾ There is no doubt that the climactic section of the chapter is profoundly significant for philosophy; and it was this which I took up in my first Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* and which serves as one of the constant reference-points of my teaching: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling".⁽⁸²⁾

The Council also dealt with the study of philosophy required of candidates for the priesthood; and its recommendations have implications for Christian education as a whole. These are the Council's words: "The philosophical disciplines should be taught in such a way that students acquire in the first place a solid and harmonious knowledge of the human being, of the world and of God, based upon the philosophical heritage which is enduringly valid, yet taking into account currents of modern philosophy".⁽⁸³⁾

These directives have been reiterated and developed in a number of other magisterial documents in order to guarantee a solid philosophical formation, especially for those preparing for theological studies. I have myself emphasized several times the importance of this philosophical formation for those who one day, in their pastoral life, will have to address the aspirations of the contemporary world and understand the causes of certain behaviour in order to respond in appropriate ways.⁽⁸⁴⁾

61.

If it has been necessary from time to time to intervene on this question, to reiterate the value of the Angelic Doctor's insights and insist on the study of his thought, this has been because the Magisterium's directives have not always been followed with the readiness one would wish. In the years after the Second Vatican Council, many Catholic faculties were in some ways impoverished by a diminished sense of the importance of the study not just of Scholastic philosophy but more generally of the study of philosophy itself. I cannot fail to note with surprise and displeasure that this lack of interest in the study of philosophy is shared by not a few theologians.

There are various reasons for this disenchantment. First, there is the distrust of reason found in much contemporary philosophy, which has largely abandoned metaphysical study of the ultimate human questions in order to concentrate upon problems which are more detailed and restricted, at times even purely formal. Another reason, it should be said, is the misunderstanding which has arisen especially with regard to the "human sciences". On a number of occasions, the Second Vatican Council stressed the positive value of scientific research for a deeper knowledge of the mystery of the human being.⁽⁸⁵⁾ But the invitation addressed to theologians to engage the human sciences and apply them properly in their enquiries should not be interpreted as an implicit authorization to marginalize philosophy or to put something else in its place in pastoral formation and in the *praeparatio fidei*. A further factor is the renewed interest in the inculturation of faith. The life of the young Churches in particular has brought to light, together with sophisticated modes of thinking, an array of expressions of popular wisdom; and this constitutes a genuine cultural wealth of traditions. Yet the study of traditional ways must go hand in hand with philosophical enquiry, an enquiry which will allow the positive traits of popular wisdom to emerge and forge the necessary link with the proclamation of the Gospel.⁽⁸⁶⁾

62.

I wish to repeat clearly that the study of philosophy is fundamental and indispensable to the structure of theological studies and to the formation of candidates for the priesthood. It is not by chance that the curriculum of theological studies is preceded by a time of special study of philosophy. This decision, confirmed by the Fifth Lateran Council, ⁽⁸⁷⁾ is rooted in the experience which matured through the Middle Ages, when the importance of a constructive harmony of philosophical and theological learning emerged. This ordering of studies influenced, promoted and enabled much of the development of modern philosophy, albeit indirectly. One telling example of this is the influence of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* of Francisco Suárez, which found its way even into the Lutheran universities of Germany.

Conversely, the dismantling of this arrangement has created serious gaps in both priestly formation and theological research. Consider, for instance, the disregard of modern thought and culture which has led either to a refusal of any kind of dialogue or to an indiscriminate acceptance of any kind of philosophy.

I trust most sincerely that these difficulties will be overcome by an intelligent philosophical and theological formation, which must never be lacking in the Church.

63. For the reasons suggested here, it has seemed to me urgent to re-emphasize with this Encyclical Letter the Church's intense interest in philosophy—indeed the intimate bond which ties theological work to the philosophical search for truth. From this comes the Magisterium's duty to discern and promote philosophical thinking which is not at odds with faith. It is my task to state principles and criteria which in my judgement are necessary in order to restore a harmonious and creative relationship between theology and philosophy. In the light of these principles and criteria, it will be possible to discern with greater clarity what link, if any, theology should forge with the different philosophical opinions or systems which the world of today presents.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

The knowledge of faith and the demands of philosophical reason

64.

The word of God is addressed to all people, in every age and in every part of the world; and the human being is by nature a philosopher. As a reflective and scientific elaboration of the understanding of God's word in the light of faith, theology for its part must relate, in some of its procedures and in the performance of its specific tasks, to the philosophies which have been developed through the ages. I have no wish to direct theologians to particular methods, since that is not the competence of the Magisterium. I wish instead to recall some specific tasks of theology which, by the very nature of the revealed word, demand recourse to philosophical enquiry.

65.

Theology is structured as an understanding of faith in the light of a twofold methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. With the first, theology makes its own the content of Revelation as this has been gradually expounded in Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church's living Magisterium.⁽⁸⁸⁾ With the second, theology seeks to respond through speculative enquiry to the specific demands of disciplined thought.

Philosophy contributes specifically to theology in preparing for a correct *auditus fidei* with its study of the structure of knowledge and personal communication, especially the various forms and functions of language. No less important is philosophy's contribution to a more coherent understanding of Church Tradition, the pronouncements of the Magisterium and the teaching of the great masters of theology, who often adopt concepts and thought-forms drawn from a particular philosophical tradition. In this case, the theologian is summoned not only to explain the concepts and terms used by the Church in her thinking and the development of her teaching, but also to know in depth the philosophical systems which may have influenced those concepts and terms, in order to formulate correct and consistent interpretations of them.

66.

With regard to the *intellectus fidei*, a prime consideration must be that divine Truth “proposed to us in the Sacred Scriptures and rightly interpreted by the Church's teaching” ⁽⁸⁹⁾ enjoys an innate intelligibility, so logically consistent that it stands as an authentic body of knowledge. The *intellectus fidei* expounds this truth, not only in grasping the logical and conceptual structure of the propositions in which the Church's teaching is framed, but also, indeed primarily, in bringing to light the salvific meaning of these propositions for the individual and for humanity. From the sum of these propositions, the believer comes to know the history of salvation, which culminates in the person of Jesus Christ and in his Paschal Mystery. Believers then share in this mystery by their assent of faith.

For its part, dogmatic theology must be able to articulate the universal meaning of the mystery of the One and Triune God and of the economy of salvation, both as a narrative and, above all, in the form of argument. It must do so, in other words, through concepts formulated in a critical and universally communicable way. Without philosophy's contribution, it would in fact be impossible to discuss theological issues such as, for example, the use of language to speak about God, the personal relations within the Trinity, God's creative activity in the world, the relationship between God and man, or Christ's identity as true God and true man. This is no less true of the different themes of moral theology, which employ concepts such as the moral law, conscience, freedom, personal responsibility and guilt, which are in part defined by philosophical ethics.

It is necessary therefore that the mind of the believer acquire a natural, consistent and true knowledge of created realities—the world and man himself—which are also the object of divine Revelation. Still more, reason must be able to articulate this knowledge in concept and argument. Speculative dogmatic theology thus presupposes and implies a philosophy of the human being, the world and, more radically, of being, which has objective truth as its foundation.

67.

With its specific character as a discipline charged with giving an account of faith (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), the concern of fundamental theology will be to justify and expound the relationship between faith and philosophical thought. Recalling the teaching of Saint Paul (cf. Rom 1:19-20), the First Vatican Council pointed to the existence of truths which are naturally, and thus philosophically, knowable; and an acceptance of God's Revelation necessarily presupposes knowledge of these truths. In studying Revelation and its credibility, as well as the corresponding act of faith, fundamental theology should show how, in the light of the knowledge conferred by faith, there emerge certain truths which reason, from its own independent enquiry, already perceives. Revelation endows these truths with their fullest meaning, directing them towards the richness of the revealed mystery in which they find their ultimate purpose. Consider, for example, the natural knowledge of God, the possibility of distinguishing divine Revelation from other phenomena or the recognition of its credibility, the capacity of human language to speak in a true and meaningful way even of things which transcend all human experience. From all these truths, the mind is led to acknowledge the existence of a truly propaedeutic path to faith, one which can lead to the acceptance of Revelation without in any way compromising the principles and autonomy of the mind itself.(90)

Similarly, fundamental theology should demonstrate the profound compatibility that exists between faith and its need to find expression by way of human reason fully free to give its assent. Faith will thus be able "to show fully the path to reason in a sincere search for the truth. Although faith, a gift of God, is not based on reason, it can certainly not dispense with it. At the same time, it becomes apparent that reason needs to be reinforced by faith, in order to discover horizons it cannot reach on its own".(91)

68.

Moral theology has perhaps an even greater need of philosophy's contribution. In the New Testament, human life is much less governed by prescriptions than in the Old Testament. Life in the Spirit leads believers to a freedom and responsibility which surpass the Law. Yet the Gospel and the Apostolic writings still set forth both general principles of Christian conduct and specific teachings and precepts. In order to apply these to the particular circumstances of individual and communal life, Christians must be able fully to engage their conscience and the power of their reason. In other words, moral theology requires a sound philosophical vision of human nature and society, as well as of the general principles of ethical decision-making.

69.

It might be objected that the theologian should nowadays rely less on philosophy than on the help of other kinds of human knowledge, such as history and above all the sciences, the extraordinary advances of which in recent times stir such admiration. Others, more alert to the link between faith and culture, claim that theology should look more to the wisdom contained in peoples' traditions than to a philosophy of Greek and Eurocentric provenance. Others still, prompted by a mistaken notion of cultural pluralism, simply deny the universal value of the Church's philosophical heritage.

There is some truth in these claims which are acknowledged in the teaching of the Council.(92) Reference to the sciences is often helpful, allowing as it does a more thorough knowledge of the subject under study; but it should not mean the rejection of a typically philosophical and critical thinking which is concerned with the universal. Indeed, this kind of thinking is required for a fruitful exchange between cultures. What I wish to emphasize is the duty to go beyond the particular and concrete, lest the prime task of demonstrating the universality of faith's content be abandoned. Nor should it be forgotten that the specific contribution of philosophical enquiry enables us to discern in different world-views and different cultures "not what people think but what the objective truth is".(93) It is not an array of human opinions but truth alone which can be of help to theology.

70.

Because of its implications for both philosophy and theology, the question of the relationship with cultures calls for particular attention, which cannot however claim to be exhaustive. From the time the Gospel was first preached, the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with cultures. Christ's mandate to his disciples to go out everywhere, "even to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), in order to pass on the truth which he had revealed, led the Christian community to recognize from the first the universality of its message and the difficulties created by cultural differences. A passage of Saint Paul's letter to the Christians of Ephesus helps us to understand how the early community responded to the problem. The Apostle writes: "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the wall of hostility" (2:13-14).

In the light of this text, we reflect further to see how the Gentiles were transformed once they had embraced the faith. With the richness of the salvation wrought by Christ, the walls separating the different cultures collapsed. God's promise in Christ now became a universal offer: no longer limited to one particular people, its language and its customs, but extended to all as a heritage from which each might freely draw. From their different locations and traditions all are called in Christ to share in the unity of the family of God's children. It is Christ who enables the two peoples to become "one". Those who were "far off" have come "near", thanks to the newness brought by the Paschal Mystery. Jesus destroys the walls of division and creates unity in a new and unsurpassed way through our sharing in his mystery. This unity is so deep that the Church can say with Saint Paul: "You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

This simple statement contains a great truth: faith's encounter with different cultures has created something new. When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures show forth the human being's characteristic openness to the universal and the transcendent. Therefore they offer different paths to the truth, which assuredly serve men and women well in revealing values which can make their life ever more human.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Insofar as cultures appeal to the values of older traditions, they point-implicitly but authentically-to the manifestation of God in nature, as we saw earlier in considering the Wisdom literature and the teaching of Saint Paul.

71. Inseparable as they are from people and their history, cultures share the dynamics which the human experience of life reveals. They change and advance because people meet in new ways and share with each other their ways of life. Cultures are fed by the communication of values, and they survive and flourish insofar as they remain open to assimilating new experiences. How are we to explain these dynamics? All people are part of a culture, depend upon it and shape it. Human beings are both child and parent of the culture in which they are immersed. To everything they do, they bring something which sets them apart from the rest of creation: their unfailing openness to mystery and their boundless desire for knowledge. Lying deep in every culture, there appears this impulse towards a fulfilment. We may say, then, that culture itself has an intrinsic capacity to receive divine Revelation.

Cultural context permeates the living of Christian faith, which contributes in turn little by little to shaping that context. To every culture Christians bring the unchanging truth of God, which he reveals in the history and culture of a people. Time and again, therefore, in the course of the centuries we have seen repeated the event witnessed by the pilgrims in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Hearing the Apostles, they asked one another: "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:7-11). While it demands of all who hear it the adherence of faith, the proclamation of the Gospel in different cultures allows people to preserve their own cultural identity. This in no way creates division, because the community of the baptized is marked by a universality which can embrace every culture and help to foster whatever is implicit in them to the point where it will be fully explicit in the light of truth.

This means that no one culture can ever become the criterion of judgment, much less the ultimate criterion of truth with regard to God's Revelation. The Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if in engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it. On the contrary, the message which believers bring to the world and to cultures is a genuine liberation from all the disorders caused by sin and is, at the same time, a call to the fullness of truth. Cultures are not only not diminished by this encounter; rather, they are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel's truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways.

72. In preaching the Gospel, Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded. Today, as the Gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds which once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation, which mean that our generation faces problems not unlike those faced by the Church in the first centuries.

My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems.

In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought. In this work of discernment, which finds its inspiration in the Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, certain criteria will have to be kept in mind. The first of these is the universality of the human spirit, whose basic needs are the same in the most disparate cultures. The second, which derives from the first, is this: in engaging great cultures for the first time, the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. This criterion is valid for the Church in every age, even for the Church of the future, who will judge herself enriched by all that comes from today's engagement with Eastern cultures and will find in this inheritance fresh cues for fruitful dialogue with the cultures which will emerge as humanity moves into the future. Thirdly, care will need to be taken lest, contrary to the very nature of the human spirit, the legitimate defense of the uniqueness and originality of Indian thought be confused with the idea that a particular cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference and affirm itself by opposing other traditions.

What has been said here of India is no less true for the heritage of the great cultures of China, Japan and the other countries of Asia, as also for the riches of the traditional cultures of Africa, which are for the most part orally transmitted.

73.

In the light of these considerations, the relationship between theology and philosophy is best construed as a circle. Theology's source and starting-point must always be the word of God revealed in history, while its final goal will be an understanding of that word which increases with each passing generation. Yet, since God's word is Truth (cf. Jn 17:17), the human search for truth-philosophy, pursued in keeping with its own rules-can only help to understand God's word

better. It is not just a question of theological discourse using this or that concept or element of a philosophical construct; what matters most is that the believer's reason use its powers of reflection in the search for truth which moves from the word of God towards a better understanding of it. It is as if, moving between the twin poles of God's word and a better understanding of it, reason is offered guidance and is warned against paths which would lead it to stray from revealed Truth and to stray in the end from the truth pure and simple. Instead, reason is stirred to explore paths which of itself it would not even have suspected it could take. This circular relationship with the word of God leaves philosophy enriched, because reason discovers new and unsuspected horizons.

74.

The fruitfulness of this relationship is confirmed by the experience of great Christian theologians who also distinguished themselves as great philosophers, bequeathing to us writings of such high speculative value as to warrant comparison with the masters of ancient philosophy. This is true of both the Fathers of the Church, among whom at least Saint Gregory of Nazianzus and Saint Augustine should be mentioned, and the Medieval Doctors with the great triad of Saint Anselm, Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas Aquinas. We see the same fruitful relationship between philosophy and the word of God in the courageous research pursued by more recent thinkers, among whom I gladly mention, in a Western context, figures such as John Henry Newman, Antonio Rosmini, Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson and Edith Stein and, in an Eastern context, eminent scholars such as Vladimir S. Soloviev, Pavel A. Florensky, Petr Chaadaev and Vladimir N. Lossky. Obviously other names could be cited; and in referring to these I intend not to endorse every aspect of their thought, but simply to offer significant examples of a process of philosophical enquiry which was enriched by engaging the data of faith. One thing is certain: attention to the spiritual journey of these masters can only give greater momentum to both the search for truth and the effort to apply the results of that search to the service of humanity. It is to be hoped that now and in the future there will be those who continue to cultivate this great philosophical and theological tradition for the good of both the Church and humanity.

Different stances of philosophy

75. As appears from this brief sketch of the history of the relationship between faith and philosophy, one can distinguish different stances of philosophy with regard to Christian faith. First, there is a philosophy completely independent of the Gospel's Revelation: this is the stance adopted by philosophy as it took shape in history before the birth of the Redeemer and later in regions as yet untouched by the Gospel. We see here philosophy's valid aspiration to be an autonomous enterprise, obeying its own rules and employing the powers of reason alone. Although seriously handicapped by the inherent weakness of human reason, this aspiration should be supported and strengthened. As a search for truth within the natural order, the enterprise of philosophy is always open-at least implicitly-to the supernatural.

Moreover, the demand for a valid autonomy of thought should be respected even when theological discourse makes use of philosophical concepts and arguments. Indeed, to argue according to rigorous rational criteria is to guarantee that the results attained are universally valid. This also confirms the principle that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it: the assent of faith, engaging the intellect and will, does not destroy but perfects the free will of each believer who deep within welcomes what has been revealed.

It is clear that this legitimate approach is rejected by the theory of so-called "separate" philosophy, pursued by some modern philosophers. This theory claims for philosophy not only a valid autonomy, but a self-sufficiency of thought which is patently invalid. In refusing the truth offered by divine Revelation, philosophy only does itself damage, since this is to preclude access to a deeper knowledge of truth.

76. A second stance adopted by philosophy is often designated as Christian philosophy. In itself, the term is valid, but it should not be misunderstood: it in no way intends to suggest that there is an official philosophy of the Church, since the faith as such is not a philosophy. The term seeks rather to indicate a Christian way of philosophizing, a philosophical speculation conceived in dynamic union with faith. It does not therefore refer simply to a philosophy developed by Christian philosophers who have striven in their research not to contradict the faith. The term Christian philosophy includes those important developments of philosophical thinking which would not have happened without the direct or indirect contribution of Christian faith.

Christian philosophy therefore has two aspects. The first is subjective, in the sense that faith purifies reason. As a theological virtue, faith liberates reason from presumption, the typical temptation of the philosopher. Saint Paul, the Fathers of the Church and, closer to our own time, philosophers such as Pascal and Kierkegaard reproached such presumption. The philosopher who learns humility will also find courage to tackle questions which are difficult to resolve if the data of Revelation are ignored-for example, the problem of evil and suffering, the personal nature of God and the question of the meaning of life or, more directly, the radical metaphysical question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?"

The second aspect of Christian philosophy is objective, in the sense that it concerns content. Revelation clearly proposes certain truths which might never have been discovered by reason unaided, although they are not of themselves inaccessible to reason. Among these truths is the notion of a free and personal God who is the Creator of the world, a truth which has been so crucial for the development of philosophical thinking, especially the philosophy of being.

There is also the reality of sin, as it appears in the light of faith, which helps to shape an adequate philosophical formulation of the problem of evil. The notion of the person as a spiritual being is another of faith's specific contributions: the Christian proclamation of human dignity, equality and freedom has undoubtedly influenced modern philosophical thought. In more recent times, there has been the discovery that history as event-so central to Christian Revelation-is important for philosophy as well. It is no accident that this has become pivotal for a philosophy of history which stakes its claim as a new chapter in the human search for truth.

Among the objective elements of Christian philosophy we might also place the need to explore the rationality of certain truths expressed in Sacred Scripture, such as the possibility of man's supernatural vocation and original sin itself. These are tasks which challenge reason to recognize that there is something true and rational lying far beyond the straits within which it would normally be confined. These questions in fact broaden reason's scope for action.

In speculating on these questions, philosophers have not become theologians, since they have not sought to understand and expound the truths of faith on the basis of Revelation. They have continued working on their own terrain and with their own purely rational method, yet extending their research to new aspects of truth. It could be said that a good part of modern and contemporary philosophy would not exist without this stimulus of the word of God. This conclusion retains all its relevance, despite the disappointing fact that many thinkers in recent centuries have abandoned Christian orthodoxy.

77. Philosophy presents another stance worth noting when theology itself calls upon it. Theology in fact has always needed and still needs philosophy's contribution. As a work of critical reason in the light of faith, theology presupposes and requires in all its research a reason formed and educated to concept and argument. Moreover, theology needs philosophy as a partner in dialogue in order to confirm the intelligibility and universal truth of its claims. It was not by accident that the Fathers of the Church and the Medieval theologians adopted non-Christian philosophies. This historical fact confirms the value of philosophy's autonomy, which remains unimpaired when theology calls upon it; but it shows as well the profound transformations which philosophy itself must undergo.

It was because of its noble and indispensable contribution that, from the Patristic period onwards, philosophy was called the *ancilla theologiae*. The title was not intended to indicate philosophy's servile submission or purely functional role with regard to theology. Rather, it was used in the sense in which Aristotle had spoken of the experimental sciences as "ancillary" to "prima philosophia". The term can scarcely be used today, given the principle of autonomy to which we have referred, but it has served throughout history to indicate the necessity of the link between the two sciences and the impossibility of their separation.

Were theologians to refuse the help of philosophy, they would run the risk of doing philosophy unwittingly and locking themselves within thought-structures poorly adapted to the understanding of faith. Were philosophers, for their part, to shun theology completely, they would be forced to master on their own the contents of Christian faith, as has been the case with some modern philosophers. Either way, the grounding principles of autonomy which every science rightly wants guaranteed would be seriously threatened.

When it adopts this stance, philosophy, like theology, comes more directly under the authority of the Magisterium and its discernment, because of the implications it has for the understanding of Revelation, as I have already explained. The truths of faith make certain demands which philosophy must respect whenever it engages theology.

78.

It should be clear in the light of these reflections why the Magisterium has repeatedly acclaimed the merits of Saint Thomas' thought and made him the guide and model for theological studies. This has not been in order to take a position on properly philosophical questions nor to demand adherence to particular theses. The Magisterium's intention has always been to show how Saint Thomas is an authentic model for all who seek the truth. In his thinking, the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis ever attained by human thought, for he could defend the radical newness introduced by Revelation without ever demeaning the venture proper to reason.

79.

Developing further what the Magisterium before me has taught, I intend in this final section to point out certain requirements which theology-and more fundamentally still, the word of God itself-makes today of philosophical thinking and contemporary philosophies. As I have already noted, philosophy must obey its own rules and be based upon its own principles; truth, however, can only be one. The content of Revelation can never debase the discoveries and legitimate autonomy of reason. Yet, conscious that it cannot set itself up as an absolute and exclusive value, reason on its part must never lose its capacity to question and to be questioned. By virtue of the splendour emanating from subsistent Being itself, revealed truth offers the fullness of light and will therefore illumine the path of philosophical enquiry. In short, Christian Revelation becomes the true point of encounter and engagement between philosophical and theological thinking in their reciprocal relationship. It is to be hoped therefore that theologians and philosophers will let themselves be guided by the authority of truth alone so that there will emerge a philosophy consonant with the word of God. Such a philosophy will be a place where Christian faith and human cultures may meet, a point of understanding between believer and non-believer. It will help lead believers to a stronger conviction that faith grows deeper and more authentic when it is wedded to thought and does not reject it. It is again the Fathers who teach us this: "To believe is nothing other than to think with assent... Believers are also thinkers: in believing, they think and in thinking, they

believe... If faith does not think, it is nothing".(95) And again: "If there is no assent, there is no faith, for without assent one does not really believe".(96)

CHAPTER VII

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS AND TASKS

The indispensable requirements of the word of God

80. In Sacred Scripture are found elements, both implicit and explicit, which allow a vision of the human being and the world which has exceptional philosophical density. Christians have come to an ever deeper awareness of the wealth to be found in the sacred text. It is there that we learn that what we experience is not absolute: it is neither uncreated nor self-generating. God alone is the Absolute. From the Bible there emerges also a vision of man as *imago Dei*. This vision offers indications regarding man's life, his freedom and the immortality of the human spirit. Since the created world is not self-sufficient, every illusion of autonomy which would deny the essential dependence on God of every creature-the human being included-leads to dramatic situations which subvert the rational search for the harmony and the meaning of human life.

The problem of moral evil-the most tragic of evil's forms-is also addressed in the Bible, which tells us that such evil stems not from any material deficiency, but is a wound inflicted by the disordered exercise of human freedom. In the end, the word of God poses the problem of the meaning of life and proffers its response in directing the human being to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, who is the perfect realization of human existence. A reading of the sacred text would reveal other aspects of this problem; but what emerges clearly is the rejection of all forms of relativism, materialism and pantheism.

The fundamental conviction of the "philosophy" found in the Bible is that the world and human life do have a meaning and look towards their fulfilment, which comes in Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Incarnation will always remain the central point of reference for an understanding of the enigma of human existence, the created world and God himself. The challenge of this mystery pushes philosophy to its limits, as reason is summoned to make its own a logic which brings down the walls within which it risks being confined. Yet only at this point does the meaning of life reach its defining moment. The intimate essence of God and of the human being become intelligible: in the mystery of the Incarnate Word, human nature and divine nature are safeguarded in all their autonomy, and at the same time the unique bond which sets them together in mutuality without confusion of any kind is revealed.(97)

81. One of the most significant aspects of our current situation, it should be noted, is the "crisis of meaning". Perspectives on life and the world, often of a scientific temper, have so proliferated that we face an increasing fragmentation of knowledge. This makes the search for meaning difficult and often fruitless. Indeed, still more dramatically, in this maelstrom of data and facts in which we live and which seem to comprise the very fabric of life, many people wonder whether it still makes sense to ask about meaning. The array of theories which vie to give an answer, and the different ways of viewing and of interpreting the world and human life, serve only to aggravate this radical doubt, which can easily lead to scepticism, indifference or to various forms of nihilism.

In consequence, the human spirit is often invaded by a kind of ambiguous thinking which leads it to an ever deepening introversion, locked within the confines of its own immanence without reference of any kind to the transcendent. A philosophy which no longer asks the question of the meaning of life would be in grave danger of reducing reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for truth.

To be consonant with the word of God, philosophy needs first of all to recover its sapiential dimension as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life. This first requirement is in fact most helpful in stimulating philosophy to conform to its proper nature. In doing so, it will be not only the decisive critical factor which determines the foundations and limits of the different fields of scientific learning, but will also take its place as the ultimate framework of the unity of human knowledge and action, leading them to converge towards a final goal and meaning. This sapiential dimension is all the more necessary today, because the immense expansion of humanity's technical capability demands a renewed and sharpened sense of ultimate values. If this technology is not ordered to something greater than a merely utilitarian end, then it could soon prove inhuman and even become potential destroyer of the human race.(98)

The word of God reveals the final destiny of men and women and provides a unifying explanation of all that they do in the world. This is why it invites philosophy to engage in the search for the natural foundation of this meaning, which corresponds to the religious impulse innate in every person. A philosophy denying the possibility of an ultimate and overarching meaning would be not only ill-adapted to its task, but false.

82. Yet this sapiential function could not be performed by a philosophy which was not itself a true and authentic knowledge, addressed, that is, not only to particular and subordinate aspects of reality-functional, formal or utilitarian-but to its total and definitive truth, to the very being of the object which is known. This prompts a second requirement: that philosophy verify the human capacity to know the truth, to come to a knowledge which can reach objective truth by means of that *adaequatio rei et intellectus* to which the Scholastic Doctors referred.(99) This requirement, proper to faith, was explicitly reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council: "Intelligence is not confined to observable data alone.

It can with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable, though in consequence of sin that certitude is partially obscured and weakened". (100)

A radically phenomenalist or relativist philosophy would be ill-adapted to help in the deeper exploration of the riches found in the word of God. Sacred Scripture always assumes that the individual, even if guilty of duplicity and mendacity, can know and grasp the clear and simple truth. The Bible, and the New Testament in particular, contains texts and statements which have a genuinely ontological content. The inspired authors intended to formulate true statements, capable, that is, of expressing objective reality. It cannot be said that the Catholic tradition erred when it took certain texts of Saint John and Saint Paul to be statements about the very being of Christ. In seeking to understand and explain these statements, theology needs therefore the contribution of a philosophy which does not disavow the possibility of a knowledge which is objectively true, even if not perfect. This applies equally to the judgements of moral conscience, which Sacred Scripture considers capable of being objectively true. (101)

83. The two requirements already stipulated imply a third: the need for a philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth. This requirement is implicit in sapiential and analytical knowledge alike; and in particular it is a requirement for knowing the moral good, which has its ultimate foundation in the Supreme Good, God himself. Here I do not mean to speak of metaphysics in the sense of a specific school or a particular historical current of thought. I want only to state that reality and truth do transcend the factual and the empirical, and to vindicate the human being's capacity to know this transcendent and metaphysical dimension in a way that is true and certain, albeit imperfect and analogical. In this sense, metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of their spiritual nature. In a special way, the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical enquiry.

Wherever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them: in truth, in beauty, in moral values, in other persons, in being itself, in God. We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from phenomenon to foundation, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being's interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises. Therefore, a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation.

The word of God refers constantly to things which transcend human experience and even human thought; but this "mystery" could not be revealed, nor could theology render it in some way intelligible, (102) were human knowledge limited strictly to the world of sense experience. Metaphysics thus plays an essential role of mediation in theological research. A theology without a metaphysical horizon could not move beyond an analysis of religious experience, nor would it allow the *intellectus fidei* to give a coherent account of the universal and transcendent value of revealed truth.

If I insist so strongly on the metaphysical element, it is because I am convinced that it is the path to be taken in order to move beyond the crisis pervading large sectors of philosophy at the moment, and thus to correct certain mistaken modes of behaviour now widespread in our society.

84. The importance of metaphysics becomes still more evident if we consider current developments in hermeneutics and the analysis of language. The results of such studies can be very helpful for the understanding of faith, since they bring to light the structure of our thought and speech and the meaning which language bears. However, some scholars working in these fields tend to stop short at the question of how reality is understood and expressed, without going further to see whether reason can discover its essence. How can we fail to see in such a frame of mind the confirmation of our present crisis of confidence in the powers of reason? When, on the basis of preconceived assumptions, these positions tend to obscure the contents of faith or to deny their universal validity, then not only do they abase reason but in so doing they also disqualify themselves. Faith clearly presupposes that human language is capable of expressing divine and transcendent reality in a universal way-analogically, it is true, but no less meaningfully for that. (103) Were this not so, the word of God, which is always a divine word in human language, would not be capable of saying anything about God. The interpretation of this word cannot merely keep referring us to one interpretation after another, without ever leading us to a statement which is simply true; otherwise there would be no Revelation of God, but only the expression of human notions about God and about what God presumably thinks of us.

85. I am well aware that these requirements which the word of God imposes upon philosophy may seem daunting to many people involved in philosophical research today. Yet this is why, taking up what has been taught repeatedly by the Popes for several generations and reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council itself, I wish to reaffirm strongly the conviction that the human being can come to a unified and organic vision of knowledge. This is one of the tasks which Christian thought will have to take up through the next millennium of the Christian era. The segmentation of knowledge, with its splintered approach to truth and consequent fragmentation of meaning, keeps people today from coming to an interior unity. How could the Church not be concerned by this? It is the Gospel which imposes this sapiential task directly upon her Pastors, and they cannot shrink from their duty to undertake it.

I believe that those philosophers who wish to respond today to the demands which the word of God makes on human thinking should develop their thought on the basis of these postulates and in organic continuity with the great tradition which, beginning with the ancients, passes through the Fathers of the Church and the masters of Scholasticism and includes the fundamental achievements of modern and contemporary thought. If philosophers can take their place

within this tradition and draw their inspiration from it, they will certainly not fail to respect philosophy's demand for autonomy.

In the present situation, therefore, it is most significant that some philosophers are promoting a recovery of the determining role of this tradition for a right approach to knowledge. The appeal to tradition is not a mere remembrance of the past; it involves rather the recognition of a cultural heritage which belongs to all of humanity. Indeed it may be said that it is we who belong to the tradition and that it is not ours to dispose of at will. Precisely by being rooted in the tradition will we be able today to develop for the future an original, new and constructive mode of thinking. This same appeal is all the more valid for theology. Not only because theology has the living Tradition of the Church as its original source, (104) but also because, in virtue of this, it must be able to recover both the profound theological tradition of earlier times and the enduring tradition of that philosophy which by dint of its authentic wisdom can transcend the boundaries of space and time.

86. This insistence on the need for a close relationship of continuity between contemporary philosophy and the philosophy developed in the Christian tradition is intended to avert the danger which lies hidden in some currents of thought which are especially prevalent today. It is appropriate, I think, to review them, however briefly, in order to point out their errors and the consequent risks for philosophical work.

The first goes by the name of eclecticism, by which is meant the approach of those who, in research, teaching and argumentation, even in theology, tend to use individual ideas drawn from different philosophies, without concern for their internal coherence, their place within a system or their historical context. They therefore run the risk of being unable to distinguish the part of truth of a given doctrine from elements of it which may be erroneous or ill-suited to the task at hand. An extreme form of eclecticism appears also in the rhetorical misuse of philosophical terms to which some theologians are given at times. Such manipulation does not help the search for truth and does not train reason—whether theological or philosophical—to formulate arguments seriously and scientifically. The rigorous and far-reaching study of philosophical doctrines, their particular terminology and the context in which they arose, helps to overcome the danger of eclecticism and makes it possible to integrate them into theological discourse in a way appropriate to the task.

87.

Eclecticism is an error of method, but lying hidden within it can also be the claims of historicism. To understand a doctrine from the past correctly, it is necessary to set it within its proper historical and cultural context. The fundamental claim of historicism, however, is that the truth of a philosophy is determined on the basis of its appropriateness to a certain period and a certain historical purpose. At least implicitly, therefore, the enduring validity of truth is denied. What was true in one period, historicists claim, may not be true in another. Thus for them the history of thought becomes little more than an archeological resource useful for illustrating positions once held, but for the most part outmoded and meaningless now. On the contrary, it should not be forgotten that, even if a formulation is bound in some way by time and culture, the truth or the error which it expresses can invariably be identified and evaluated as such despite the distance of space and time.

In theological enquiry, historicism tends to appear for the most part under the guise of “modernism”. Rightly concerned to make theological discourse relevant and understandable to our time, some theologians use only the most recent opinions and philosophical language, ignoring the critical evaluation which ought to be made of them in the light of the tradition. By exchanging relevance for truth, this form of modernism shows itself incapable of satisfying the demands of truth to which theology is called to respond.

88.

Another threat to be reckoned with is scientism. This is the philosophical notion which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences; and it relegates religious, theological, ethical and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy. In the past, the same idea emerged in positivism and neo-positivism, which considered metaphysical statements to be meaningless. Critical epistemology has discredited such a claim, but now we see it revived in the new guise of scientism, which dismisses values as mere products of the emotions and rejects the notion of being in order to clear the way for pure and simple facticity. Science would thus be poised to dominate all aspects of human life through technological progress. The undeniable triumphs of scientific research and contemporary technology have helped to propagate a scientific outlook, which now seems boundless, given its inroads into different cultures and the radical changes it has brought.

Regrettably, it must be noted, scientism consigns all that has to do with the question of the meaning of life to the realm of the irrational or imaginary. No less disappointing is the way in which it approaches the other great problems of philosophy which, if they are not ignored, are subjected to analyses based on superficial analogies, lacking all rational foundation. This leads to the impoverishment of human thought, which no longer addresses the ultimate problems which the human being, as the animal rationale, has pondered constantly from the beginning of time. And since it leaves no space for the critique offered by ethical judgement, the scientific mentality has succeeded in leading many to think that if something is technically possible it is therefore morally admissible.

89.

No less dangerous is pragmatism, an attitude of mind which, in making its choices, precludes theoretical considerations or judgements based on ethical principles. The practical consequences of this mode of thinking are

significant. In particular there is growing support for a concept of democracy which is not grounded upon any reference to unchanging values: whether or not a line of action is admissible is decided by the vote of a parliamentary majority. (105) The consequences of this are clear: in practice, the great moral decisions of humanity are subordinated to decisions taken one after another by institutional agencies. Moreover, anthropology itself is severely compromised by a one-dimensional vision of the human being, a vision which excludes the great ethical dilemmas and the existential analyses of the meaning of suffering and sacrifice, of life and death.

90.

The positions we have examined lead in turn to a more general conception which appears today as the common framework of many philosophies which have rejected the meaningfulness of being. I am referring to the nihilist interpretation, which is at once the denial of all foundations and the negation of all objective truth. Quite apart from the fact that it conflicts with the demands and the content of the word of God, nihilism is a denial of the humanity and of the very identity of the human being. It should never be forgotten that the neglect of being inevitably leads to losing touch with objective truth and therefore with the very ground of human dignity. This in turn makes it possible to erase from the countenance of man and woman the marks of their likeness to God, and thus to lead them little by little either to a destructive will to power or to a solitude without hope. Once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery. (106)

91.

In discussing these currents of thought, it has not been my intention to present a complete picture of the present state of philosophy, which would, in any case, be difficult to reduce to a unified vision. And I certainly wish to stress that our heritage of knowledge and wisdom has indeed been enriched in different fields. We need only cite logic, the philosophy of language, epistemology, the philosophy of nature, anthropology, the more penetrating analysis of the affective dimensions of knowledge and the existential approach to the analysis of freedom. Since the last century, however, the affirmation of the principle of immanence, central to the rationalist argument, has provoked a radical questioning of claims once thought indisputable. In response, currents of irrationalism arose, even as the baselessness of the demand that reason be absolutely self-grounded was being critically demonstrated.

Our age has been termed by some thinkers the age of "postmodernity". Often used in very different contexts, the term designates the emergence of a complex of new factors which, widespread and powerful as they are, have shown themselves able to produce important and lasting changes. The term was first used with reference to aesthetic, social and technological phenomena. It was then transposed into the philosophical field, but has remained somewhat ambiguous, both because judgement on what is called "postmodern" is sometimes positive and sometimes negative, and because there is as yet no consensus on the delicate question of the demarcation of the different historical periods. One thing however is certain: the currents of thought which claim to be postmodern merit appropriate attention. According to some of them, the time of certainties is irrevocably past, and the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral. In their destructive critique of every certitude, several authors have failed to make crucial distinctions and have called into question the certitudes of faith.

This nihilism has been justified in a sense by the terrible experience of evil which has marked our age. Such a dramatic experience has ensured the collapse of rationalist optimism, which viewed history as the triumphant progress of reason, the source of all happiness and freedom; and now, at the end of this century, one of our greatest threats is the temptation to despair.

Even so, it remains true that a certain positivist cast of mind continues to nurture the illusion that, thanks to scientific and technical progress, man and woman may live as a demiurge, single-handedly and completely taking charge of their destiny.

Current tasks for theology

92. As an understanding of Revelation, theology has always had to respond in different historical moments to the demands of different cultures, in order then to mediate the content of faith to those cultures in a coherent and conceptually clear way. Today, too, theology faces a dual task. On the one hand, it must be increasingly committed to the task entrusted to it by the Second Vatican Council, the task of renewing its specific methods in order to serve evangelization more effectively. How can we fail to recall in this regard the words of Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Council? He said then: "In line with the keen expectation of those who sincerely love the Christian, Catholic and apostolic religion, this doctrine must be known more widely and deeply, and souls must be instructed and formed in it more completely; and this certain and unchangeable doctrine, always to be faithfully respected, must be understood more profoundly and presented in a way which meets the needs of our time". (107)

On the other hand, theology must look to the ultimate truth which Revelation entrusts to it, never content to stop short of that goal. Theologians should remember that their work corresponds "to a dynamism found in the faith itself" and that the proper object of their enquiry is "the Truth which is the living God and his plan for salvation revealed in Jesus Christ". (108) This task, which is theology's prime concern, challenges philosophy as well. The array of problems

which today need to be tackled demands a joint effort—approached, it is true, with different methods—so that the truth may once again be known and expressed. The Truth, which is Christ, imposes itself as an all-embracing authority which holds out to theology and philosophy alike the prospect of support, stimulation and increase (cf. Eph 4:15).

To believe it possible to know a universally valid truth is in no way to encourage intolerance; on the contrary, it is the essential condition for sincere and authentic dialogue between persons. On this basis alone is it possible to overcome divisions and to journey together towards full truth, walking those paths known only to the Spirit of the Risen Lord. (109) I wish at this point to indicate the specific form which the call to unity now takes, given the current tasks of theology.

93.

The chief purpose of theology is to provide an understanding of Revelation and the content of faith. The very heart of theological enquiry will thus be the contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God. The approach to this mystery begins with reflection upon the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God: his coming as man, his going to his Passion and Death, a mystery issuing into his glorious Resurrection and Ascension to the right hand of the Father, whence he would send the Spirit of truth to bring his Church to birth and give her growth. From this vantage-point, the prime commitment of theology is seen to be the understanding of God's kenosis, a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return. In this light, a careful analysis of texts emerges as a basic and urgent need: first the texts of Scripture, and then those which express the Church's living Tradition. On this score, some problems have emerged in recent times, problems which are only partially new; and a coherent solution to them will not be found without philosophy's contribution.

94.

An initial problem is that of the relationship between meaning and truth. Like every other text, the sources which the theologian interprets primarily transmit a meaning which needs to be grasped and explained. This meaning presents itself as the truth about God which God himself communicates through the sacred text. Human language thus embodies the language of God, who communicates his own truth with that wonderful "condescension" which mirrors the logic of the Incarnation. (110) In interpreting the sources of Revelation, then, the theologian needs to ask what is the deep and authentic truth which the texts wish to communicate, even within the limits of language.

The truth of the biblical texts, and of the Gospels in particular, is certainly not restricted to the narration of simple historical events or the statement of neutral facts, as historicist positivism would claim. (111)

Beyond simple historical occurrence, the truth of the events which these texts relate lies rather in the meaning they have in and for the history of salvation. This truth is elaborated fully in the Church's constant reading of these texts over the centuries, a reading which preserves intact their original meaning. There is a pressing need, therefore, that the relationship between fact and meaning, a relationship which constitutes the specific sense of history, be examined also from the philosophical point of view.

95.

The word of God is not addressed to any one people or to any one period of history. Similarly, dogmatic statements, while reflecting at times the culture of the period in which they were defined, formulate an unchanging and ultimate truth. This prompts the question of how one can reconcile the absoluteness and the universality of truth with the unavoidable historical and cultural conditioning of the formulas which express that truth. The claims of historicism, I noted earlier, are untenable; but the use of a hermeneutic open to the appeal of metaphysics can show how it is possible to move from the historical and contingent circumstances in which the texts developed to the truth which they express, a truth transcending those circumstances.

Human language may be conditioned by history and constricted in other ways, but the human being can still express truths which surpass the phenomenon of language. Truth can never be confined to time and culture; in history it is known, but it also reaches beyond history.

96.

To see this is to glimpse the solution of another problem: the problem of the enduring validity of the conceptual language used in Conciliar definitions. This is a question which my revered predecessor Pius XII addressed in his Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis*. (112)

This is a complex theme to ponder, since one must reckon seriously with the meaning which words assume in different times and cultures. Nonetheless, the history of thought shows that across the range of cultures and their development certain basic concepts retain their universal epistemological value and thus retain the truth of the propositions in which they are expressed. (113) Were this not the case, philosophy and the sciences could not communicate with each other, nor could they find a place in cultures different from those in which they were conceived and developed. The hermeneutical problem exists, to be sure; but it is not insoluble. Moreover, the objective value of many concepts does not exclude that their meaning is often imperfect. This is where philosophical speculation can be very helpful. We may hope, then, that philosophy will be especially concerned to deepen the understanding of the relationship between conceptual language and truth, and to propose ways which will lead to a right understanding of that relationship.

97.

The interpretation of sources is a vital task for theology; but another still more delicate and demanding task is the understanding of revealed truth, or the articulation of the *intellectus fidei*. The *intellectus fidei*, as I have noted, demands the contribution of a philosophy of being which first of all would enable dogmatic theology to perform its functions appropriately. The dogmatic pragmatism of the early years of this century, which viewed the truths of faith as nothing more than rules of conduct, has already been refuted and rejected; (114) but the temptation always remains of understanding these truths in purely functional terms. This leads only to an approach which is inadequate, reductive and superficial at the level of speculation. A Christology, for example, which proceeded solely “from below”, as is said nowadays, or an ecclesiology developed solely on the model of civil society, would be hard pressed to avoid the danger of such reductionism.

If the *intellectus fidei* wishes to integrate all the wealth of the theological tradition, it must turn to the philosophy of being, which should be able to propose anew the problem of being-and this in harmony with the demands and insights of the entire philosophical tradition, including philosophy of more recent times, without lapsing into sterile repetition of antiquated formulas. Set within the Christian metaphysical tradition, the philosophy of being is a dynamic philosophy which views reality in its ontological, causal and communicative structures. It is strong and enduring because it is based upon the very act of being itself, which allows a full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole, surpassing every limit in order to reach the One who brings all things to fulfilment. (115) In theology, which draws its principles from Revelation as a new source of knowledge, this perspective is confirmed by the intimate relationship which exists between faith and metaphysical reasoning.

98.

These considerations apply equally to moral theology. It is no less urgent that philosophy be recovered at the point where the understanding of faith is linked to the moral life of believers. Faced with contemporary challenges in the social, economic, political and scientific fields, the ethical conscience of people is disoriented. In the Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, I wrote that many of the problems of the contemporary world stem from a crisis of truth. I noted that “once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its prime reality as an act of a person's intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly. Such an outlook is quite congenial to an individualist ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth different from the truth of others”. (116)

Throughout the Encyclical I underscored clearly the fundamental role of truth in the moral field. In the case of the more pressing ethical problems, this truth demands of moral theology a careful enquiry rooted unambiguously in the word of God. In order to fulfil its mission, moral theology must turn to a philosophical ethics which looks to the truth of the good, to an ethics which is neither subjectivist nor utilitarian. Such an ethics implies and presupposes a philosophical anthropology and a metaphysics of the good. Drawing on this organic vision, linked necessarily to Christian holiness and to the practice of the human and supernatural virtues, moral theology will be able to tackle the various problems in its competence, such as peace, social justice, the family, the defence of life and the natural environment, in a more appropriate and effective way.

99.

Theological work in the Church is first of all at the service of the proclamation of the faith and of catechesis. (117) Proclamation or *kerygma* is a call to conversion, announcing the truth of Christ, which reaches its summit in his Paschal Mystery: for only in Christ is it possible to know the fullness of the truth which saves (cf. Acts 4:12; 1 Tm 2:4-6).

In this respect, it is easy to see why, in addition to theology, reference to catechesis is also important, since catechesis has philosophical implications which must be explored more deeply in the light of faith. The teaching imparted in catechesis helps to form the person. As a mode of linguistic communication, catechesis must present the Church's doctrine in its integrity, (118) demonstrating its link with the life of the faithful. (119) The result is a unique bond between teaching and living which is otherwise unattainable, since what is communicated in catechesis is not a body of conceptual truths, but the mystery of the living God. (120)

Philosophical enquiry can help greatly to clarify the relationship between truth and life, between event and doctrinal truth, and above all between transcendent truth and humanly comprehensible language. (121) This involves a reciprocity between the theological disciplines and the insights drawn from the various strands of philosophy; and such a reciprocity can prove genuinely fruitful for the communication and deeper understanding of the faith.

CONCLUSION

100.

More than a hundred years after the appearance of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Æterni Patris*, to which I have often referred in these pages, I have sensed the need to revisit in a more systematic way the issue of the relationship between faith and philosophy. The importance of philosophical thought in the development of culture and its influence on

patterns of personal and social behaviour is there for all to see. In addition, philosophy exercises a powerful, though not always obvious, influence on theology and its disciplines. For these reasons, I have judged it appropriate and necessary to emphasize the value of philosophy for the understanding of the faith, as well as the limits which philosophy faces when it neglects or rejects the truths of Revelation. The Church remains profoundly convinced that faith and reason “mutually support each other”; (122) each influences the other, as they offer to each other a purifying critique and a stimulus to pursue the search for deeper understanding.

101.

A survey of the history of thought, especially in the West, shows clearly that the encounter between philosophy and theology and the exchange of their respective insights have contributed richly to the progress of humanity. Endowed as it is with an openness and originality which allow it to stand as the science of faith, theology has certainly challenged reason to remain open to the radical newness found in God's Revelation; and this has been an undoubted boon for philosophy which has thus glimpsed new vistas of further meanings which reason is summoned to penetrate.

Precisely in the light of this consideration, and just as I have reaffirmed theology's duty to recover its true relationship with philosophy, I feel equally bound to stress how right it is that, for the benefit and development of human thought, philosophy too should recover its relationship with theology. In theology, philosophy will find not the thinking of a single person which, however rich and profound, still entails the limited perspective of an individual, but the wealth of a communal reflection. For by its very nature, theology is sustained in the search for truth by its ecclesial context (123) and by the tradition of the People of God, with its harmony of many different fields of learning and culture within the unity of faith.

102.

Insisting on the importance and true range of philosophical thought, the Church promotes both the defence of human dignity and the proclamation of the Gospel message. There is today no more urgent preparation for the performance of these tasks than this: to lead people to discover both their capacity to know the truth (124) and their yearning for the ultimate and definitive meaning of life. In the light of these profound needs, inscribed by God in human nature, the human and humanizing meaning of God's word also emerges more clearly. Through the mediation of a philosophy which is also true wisdom, people today will come to realize that their humanity is all the more affirmed the more they entrust themselves to the Gospel and open themselves to Christ.

103.

Philosophy moreover is the mirror which reflects the culture of a people. A philosophy which responds to the challenge of theology's demands and evolves in harmony with faith is part of that “evangelization of culture” which Paul VI proposed as one of the fundamental goals of evangelization.

(125) I have unstintingly recalled the pressing need for a new evangelization; and I appeal now to philosophers to explore more comprehensively the dimensions of the true, the good and the beautiful to which the word of God gives access. This task becomes all the more urgent if we consider the challenges which the new millennium seems to entail, and which affect in a particular way regions and cultures which have a long-standing Christian tradition. This attention to philosophy too should be seen as a fundamental and original contribution in service of the new evangelization.

104.

Philosophical thought is often the only ground for understanding and dialogue with those who do not share our faith. The current ferment in philosophy demands of believing philosophers an attentive and competent commitment, able to discern the expectations, the points of openness and the key issues of this historical moment. Reflecting in the light of reason and in keeping with its rules, and guided always by the deeper understanding given them by the word of God, Christian philosophers can develop a reflection which will be both comprehensible and appealing to those who do not yet grasp the full truth which divine Revelation declares. Such a ground for understanding and dialogue is all the more vital nowadays, since the most pressing issues facing humanity—ecology, peace and the co-existence of different races and cultures, for instance—may possibly find a solution if there is a clear and honest collaboration between Christians and the followers of other religions and all those who, while not sharing a religious belief, have at heart the renewal of humanity. The Second Vatican Council said as much: “For our part, the desire for such dialogue, undertaken solely out of love for the truth and with all due prudence, excludes no one, neither those who cultivate the values of the human spirit while not yet acknowledging their Source, nor those who are hostile to the Church and persecute her in various ways”. (126) A philosophy in which there shines even a glimmer of the truth of Christ, the one definitive answer to humanity's problems, (127) will provide a potent underpinning for the true and planetary ethics which the world now needs.

105.

In concluding this Encyclical Letter, my thoughts turn particularly to theologians, encouraging them to pay special attention to the philosophical implications of the word of God and to be sure to reflect in their work all the speculative and practical breadth of the science of theology. I wish to thank them for their service to the Church. The intimate bond between theological and philosophical wisdom is one of the Christian tradition's most distinctive treasures in the exploration of revealed truth. This is why I urge them to recover and express to the full the metaphysical dimension of truth in order to enter into a demanding critical dialogue with both contemporary philosophical thought and with the philosophical tradition in all its aspects, whether consonant with the word of God or not. Let theologians always

remember the words of that great master of thought and spirituality, Saint Bonaventure, who in introducing his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* invites the reader to recognize the inadequacy of “reading without repentance, knowledge without devotion, research without the impulse of wonder, prudence without the ability to surrender to joy, action divorced from religion, learning sundered from love, intelligence without humility, study unsustained by divine grace, thought without the wisdom inspired by God”. (128)

I am thinking too of those responsible for priestly formation, whether academic or pastoral. I encourage them to pay special attention to the philosophical preparation of those who will proclaim the Gospel to the men and women of today and, even more, of those who will devote themselves to theological research and teaching. They must make every effort to carry out their work in the light of the directives laid down by the Second Vatican Council (129) and subsequent legislation, which speak clearly of the urgent and binding obligation, incumbent on all, to contribute to a genuine and profound communication of the truths of the faith. The grave responsibility to provide for the appropriate training of those charged with teaching philosophy both in seminaries and ecclesiastical faculties must not be neglected. (130) Teaching in this field necessarily entails a suitable scholarly preparation, a systematic presentation of the great heritage of the Christian tradition and due discernment in the light of the current needs of the Church and the world.

106.

I appeal also to philosophers, and to all teachers of philosophy, asking them to have the courage to recover, in the flow of an enduringly valid philosophical tradition, the range of authentic wisdom and truth-metaphysical truth included-which is proper to philosophical enquiry. They should be open to the impelling questions which arise from the word of God and they should be strong enough to shape their thought and discussion in response to that challenge. Let them always strive for truth, alert to the good which truth contains. Then they will be able to formulate the genuine ethics which humanity needs so urgently at this particular time. The Church follows the work of philosophers with interest and appreciation; and they should rest assured of her respect for the rightful autonomy of their discipline. I would want especially to encourage believers working in the philosophical field to illumine the range of human activity by the exercise of a reason which grows more penetrating and assured because of the support it receives from faith.

Finally, I cannot fail to address a word to scientists, whose research offers an ever greater knowledge of the universe as a whole and of the incredibly rich array of its component parts, animate and inanimate, with their complex atomic and molecular structures. So far has science come, especially in this century, that its achievements never cease to amaze us. In expressing my admiration and in offering encouragement to these brave pioneers of scientific research, to whom humanity owes so much of its current development, I would urge them to continue their efforts without ever abandoning the sapiential horizon within which scientific and technological achievements are wedded to the philosophical and ethical values which are the distinctive and indelible mark of the human person. Scientists are well aware that “the search for truth, even when it concerns a finite reality of the world or of man, is never-ending, but always points beyond to something higher than the immediate object of study, to the questions which give access to Mystery”. (131)

107.

I ask everyone to look more deeply at man, whom Christ has saved in the mystery of his love, and at the human being's unceasing search for truth and meaning. Different philosophical systems have lured people into believing that they are their own absolute master, able to decide their own destiny and future in complete autonomy, trusting only in themselves and their own powers. But this can never be the grandeur of the human being, who can find fulfilment only in choosing to enter the truth, to make a home under the shade of Wisdom and dwell there. Only within this horizon of truth will people understand their freedom in its fullness and their call to know and love God as the supreme realization of their true self.

108.

I turn in the end to the woman whom the prayer of the Church invokes as Seat of Wisdom, and whose life itself is a true parable illuminating the reflection contained in these pages. For between the vocation of the Blessed Virgin and the vocation of true philosophy there is a deep harmony. Just as the Virgin was called to offer herself entirely as human being and as woman that God's Word might take flesh and come among us, so too philosophy is called to offer its rational and critical resources that theology, as the understanding of faith, may be fruitful and creative. And just as in giving her assent to Gabriel's word, Mary lost nothing of her true humanity and freedom, so too when philosophy heeds the summons of the Gospel's truth its autonomy is in no way impaired. Indeed, it is then that philosophy sees all its enquiries rise to their highest expression. This was a truth which the holy monks of Christian antiquity understood well when they called Mary “the table at which faith sits in thought”. (132) In her they saw a lucid image of true philosophy and they were convinced of the need to philosophari in Maria.

May Mary, Seat of Wisdom, be a sure haven for all who devote their lives to the search for wisdom. May their journey into wisdom, sure and final goal of all true knowing, be freed of every hindrance by the intercession of the one who, in giving birth to the Truth and treasuring it in her heart, has shared it forever with all the world.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 14 September, the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, in the year 1998, the twentieth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

- (1) In my first Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, I wrote: “We have become sharers in this mission of the prophet Christ, and in virtue of that mission we together with him are serving divine truth in the Church. Being responsible for that truth also means loving it and seeking the most exact understanding of it, in order to bring it closer to ourselves and others in all its saving power, its splendour and its profundity joined with simplicity”: No. 19: AAS 71 (1979), 306.
- (2) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.
- (3) Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.
- (4) No. 4: AAS 85 (1993), 1136.
- (5) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 2.
- (6) Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, III: DS 3008.
- (7) *Ibid.*, IV: DS 3015; quoted also in Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 59.
- (8) Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 2.
- (9) Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 10: AAS 87 (1995), 11.
- (10) No. 4.
- (11) No. 8.
- (12) No. 22.
- (13) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 4.
- (14) *Ibid.*, 5.
- (15) The First Vatican Council, to which the quotation above refers, teaches that the obedience of faith requires the engagement of the intellect and the will: “Since human beings are totally dependent on God as their creator and Lord, and created reason is completely subject to uncreated truth, we are obliged to yield through faith to God the revealer full submission of intellect and will” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, III: DS 3008).
- (16) Sequence for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord.
- (17) *Pensées*, 789 (ed. L. Brunschvicg).
- (18) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- (19) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 2.
- (20) Proemium and Nos. 1, 15: PL 158, 223-224; 226; 235.
- (21) *De Vera Religione*, XXXIX, 72: CCL 32, 234. (48 of 56)2006-10-03 17:19:22
- (22) “*Ut te semper desiderando quaerent et inveniendo quiescerent*”: *Missale Romanum*.
- (23) Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 1.
- (24) *Confessions*, X, 23, 33: CCL 27, 173.
- (25) No. 34: AAS 85 (1993), 1161.
- (26) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (11 February 1984), 9: AAS 76 (1984), 209-210.
- (27) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Relations of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, 2.
- (28) This is a theme which I have long pursued and which I have addressed on a number of occasions. “ ‘What is man and of what use is he? What is good in him and what is evil?’ (Sir 18:8)... These are questions in every human heart, as the poetic genius of every time and every people has shown, posing again and again-almost as the prophetic voice of humanity-the serious question which makes human beings truly what they are. They are questions which express the urgency of finding a reason for existence, in every moment, at life's most important and decisive times as well as more ordinary times. These questions show the deep reasonableness of human existence, since they summon human intelligence and will to search freely for a solution which can reveal the full meaning of life. These enquiries, therefore, are the highest expression of human nature; which is why the answer to them is the gauge of the depth of his engagement with his own existence. In particular, when the why of things is explored in full harmony with the search for the ultimate answer, then human reason reaches its zenith and opens to the religious impulse. The religious impulse is the highest expression of the human person, because it is the highpoint of his rational nature. It springs from the profound human aspiration for the truth and it is the basis of the human being's free and personal search for the divine”: General Audience (19 October 1983), 1-2: *Insegnamenti VI*, 2 (1983), 814-815.
- (29) “[Galileo] declared explicitly that the two truths, of faith and of science, can never contradict each other, ‘Sacred Scripture and the natural world proceeding equally from the divine Word, the first as dictated by the Holy Spirit, the second as a very faithful executor of the commands of God’, as he wrote in his letter to Father Benedetto Castelli on 21 December 1613. The Second Vatican Council says the same thing, even adopting similar language in its teaching: ‘Methodical research, in all realms of knowledge, if it respects... moral norms, will never be genuinely opposed to faith: the reality of the world and of faith have their origin in the same God’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36). Galileo sensed in his scientific research the presence of the Creator who, stirring in the depths of his spirit, stimulated him, anticipating and

- assisting his intuitions”: John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (10 November 1979): *Insegnamenti*, II, 2 (1979), 1111-1112.
- (30) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 4.
- (31) Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3, 55: SC 136, 130.
- (32) *Dialogue with Trypho*, 8, 1: PG 6, 492.
- (33) *Stromata* I, 18, 90, 1: SC 30, 115.
- (34) Cf. *ibid.*, I, 16, 80, 5: SC 30, 108.
- (35) Cf. *ibid.*, I, 5, 28, 1: SC 30, 65.
- (36) *Ibid.*, VI, 7, 55, 1-2: PG 9, 277.
- (37) *Ibid.*, I, 20, 100, 1: SC 30, 124.
- (38) Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, VI, 5, 7: CCL 27, 77-78.
- (39) Cf. *ibid.*, VII, 9, 13-14: CCL 27, 101-102.
- (40) *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, VII, 9: SC 46, 98: “*Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? Quid academiae et ecclesiae?*”.
- (41) Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church in Priestly Formation* (10 November 1989), 25: AAS 82 (1990), 617-618.
- (42) Saint Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1: PL 158, 226.
- (43) *Idem*, *Monologion*, 64: PL 158, 210.
- (44) Cf. *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 7.
- (45) Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 8 ad 2: “*cum enim gratia non tollat naturam sed perficiat*”.
- (46) Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Participants at the IX International Thomistic Congress (29 September 1990): *Insegnamenti*, XIII, 2 (1990), 770-771.
- (47) Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae* (20 November 1974), 8: AAS 66 (1974), 680.
- (48) Cf. I, 1, 6: “*Praeterea, haec doctrina per studium acquiritur. Sapientia autem per infusionem habetur, unde inter septem dona Spiritus Sancti connumeratur*”.
- (49) *Ibid.*, II-II, 45, 1 ad 2; cf. also II-II, 45, 2.
- (50) *Ibid.*, I-II, 109, 1 ad 1, which echoes the well known phrase of the Ambrosiaster, *In Prima Cor 12:3*: PL 17, 258.
- (51) Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris* (4 August 1879): ASS 11 (1878-79), 109.
- (52) Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae* (20 November 1974), 8: AAS 66 (1974), 683.
- (53) Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 15: AAS 71 (1979), 286.
- (54) Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 566.
- (55) Cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ *Pastor Aeternus*: DS 3070; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25 c.
- (56) Cf. Synod of Constantinople, DS 403.
- (57) Cf. Council of Toledo I, DS 205; Council of Braga I, DS 459-460; Sixtus V, Bull *Coeli et Terrae Creator* (5 January 1586): *Bullarium Romanum* 4/4, Rome 1747, 176-179; Urban VIII, *Inscrutabilis Iudiciorum* (1 April 1631): *Bullarium Romanum* 6/1, Rome 1758, 268-270.
- (58) Cf. Ecumenical Council of Vienne, Decree *Fidei Catholicae*, DS 902; Fifth Lateran Ecumenical Council, Bull *Apostoli Regiminis*, DS 1440.
- (59) Cf. *Theses a Ludovico Eugenio Bautain iussu sui Episcopi subscriptae* (8 September 1840), DS 2751-2756; *Theses a Ludovico Eugenio Bautain ex mandato S. Cong. Episcoporum et Religiosorum subscriptae* (26 April 1844), DS 2765-2769.
- (60) Cf. Sacred Congregation of the Index, Decree *Theses contra Traditionalismum Augustini Bonnetty* (11 June 1855), DS 2811-2814.
- (61) Cf. Pius IX, Brief *Eximiam Tuam* (15 June 1857), DS 2828-2831; Brief *Gravissimas Inter* (11 December 1862), DS 2850-2861.
- (62) Cf. Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, Decree *Errores Ontologistarum* (18 September 1861), DS 2841-2847.
- (63) Cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, II: DS 3004; and Canon 2, 1: DS 3026.
- (64) *Ibid.*, IV: DS 3015, cited in Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, 59.
- (65) First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, IV: DS 3017.
- (66) Cf. Encyclical Letter *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (8 September 1907): ASS 40 (1907), 596-597.
- (67) Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Divini Redemptoris* (19 March 1937): AAS 29 (1937), 65-106.
- (68) Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 562-563.
- (69) *Ibid.*, loc. cit., 563-564.
- (70) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (28 June 1988), Arts. 48-49: AAS 80 (1988), 873; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian Donum Veritatis* (24 May 1990), 18: AAS 82 (1990), 1558.

- (71) Cf. Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation” *Libertatis Nuntius* (6 August 1984), VII-X: AAS 76 (1984), 890-903.
- (72) In language as clear as it is authoritative, the First Vatican Council condemned this error, affirming on the one hand that “as regards this faith..., the Catholic Church professes that it is a supernatural virtue by means of which, under divine inspiration and with the help of grace, we believe to be true the things revealed by God, not because of the intrinsic truth of the things perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself, who reveals them and who can neither deceive nor be deceived”: Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, III: DS 3008, and Canon 3, 2: DS 3032. On the other hand, the Council declared that reason is never “able to penetrate [these mysteries] as it does the truths which are its proper object”: *ibid.*, IV: DS 3016. It then drew a practical conclusion: “The Christian faithful not only have no right to defend as legitimate scientific conclusions opinions which are contrary to the doctrine of the faith, particularly if condemned by the Church, but they are strictly obliged to regard them as errors which have no more than a fraudulent semblance of truth”: *ibid.*, IV: DS 3018.
- (73) Cf. Nos. 9-10.
- (74) *Ibid.*, 10.
- (75) *Ibid.*, 21.
- (76) Cf. *ibid.*, 10.
- (77) Cf. Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 565-567; 571-573.
- (78) Cf. Encyclical Letter *Æterni Patris* (4 August 1879): ASS 11 (1878-1879), 97-115.
- (79) *Ibid.*, loc. cit., 109.
- (80) Cf. Nos. 14-15.
- (81) Cf. *ibid.*, 20-21.
- (82) *Ibid.*, 22; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 8: AAS 71 (1979), 271-272.
- (83) Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius*, 15.
- (84) Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (15 April 1979), Arts. 79-80: AAS 71 (1979), 495-496; Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 52: AAS 84 (1992), 750-751. Cf. also various remarks on the philosophy of Saint Thomas: Address to the International Pontifical Athenaeum “*Angelicum*” (17 November 1979): *Insegnamenti* II, 2 (1979), 1177-1189; Address to the Participants of the Eighth International Thomistic Congress (13 September 1980): *Insegnamenti* III, 2 (1980), 604-615; Address to the Participants at the International Congress of the Saint Thomas Society on the Doctrine of the Soul in Saint Thomas (4 January 1986): *Insegnamenti* IX, 1 (1986), 18-24. Also the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio Fundamental Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (6 January 1970), 70-75: AAS 62 (1970), 366-368; Decree *Sacra Theologia* (20 January 1972): AAS 64 (1972), 583-586.
- (85) Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 57; 62.
- (86) Cf. *ibid.*, 44.
- (87) Cf. Fifth Lateran Ecumenical Council, Bull *Apostolici Regimini Sollicitudo*, Session VIII: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 1991, 605-606.
- (88) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 10.
- (89) Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 5, 3 ad 2.
- (90) “The search for the conditions in which man on his own initiative asks the first basic questions about the meaning of life, the purpose he wishes to give it and what awaits him after death constitutes the necessary preamble to fundamental theology, so that today too, faith can fully show the way to reason in a sincere search for the truth”: John Paul II, Letter to Participants in the International Congress of Fundamental Theology on the 125th Anniversary of “*Dei Filius*” (30 September 1995), 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1995, 8.
- (91) *Ibid.*
- (92) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 15; Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 22.
- (93) Saint Thomas Aquinas, *De Caelo*, 1, 22.
- (94) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 53-59.
- (95) Saint Augustine, *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, 2, 5: PL 44, 963.
- (96) *Idem*, *De Fide, Spe et Caritate*, 7: CCL 64, 61.
- (97) Cf. Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, *Symbolum*, *Definitio*: DS 302.
- (98) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 15: AAS 71 (1979), 286-289.
- (99) Cf., for example, Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 16, 1; Saint Bonaventure, *Coll. In Hex.*, 3, 8, 1.
- (100) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 15.
- (101) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 57-61: AAS 85 (1993), 1179-1182.
- (102) Cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, IV: DS 3016.
- (103) Cf. Fourth Lateran Ecumenical Council, *De Errore Abbatum Ioachim*, II: DS 806.

- (104) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 24; Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatum Totius*, 16.
- (105) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), 69: AAS 87 (1995), 481.
- (106) In the same sense I commented in my first Encyclical Letter on the expression in the Gospel of Saint John, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (8:32): “These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world. Today also, even after two thousand years, we see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man's soul, his heart and his conscience”: Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 12: AAS 71 (1979), 280-281.
- (107) Address at the Opening of the Council (11 October 1962): AAS 54 (1962), 792.
- (108) Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum Veritatis* (24 May 1990), 7-8: AAS 82 (1990), 1552-1553.
- (109) In the Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, commenting on Jn 16:12-13, I wrote: “Jesus presents the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, as the one who 'will teach' and 'bring to remembrance', as the one who 'will bear witness' to him. Now he says: 'he will guide you into all the truth'. This 'guiding into all the truth', referring to what the Apostles 'cannot bear now', is necessarily connected with Christ's self-emptying through his Passion and Death on the Cross, which, when he spoke these words, was just about to happen. Later however it becomes clear that this 'guiding into all the truth' is connected not only with the *scandalum Crucis*, but also with everything that Christ 'did and taught' (Acts 1:1). For the *mysterium Christi* taken as a whole demands faith, since it is faith that adequately introduces man into the reality of the revealed mystery. The 'guiding into all the truth' is therefore achieved in faith and through faith: and this is the work of the Spirit of truth and the result of his action in man. Here the Holy Spirit is to be man's supreme guide and the light of the human spirit”: No. 6: AAS 78 (1986), 815-816.
- (110) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 13.
- (111) Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels (21 April 1964): AAS 56 (1964), 713.
- (112) “It is clear that the Church cannot be tied to any and every passing philosophical system. Nevertheless, those notions and terms which have been developed through common effort by Catholic teachers over the course of the centuries to bring about some understanding of dogma are certainly not based on any such weak foundation. They are based on principles and notions deduced from a true knowledge of created things. In the process of deduction, this knowledge, like a star, gave enlightenment to the human mind through the Church. Hence it is not astonishing that some of these notions have not only been employed by the Ecumenical Councils, but even sanctioned by them, so that it is wrong to depart from them”: Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 566-567; cf. International Theological Commission, Document *Interpretationis Problema* (October 1989): *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 11, 2717-2811.
- (113) “As for the meaning of dogmatic formulas, this remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed. The faithful therefore must shun the opinion, first, that dogmatic formulas (or some category of them) cannot signify the truth in a determinate way, but can only offer changeable approximations to it, which to a certain extent distort or alter it”: Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration in Defence of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (24 June 1973), 5: AAS 65 (1973), 403.
- (114) Cf. Congregation of the Holy Office, Decree *Lamentabili* (3 July 1907), 26: ASS 40 (1907), 473.
- (115) Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Athenaeum “*Angelicum*” (17 November 1979), 6: *Insegnamenti*, II, 2 (1979), 1183-1185.
- (116) No. 32: AAS 85 (1993), 1159-1160.
- (117) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979), 30: AAS 71 (1979), 1302-1303; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum Veritatis* (24 May 1990), 7: AAS 82 (1990), 1552-1553.
- (118) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979), 30: AAS 71 (1979), 1302-1303.
- (119) Cf. *ibid.*, 22, loc. cit., 1295-1296.
- (120) Cf. *ibid.*, 7, loc. cit., 1282.
- (121) Cf. *ibid.*, 59, loc. cit., 1325.
- (122) First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, IV: DS 3019.
- (123) “Nobody can make of theology as it were a simple collection of his own personal ideas, but everybody must be aware of being in close union with the mission of teaching truth for which the Church is responsible”: John Paul II, 2006-10-03 17:19:22
- (124) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1-3.
- (125) Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 20: AAS 68 (1976), 18-19.

(126) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 92.

(127) Cf. *ibid.*, 10.

(128) Prologus, 4: *Opera Omnia*, Florence, 1891, vol. V, 296.

(129) Cf. Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatum Totius*, 15.

(130) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (15 April 1979), Arts. 67-68: *AAS* 71 (1979), 491-492.

(131) John Paul II, Address to the University of Krakow for the 600th Anniversary of the Jagiellonian University (8 June 1997), 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9-10 June 1997, 12.

(132) "He noera tes pisteos trapeza": Pseudo-Epiphanius, Homily in Praise of Holy Mary Mother of God: *PG* 43, 493.

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Ioannes Paulus PP. II

On commitment to Ecumenism 1995.05.25

INTRODUCTION

1. Ut unum sint! The call for Christian unity made by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council with such impassioned commitment is finding an ever greater echo in the hearts of believers, especially as the Year 2000 approaches, a year which Christians will celebrate as a sacred Jubilee, the commemoration of the Incarnation of the Son of God, who became man in order to save humanity.

The courageous witness of so many martyrs of our century, including members of Churches and Ecclesial Communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church, gives new vigour to the Council's call and reminds us of our duty to listen to and put into practice its exhortation. These brothers and sisters of ours, united in the selfless offering of their lives for the Kingdom of God, are the most powerful proof that every factor of division can be transcended and overcome in the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel.

Christ calls all his disciples to unity. My earnest desire is to renew this call today, to propose it once more with determination, repeating what I said at the Roman Colosseum on Good Friday 1994, at the end of the meditation on the Via Crucis prepared by my Venerable Brother Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. There I stated that believers in Christ, united in following in the footsteps of the martyrs, cannot remain divided. If they wish truly and effectively to oppose the world's tendency to reduce to powerlessness the Mystery of Redemption, they must profess together the same truth about the Cross. 1 The Cross! An anti-Christian outlook seeks to minimize the Cross, to empty it of its meaning, and to deny that in it man has the source of his new life. It claims that the Cross is unable to provide either vision or hope. Man, it says, is nothing but an earthly being, who must live as if God did not exist.

2. No one is unaware of the challenge which all this poses to believers. They cannot fail to meet this challenge. Indeed, how could they refuse to do everything possible, with God's help, to break down the walls of division and distrust, to overcome obstacles and prejudices which thwart the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in the Cross of Jesus, the one Redeemer of man, of every individual?

I thank the Lord that he has led us to make progress along the path of unity and communion between Christians, a path difficult but so full of joy. Interconfessional dialogues at the theological level have produced positive and tangible results: this encourages us to move forward.

Nevertheless, besides the doctrinal differences needing to be resolved, Christians cannot underestimate the burden of long-standing misgivings inherited from the past, and of mutual misunderstandings and prejudices. Complacency, indifference and insufficient knowledge of one another often make this situation worse. Consequently, the commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the necessary purification of past memories. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Lord's disciples, inspired by love, by the power of the truth and by a sincere desire for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, are called to re-examine together their painful past and the hurt which that past regrettably continues to provoke even today. All together, they are invited by the ever fresh power of the Gospel to acknowledge with sincere and total objectivity the mistakes made and the contingent factors at work at the origins of their deplorable divisions. What is needed is a calm, clear-sighted and truthful vision of things, a vision enlivened by divine mercy and capable of freeing people's minds and of inspiring in everyone a renewed willingness, precisely with a view to proclaiming the Gospel to the men and women of every people and nation.

3. At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself irrevocably to following the path of the ecumenical venture, thus heeding the Spirit of the Lord, who teaches people to interpret carefully the "signs of the times". The experiences of these years have made the Church even more profoundly aware of her identity and her mission in history. The Catholic Church acknowledges and confesses the weaknesses of her members, conscious that their sins are so many betrayals of and obstacles to the accomplishment of the Saviour's plan. Because she feels herself constantly called to be renewed in the spirit of the Gospel, she does not cease to do penance. At the same time, she acknowledges and exalts still more the power of the Lord, who fills her with the gift of holiness, leads her forward, and conforms her to his Passion and Resurrection.

Taught by the events of her history, the Church is committed to freeing herself from every purely human support, in order to live in depth the Gospel law of the Beatitudes. Conscious that the truth does not impose itself except "by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power", 2 she seeks nothing for herself but the freedom to proclaim the Gospel. Indeed, her authority is exercised in the service of truth and charity.

I myself intend to promote every suitable initiative aimed at making the witness of the entire Catholic community understood in its full purity and consistency, especially considering the engagement which awaits the Church at the threshold of the new Millennium. That will be an exceptional occasion, in view of which she asks the Lord to increase the unity of all Christians until they reach full communion.³ The present Encyclical Letter is meant as a contribution to this most noble goal. Essentially pastoral in character, it seeks to encourage the efforts of all who work for the cause of unity.

4. This is a specific duty of the Bishop of Rome as the Successor of the Apostle Peter. I carry out this duty with the profound conviction that I am obeying the Lord, and with a clear sense of my own human frailty. Indeed, if Christ himself gave Peter this special mission in the Church and exhorted him to strengthen his brethren, he also made clear to him his human weakness and his special need of conversion: "And when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:32). It is precisely in Peter's human weakness that it becomes fully clear that the Pope, in order to carry out this special ministry in the Church, depends totally on the Lord's grace and prayer: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Lk 22:32). The conversion of Peter and that of his Successors is upheld by the very prayer of the Redeemer, and the Church constantly makes this petition her own. In our ecumenical age, marked by the Second Vatican Council, the mission of the Bishop of Rome is particularly directed to recalling the need for full communion among Christ's disciples.

The Bishop of Rome himself must fervently make his own Christ's prayer for that conversion which is indispensable for "Peter" to be able to serve his brethren. I earnestly invite the faithful of the Catholic Church and all Christians to share in this prayer. May all join me in praying for this conversion!

We know that during her earthly pilgrimage the Church has suffered and will continue to suffer opposition and persecution. But the hope which sustains her is unshakable, just as the joy which flows from this hope is indestructible. In effect, the firm and enduring rock upon which she is founded is Jesus Christ, her Lord.

CHAPTER I - THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S COMMITMENT TO ECUMENISM

God's plan and communion

5. Together with all Christ's disciples, the Catholic Church bases upon God's plan her ecumenical commitment to gather all Christians into unity. Indeed, "the Church is not a reality closed in on herself. Rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavour, for she is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her, and

to gather all people and all things into Christ, so as to be for all an 'inseparable sacrament of unity' ".⁴

Already in the Old Testament, the Prophet Ezekiel, referring to the situation of God's People at that time, and using the simple sign of two broken sticks which are first divided and then joined together, expressed the divine will to "gather from all sides" the members of his scattered people. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel" (cf. 37:16-28). The Gospel of John, for its part, considering the situation of the People of God at the time it was written, sees in Jesus' death the reason for the unity of God's children: "Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (11:51-52). Indeed, as the Letter to the Ephesians explains, Jesus "broke down the dividing wall of hostility... through the Cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end"; in place of what was divided he brought about unity (cf. 2:14-16).

6. The unity of all divided humanity is the will of God. For this reason he sent his Son, so that by dying and rising for us he might bestow on us the Spirit of love. On the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they might be one, a living communion. This is the basis not only of the duty, but also of the responsibility before God and his plan, which falls to those who through Baptism become members of the Body of Christ, a Body in which the fullness of reconciliation and communion must be made present. How is it possible to remain divided, if we have been "buried" through Baptism in the Lord's death, in the very act by which God, through the death of his Son, has broken down the walls of division? Division "openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature".⁵

The way of ecumenism: the way of the Church

7.

"The Lord of the Ages wisely and patiently follows out the plan of his grace on behalf of us sinners. In recent times he has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and a longing for unity. Everywhere, large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. Taking part in this movement, which is called ecumenical, are those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They join in not merely as individuals but also as members of the corporate groups in which they

have heard the Gospel, and which each regards as his Church and, indeed, God's. And yet almost everyone, though in different ways, longs that there may be one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God".⁶

8.

This statement of the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* is to be read in the context of the complete teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The Council expresses the Church's decision to take up the ecumenical task of working for Christian unity and to propose it with conviction and vigour: "This sacred Synod exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to participate actively in the work of ecumenism".⁷

In indicating the Catholic principles of ecumenism, the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* recalls above all the teaching on the Church set forth in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* in its chapter on the People of God.⁸ At the same time, it takes into account everything affirmed in the Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*.⁹

The Catholic Church embraces with hope the commitment to ecumenism as a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love. Here too we can apply the words of Saint Paul to the first Christians of Rome: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit"; thus our "hope does not disappoint us" (Rom 5:5). This is the hope of Christian unity, which has its divine source in the Trinitarian unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

9. Jesus himself, at the hour of his Passion, prayed "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ's mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his agape.

In effect, this unity bestowed by the Holy Spirit does not merely consist in the gathering of people as a collection of individuals. It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical communion.¹⁰ The faithful are one because, in the Spirit, they are in communion with the Son and, in him, share in his communion with the Father: "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). For the Catholic Church, then, the communion of Christians is none other than the manifestation in them of the grace by which God makes them sharers in his own communion, which is his eternal life. Christ's words "that they may be one" are thus his prayer to the Father that the Father's plan may be fully accomplished, in such a way that everyone may clearly see "what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Eph 3:9). To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: "Ut unum sint".

10. In the present situation of the lack of unity among Christians and of the confident quest for full communion, the Catholic faithful are conscious of being deeply challenged by the Lord of the Church. The Second Vatican Council strengthened their commitment with a clear ecclesiological vision, open to all the ecclesial values present among other Christians. The Catholic faithful face the ecumenical question in a spirit of faith.

The Council states that the Church of Christ "subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him", and at the same time acknowledges that "many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside her visible structure. These elements, however, as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamism towards Catholic unity".¹¹

"It follows that these separated Churches and Communities, though we believe that they suffer from defects, have by no means been deprived of significance and value in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church".¹²

11. The Catholic Church thus affirms that during the two thousand years of her history she has been preserved in unity, with all the means with which God wishes to endow his Church, and this despite the often grave crises which have shaken her, the infidelity of some of her ministers, and the faults into which her members daily fall. The Catholic Church knows that, by virtue of the strength which comes to her from the Spirit, the weaknesses, mediocrity, sins and at times the betrayals of some of her children cannot destroy what God has bestowed on her as part of his plan of grace. Moreover, "the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). Even so, the Catholic Church does not forget that many among her members cause God's plan to be discernible only with difficulty. Speaking of the lack of unity among Christians, the Decree on Ecumenism does not ignore the fact that "people of both sides were to blame",¹³ and acknowledges that responsibility cannot be attributed only to the "other side". By God's grace, however, neither what belongs to the structure of the Church of Christ nor that communion which still exists with the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities has been destroyed.

Indeed, the elements of sanctification and truth present in the other Christian Communities, in a degree which varies from one to the other, constitute the objective basis of the communion, albeit imperfect, which exists between them and the Catholic Church.

To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them. For this reason the Second Vatican Council speaks of a certain, though imperfect communion. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* stresses that the Catholic Church "recognizes that in many ways she is linked" 14 with these Communities by a true union in the Holy Spirit.

12. The same Dogmatic Constitution listed at length "the elements of sanctification and truth" which in various ways are present and operative beyond the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: "For there are many who honour Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and of action, and who show a true religious zeal. They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by Baptism, through which they are united with Christ. They also recognize and receive other sacraments within their own Churches or Ecclesial Communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and cultivate devotion towards the Virgin Mother of God. They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits. Likewise, we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them also he gives his gifts and graces, and is thereby operative among them with his sanctifying power. Some indeed he has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood. In all of Christ's disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd".15

The Council's Decree on Ecumenism, referring to the Orthodox Churches, went so far as to declare that "through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature".16 Truth demands that all this be recognized.

13. The same Document carefully draws out the doctrinal implications of this situation. Speaking of the members of these Communities, it declares: "All those justified by faith through Baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honoured by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers and sisters in the Lord by the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church".17

With reference to the many positive elements present in the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, the Decree adds: "All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to him, belong by right to the one Church of Christ. The separated brethren also carry out many of the sacred actions of the Christian religion. Undoubtedly, in many ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or Community, these actions can truly engender a life of grace, and can be rightly described as capable of providing access to the community of salvation".18

These are extremely important texts for ecumenism. It is not that beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community there is an ecclesial vacuum. Many elements of great value (*eximia*), which in the Catholic Church are part of the fullness of the means of salvation and of the gifts of grace which make up the Church, are also found in the other Christian Communities.

14. All these elements bear within themselves a tendency towards unity, having their fullness in that unity. It is not a matter of adding together all the riches scattered throughout the various Christian Communities in order to arrive at a Church which God has in mind for the future. In accordance with the great Tradition, attested to by the Fathers of the East and of the West, the Catholic Church believes that in the Pentecost Event God has already manifested the Church in her eschatological reality, which he had prepared "from the time of Abel, the just one".19 This reality is something already given. Consequently we are even now in the last times. The elements of this already-given Church exist, found in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other Communities, 20 where certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized. Ecumenism is directed precisely to making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity.

Renewal and conversion

15. Passing from principles, from the obligations of the Christian conscience, to the actual practice of the ecumenical journey towards unity, the Second Vatican Council emphasizes above all the need for interior conversion. The messianic proclamation that "the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand", and the subsequent call to "repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15) with which Jesus begins his mission, indicate the essential element of every new beginning: the fundamental need for evangelization at every stage of the Church's journey of salvation. This is true in a special way of the process begun by the Second Vatican Council, when it indicated as a dimension of renewal the ecumenical task of uniting divided Christians. "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart".21

The Council calls for personal conversion as well as for communal conversion. The desire of every Christian Community for unity goes hand in hand with its fidelity to the Gospel. In the case of individuals who live their Christian vocation, the Council speaks of interior conversion, of a renewal of mind.22

Each one therefore ought to be more radically converted to the Gospel and, without ever losing sight of God's plan, change his or her way of looking at things. Thanks to ecumenism, our contemplation of "the mighty works of God" (*mirabilia Dei*) has been enriched by new horizons, for which the Triune God calls us to give thanks: the knowledge that the Spirit is at work in other Christian Communities, the discovery of examples of holiness, the experience of the immense riches present in the communion of saints, and contact with unexpected dimensions of Christian commitment. In a corresponding way, there is an increased sense of the need for repentance: an awareness of certain exclusions

which seriously harm fraternal charity, of certain refusals to forgive, of a certain pride, of an unevangelical insistence on condemning the "other side", of a disdain born of an unhealthy presumption. Thus, the entire life of Christians is marked by a concern for ecumenism; and they are called to let themselves be shaped, as it were, by that concern.

16. In the teaching of the Second Vatican Council there is a clear connection between renewal, conversion and reform. The Council states that "Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of human beings here on earth. Therefore, if the influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies... these should be appropriately rectified at the proper moment".²³ No Christian Community can exempt itself from this call.

By engaging in frank dialogue, Communities help one another to look at themselves together in the light of the Apostolic Tradition. This leads them to ask themselves whether they truly express in an adequate way all that the Holy Spirit has transmitted through the Apostles.²⁴ With regard to the Catholic Church, I have frequently recalled these obligations and perspectives, as for example on the anniversary of the Baptism of Kievan Rus' ²⁵ or in commemorating the eleven hundred years since the evangelizing activity of Saints

Cyril and Methodius.²⁶ More recently, the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, issued with my approval by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has applied them to the pastoral sphere.²⁷

17. With regard to other Christians, the principal documents of the Commission on Faith and Order ²⁸ and the statements of numerous bilateral dialogues have already provided Christian Communities with useful tools for discerning what is necessary to the ecumenical movement and to the conversion which it must inspire. These studies are important from two points of view: they demonstrate the remarkable progress already made, and they are a source of hope inasmuch as they represent a sure foundation for further study.

The increase of fellowship in a reform which is continuous and carried out in the light of the Apostolic Tradition is certainly, in the present circumstances of Christians, one of the distinctive and most important aspects of ecumenism. Moreover, it is an essential guarantee for its future. The faithful of the Catholic Church cannot forget that the ecumenical thrust of the Second Vatican Council is one consequence of all that the Church at that time committed herself to doing in order to re-examine herself in the light of the Gospel and the great Tradition. My Predecessor, Pope John XXIII, understood this clearly: in calling the Council, he refused to separate renewal from ecumenical openness.²⁹ At the conclusion of the Council, Pope Paul VI solemnly sealed the Council's commitment to ecumenism, renewing the dialogue of charity with the Churches in communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople, and joining the Patriarch in the concrete and profoundly significant gesture which "condemned to oblivion" and "removed from memory and from the midst of the Church" the excommunications of the past. It is worth recalling that the establishment of a special body for ecumenical matters coincided with the launching of preparations for the Second Vatican Council ³⁰ and that through this body the opinions and judgments of the other Christian Communities played a part in the great debates about Revelation, the Church, the nature of ecumenism and religious freedom.

The fundamental importance of doctrine

18. Taking up an idea expressed by Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Council, ³¹ the Decree on Ecumenism mentions the way of formulating doctrine as one of the elements of a continuing reform.³² Here it is not a question of altering the deposit of faith, changing the meaning of dogmas, eliminating essential words from them, accommodating truth to the preferences of a particular age, or suppressing certain articles of the Creed under the false pretext that they are no longer understood today. The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth. In the Body of Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth? The Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* attributes to human dignity the quest for truth, "especially in what concerns God and his Church", ³³ and adherence to truth's demands. A "being together" which betrayed the truth would thus be opposed both to the nature of God who offers his communion and to the need for truth found in the depths of every human heart.

19. Even so, doctrine needs to be presented in a way that makes it understandable to those for whom God himself intends it. In my Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli*, I recalled that this was the very reason why Saints Cyril and Methodius laboured to translate the ideas of the Bible and the concepts of Greek theology in the context of very different historical experiences and ways of thinking. They wanted the one word of God to be "made accessible in each civilization's own forms of expression".³⁴ They recognized that they could not therefore "impose on the peoples assigned to their preaching either the undeniable superiority of the Greek language and Byzantine culture, or the customs and way of life of the more advanced society in which they had grown up".³⁵ Thus they put into practice that "perfect communion in love which preserves the Church from all forms of particularism, ethnic exclusivism or racial prejudice, and from any nationalistic arrogance".³⁶ In the same spirit, I did not hesitate to say to the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia: "You do not have to be divided into two parts... Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture".³⁷ Because by its nature the content of faith is meant for all humanity, it must be translated into all cultures. Indeed, the element which determines communion in truth is the meaning of truth. The expression of truth can

take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning.³⁸

"This renewal therefore has notable ecumenical significance".³⁹ And not only renewal in which the faith is expressed, but also of the very life of faith. It might therefore be asked: who is responsible for doing this? To this question the Council replies clearly: "Concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the ability of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies".⁴⁰

20. All this is extremely important and of fundamental significance for ecumenical activity. Thus it is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of "appendix" which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does; it must be like the fruit borne by a healthy and flourishing tree which grows to its full stature.

This is what Pope John XXIII believed about the unity of the Church and how he saw full Christian unity. With regard to other Christians, to the great Christian family, he observed: "What unites us is much greater than what divides us". The Second Vatican Council for its part exhorts "all Christ's faithful to remember that the more purely they strive to live according to the Gospel, the more they are fostering and even practising Christian unity. For they can achieve depth and ease in strengthening mutual brotherhood to the degree that they enjoy profound communion with the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit".⁴¹

The primacy of prayer

21. "This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can rightly be called 'spiritual ecumenism' ".⁴²

We proceed along the road leading to the conversion of hearts guided by love which is directed to God and, at the same time, to all our brothers and sisters, including those not in full communion with us. Love gives rise to the desire for unity, even in those who have never been aware of the need for it. Love builds communion between individuals and between Communities. If we love one another, we strive to deepen our communion and make it perfect. Love is given to God as the perfect source of communion—the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit—that we may draw from that source the strength to build communion between individuals and Communities, or to re-establish it between Christians still divided. Love is the great undercurrent which gives life and adds vigour to the movement towards unity.

This love finds its most complete expression in common prayer. When brothers and sisters who are not in perfect communion with one another come together to pray, the Second Vatican Council defines their prayer as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement. This prayer is "a very effective means of petitioning for the grace of unity", "a genuine expression of the ties which even now bind Catholics to their separated brethren".⁴³ Even when prayer is not specifically offered for Christian unity, but for other intentions such as peace, it actually becomes an expression and confirmation of unity. The common prayer of Christians is an invitation to Christ himself to visit the community of those who call upon him: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

22.

When Christians pray together, the goal of unity seems closer. The long history of Christians marked by many divisions seems to converge once more because it tends towards that Source of its unity which is Jesus Christ. He "is the same yesterday, today and forever!" (Heb 13:8). In the fellowship of prayer Christ is truly present; he prays "in us", "with us" and "for us". It is he who leads our prayer in the Spirit—Consoler whom he promised and then bestowed on his Church in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, when he established her in her original unity.

Along the ecumenical path to unity, pride of place certainly belongs to common prayer, the prayerful union of those who gather together around Christ himself. If Christians, despite their divisions, can grow ever more united in common prayer around Christ, they will grow in the awareness of how little divides them in comparison to what unites them. If they meet more often and more regularly before Christ in prayer, they will be able to gain the courage to face all the painful human reality of their divisions, and they will find themselves together once more in that community of the Church which Christ constantly builds up in the Holy Spirit, in spite of all weaknesses and human limitations.

23.

Finally, fellowship in prayer leads people to look at the Church and Christianity in a new way. It must not be forgotten in fact that the Lord prayed to the Father that his disciples might be one, so that their unity might bear witness to his mission and the world would believe that the Father had sent him (cf. Jn 17:21). It can be said that the ecumenical movement in a certain sense was born out of the negative experience of each one of those who, in proclaiming the one Gospel, appealed to his own Church or Ecclesial Community. This was a contradiction which could not escape those who listened to the message of salvation and found in this fact an obstacle to acceptance of the Gospel. Regrettably, this grave obstacle has not been overcome. It is true that we are not yet in full communion. And yet, despite our divisions, we are on the way towards full unity, that unity which marked the Apostolic Church at its birth and which we sincerely seek. Our common prayer, inspired by faith, is proof of this. In that prayer, we gather together in the name of Christ who is One. He is our unity.

"Ecumenical" prayer is at the service of the Christian mission and its credibility. It must thus be especially present in the life of the Church and in every activity aimed at fostering Christian unity. It is as if we constantly need to go back and meet in the Upper Room of Holy Thursday, even though our presence together in that place will not be perfect until the obstacles to full ecclesial communion are overcome and all Christians can gather together in the common celebration of the Eucharist.⁴⁴

24. It is a source of joy to see that the many ecumenical meetings almost always include and indeed culminate in prayer. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, celebrated in January or, in some countries, around Pentecost, has become a widespread and well established tradition. But there are also many other occasions during the year when Christians are led to pray together. In this context, I wish to mention the special experience of the Pope's pilgrimages to the various Churches in the different continents and countries of the present-day oikoumene. I am very conscious that it was the Second Vatican Council which led the Pope to exercise his apostolic ministry in this particular way. Even more can be said. The Council made these visits of the Pope a specific responsibility in carrying out the role of the Bishop of Rome at the service of communion.⁴⁵ My visits have almost always included an ecumenical meeting and common prayer with our brothers and sisters who seek unity in Christ and in his Church. With profound emotion I remember praying together with the Primate of the Anglican Communion at Canterbury Cathedral (29 May 1982); in that magnificent edifice, I saw "an eloquent witness both to our long years of common inheritance and to the sad years of division that followed".⁴⁶ Nor can I forget the meetings held in the Scandinavian and Nordic Countries (1-10 June 1989), in North and South America and in Africa, and at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches (12 June 1984), the organization committed to calling its member Churches and Ecclesial Communities "to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ".⁴⁷ And how could I ever forget taking part in the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Church of Saint George at the Ecumenical Patriarchate (30 November 1979), and the service held in Saint Peter's Basilica during the visit to Rome of my Venerable Brother, Patriarch Dimitrios I (6 December 1987)? On that occasion, at the Altar of the Confession, we recited together the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed according to its original Greek text. It is hard to describe in a few words the unique nature of each of these occasions of prayer. Given the differing ways in which each of these meetings was conditioned by past events, each had its own special eloquence. They have all become part of the Church's memory as she is guided by the Paraclete to seek the full unity of all believers in Christ.

25.

It is not just the Pope who has become a pilgrim. In recent years, many distinguished leaders of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities have visited me in Rome, and I have been able to join them in prayer, both in public and in private. I have already mentioned the visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I. I would now like to recall the prayer meeting, also held in Saint Peter's Basilica, at which I joined the Lutheran Archbishops, the Primes of Sweden and Finland, for the celebration of Vespers on the occasion of the Sixth Centenary of the Canonization of Saint Birgitta (5 October 1991). This is just one example, because awareness of the duty to pray for unity has become an integral part of the Church's life. There is no important or significant event which does not benefit from Christians coming together and praying. It is impossible for me to give a complete list of such meetings, even though each one deserves to be mentioned. Truly the Lord has taken us by the hand and is guiding us. These exchanges and these prayers have already written pages and pages of our "Book of unity", a "Book" which we must constantly return to and re-read so as to draw from it new inspiration and hope.

26.

Prayer, the community at prayer, enables us always to discover anew the evangelical truth of the words: "You have one Father" (Mt 23:9), the Father-Abba-invoked by Christ himself, the Only-begotten and Consubstantial Son. And again: "You have one teacher, and you are all brethren" (Mt 23:8). "Ecumenical" prayer discloses this fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ, who died to gather together the children of God who were scattered, so that in becoming "sons and daughters in the Son" (cf. Eph 1:5) we might show forth more fully both the mysterious reality of God's fatherhood and the truth about the human nature shared by each and every individual.

"Ecumenical" prayer, as the prayer of brothers and sisters, expresses all this. Precisely because they are separated from one another, they meet in Christ with all the more hope, entrusting to him the future of their unity and their communion. Here too we can appropriately apply the teaching of the Council: "The Lord Jesus, when he prayed to the Father 'that all may be one... as we are one' (Jn 17:21-22), opened up vistas closed to human reason. For he implied a certain likeness between the union of the Divine Persons, and the union of God's children in truth and charity".⁴⁸

The change of heart which is the essential condition for every authentic search for unity flows from prayer and its realization is guided by prayer: "For it is from newness of attitudes, from self-denial and unstinted love, that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow towards maturity. We should therefore pray to the divine Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others, and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity towards them".⁴⁹

27. Praying for unity is not a matter reserved only to those who actually experience the lack of unity among Christians. In the deep personal dialogue which each of us must carry on with the Lord in prayer, concern for unity cannot be absent. Only in this way, in fact, will that concern fully become part of the reality of our life and of the commitments we have taken on in the Church. It was in order to reaffirm this duty that I set before the faithful of the Catholic Church

a model which I consider exemplary, the model of a Trappistine Sister, Blessed Maria Gabriella of Unity, whom I beatified on 25 January 1983.⁵⁰ Sister Maria Gabriella, called by her vocation to be apart from the world, devoted her life to meditation and prayer centered on chapter seventeen of Saint John's Gospel, and offered her life for Christian unity. This is truly the cornerstone of all prayer: the total and unconditional offering of one's life to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The example of Sister Maria Gabriella is instructive; it helps us to understand that there are no special times, situations or places of prayer for unity. Christ's prayer to the Father is offered as a model for everyone, always and everywhere.

Ecumenical dialogue

28. If prayer is the "soul" of ecumenical renewal and of the yearning for unity, it is the basis and support for everything the Council defines as "dialogue". This definition is certainly not unrelated to today's personalist way of thinking. The capacity for "dialogue" is rooted in the nature of the person and his dignity. As seen by philosophy, this approach is linked to the Christian truth concerning man as expressed by the Council: man is in fact "the only creature on earth which God willed for itself"; thus he cannot "fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself".⁵¹ Dialogue is an indispensable step along the path towards human self-realization, the self-realization both of each individual and of every human community. Although the concept of "dialogue" might appear to give priority to the cognitive dimension (dia-logos), all dialogue implies a global, existential dimension. It involves the human subject in his or her entirety; dialogue between communities involves in a particular way the subjectivity of each.

This truth about dialogue, so profoundly expressed by Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*,⁵² was also taken up by the Council in its teaching and ecumenical activity. Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an "exchange of gifts".⁵³

29.

For this reason, the Council's Decree on Ecumenism also emphasizes the importance of "every effort to eliminate words, judgments, and actions which do not respond to the condition of separated brethren with truth and fairness and so make mutual relations between them more difficult".⁵⁴ The Decree approaches the question from the standpoint of the Catholic Church and refers to the criteria which she must apply in relation to other Christians. In all this, however, reciprocity is required. To follow these criteria is a commitment of each of the parties which desire to enter into dialogue and it is a precondition for starting such dialogue. It is necessary to pass from antagonism and conflict to a situation where each party recognizes the other as a partner. When undertaking dialogue, each side must presuppose in the other a desire for reconciliation, for unity in truth. For this to happen, any display of mutual opposition must disappear. Only thus will dialogue help to overcome division and lead us closer to unity.

30.

It can be said, with a sense of lively gratitude to the Spirit of Truth, that the Second Vatican Council was a blessed time, during which the bases for the Catholic Church's participation in ecumenical dialogue were laid. At the same time, the presence of many observers from various Churches and Ecclesial Communities, their deep involvement in the events of the Council, the many meetings and the common prayer which the Council made possible, also helped bring about the conditions for dialogue with one another. During the Council, the representatives of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities experienced the readiness of the worldwide Catholic Episcopate, and in particular of the Apostolic See, to engage in dialogue.

Local structures of dialogue

31. The Church's commitment to ecumenical dialogue, as it has clearly appeared since the Council, far from being the responsibility of the Apostolic See alone, is also the duty of individual local or particular Churches. Special commissions for fostering the ecumenical spirit and ecumenical activity have been set up by the Bishops' Conferences and the Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches. Suitable structures similar to these are operating in individual Dioceses. These initiatives are a sign of the widespread practical commitment of the Catholic Church to apply the Council's guidelines on ecumenism: this is an essential aspect of the ecumenical movement.⁵⁵ Dialogue has not only been undertaken; it has become an outright necessity, one of the Church's priorities. As a result, the "methods" of dialogue have been improved, which in turn has helped the spirit of dialogue to grow. In this context mention has to be made in the first place of "dialogue between competent experts from different Churches and Communities. In their meetings, which are organized in a religious spirit, each explains the teaching of his Communion in greater depth and brings out clearly its distinctive features".⁵⁶ Moreover, it is useful for all the faithful to be familiar with the method which makes dialogue possible.

32. As the Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom affirms: "Truth is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication, and dialogue. In the course of these, people explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that individuals are to adhere to it".⁵⁷

Ecumenical dialogue is of essential importance. "Through such dialogue everyone gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both Communions. In addition, these Communions cooperate more closely in whatever projects a Christian conscience demands for the common good. They also come together for common prayer, where that is permitted. Finally, all are led to examine their own faithfulness to Christ's will for the Church and, wherever necessary, undertake with vigour the tasks of renewal and reform".⁵⁸

Dialogue as an examination of conscience

33.

In the Council's thinking, ecumenical dialogue is marked by a common quest for truth, particularly concerning the Church. In effect, truth forms consciences and directs efforts to promote unity. At the same time, it demands that the consciences and actions of Christians, as brethren divided from one another, should be inspired by and submissive to Christ's prayer for unity. There is a close relationship between prayer and dialogue. Deeper and more conscious prayer makes dialogue more fruitful. If on the one hand, dialogue depends on prayer, so, in another sense, prayer also becomes the ever more mature fruit of dialogue.

34.

Thanks to ecumenical dialogue we can speak of a greater maturity in our common prayer for one another. This is possible inasmuch as dialogue also serves as an examination of conscience. In this context, how can we fail to recall the words of the First Letter of John? "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1:8-9). John even goes so far as to state: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1:10). Such a radical exhortation to acknowledge our condition as sinners ought also to mark the spirit which we bring to ecumenical dialogue. If such dialogue does not become an examination of conscience, a kind of "dialogue of consciences", can we count on the assurance which the First Letter of John gives us? "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (2:1-2). All the sins of the world were gathered up in the saving sacrifice of Christ, including the sins committed against the Church's unity: the sins of Christians, those of the pastors no less than those of the lay faithful. Even after the many sins which have contributed to our historical divisions, Christian unity is possible, provided that we are humbly conscious of having sinned against unity and are convinced of our need for conversion. Not only personal sins must be forgiven and left behind, but also social sins, which is to say the sinful "structures" themselves which have contributed and can still contribute to division and to the reinforcing of division.

35. Here once again the Council proves helpful. It can be said that the entire Decree on Ecumenism is permeated by the spirit of conversion.⁵⁹ In the Document, ecumenical dialogue takes on a specific characteristic; it becomes a "dialogue of conversion", and thus, in the words of Pope Paul VI, an authentic "dialogue of salvation".⁶⁰ Dialogue cannot take place merely on a horizontal level, being restricted to meetings, exchanges of points of view or even the sharing of gifts proper to each Community. It has also a primarily vertical thrust, directed towards the One who, as the Redeemer of the world and the Lord of history, is himself our Reconciliation. This vertical aspect of dialogue lies in our acknowledgment, jointly and to each other, that we are men and women who have sinned. It is precisely this acknowledgment which creates in brothers and sisters living in Communities not in full communion with one another that interior space where Christ, the source of the Church's unity, can effectively act, with all the power of his Spirit, the Paraclete.

Dialogue as a means of resolving disagreements

36. Dialogue is also a natural instrument for comparing differing points of view and, above all, for examining those disagreements which hinder full communion between Christians. The Decree on Ecumenism dwells in the first place on a description of the attitudes under which doctrinal discussions should take place: "Catholic theologians engaged in ecumenical dialogue, while standing fast by the teaching of the Church and searching together with separated brothers and sisters into the divine mysteries, should act with love for truth, with charity, and with humility".⁶¹

Love for the truth is the deepest dimension of any authentic quest for full communion between Christians. Without this love it would be impossible to face the objective theological, cultural, psychological and social difficulties which appear when disagreements are examined. This dimension, which is interior and personal, must be inseparably accompanied by a spirit of charity and humility. There must be charity towards one's partner in dialogue, and humility with regard to the truth which comes to light and which might require a review of assertions and attitudes.

With regard to the study of areas of disagreement, the Council requires that the whole body of doctrine be clearly presented. At the same time, it asks that the manner and method of expounding the Catholic faith should not be a hindrance to dialogue with our brothers and sisters.⁶² Certainly it is possible to profess one's faith and to explain its

teaching in a way that is correct, fair and understandable, and which at the same time takes into account both the way of thinking and the actual historical experiences of the other party.

Full communion of course will have to come about through the acceptance of the whole truth into which the Holy Spirit guides Christ's disciples. Hence all forms of reductionism or facile "agreement" must be absolutely avoided. Serious questions must be resolved, for if not, they will reappear at another time, either in the same terms or in a different guise. 37.

The Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* also indicates a criterion to be followed when Catholics are presenting or comparing doctrines: "They should remember that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened for this kind of fraternal rivalry to incite all to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ".63

38.

In dialogue, one inevitably comes up against the problem of the different formulations whereby doctrine is expressed in the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities. This has more than one consequence for the work of ecumenism.

In the first place, with regard to doctrinal formulations which differ from those normally in use in the community to which one belongs, it is certainly right to determine whether the words involved say the same thing. This has been ascertained in the case for example of the recent common declarations signed by my Predecessors or by myself with the Patriarchs of Churches with which for centuries there have been disputes about Christology. As far as the formulation of revealed truths is concerned, the Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* states: "Even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions. In view of this, it must be stated that the dogmatic formulas of the Church's Magisterium were from the very beginning suitable for communicating revealed truth, and that as they are they remain for ever suitable for communicating this truth to those who interpret them correctly".64 In this regard, ecumenical dialogue, which prompts the parties involved to question each other, to understand each other and to explain their positions to each other, makes surprising discoveries possible. Intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking at the same reality. Nowadays we need to find the formula which, by capturing the reality in its entirety, will enable us to move beyond partial readings and eliminate false interpretations.

One of the advantages of ecumenism is that it helps Christian Communities to discover the unfathomable riches of the truth. Here too, everything that the Spirit brings about in "others" can serve for the building up of all Communities 65 and in a certain sense instruct them in the mystery of Christ. Authentic ecumenism is a gift at the service of truth.

39. Finally, dialogue puts before the participants real and genuine disagreements in matters of faith. Above all, these disagreements should be faced in a sincere spirit of fraternal charity, of respect for the demands of one's own conscience and of the conscience of the other party, with profound humility and love for the truth. The examination of such disagreements has two essential points of reference: Sacred Scripture and the great Tradition of the Church. Catholics have the help of the Church's living Magisterium.

Practical cooperation

40. Relations between Christians are not aimed merely at mutual knowledge, common prayer and dialogue.

They presuppose and from now on call for every possible form of practical cooperation at all levels: pastoral, cultural and social, as well as that of witnessing to the Gospel message.66

"Cooperation among all Christians vividly expresses that bond which already unites them, and it sets in clearer relief the features of Christ the Servant".67 This cooperation based on our common faith is not only filled with fraternal communion, but is a manifestation of Christ himself.

Moreover, ecumenical cooperation is a true school of ecumenism, a dynamic road to unity. Unity of action leads to the full unity of faith: "Through such cooperation, all believers in Christ are able to learn easily how they can understand each other better and esteem each other more, and how the road to the unity of Christians may be made smooth".68

In the eyes of the world, cooperation among Christians becomes a form of common Christian witness and a means of evangelization which benefits all involved.

CHAPTER II - THE FRUITS OF DIALOGUE

Brotherhood rediscovered

41.

What has been said above about ecumenical dialogue since the end of the Council inspires us to give thanks to the Spirit of Truth promised by Christ the Lord to the Apostles and the Church (cf. Jn 14:26). It is the first time in history that efforts on behalf of Christian unity have taken on such great proportions and have become so extensive. This is truly an immense gift of God, one which deserves all our gratitude. From the fullness of Christ we receive "grace upon

grace" (Jn 1:16). An appreciation of how much God has already given is the condition which disposes us to receive those gifts still indispensable for bringing to completion the ecumenical work of unity.

An overall view of the last thirty years enables us better to appreciate many of the fruits of this common conversion to the Gospel which the Spirit of God has brought about by means of the ecumenical movement.

42.

It happens for example that, in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, Christians of one confession no longer consider other Christians as enemies or strangers but see them as brothers and sisters. Again, the very expression separated brethren tends to be replaced today by expressions which more readily evoke the deep communion - linked to the baptismal character - which the Spirit fosters in spite of historical and canonical divisions. Today we speak of "other Christians", "others who have received Baptism", and "Christians of other Communities". The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism refers to the Communities to which these Christians belong as "Churches and Ecclesial Communities that are not in full communion with the Catholic Church".⁶⁹ This broadening of vocabulary is indicative of a significant change in attitudes. There is an increased awareness that we all belong to Christ. I have personally been able many times to observe this during the ecumenical celebrations which are an important part of my Apostolic Visits to various parts of the world, and also in the meetings and ecumenical celebrations which have taken place in Rome. The "universal brotherhood" of Christians has become a firm ecumenical conviction. Consigning to oblivion the excommunications of the past, Communities which were once rivals are now in many cases helping one another: places of worship are sometimes lent out; scholarships are offered for the training of ministers in the Communities most lacking in resources; approaches are made to civil authorities on behalf of other Christians who are unjustly persecuted; and the slander to which certain groups are subjected is shown to be unfounded.

In a word, Christians have been converted to a fraternal charity which embraces all Christ's disciples. If it happens that, as a result of violent political disturbances, a certain aggressiveness or a spirit of vengeance appears, the leaders of the parties in question generally work to make the "New Law" of the spirit of charity prevail. Unfortunately, this spirit has not been able to transform every situation where brutal conflict rages. In such circumstances those committed to ecumenism are often required to make choices which are truly heroic.

It needs be reaffirmed in this regard that acknowledging our brotherhood is not the consequence of a large-hearted philanthropy or a vague family spirit. It is rooted in recognition of the oneness of Baptism and the subsequent duty to glorify God in his work. The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism expresses the hope that Baptisms will be mutually and officially recognized.⁷⁰ This is something much more than an act of ecumenical courtesy; it constitutes a basic ecclesiological statement.

It is fitting to recall that the fundamental role of Baptism in building up the Church has been clearly brought out thanks also to multilateral dialogues.⁷¹

Solidarity in the service of humanity

43. It happens more and more often that the leaders of Christian Communities join together in taking a stand in the name of Christ on important problems concerning man's calling and on freedom, justice, peace, and the future of the world. In this way they "communicate" in one of the tasks which constitutes the mission of Christians: that of reminding society of God's will in a realistic manner, warning the authorities and their fellow-citizens against taking steps which would lead to the trampling of human rights. It is clear, as experience shows, that in some circumstances the united voice of Christians has more impact than any one isolated voice.

Nor are the leaders of Communities the only ones joined in the work for unity. Many Christians from all Communities, by reason of their faith, are jointly involved in bold projects aimed at changing the world by inculcating respect for the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenceless. In my Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, I was pleased to note this cooperation, stressing that the Catholic Church cannot fail to take part in these efforts.⁷² In effect, Christians who once acted independently are now engaged together in the service of this cause, so that God's mercy may triumph.

This way of thinking and acting is already that of the Gospel. Hence, reaffirming what I wrote in my first Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, I have had occasion "to insist on this point and to encourage every effort made in this direction, at all levels where we meet our other brother Christians".⁷³ I have thanked God "for what he has already accomplished in the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and through them", as well as through the Catholic Church.⁷⁴ Today I see with satisfaction that the already vast network of ecumenical cooperation is constantly growing. Thanks also to the influence of the World Council of Churches, much is being accomplished in this field.

Approaching one another through the Word of God and through divine worship

44.

Significant progress in ecumenical cooperation has also been made in another area, that of the Word of God. I am thinking above all of the importance for the different language groups of ecumenical translations of the Bible.

Following the promulgation by the Second Vatican Council of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*, the Catholic Church could not fail to welcome this development.⁷⁵ These translations, prepared by experts, generally offer a solid basis for the prayer and pastoral activity of all Christ's followers. Anyone who recalls how heavily debates about Scripture influenced divisions, especially in the West, can appreciate the significant step forward which these common translations represent.

45.

Corresponding to the liturgical renewal carried out by the Catholic Church, certain other Ecclesial Communities have made efforts to renew their worship. Some, on the basis of a recommendation expressed at the ecumenical level, ⁷⁶ have abandoned the custom of celebrating their liturgy of the Lord's Supper only infrequently and have opted for a celebration each Sunday. Again, when the cycles of liturgical readings used by the various Christian Communities in the West are compared, they appear to be essentially the same. Still on the ecumenical level, ⁷⁷ very special prominence has been given to the liturgy and liturgical signs (images, icons, vestments, light, incense, gestures). Moreover, in schools of theology where future ministers are trained, courses in the history and significance of the liturgy are beginning to be part of the curriculum in response to a newly discovered need.

These are signs of convergence which regard various aspects of the sacramental life. Certainly, due to disagreements in matters of faith, it is not yet possible to celebrate together the same Eucharistic Liturgy. And yet we do have a burning desire to join in celebrating the one Eucharist of the Lord, and this desire itself is already a common prayer of praise, a single supplication. Together we speak to the Father and increasingly we do so "with one heart". At times it seems that we are closer to being able finally to seal this "real although not yet full" communion. A century ago who could even have imagined such a thing?

46. In this context, it is a source of joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer the Sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church but who greatly desire to receive these sacraments, freely request them and manifest the faith which the Catholic Church professes with regard to these sacraments. Conversely, in specific cases and in particular circumstances, Catholics too can request these same sacraments from ministers of Churches in which these sacraments are valid. The conditions for such reciprocal reception have been laid down in specific norms; for the sake of furthering ecumenism these norms must be respected.⁷⁸

Appreciating the endowments present among other Christians

47.

Dialogue does not extend exclusively to matters of doctrine but engages the whole person; it is also a dialogue of love. The Council has stated: "Catholics must joyfully acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brothers and sisters. It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in his works and worthy of admiration".⁷⁹

48.

The relationships which the members of the Catholic Church have established with other Christians since the Council have enabled us to discover what God is bringing about in the members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. This direct contact, at a variety of levels, with pastors and with the members of these Communities has made us aware of the witness which other Christians bear to God and to Christ. A vast new field has thus opened up for the whole ecumenical experience, which at the same time is the great challenge of our time. Is not the twentieth century a time of great witness, which extends "even to the shedding of blood"? And does not this witness also involve the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities which take their name from Christ, Crucified and Risen?

Such a joint witness of holiness, as fidelity to the one Lord, has an ecumenical potential extraordinarily rich in grace. The Second Vatican Council made it clear that elements present among other Christians can contribute to the edification of Catholics: "Nor should we forget that whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brothers and sisters can contribute to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian never conflicts with the genuine interests of the faith; indeed, it can always result in a more ample realization of the very mystery of Christ and the Church".⁸⁰ Ecumenical dialogue, as a true dialogue of salvation, will certainly encourage this process, which has already begun well, to advance towards true and full communion.

The growth of communion

49. A valuable result of the contacts between Christians and of the theological dialogue in which they engage is the growth of communion. Both contacts and dialogue have made Christians aware of the elements of faith which they have in common. This has served to consolidate further their commitment to full unity. In all of this, the Second Vatican Council remains a powerful source of incentive and orientation.

The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* links its teaching on the Catholic Church to an acknowledgment of the saving elements found in other Churches and Ecclesial Communities.⁸¹ It is not a matter of becoming aware of static

elements passively present in those Churches and Communities. Insofar as they are elements of the Church of Christ, these are by their nature a force for the re-establishment of unity. Consequently, the quest for Christian unity is not a matter of choice or expediency, but a duty which springs from the very nature of the Christian community. In a similar way, the bilateral theological dialogues carried on with the major Christian Communities start from a recognition of the degree of communion already present, in order to go on to discuss specific areas of disagreement. The Lord has made it possible for Christians in our day to reduce the number of matters traditionally in dispute.

Dialogue with the Churches of the East

50. In this regard, it must first be acknowledged, with particular gratitude to Divine Providence, that our bonds with the Churches of the East, weakened in the course of the centuries, were strengthened through the Second Vatican Council. The observers from these Churches present at the Council, together with representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West, stated publicly, at that very solemn moment for the Catholic Church, their common willingness to seek the re-establishment of communion.

The Council, for its part, considered the Churches of the East with objectivity and deep affection, stressing their ecclesial nature and the real bonds of communion linking them with the Catholic Church. The Decree on Ecumenism points out: "Through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature". It adds, as a consequence, that "although these Churches are separated from us, they possess true sacraments, above all - by apostolic succession - the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are still joined to us in a very close relationship".⁸²

Speaking of the Churches of the East, the Council acknowledged their great liturgical and spiritual tradition, the specific nature of their historical development, the disciplines coming from the earliest times and approved by the Holy Fathers and Ecumenical Councils, and their own particular way of expressing their teaching. The Council made this acknowledgement in the conviction that legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission.

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council wished to base dialogue on the communion which already exists, and it draws attention to the noble reality of the Churches of the East: "Therefore, this Sacred Synod urges all, but especially those who plan to devote themselves to the work of restoring the full communion that is desired between the Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church, to give due consideration to these special aspects of the origin and growth of the Churches of the East, and to the character of the relations which obtained between them and the Roman See before the separation, and to form for themselves a correct evaluation of these facts".⁸³

51. The Council's approach has proved fruitful both for the steady maturing of fraternal relations through the dialogue of charity, and for doctrinal discussion in the framework of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. It has likewise proved most fruitful in relations with the Ancient Churches of the East.

The process has been slow and arduous, yet a source of great joy; and it has been inspiring, for it has led to the gradual rediscovery of brotherhood.

Resuming contacts

52. With regard to the Church of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the process which we have just mentioned began thanks to the mutual openness demonstrated by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI on the one hand, and by the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I and his successors on the other. The resulting change found its historical expression in the ecclesial act whereby "there was removed from memory and from the midst of the Church" ⁸⁴ the remembrance of the excommunications which nine hundred years before, in 1054, had become the symbol of the schism between Rome and Constantinople. That ecclesial event, so filled with ecumenical commitment, took place during the last days of the Council, on 7 December 1965. The Council thus ended with a solemn act which was at once a healing of historical memories, a mutual forgiveness, and a firm commitment to strive for communion.

This gesture had been preceded by the meeting of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I in Jerusalem, in January 1964, during the Pope's pilgrimage to the Holy Land. At that time Pope Paul was also able to meet Benedictos, the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem. Later, Pope Paul visited Patriarch Athenagoras at the Phanar (Istanbul), on 25 July 1967, and in October of the same year the Patriarch was solemnly received in Rome. These prayer-filled meetings mapped out the path of rapprochement between the Church of the East and the Church of the West, and of the re-establishment of the unity they shared in the first millennium.

Following the death of Pope Paul VI and the brief pontificate of Pope John I, when the ministry of Bishop of Rome was entrusted to me, I considered it one of the first duties of my pontificate to renew personal contact with the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, who had meanwhile succeeded Patriarch Athenagoras in the See of Constantinople. During my visit to the Phanar on 29 November 1979, the Patriarch and I were able to decide to begin theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and all the Orthodox Churches in canonical communion with the See of Constantinople. In this regard it would seem important to add that at that time preparations were already under way for the convocation of a

future Council of the Orthodox Churches. The quest for harmony between them contributes to the life and vitality of these sister Churches; this is also significant in view of the role they are called to play in the path towards unity. The Ecumenical Patriarch decided to repay my visit, and in December 1987 I had the joy of welcoming him to Rome with deep affection and with the solemnity due to him. It is in this context of ecclesial fraternity that we should mention the practice, which has now been in place for a number of years, of welcoming a delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate to Rome for the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, as well as the custom of sending a delegation of the Holy See to the Phanar for the solemn celebration of Saint Andrew.

53. Among other things, these regular contacts permit a direct exchange of information and opinions with a view to fostering fraternal coordination. Furthermore, taking part together in prayer accustoms us once more to living side by side and helps us in accepting and putting into practice the Lord's will for his Church.

On the path which we have travelled since the Second Vatican Council, at least two particularly telling events of great ecumenical significance for relations between East and West should be mentioned. The first of these was the 1984 Jubilee in commemoration of the eleventh centenary of the evangelizing activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius, an occasion which enabled me to proclaim the two Holy Apostles of the Slavs, those heralds of faith, co-patrons of Europe. In 1964, during the Council, Pope Paul VI had already proclaimed Saint Benedict patron of Europe. Associating the two Brothers from Thessalonica with the great founder of Western monasticism serves indirectly to highlight that twofold ecclesial and cultural tradition which has proved so significant for the two thousand years of Christianity which mark the history of Europe. Consequently it is worth recalling that Saints Cyril and Methodius came from the background of the Byzantine Church of their day, at a time when the latter was in communion with Rome. In proclaiming them patrons of Europe, together with Saint Benedict, it was my intention not only to reaffirm the historical truth about Christianity in Europe, but also to provide an important topic for the dialogue between East and West which has raised such high hopes in the period since the Council. As in Saint Benedict, so in Saints Cyril and Methodius, Europe can rediscover its spiritual roots. Now, as the second millennium since the Birth of Christ draws to a close, they must be venerated together, as the patrons of our past and as the Saints to whom the Churches and nations of Europe entrust their future.

54. The other event which I am pleased to recall is the celebration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus' (988-1988). The Catholic Church, and this Apostolic See in particular, desired to take part in the Jubilee celebrations and also sought to emphasize that the Baptism conferred on Saint Vladimir in Kiev was a key event in the evangelization of the world. The great Slav nations of Eastern Europe owe their faith to this event, as do the peoples living beyond the Ural Mountains and as far as Alaska.

In this perspective an expression which I have frequently employed finds its deepest meaning: the Church must breathe with her two lungs! In the first millennium of the history of Christianity, this expression refers primarily to the relationship between Byzantium and Rome. From the time of the Baptism of Rus' it comes to have an even wider application: evangelization spread to a much vaster area, so that it now includes the entire Church. If we then consider that the salvific event which took place on the banks of the Dnieper goes back to a time when the Church in the East and the Church in the West were not divided, we understand clearly that the vision of the full communion to be sought is that of unity in legitimate diversity. This is what I strongly asserted in my Encyclical *Epistola Slavolorum Apostoli* 85 on Saints Cyril and Methodius and in my Apostolic Letter *Euntes in Mundum* 86 addressed to the faithful of the Catholic Church in commemoration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Kievan Rus'.

Sister Churches

55. In its historical survey the Council Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* has in mind the unity which, in spite of everything, was experienced in the first millennium and in a certain sense now serves as a kind of model. "This most sacred Synod gladly reminds all... that in the East there flourish many particular or local Churches; among them the Patriarchal Churches hold first place; and of these, many glory in taking their origin from the Apostles themselves".⁸⁷ The Church's journey began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and its original expansion in the oikoumene of that time was centred around Peter and the Eleven (cf. Acts 2:14). The structures of the Church in the East and in the West evolved in reference to that Apostolic heritage. Her unity during the first millennium was maintained within those same structures through the Bishops, Successors of the Apostles, in communion with the Bishop of Rome. If today at the end of the second millennium we are seeking to restore full communion, it is to that unity, thus structured, which we must look.

The Decree on Ecumenism highlights a further distinctive aspect, thanks to which all the particular Churches remained in unity: "an eager desire to perpetuate in a communion of faith and charity those family ties which ought to thrive between local Churches, as between sisters".⁸⁸

56. Following the Second Vatican Council, and in the light of earlier tradition, it has again become usual to refer to the particular or local Churches gathered around their Bishop as "Sister Churches". In addition, the lifting of the mutual excommunications, by eliminating a painful canonical and psychological obstacle, was a very significant step on the way towards full communion.

The structures of unity which existed before the separation are a heritage of experience that guides our common path towards the re-establishment of full communion. Obviously, during the second millennium the Lord has not ceased to bestow on his Church abundant fruits of grace and growth. Unfortunately, however, the gradual and mutual estrangement between the Churches of the West and the East deprived them of the benefits of mutual exchanges and cooperation. With the grace of God a great effort must be made to re-establish full communion among them, the source of such good for the Church of Christ. This effort calls for all our good will, humble prayer and a steadfast cooperation which never yields to discouragement. Saint Paul urges us: "Bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2). How appropriate and relevant for us is the Apostle's exhortation! The traditional designation of "Sister Churches" should ever accompany us along this path.

57. In accordance with the hope expressed by Pope Paul VI, our declared purpose is to re-establish together full unity in legitimate diversity: "God has granted us to receive in faith what the Apostles saw, understood, and proclaimed to us. By Baptism 'we are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). In virtue of the apostolic succession, we are united more closely by the priesthood and the Eucharist. By participating in the gifts of God to his Church we are brought into communion with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit... In each local Church this mystery of divine love is enacted, and surely this is the ground of the traditional and very beautiful expression 'Sister Churches', which local Churches were fond of applying to one another (cf. Decree, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14). For centuries we lived this life of 'Sister Churches', and together held Ecumenical Councils which guarded the deposit of faith against all corruption. And now, after a long period of division and mutual misunderstanding, the Lord is enabling us to discover ourselves as 'Sister Churches' once more, in spite of the obstacles which were once raised between us".⁸⁹ If today, on the threshold of the third millennium, we are seeking the re-establishment of full communion, it is for the accomplishment of this reality that we must work and it is to this reality that we must refer.

Contact with this glorious tradition is most fruitful for the Church. As the Council points out: "From their very origins the Churches of the East have had a treasury from which the Church of the West has amply drawn for its liturgy, spiritual tradition and jurisprudence".⁹⁰

Part of this "treasury" are also "the riches of those spiritual traditions to which monasticism gives special expression. From the glorious days of the Holy Fathers, there flourished in the East that monastic spirituality which later flowed over into the Western world".⁹¹ As I have had the occasion to emphasize in my recent Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen*, the Churches of the East have lived with great generosity the commitment shown by monastic life, "starting with evangelization, the highest service that the Christian can offer his brother, followed by many other forms of spiritual and material service. Indeed it can be said that monasticism in antiquity-and at various times in subsequent ages too-has been the privileged means for the evangelization of peoples".⁹²

The Council does not limit itself to emphasizing the elements of similarity between the Churches in the East and in the West. In accord with historical truth, it does not hesitate to say: "It is hardly surprising if sometimes one tradition has come nearer than the other to an apt appreciation of certain aspects of the revealed mystery or has expressed them in a clearer manner. As a result, these various theological formulations are often to be considered as complementary rather than conflicting".⁹³ Communion is made fruitful by the exchange of gifts between the Churches insofar as they complement each other.

58. From the reaffirmation of an already existing communion of faith, the Second Vatican Council drew pastoral consequences which are useful for the everyday life of the faithful and for the promotion of the spirit of unity. By reason of the very close sacramental bonds between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* has stated: "Pastoral experience clearly shows that with respect to our Eastern brethren there should and can be taken into consideration various circumstances affecting individuals, wherein the unity of the Church is not jeopardized nor are intolerable risks involved, but in which salvation itself and the spiritual profit of souls are urgently at issue. Hence, in view of special circumstances of time, place and personage, the Catholic Church has often adopted and now adopts a milder policy, offering to all the means of salvation and an example of charity among Christians through participation in the Sacraments and in other sacred functions and objects".⁹⁴

In the light of experience gained in the years following the Council, this theological and pastoral orientation has been incorporated into the two Codes of Canon Law.⁹⁵ It has been explicitly treated from the pastoral standpoint in the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism. ⁹⁶

In so important and sensitive a matter, it is necessary for Pastors to instruct the faithful with care, making them clearly aware of the specific reasons both for this sharing in liturgical worship and for the various regulations which govern it. There must never be a loss of appreciation for the ecclesiological implication of sharing in the sacraments, especially in the Holy Eucharist.

Progress in dialogue

59.

Since its establishment in 1979, the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church has worked steadily, directing its study to areas decided upon by mutual agreement,

with the purpose of re-establishing full communion between the two Churches. This communion which is founded on the unity of faith, following in the footsteps of the experience and tradition of the ancient Church, will find its fulfilment in the common celebration of the Holy Eucharist. In a positive spirit, and on the basis of what we have in common, the Joint Commission has been able to make substantial progress and, as I was able to declare in union with my Venerable Brother, His Holiness Dimitrios I, the Ecumenical Patriarch, it has concluded "that the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church can already profess together that common faith in the mystery of the Church and the bond between faith and sacraments".⁹⁷ The Commission was then able to acknowledge that "in our Churches apostolic succession is fundamental for the sanctification and the unity of the people of God".⁹⁸ These are important points of reference for the continuation of the dialogue. Moreover, these joint affirmations represent the basis for Catholics and Orthodox to be able from now on to bear a faithful and united common witness in our time, that the name of the Lord may be proclaimed and glorified.

60.

More recently, the Joint International Commission took a significant step forward with regard to the very sensitive question of the method to be followed in re-establishing full communion between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, an issue which has frequently embittered relations between Catholics and Orthodox. The Commission has laid the doctrinal foundations for a positive solution to this problem on the basis of the doctrine of Sister Churches. Here too it has become evident that the method to be followed towards full communion is the dialogue of truth, fostered and sustained by the dialogue of love. A recognition of the right of the Eastern Catholic Churches to have their own organizational structures and to carry out their own apostolate, as well as the actual involvement of these Churches in the dialogue of charity and in theological dialogue, will not only promote a true and fraternal mutual esteem between Orthodox and Catholics living in the same territory, but will also foster their joint commitment to work for unity.⁹⁹ A step forward has been taken. The commitment must continue. Already there are signs of a lessening of tensions, which is making the quest for unity more fruitful.

With regard to the Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with the Catholic Church, the Council expressed its esteem in these terms: "While thanking God that many Eastern sons of the Catholic Church... are already living in full communion with their brethren who follow the tradition of the West, this sacred Synod declares that this entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology, in their various traditions, belongs to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church".¹⁰⁰ Certainly the Eastern Catholic Churches, in the spirit of the Decree on Ecumenism, will play a constructive role in the dialogue of love and in the theological dialogue at both the local and international levels, and thus contribute to mutual understanding and the continuing pursuit of full unity.¹⁰¹

61. In view of all this, the Catholic Church desires nothing less than full communion between East and West. She finds inspiration for this in the experience of the first millennium. In that period, indeed, "the development of different experiences of ecclesial life did not prevent Christians, through mutual relations, from continuing to feel certain that they were at home in any Church, because praise of the one Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, rose from them all, in a marvellous variety of languages and melodies; all were gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist, the heart and model for the community regarding not only spirituality and the moral life, but also the Church's very structure, in the variety of ministries and services under the leadership of the Bishop, successor of the Apostles. The first Councils are an eloquent witness to this enduring unity in diversity".¹⁰² How can unity be restored after almost a thousand years? This is the great task which the Catholic Church must accomplish, a task equally incumbent on the Orthodox Church. Thus can be understood the continuing relevance of dialogue, guided by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit.

Relations with the Ancient Churches of the East

62. In the period following the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has also, in different ways and with greater or lesser rapidity, restored fraternal relations with the Ancient Churches of the East which rejected the dogmatic formulations of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. All these Churches sent official observers to the Second Vatican Council; their Patriarchs have honoured us by their visits, and the Bishop of Rome has been able to converse with them as with brothers who, after a long time, joyfully meet again.

The return of fraternal relations with the Ancient Churches of the East witnesses to the Christian faith in situations which are often hostile and tragic. This is a concrete sign of how we are united in Christ in spite of historical, political, social and cultural barriers. And precisely in relation to Christology, we have been able to join the Patriarchs of some of these Churches in declaring our common faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Pope Paul VI of venerable memory signed declarations to this effect with His Holiness Shenouda III, the Coptic Orthodox Pope and Patriarch, ¹⁰³ and with His Beatitude Jacob III, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch.¹⁰⁴ I myself have been able to confirm this Christological agreement and draw on it for the development of dialogue with Pope Shenouda, ¹⁰⁵ and for pastoral cooperation with the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas.¹⁰⁶

When the Venerable Patriarch of the Ethiopian Church, Abuna Paulos, paid me a visit in Rome on 11 June 1993, together we emphasized the deep communion existing between our two Churches: "We share the faith handed down from the Apostles, as also the same sacraments and the same ministry, rooted in the apostolic succession... Today,

moreover, we can affirm that we have the one faith in Christ, even though for a long time this was a source of division between us".¹⁰⁷

More recently, the Lord has granted me the great joy of signing a common Christological declaration with the Assyrian Patriarch of the East, His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, who for this purpose chose to visit me in Rome in November 1994. Taking into account the different theological formulations, we were able to profess together the true faith in Christ.¹⁰⁸ I wish to express my joy at all this in the words of the Blessed Virgin: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" (Lk 1:46).

63. Ecumenical contacts have thus made possible essential clarifications with regard to the traditional controversies concerning Christology, so much so that we have been able to profess together the faith which we have in common. Once again it must be said that this important achievement is truly a fruit of theological investigation and fraternal dialogue. And not only this. It is an encouragement for us: for it shows us that the path followed is the right one and that we can reasonably hope to discover together the solution to other disputed questions.

Dialogue with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities in the West

64. In its great plan for the re-establishment of unity among all Christians, the Decree on Ecumenism also speaks of relations with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West. Wishing to create a climate of Christian fraternity and dialogue, the Council situates its guidelines in the context of two general considerations: one of an historical and psychological nature, and the other theological and doctrinal. On the one hand, this Decree affirms: "The Churches and Ecclesial Communities which were separated from the Apostolic See of Rome during the very serious crisis that began in the West at the end of the Middle Ages, or during later times, are bound to the Catholic Church by a special affinity and close relationship in view of the long span of earlier centuries when the Christian people lived in ecclesiastical communion".¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, with equal realism the same Document states: "At the same time one should recognize that between these Churches and Communities on the one hand, and the Catholic Church on the other, there are very weighty differences not only of a historical, sociological, psychological and cultural nature, but especially in the interpretation of revealed truth".¹¹⁰

65. Common roots and similar, if distinct, considerations have guided the development in the West of the Catholic Church and of the Churches and Communities which have their origins in the Reformation. Consequently these share the fact that they are "Western" in character. Their "diversities", although significant as has been pointed out, do not therefore preclude mutual interaction and complementarity.

The ecumenical movement really began within the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the Reform. At about the same time, in January, 1920, the Ecumenical Patriarchate expressed the hope that some kind of cooperation among the Christian Communions could be organized. This fact shows that the weight of cultural background is not the decisive factor. What is essential is the question of faith. The prayer of Christ, our one Lord, Redeemer and Master, speaks to everyone in the same way, both in the East and in the West. That prayer becomes an imperative to leave behind our divisions in order to seek and re-establish unity, as a result also of the bitter experiences of division itself.

66. The Second Vatican Council did not attempt to give a "description" of post-Reformation Christianity, since "in origin, teaching and spiritual practice, these Churches and Ecclesial Communities differ not only from us but also among themselves to a considerable degree".¹¹¹ Furthermore, the Decree observes that the ecumenical movement and the desire for peace with the Catholic Church have not yet taken root everywhere.¹¹² These circumstances notwithstanding, the Council calls for dialogue.

The Council Decree then seeks to "propose... some considerations which can and ought to serve as a basis and motivation for such dialogue".¹¹³

"Our thoughts are concerned... with those Christians who openly confess Jesus Christ as God and Lord and as the sole Mediator between God and man unto the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit".¹¹⁴

These brothers and sisters promote love and veneration for the Sacred Scriptures: "Calling upon the Holy Spirit, they seek in these Sacred Scriptures God as he speaks to them in Christ, the One whom the prophets foretold, God's Word made flesh for us. In the Scriptures they contemplate the life of Christ, as well as the teachings and the actions of the Divine Master on behalf of the salvation of all, in particular the mysteries of his Death and Resurrection... They affirm the divine authority of the Sacred Books".¹¹⁵

At the same time, however, they "think differently from us... about the relationship between the Scriptures and the Church. In the Church, according to Catholic belief, an authentic teaching office plays a special role in the explanation and proclamation of the written word of God".¹¹⁶ Even so, "in 1 dialogue itself, the sacred utterances are precious instruments in the mighty hand of God for attaining that unity which the Saviour holds out to all".¹¹⁷

Furthermore, the Sacrament of Baptism, which we have in common, represents "a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it".¹¹⁸ The theological, pastoral and ecumenical implications of our common Baptism are many and important. Although this sacrament of itself is "only a beginning, a point of departure", it is "oriented towards a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ himself willed it to be, and finally, towards a complete participation in Eucharistic communion".¹¹⁹

67. Doctrinal and historical disagreements at the time of the Reformation emerged with regard to the Church, the sacraments and the ordained ministry. The Council therefore calls for "dialogue to be undertaken concerning the true meaning of the Lord's Supper, the other sacraments and the Church's worship and ministry".¹²⁰

The Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, pointing out that the post-Reformation Communities lack that "fullness of unity with us which should flow from Baptism", observes that "especially because of the lack of the Sacrament of Orders they have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the Eucharistic mystery", even though "when they commemorate the Lord's Death and Resurrection in the Holy Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and they await his coming in glory".¹²¹

68. The Decree does not overlook the spiritual life and its moral consequences: "The Christian way of life of these brethren is nourished by faith in Christ. It is strengthened by the grace of Baptism and the hearing of God's Word. This way of life expresses itself in private prayer, in meditation on the Bible, in Christian family life, and in services of worship offered by Communities assembled to praise God. Furthermore, their worship sometimes displays notable features of the ancient, common liturgy".¹²²

The Council document moreover does not limit itself to these spiritual, moral and cultural aspects but extends its appreciation to the lively sense of justice and to the sincere charity towards others which are present among these brothers and sisters. Nor does it overlook their efforts to make social conditions more humane and to promote peace. All this is the result of a sincere desire to be faithful to the Word of Christ as the source of Christian life.

The text thus raises a series of questions which, in the area of ethics and morality, is becoming ever more urgent in our time: "There are many Christians who do not always understand the Gospel in the same way as Catholics".¹²³ In this vast area there is much room for dialogue concerning the moral principles of the Gospel and their implications.

69. The hopes and invitation expressed by the Second Vatican Council have been acted upon, and bilateral theological dialogue with the various worldwide Churches and Christian Communities in the West has been progressively set in motion.

Moreover, with regard to multilateral dialogue, as early as 1964 the process of setting up a "Joint Working Group" with the World Council of Churches was begun, and since 1968 Catholic theologians have been admitted as full members of the theological Department of the Council, the Commission on Faith and Order.

This dialogue has been and continues to be fruitful and full of promise. The topics suggested by the Council Decree have already been addressed, or will be in the near future. The reflections of the various bilateral dialogues, conducted with a dedication which deserves the praise of all those committed to ecumenism, have concentrated on many disputed questions such as Baptism, the Eucharist, the ordained ministry, the sacramentality and authority of the Church and apostolic succession. As a result, unexpected possibilities for resolving these questions have come to light, while at the same time there has been a realization that certain questions need to be studied more deeply.

70. This difficult and delicate research, which involves questions of faith and respect for one's own conscience as well as for the consciences of others, has been accompanied and sustained by the prayer of the Catholic Church and of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. Prayer for unity, already so deeply rooted in and spread throughout the body of the Church, shows that Christians do indeed see the importance of ecumenism. Precisely because the search for full unity requires believers to question one another in relation to their faith in the one Lord, prayer is the source of enlightenment concerning the truth which has to be accepted in its entirety.

Moreover, through prayer the quest for unity, far from being limited to a group of specialists, comes to be shared by all the baptized. Everyone, regardless of their role in the Church or level of education, can make a valuable contribution, in a hidden and profound way.

Ecclesial relations

71.

We must give thanks to Divine Providence also for all the events which attest to progress on the path to unity. Besides theological dialogue, mention should be made of other forms of encounter, common prayer and practical cooperation. Pope Paul VI strongly encouraged this process by his visit to the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva on 10 June 1969, and by his many meetings with representatives of various Churches and Ecclesial Communities. Such contacts greatly help to improve mutual knowledge and to increase Christian fraternity.

Pope John Paul I, during his very brief Pontificate, expressed the desire to continue on this path.¹²⁴ The Lord has enabled me to carry on this work. In addition to important ecumenical meetings held in Rome, a significant part of my Pastoral Visits is regularly devoted to fostering Christian unity. Some of my journeys have a precise ecumenical "priority", especially in countries where the Catholic communities constitute a minority with respect to the post-Reformation communities or where the latter represent a considerable portion of the believers in Christ in a given society.

72.

This is true above all for the European countries, in which these divisions first appeared, and for North America. In this regard, without wishing to minimize the other visits, I would especially mention those within Europe which took me twice to Germany, in November 1980 and in April-May 1987; to the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and

Wales) in May-June 1982; to Switzerland in June 1984; and to the Scandinavian and Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland) in June 1989. In an atmosphere of joy, mutual respect, Christian solidarity and prayer I met so very many brothers and sisters, all making a committed effort to be faithful to the Gospel. Seeing all this has been for me a great source of encouragement. We experienced the Lord's presence among us.

In this respect I would like to mention one demonstration dictated by fraternal charity and marked by deep clarity of faith which made a profound impression on me. I am speaking of the Eucharistic celebrations at which I presided in Finland and Sweden during my journey to the Scandinavian and Nordic countries. At Communion time, the Lutheran Bishops approached the celebrant. They wished, by means of an agreed gesture, to demonstrate their desire for that time when we, Catholics and Lutherans, will be able to share the same Eucharist, and they wished to receive the celebrant's blessing. With love I blessed them. The same gesture, so rich in meaning, was repeated in Rome at the Mass at which I presided in Piazza Farnese, on the sixth centenary of the canonization of Saint Birgitta of Sweden, on 6 October 1991.

I have encountered similar sentiments on the other side of the ocean also: in Canada, in September 1984; and particularly in September 1987 in the United States, where one notices a great ecumenical openness. This was the case, to give one example, of the ecumenical meeting held at Columbia, South Carolina on 11 September 1987. The very fact that such meetings regularly take place between the Pope and these brothers and sisters whose Churches and Ecclesial Communities originate in the Reformation is important in itself. I am deeply grateful for the warm reception which I have received both from the leaders of the various Communities and from the Communities as a whole. From this standpoint, I consider significant the ecumenical celebration of the Word held in Columbia on the theme of the family.

73. It is also a source of great joy to observe how in the postconciliar period and in the local Churches many programmes and activities on behalf of Christian unity are in place, programmes and activities which have a stimulating effect at the level of Episcopal Conferences, individual Dioceses and parishes, and at the level of the various ecclesial organizations and movements.

Achievements of cooperation

74. "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21). The consistency and honesty of intentions and of statements of principles are verified by their application to real life. The Council Decree on Ecumenism notes that among other Christians "the faith by which they believe in Christ bears fruit in praise and thanksgiving for the benefits received from the hands of God. Joined to it are a lively sense of justice and a true neighbourly charity".¹²⁵

What has just been outlined is fertile ground not only for dialogue but also for practical cooperation: "Active faith has produced many organizations for the relief of spiritual and bodily distress, the education of youth, the advancement of humane social conditions, and the promotion of peace throughout the world".¹²⁶

Social and cultural life offers ample opportunities for ecumenical cooperation. With increasing frequency Christians are working together to defend human dignity, to promote peace, to apply the Gospel to social life, to bring the Christian spirit to the world of science and of the arts. They find themselves ever more united in striving to meet the sufferings and the needs of our time: hunger, natural disasters and social injustice.

75. For Christians, this cooperation, which draws its inspiration from the Gospel itself, is never mere humanitarian action. It has its reason for being in the Lord's words: "For I was hungry and you gave me food" (Mt 25:35). As I have already emphasized, the cooperation among Christians clearly manifests that degree of communion which already exists among them.¹²⁷

Before the world, united action in society on the part of Christians has the clear value of a joint witness to the name of the Lord. It is also a form of proclamation, since it reveals the face of Christ.

The doctrinal disagreements which remain exercise a negative influence and even place limits on cooperation. Still, the communion of faith which already exists between Christians provides a solid foundation for their joint action not only in the social field but also in the religious sphere.

Such cooperation will facilitate the quest for unity. The Decree on Ecumenism noted that "through such cooperation, all believers in Christ are able to learn easily how they can understand each other better and esteem each other more, and how the road to the unity of Christians may be made smooth".¹²⁸

76. In this context, how can I fail to mention the ecumenical interest in peace, expressed in prayer and action by ever greater numbers of Christians and with a steadily growing theological inspiration? It could not be otherwise. Do we not believe in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace? Christians are becoming ever more united in their rejection of violence, every kind of violence, from wars to social injustice.

We are called to make ever greater efforts, so that it may be ever more apparent that religious considerations are not the real cause of current conflicts, even though, unfortunately, there is still a risk of religion being exploited for political and polemical purposes.

In 1986, at Assisi, during the World Day of Prayer for Peace, Christians of the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities prayed with one voice to the Lord of history for peace in the world. That same day, in a different but

parallel way, Jews and representatives of non-Christian religions also prayed for peace in a harmonious expression of feelings which struck a resonant chord deep in the human spirit.

Nor do I wish to overlook the Day of Prayer for Peace in Europe, especially in the Balkans, which took me back to the town of Saint Francis as a pilgrim on 9-10 January 1993, and the Mass for Peace in the Balkans and especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which I celebrated on 23 January 1994 in Saint Peter's Basilica during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

When we survey the world joy fills our hearts. For we note that Christians feel ever more challenged by the issue of peace. They see it as intimately connected with the proclamation of the Gospel and with the coming of God's Kingdom.

CHAPTER III -QUANTA EST NOBIS VIA?

Continuing and deepening dialogue

77.

We can now ask how much further we must travel until that blessed day when full unity in faith will be attained and we can celebrate together in peace the Holy Eucharist of the Lord. The greater mutual understanding and the doctrinal convergences already achieved between us, which have resulted in an affective and effective growth of communion, cannot suffice for the conscience of Christians who profess that the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is to re-establish full visible unity among all the baptized.

In view of this goal, all the results so far attained are but one stage of the journey, however promising and positive.

78.

In the ecumenical movement, it is not only the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches which hold to this demanding concept of the unity willed by God. The orientation towards such unity is also expressed by others.¹²⁹

Ecumenism implies that the Christian communities should help one another so that there may be truly present in them the full content and all the requirements of "the heritage handed down by the Apostles".¹³⁰ Without this, full communion will never be possible. This mutual help in the search for truth is a sublime form of evangelical charity.

The documents of the many International Mixed Commissions of dialogue have expressed this commitment to seeking unity. On the basis of a certain fundamental doctrinal unity, these texts discuss Baptism, Eucharist, ministry and authority.

From this basic but partial unity it is now necessary to advance towards the visible unity which is required and sufficient and which is manifested in a real and concrete way, so that the Churches may truly become a sign of that full communion in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church which will be expressed in the common celebration of the Eucharist.

This journey towards the necessary and sufficient visible unity, in the communion of the one Church willed by Christ, continues to require patient and courageous efforts. In this process, one must not impose any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary (cf. Acts 15:28).

79. It is already possible to identify the areas in need of fuller study before a true consensus of faith can be achieved: 1) the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God; 2) the Eucharist, as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, an offering of praise to the Father, the sacrificial memorial and Real Presence of Christ and the sanctifying outpouring of the Holy Spirit; 3) Ordination, as a Sacrament, to the threefold ministry of the episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate; 4) the Magisterium of the Church, entrusted to the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him, understood as a responsibility and an authority exercised in the name of Christ for teaching and safeguarding the faith; 5) the Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Christ's disciples and for all humanity.

In this courageous journey towards unity, the transparency and the prudence of faith require us to avoid both false irenicism and indifference to the Church's ordinances.¹³¹ Conversely, that same transparency and prudence urge us to reject a halfhearted commitment to unity and, even more, a prejudicial opposition or a defeatism which tends to see everything in negative terms.

To uphold a vision of unity which takes account of all the demands of revealed truth does not mean to put a brake on the ecumenical movement.¹³² On the contrary, it means preventing it from settling for apparent solutions which would lead to no firm and solid results.¹³³ The obligation to respect the truth is absolute. Is this not the law of the Gospel?

Reception of the results already achieved

80. While dialogue continues on new subjects or develops at deeper levels, a new task lies before us: that of receiving the results already achieved. These cannot remain the statements of bilateral commissions but must become a common heritage. For this to come about and for the bonds of communion to be thus strengthened, a serious examination needs to be made, which, by different ways and means and at various levels of responsibility, must involve the whole People of God. We are in fact dealing with issues which frequently are matters of faith, and these require universal consent, extending from the Bishops to the lay faithful, all of whom have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁴ It is the same Spirit who assists the Magisterium and awakens the *sensus fidei*.

Consequently, for the outcome of dialogue to be received, there is needed a broad and precise critical process which analyzes the results and rigorously tests their consistency with the Tradition of faith received from the Apostles and lived out in the community of believers gathered around the Bishop, their legitimate Pastor.

81. This process, which must be carried forward with prudence and in a spirit of faith, will be assisted by the Holy Spirit. If it is to be successful, its results must be made known in appropriate ways by competent persons. Significant in this regard is the contribution which theologians and faculties of theology are called to make by exercising their charism in the Church. It is also clear that ecumenical commissions have very specific responsibilities and tasks in this regard.

The whole process is followed and encouraged by the Bishops and the Holy See. The Church's teaching authority is responsible for expressing a definitive judgment.

In all this, it will be of great help methodologically to keep carefully in mind the distinction between the deposit of faith and the formulation in which it is expressed, as Pope John XXIII recommended in his opening address at the Second Vatican Council.¹³⁵

Continuing spiritual ecumenism and bearing witness to holiness

82. It is understandable how the seriousness of the commitment to ecumenism presents a deep challenge to the Catholic faithful. The Spirit calls them to make a serious examination of conscience. The Catholic Church must enter into what might be called a "dialogue of conversion", which constitutes the spiritual foundation of ecumenical dialogue. In this dialogue, which takes place before God, each individual must recognize his own faults, confess his sins and place himself in the hands of the One who is our Intercessor before the Father, Jesus Christ.

Certainly, in this attitude of conversion to the will of the Father and, at the same time, of repentance and absolute trust in the reconciling power of the truth which is Christ, we will find the strength needed to bring to a successful conclusion the long and arduous pilgrimage of ecumenism. The "dialogue of conversion" with the Father on the part of each Community, with the full acceptance of all that it demands, is the basis of fraternal relations which will be something more than a mere cordial understanding or external sociability. The bonds of fraternal *koinonia* must be forged before God and in Christ Jesus.

Only the act of placing ourselves before God can offer a solid basis for that conversion of individual Christians and for that constant reform of the Church, insofar as she is also a human and earthly institution, ¹³⁶ which represent the preconditions for all ecumenical commitment. One of the first steps in ecumenical dialogue is the effort to draw the Christian Communities into this completely interior spiritual space in which Christ, by the power of the Spirit, leads them all, without exception, to examine themselves before the Father and to ask themselves whether they have been faithful to his plan for the Church.

83.

I have mentioned the will of the Father and the spiritual space in which each community hears the call to overcome the obstacles to unity. All Christian Communities know that, thanks to the power given by the Spirit, obeying that will and overcoming those obstacles are not beyond their reach. All of them in fact have martyrs for the Christian faith.¹³⁷ Despite the tragedy of our divisions, these brothers and sisters have preserved an attachment to Christ and to the Father so radical and absolute as to lead even to the shedding of blood. But is not this same attachment at the heart of what I have called a "dialogue of conversion"? Is it not precisely this dialogue which clearly shows the need for an ever more profound experience of the truth if full communion is to be attained?

84.

In a theocentric vision, we Christians already have a common Martyrology. This also includes the martyrs of our own century, more numerous than one might think, and it shows how, at a profound level, God preserves communion among the baptized in the supreme demand of faith, manifested in the sacrifice of life itself.¹³⁸ The fact that one can die for the faith shows that other demands of the faith can also be met. I have already remarked, and with deep joy, how an imperfect but real communion is preserved and is growing at many levels of ecclesial life. I now add that this communion is already perfect in what we all consider the highest point of the life of grace, martyrdom unto death, the truest communion possible with Christ who shed his Blood, and by that sacrifice brings near those who once were far off (cf. Eph 2:13).

While for all Christian communities the martyrs are the proof of the power of grace, they are not the only ones to bear witness to that power. Albeit in an invisible way, the communion between our Communities, even if still incomplete, is truly and solidly grounded in the full communion of the Saints—those who, at the end of a life faithful to grace, are in communion with Christ in glory. These Saints come from all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which gave them entrance into the communion of salvation.

When we speak of a common heritage, we must acknowledge as part of it not only the institutions, rites, means of salvation and the traditions which all the communities have preserved and by which they have been shaped, but first and foremost this reality of holiness.¹³⁹

In the radiance of the "heritage of the saints" belonging to all Communities, the "dialogue of conversion" towards full and visible unity thus appears as a source of hope. This universal presence of the Saints is in fact a proof of the

transcendent power of the Spirit. It is the sign and proof of God's victory over the forces of evil which divide humanity. As the liturgies sing: "You are glorified in your Saints, for their glory is the crowning of your gifts".¹⁴⁰

Where there is a sincere desire to follow Christ, the Spirit is often able to pour out his grace in extraordinary ways. The experience of ecumenism has enabled us to understand this better. If, in the interior spiritual space described above, Communities are able truly to "be converted" to the quest for full and visible communion, God will do for them what he did for their Saints. He will overcome the obstacles inherited from the past and will lead Communities along his paths to where he wills: to the visible koinonia which is both praise of his glory and service of his plan of salvation.

85. Since God in his infinite mercy can always bring good even out of situations which are an offence to his plan, we can discover that the Spirit has allowed conflicts to serve in some circumstances to make explicit certain aspects of the Christian vocation, as happens in the lives of the Saints. In spite of fragmentation, which is an evil from which we need to be healed, there has resulted a kind of rich bestowal of grace which is meant to embellish the koinonia. God's grace will be with all those who, following the example of the Saints, commit themselves to meeting its demands. How can we hesitate to be converted to the Father's expectations? He is with us.

Contribution of the Catholic Church to the quest for Christian unity

86.

The Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, in a fundamental affirmation echoed by the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 141 states that the one Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church.¹⁴² The Decree on Ecumenism emphasizes the presence in her of the fullness (*plenitudo*) of the means of salvation.¹⁴³ Full unity will come about when all share in the fullness of the means of salvation entrusted by Christ to his Church.

87.

Along the way that leads to full unity, ecumenical dialogue works to awaken a reciprocal fraternal assistance, whereby Communities strive to give in mutual exchange what each one needs in order to grow towards definitive fullness in accordance with God's plan (cf. Eph 4:11-13). I have said how we are aware, as the Catholic Church, that we have received much from the witness borne by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities to certain common Christian values, from their study of those values, and even from the way in which they have emphasized and experienced them. Among the achievements of the last thirty years, this reciprocal fraternal influence has had an important place. At the stage which we have now reached, ¹⁴⁴ this process of mutual enrichment must be taken seriously into account. Based on the communion which already exists as a result of the ecclesial elements present in the Christian communities, this process will certainly be a force impelling towards full and visible communion, the desired goal of the journey we are making. Here we have the ecumenical expression of the Gospel law of sharing. This leads me to state once more: "We must take every care to meet the legitimate desires and expectations of our Christian brethren, coming to know their way of thinking and their sensibilities... The talents of each must be developed for the utility and the advantage of all".¹⁴⁵

The ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome

88. Among all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities, the Catholic Church is conscious that she has preserved the ministry of the Successor of the Apostle Peter, the Bishop of Rome, whom God established as her "perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity" ¹⁴⁶ and whom the Spirit sustains in order that he may enable all the others to share in this essential good. In the beautiful expression of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, my ministry is that of *servus servorum Dei*. This designation is the best possible safeguard against the risk of separating power (and in particular the primacy) from ministry. Such a separation would contradict the very meaning of power according to the Gospel: "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27), says our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. On the other hand, as I acknowledged on the important occasion of a visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva on 12 June 1984, the Catholic Church's conviction that in the ministry of the Bishop of Rome she has preserved, in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition and the faith of the Fathers, the visible sign and guarantor of unity, constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections.

To the extent that we are responsible for these, I join my Predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness.¹⁴⁷

89.

It is nonetheless significant and encouraging that the question of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome has now become a subject of study which is already under way or will be in the near future. It is likewise significant and encouraging that this question appears as an essential theme not only in the theological dialogues in which the Catholic Church is engaging with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, but also more generally in the ecumenical movement as a whole. Recently the delegates to the Fifth World Assembly of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, held in Santiago de Compostela, recommended that the Commission "begin a new study of the question of a universal ministry of Christian unity".¹⁴⁸ After centuries of bitter controversies, the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities are more and more taking a fresh look at this ministry of unity.¹⁴⁹

90.

The Bishop of Rome is the Bishop of the Church which preserves the mark of the martyrdom of Peter and of Paul: "By a mysterious design of Providence it is at Rome that [Peter] concludes his journey in following Jesus, and it is at Rome that he gives his greatest proof of love and fidelity. Likewise Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, gives his supreme witness at Rome. In this way the Church of Rome became the Church of Peter and of Paul".¹⁵⁰

In the New Testament, the person of Peter has an eminent place. In the first part of the Acts of the Apostles, he appears as the leader and spokesman of the Apostolic College described as "Peter... and the Eleven" (2:14; cf. 2:37, 5:29). The place assigned to Peter is based on the words of Christ himself, as they are recorded in the Gospel traditions.

91. The Gospel of Matthew gives a clear outline of the pastoral mission of Peter in the Church: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (16:17-19). Luke makes clear that Christ urged Peter to strengthen his brethren, while at the same time reminding him of his own human weakness and need of conversion (cf. 22:31-32). It is just as though, against the backdrop of Peter's human weakness, it were made fully evident that his particular ministry in the Church derives altogether from grace. It is as though the Master especially concerned himself with Peter's conversion as a way of preparing him for the task he was about to give him in his Church, and for this reason was very strict with him. This same role of Peter, similarly linked with a realistic affirmation of his weakness, appears again in the Fourth Gospel: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?... Feed my sheep" (cf. Jn 21:15-19). It is also significant that according to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians the Risen Christ appears to Cephas and then to the Twelve (cf. 15:5).

It is important to note how the weakness of Peter and of Paul clearly shows that the Church is founded upon the infinite power of grace (cf. Mt 16:17; 2 Cor 12:7-10). Peter, immediately after receiving his mission, is rebuked with unusual severity by Christ, who tells him: "You are a hindrance to me" (Mt 16:23). How can we fail to see that the mercy which Peter needs is related to the ministry of that mercy which he is the first to experience? And yet, Peter will deny Jesus three times. The Gospel of John emphasizes that Peter receives the charge of shepherding the flock on the occasion of a threefold profession of love (cf. 21:15-17), which corresponds to his threefold denial (cf. 13:38). Luke, for his part, in the words of Christ already quoted, words which the early tradition will concentrate upon in order to clarify the mission of Peter, insists on the fact that he will have to "strengthen his brethren when he has turned again" (cf. 22:32).

92.

As for Paul, he is able to end the description of his ministry with the amazing words which he had heard from the Lord himself: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"; consequently, he can exclaim: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:9-10). This is a basic characteristic of the Christian experience.

As the heir to the mission of Peter in the Church, which has been made fruitful by the blood of the Princes of the Apostles, the Bishop of Rome exercises a ministry originating in the manifold mercy of God. This mercy converts hearts and pours forth the power of grace where the disciple experiences the bitter taste of his personal weakness and helplessness. The authority proper to this ministry is completely at the service of God's merciful plan and it must always be seen in this perspective. Its power is explained from this perspective.

93.

Associating himself with Peter's threefold profession of love, which corresponds to the earlier threefold denial, his Successor knows that he must be a sign of mercy. His is a ministry of mercy, born of an act of Christ's own mercy. This whole lesson of the Gospel must be constantly read anew, so that the exercise of the Petrine ministry may lose nothing of its authenticity and transparency.

The Church of God is called by Christ to manifest to a world ensnared by its sins and evil designs that, despite everything, God in his mercy can convert hearts to unity and enable them to enter into communion with him.

94.

This service of unity, rooted in the action of divine mercy, is entrusted within the College of Bishops to one among those who have received from the Spirit the task, not of exercising power over the people-as the rulers of the Gentiles and their great men do (cf. Mt 20:25; Mk 10:42)-but of leading them towards peaceful pastures. This task can require the offering of one's own life (cf. Jn 10:11-18). Saint Augustine, after showing that Christ is "the one Shepherd, in whose unity all are one", goes on to exhort: "May all shepherds thus be one in the one Shepherd; may they let the one voice of the Shepherd be heard; may the sheep hear this voice and follow their Shepherd, not this shepherd or that, but the only one; in him may they all let one voice be heard and not a babble of voices... the voice free of all division, purified of all heresy, that the sheep hear".¹⁵¹ The mission of the Bishop of Rome within the College of all the Pastors consists precisely in "keeping watch" (episkopein), like a sentinel, so that, through the efforts of the Pastors, the true voice of Christ the Shepherd may be heard in all the particular Churches. In this way, in each of the particular Churches entrusted to those Pastors, the *una, sancta, catholica et apostolica Ecclesia* is made present. All the Churches are in full and visible communion, because all the Pastors are in communion with Peter and therefore united in Christ.

With the power and the authority without which such an office would be illusory, the Bishop of Rome must ensure the communion of all the Churches. For this reason, he is the first servant of unity. This primacy is exercised on various levels, including vigilance over the handing down of the Word, the celebration of the Liturgy and the Sacraments, the

Church's mission, discipline and the Christian life. It is the responsibility of the Successor of Peter to recall the requirements of the common good of the Church, should anyone be tempted to overlook it in the pursuit of personal interests. He has the duty to admonish, to caution and to declare at times that this or that opinion being circulated is irreconcilable with the unity of faith. When circumstances require it, he speaks in the name of all the Pastors in communion with him. He can also- under very specific conditions clearly laid down by the First Vatican Council- declare ex cathedra that a certain doctrine belongs to the deposit of faith.¹⁵² By thus bearing witness to the truth, he serves unity.

95. All this however must always be done in communion. When the Catholic Church affirms that the office of the Bishop of Rome corresponds to the will of Christ, she does not separate this office from the mission entrusted to the whole body of Bishops, who are also "vicars and ambassadors of Christ".¹⁵³ The Bishop of Rome is a member of the "College", and the Bishops are his brothers in the ministry.

Whatever relates to the unity of all Christian communities clearly forms part of the concerns of the primacy. As Bishop of Rome I am fully aware, as I have reaffirmed in the present Encyclical Letter, that Christ ardently desires the full and visible communion of all those Communities in which, by virtue of God's faithfulness, his Spirit dwells. I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility in this regard, above all in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation. For a whole millennium Christians were united in "a brotherly fraternal communion of faith and sacramental life... If disagreements in belief and discipline arose among them, the Roman See acted by common consent as moderator".¹⁵⁴

In this way the primacy exercised its office of unity. When addressing the Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Dimitrios I, I acknowledged my awareness that "for a great variety of reasons, and against the will of all concerned, what should have been a service sometimes manifested itself in a very different light. But... it is out of a desire to obey the will of Christ truly that I recognize that as Bishop of Rome I am called to exercise that ministry... I insistently pray the Holy Spirit to shine his light upon us, enlightening all the Pastors and theologians of our Churches, that we may seek-together, of course-the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned".¹⁵⁵

96. This is an immense task, which we cannot refuse and which I cannot carry out by myself. Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21)?

The communion of all particular Churches with the Church of Rome: a necessary condition for unity

97. The Catholic Church, both in her praxis and in her solemn documents, holds that the communion of the particular Churches with the Church of Rome, and of their Bishops with the Bishop of Rome, is-in God's plan-an essential requisite of full and visible communion. Indeed full communion, of which the Eucharist is the highest sacramental manifestation, needs to be visibly expressed in a ministry in which all the Bishops recognize that they are united in Christ and all the faithful find confirmation for their faith. The first part of the Acts of the Apostles presents Peter as the one who speaks in the name of the apostolic group and who serves the unity of the community-all the while respecting the authority of James, the head of the Church in Jerusalem. This function of Peter must continue in the Church so that under her sole Head, who is Jesus Christ, she may be visibly present in the world as the communion of all his disciples.

Do not many of those involved in ecumenism today feel a need for such a ministry? A ministry which presides in truth and love so that the ship-that beautiful symbol which the World Council of Churches has chosen as its emblem- will not be buffeted by the storms and will one day reach its haven.

Full unity and evangelization

98. The ecumenical movement in our century, more than the ecumenical undertakings of past centuries, the importance of which must not however be underestimated, has been characterized by a missionary outlook. In the verse of John's Gospel which is ecumenism's inspiration and guiding motif-"that they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21)-the phrase that the world may believe has been so strongly emphasized that at times we run the risk of forgetting that, in the mind of the Evangelist, unity is above all for the glory of the Father. At the same time it is obvious that the lack of unity among Christians contradicts the Truth which Christians have the mission to spread and, consequently, it gravely damages their witness. This was clearly understood and expressed by my Predecessor Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "As evangelizers, we must offer Christ's faithful not the image of people divided and separated by unedifying quarrels, but the image of people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting-point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and disinterested search for truth. Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church... At this point we wish to emphasize the sign of unity among all Christians as the way and instrument of evangelization. The division among Christians is a serious reality which impedes the very work of Christ".¹⁵⁶

How indeed can we proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation without at the same time being committed to working for reconciliation between Christians? However true it is that the Church, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit and with the

promise of indefectibility, has preached and still preaches the Gospel to all nations, it is also true that she must face the difficulties which derive from the lack of unity. When non-believers meet missionaries who do not agree among themselves, even though they all appeal to Christ, will they be in a position to receive the true message? Will they not think that the Gospel is a cause of division, despite the fact that it is presented as the fundamental law of love?

99. When I say that for me, as Bishop of Rome, the ecumenical task is "one of the pastoral priorities" of my Pontificate, 157 I think of the grave obstacle which the lack of unity represents for the proclamation of the Gospel. A Christian Community which believes in Christ and desires, with Gospel fervour, the salvation of mankind can hardly be closed to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who leads all Christians towards full and visible unity. Here an imperative of charity is in question, an imperative which admits of no exception. Ecumenism is not only an internal question of the Christian Communities. It is a matter of the love which God has in Jesus Christ for all humanity; to stand in the way of this love is an offence against him and against his plan to gather all people in Christ. As Pope Paul VI wrote to the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I: "May the Holy Spirit guide us along the way of reconciliation, so that the unity of our Churches may become an ever more radiant sign of hope and consolation for all mankind".158

EXHORTATION

100. In my recent Letter to the Bishops, clergy and faithful of the Catholic Church indicating the path to be followed towards the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Holy Year 2000, I wrote that "the best preparation for the new millennium can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church".159 The Second Vatican Council is the great beginning-the Advent as it were-of the journey leading us to the threshold of the Third Millennium. Given the importance which the Council attributed to the work of rebuilding Christian unity, and in this our age of grace for ecumenism, I thought it necessary to reaffirm the fundamental convictions which the Council impressed upon the consciousness of the Catholic Church, recalling them in the light of the progress subsequently made towards the full communion of all the baptized.

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is active in this endeavour and that he is leading the Church to the full realization of the Father's plan, in conformity with the will of Christ. This will was expressed with heartfelt urgency in the prayer which, according to the Fourth Gospel, he uttered at the moment when he entered upon the saving mystery of his Passover. Just as he did then, today too Christ calls everyone to renew their commitment to work for full and visible communion.

101. I therefore exhort my Brothers in the Episcopate to be especially mindful of this commitment. The two Codes of Canon Law include among the responsibilities of the Bishop that of promoting the unity of all Christians by supporting all activities or initiatives undertaken for this purpose, in the awareness that the Church has this obligation from the will of Christ himself.160 This is part of the episcopal mission and it is a duty which derives directly from fidelity to Christ, the Shepherd of the Church. Indeed all the faithful are asked by the Spirit of God to do everything possible to strengthen the bonds of communion between all Christians and to increase cooperation between Christ's followers: "Concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone according to the potential of each".161

102. The power of God's Spirit gives growth and builds up the Church down the centuries. As the Church turns her gaze to the new millennium, she asks the Spirit for the grace to strengthen her own unity and to make it grow towards full communion with other Christians.

How is the Church to obtain this grace? In the first place, through prayer. Prayer should always concern itself with the longing for unity, and as such is one of the basic forms of our love for Christ and for the Father who is rich in mercy. In this journey which we are undertaking with other Christians towards the new millennium prayer must occupy the first place.

How is she to obtain this grace? Through giving thanks, so that we do not present ourselves empty-handed at the appointed time: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness... " intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26), disposing us to ask God for what we need.

How is she to obtain this grace? Through hope in the Spirit, who can banish from us the painful memories of our separation. The Spirit is able to grant us clear-sightedness, strength and courage to take whatever steps are necessary, that our commitment may be ever more authentic.

And should we ask if all this is possible, the answer will always be yes. It is the same answer which Mary of Nazareth heard: with God nothing is impossible.

I am reminded of the words of Saint Cyprian's commentary on the Lord's Prayer, the prayer of every Christian: "God does not accept the sacrifice of a sower of disunion, but commands that he depart from the altar so that he may first be reconciled with his brother. For God can be appeased only by prayers that make peace. To God, the better offering is peace, brotherly concord and a people made one in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit".162

At the dawn of the new millennium, how can we not implore from the Lord, with renewed enthusiasm and a deeper awareness, the grace to prepare ourselves, together, to offer this sacrifice of unity?

103. I, John Paul, servus servorum Dei, venture to make my own the words of the Apostle Paul, whose martyrdom, together with that of the Apostle Peter, has bequeathed to this See of Rome the splendour of its witness, and I say to

you, the faithful of the Catholic Church, and to you, my brothers and sisters of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities: "Mend your ways, encourage one another, live in harmony, and the God of love and peace will be with you... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:11, 13).

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 May, the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, in the year 1995, the seventeenth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1 Cf. Address following the Way of the Cross on Good Friday (1 April 1994), 3: AAS 87 (1995), 88.

2 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration On Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae, 1.

3 Cf. Apostolic Letter Tertio Millennio Adveniente (10 November 1994), 16: AAS 87 (1995), 15.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html
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4 CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion Communionis Notio (28 May 1992), 4: AAS 85 (1993), 840.

5 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 1.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 4.

8 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 14.

9 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae, 1 and 2.

10 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 14.

11 Ibid., 8.

12 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 3.

13 Ibid.

14 No. 15.

15 Ibid.

16 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 15.

17 Ibid., 3.

18 Ibid.

19 Cf. SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, Homilies on the Gospel, 19, 1: PL, 1154, quoted in SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 2.

20 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 4.

21 Ibid., 7.

22 Cf. Ibid.

23 Ibid., 6.

24 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum, 7.

25 Cf. Apostolic Letter Euntes in Mundum (25 January 1988): AAS 80 (1988), 935-956.

26 Cf. Encyclical Epistle Slavorum Apostoli (2 June 1985): AAS 77 (1985), 779-813.

27 Cf. Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (25 March 1993): AAS 85 (1993), 1039-1119.

28 Cf. in particular, the Lima Document: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (January 1982); and the study of the JOINT WORKING GROUP BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, Confessing the "One" Faith (1991), Document No. 153 of the Commission on Faith and Order, Geneva, 1991.

29 Cf. Opening Address of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (11 October 1962): AAS 54 (1962), 793.

30 We are speaking of the SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, established by Pope John XXIII With the Motu Proprio Supremo Dei Nutu (5 June 1960), 9: AAS 52 (1960), 436, and confirmed by successive http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html
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documents: JOHN XXIII Motu Proprio Appropinquante Concilio (6 August 1962), c. III, a. 7, § 2, I: AAS 54 (1962), 614; cf. PAUL VI Apostolic Constitution Regimini Ecclesiae Universae (15 August 1967), 92-94: AAS 59 (1967), 918-919. This dicastery is now called the PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY: Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution Pastor Bonus (28 June 1988), V, Arts. 135-138: AAS 80 (1988), 895-896.

31 Opening Address of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (11 October 1962): AAS 54 (1962), 792.

32 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 6.

33 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae, 1.

34 Encyclical Epistle Slavorum Apostoli (2 June 1985), 11: AAS 77 (1985), 792.

- 35 Ibid., 13: loc. cit., 794.
- 36 Ibid., 11: loc. cit., 792.
- 37 Address to the Aboriginal Peoples (29 November 1986), 12: AAS 79 (1987), 977.
- 38 Cf. SAINT VINCENT OF LERINS, *Commonitorium primum*, 23: PL 50, 667-668.
- 39 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6.
- 40 Ibid., 5.
- 41 Ibid., 7.
- 42 Ibid., 8.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Cf. Ibid., 4.
- 45 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 24: AAS 87 (1995), 19-20.
- 46 Address at Canterbury Cathedral (29 May 1982), 5: AAS 74 (1982), 922.
- 47 WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Constitution and Rules*, III, 1.
- 48 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
- 49 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7.
- 50 Maria Sagheddu was born at Dorgali (Sardinia) in 1914. At twenty-one years of age she entered the Trappistine Monastery in Grottaferrata. Through the apostolic labours of Abbé Paul Couturier, she came to understand the need for prayers and spiritual sacrifices for the unity of Christians. In 1936, at the time of an Octave for Unity, she chose to offer her life for the unity of the Church. Following a grave illness, Sister Maria Gabriella died on 23 April 1939.
- 51 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
- 52 Cf. AAS 56 (1964), 609-659.
- 53 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.
- 54 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree On Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.
- 55 Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 755; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canons 902-904.
- 56 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.
- 57 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3.
- 58 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.
- 59 Cf. *ibid.*
- 60 Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (6 August 1964), III: AAS 56 (1964), 642.
- 61 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11.
- 62 Cf. *ibid.*
- 63 *Ibid.*; Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration in Defence of Catholic Doctrine on the Church *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (24 June 1973), 4: AAS G5 (1973), 402.
- 64 CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration in Defence of Catholic Doctrine on the Church *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 5: AAS 65 (1973), 403.
- 65 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.
- 66 Cf. Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 November 1994, 1.
- 67 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (25 March 1993), 5: AAS 85 (1993), 1040.
- 70 *Ibid.* 94: loc. cit., 1078,
- 71 Cf. COMMISSION ON FAITH AND ORDER OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (January 1982).
- 72 Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 32: AAS 80 (1988), 556.
- 73 Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (28 June 1985), 10: AAS 77 (1985), 1158; cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 11: AAS 71 (1979), 277-278.
- 74 Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (28 June 1985), 10: AAS 77 (1985), 1158.
- 75 Cf. SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY and the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES, *Guiding Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible* (1968). This was revised and then published by the SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, "Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible": Information Service, 65 (1987), 140-145.
- 76 Cf. COMMISSION ON FAITH AND ORDER OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (January 1982).
- 77 For example, at the most recent assemblies of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver (1983) and in Canberra (1991), and of the Commission on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela (1993).

78 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8 and 15; Code of Canon Law, Canon 844; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 671; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (25 March 1993), 122-125, 129-131, 123 and 132: AAS 85 (1993), 1086-1087, 1088-1089, 1087 and 1089.

79 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree On Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.

80 Ibid.

81 Cf. No. 15.

82 No. 15.

83 Ibid., 14.

84 Cf. Joint Declaration of Pope Paul VI and the Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras I (7 December 1965): *Tomos Agapis*, Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970), Rome-Istanbul, 1971, 280-281.

85 Cf. AAS 77 (1985), 779-813.

86 Cf. AAS 80 (1988), 933-956; cf. Message *Magnum Baptismi Donum*, (14 February 1988): AAS 80 (1988), 988-997,

87 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree On Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14.

88 Ibid.

89 Apostolic Brief *Anno Ineunte* (25 July 1967): *Tomos Agapis*, Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970), Rome-Istanbul, 1971, 388-391.

90 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14.

91 Ibid., 15.

92 No. 14: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 May 1995, 3.

93 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 17.

94 No. 26.

95 Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 844, §§ 2 and 3; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 671, §§ 2 and 3.

96 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (25 March 1993), 122-128: AAS 85 (1993), 1086-1088.

97 Declaration by His Holiness Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I (7 December 1987): AAS 80 (1988), 253.

98 JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, "The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church, with Particular Reference to the Importance of the Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and the Unity of the People of God" (26 June 1988), 1: Information Service, 68 (1988), 173.

99 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Letter to the Bishops of Europe on the Relations between Catholics and Orthodox in the New Situation of Central and Eastern Europe (31 May 1991), 6: AAS 84 (1992), 168.

100 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 17.

101 Cf. Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen* (2 May 1995), 24: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 May 1995, 5.

102 Ibid., 18: loc. cit., 4.

103 Cf. Joint Declaration by His Holiness Pope Paul VI and His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark of Alexandria (10 May 1973): AAS 65 (1973), 299-301.

104 Cf. Joint Declaration by His Holiness Pope Paul VI and His Beatitude Mar Ignatius Jacob III, Patriarch of the Church of Antioch of the Syrians (27 October 1971): AAS 63 (1971), 814-815.

105 Cf. Address to the Delegates of the Coptic Orthodox Church (2 June 1979): AAS 71 (1979), 1000-1001.

106 Cf. Joint Declaration of Pope John Paul II and the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (23 June 1984): *Insegnamenti VII/1* (1984), 1902-1906.

107 Address to His Holiness Abuna Paulos, Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia (11 June 1993): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 11-12 June 1993, 4.

108 Cf. Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 November 1994, 1.

109 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 19.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., 19.

112 Cf. *ibid.*

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid., 20.

115 Ibid., 21.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid., 22.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid., 22; cf. 20.

- 121 Ibid., 22.
- 122 Ibid., 23.
- 123 Ibid.
- 124 Cf. Radio Message Urbi et Orbi (27 August 1978): AAS 70 (1978), 695-696.
- 125 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 23.
- 126 Ibid.
- 127 Cf. *ibid.*, 12.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 The steady work of the Commission on Faith and Order has led to a comparable vision adopted by the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in the Canberra Declaration (7-20 February 1991); cf. *Signs of the Spirit*, Official Report, Seventh Assembly, WCC, Geneva, 1991, pp. 235-258. This vision was reaffirmed by the World Conference of Faith and Order at Santiago de Compostela (3-14 August 1993); cf. *Information Service*, 85 (1994), 18-37.
- 130 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree On Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 14.
- 131 Cf. *ibid.*, 4 and 11.
- 132 Cf. Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (28 June 1985), 6: AAS 77 (1985), 1153.
- 133 Cf. *ibid.*
- 134 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 12.
- 135 Cf. AAS 54 (1962), 792.
- 136 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 6.
- 137 Cf. *ibid.*, 4; PAUL VI, Homily for the Canonization of the Ugandan Martyrs (18 October 1964): AAS 56 (1964), 906.
- 138 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 37: AAS 87 (1995), 29-30.
- 139 Cf. PAUL VI, Address at the Shrine in Namugongo, Uganda (2 August 1969): AAS 61 (1969), 590-591.
- 140 Cf. *Missale Romanum*, Praefatio de Sanctis I: Sanctorum "coronando merita tua dona coronans",
- 141 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 4.
- 142 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
- 143 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 3.
- 144 After the Lima Document of the Commission on Faith and Order, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (January 1982), and in the spirit of the Declaration of the Seventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, *The Unity of the Church as "koinonia": Gift and Task* (Canberra, 7-20 February 1991): cf. *Istina* 36 (1991), 389-391.
- 145 Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (28 June 1985), 4: AAS 77 (1985), 1151-1152.
- 146 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.
- 147 Cf. Discourse at the Headquarters of the World Council of Churches, Geneva (12 June 1984), 2: *Insegnamenti VII/1* (1984), 1686.
- 148 WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE COMMISSION ON FAITH AND ORDER, Report of the Second Section, Santiago de Compostela (1993): *Confessing the One Faith to God's Glory*, 31, 2, Faith and Order Paper No. 166, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1994, 243.
- 149 To cite only a few examples: ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION, Final Report, ARCIC-I (September 1981); INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, Report (1981); ROMAN CATHOLIC/LUTHERAN JOINT COMMISSION, *The Ministry in the Church* (13 March 1981). The problem takes clear shape in the research conducted by the JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH.
- 150 Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (28 June 1985), 3: AAS 77 (1985), 1150.
- 151 Sermon XLVI, 30: CCL 41, 557.
- 152 Cf. FIRST VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ *Pastor Aeternus*: DS 3074.
- 153 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 27.
- 154 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree On Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 14.
- 155 Homily in the Vatican Basilica in the presence of Dimitrios I, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch (6 December 1987), 3; AAS 80 (1988), 714.
- 156 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 77: AAS 68 (1976), fig; cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 1; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (25 March 1993), 205-209: AAS 85 (1993), 1112-1114.
- 157 Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (28 June 1985), 4: AAS 77 (1985), 1151.
- 158 Letter of 13 January 1970: *Tomos Agapis*, Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970), Rome-Istanbul, 1971, pp. 610-611.

159 Apostolic Letter Tertio Millennio Adveniente (10 November 1994), 20: AAS 87 (1995), 17.

160 Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 755; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 902.

161 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 5.

162 On the Lord's Prayer, 23: CSEL 3, 284-285.

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Ioannes Paulus PP. II
 To the Bishops
 Priests and Deacons
 Men and Women religious
 lay Faithful
 and all People of Good Will
 on the Value and Inviolability
 of Human Life

1995.03.25

INTRODUCTION

1. The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as "good news" to the people of every age and culture.

At the dawn of salvation, it is the Birth of a Child which is proclaimed as joyful news: "I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:10-11). The source of this "great joy" is the Birth of the Saviour; but Christmas also reveals the full meaning of every human birth, and the joy which accompanies the Birth of the Messiah is thus seen to be the foundation and fulfilment of joy at every child born into the world (cf. Jn 16:21).

When he presents the heart of his redemptive mission, Jesus says: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). In truth, he is referring to that "new" and "eternal" life which consists in communion with the Father, to which every person is freely called in the Son by the power of the Sanctifying Spirit. It is precisely in this "life" that all the aspects and stages of human life achieve their full significance.

The incomparable worth of the human person

2. Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process which, unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise and renewed by the gift of divine life, which will reach its full realization in eternity (cf. 1 Jn 3:1-2). At the same time, it is precisely this supernatural calling which highlights the relative character of each individual's earthly life. After all, life on earth is not an "ultimate" but a "penultimate" reality; even so, it remains a sacred reality entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility and brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters.

The Church knows that this Gospel of life, which she has received from her Lord, has a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person-believer and non-believer alike-because it marvellously fulfils all the heart's expectations while infinitely surpassing them. Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree. Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded.

In a special way, believers in Christ must defend and promote this right, aware as they are of the wonderful truth recalled by the Second Vatican Council: "By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being".² This saving event reveals to humanity not only the boundless love of God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16), but also the incomparable value of every human person.

The Church, faithfully contemplating the mystery of the Redemption, acknowledges this value with ever new wonder.³ She feels called to proclaim to the people of all times this "Gospel", the source of invincible hope and true joy for every period of history. The Gospel of God's love for man, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel.

For this reason, man-living man-represents the primary and fundamental way for the Church. ⁴

New threats to human life

3. Every individual, precisely by reason of the mystery of the Word of God who was made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14), is entrusted to the maternal care of the Church. Therefore every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt in the Church's very heart; it cannot but affect her at the core of her faith in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of

God, and engage her in her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life in all the world and to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15).

Today this proclamation is especially pressing because of the extraordinary increase and gravity of threats to the life of individuals and peoples, especially where life is weak and defenceless. In addition to the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger, endemic diseases, violence and war, new threats are emerging on an alarmingly vast scale.

The Second Vatican Council, in a passage which retains all its relevance today, forcefully condemned a number of crimes and attacks against human life. Thirty years later, taking up the words of the Council and with the same forcefulness I repeat that condemnation in the name of the whole Church, certain that I am interpreting the genuine sentiment of every upright conscience: "Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and they do more harm to those who practise them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator".⁵

4. Unfortunately, this disturbing state of affairs, far from decreasing, is expanding: with the new prospects opened up by scientific and technological progress there arise new forms of attacks on the dignity of the human being. At the same time a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crimes against life a new and-if possible-even more sinister character, giving rise to further grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems.

All this is causing a profound change in the way in which life and relationships between people are considered. The fact that legislation in many countries, perhaps even departing from basic principles of their Constitutions, has determined not to punish these practices against life, and even to make them altogether legal, is both a disturbing symptom and a significant cause of grave moral decline. Choices once unanimously considered criminal and rejected by the common moral sense are gradually becoming socially acceptable. Even certain sectors of the medical profession, which by its calling is directed to the defence and care of human life, are increasingly willing to carry out these acts against the person. In this way the very nature of the medical profession is distorted and contradicted, and the dignity of those who practise it is degraded. In such a cultural and legislative situation, the serious demographic, social and family problems which weigh upon many of the world's peoples and which require responsible and effective attention from national and international bodies, are left open to false and deceptive solutions, opposed to the truth and the good of persons and nations.

The end result of this is tragic: not only is the fact of the destruction of so many human lives still to be born or in their final stage extremely grave and disturbing, but no less grave and disturbing is the fact that conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the basic value of human life.

In communion with all the Bishops of the world

5. The Extraordinary Consistory of Cardinals held in Rome on 4-7 April 1991 was devoted to the problem of the threats to human life in our day. After a thorough and detailed discussion of the problem and of the challenges it poses to the entire human family and in particular to the Christian community, the Cardinals unanimously asked me to reaffirm with the authority of the Successor of Peter the value of human life and its inviolability, in the light of present circumstances and attacks threatening it today.

In response to this request, at Pentecost in 1991 I wrote a personal letter to each of my Brother Bishops asking them, in the spirit of episcopal collegiality, to offer me their cooperation in drawing up a specific document. ⁶ I am deeply grateful to all the Bishops who replied and provided me with valuable facts, suggestions and proposals. In so doing they bore witness to their unanimous desire to share in the doctrinal and pastoral mission of the Church with regard to the Gospel of life.

In that same letter, written shortly after the celebration of the centenary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, I drew everyone's attention to this striking analogy: "Just as a century ago it was the working classes which were oppressed in their fundamental rights, and the Church very courageously came to their defence by proclaiming the sacrosanct rights of the worker as a person, so now, when another category of persons is being oppressed in the fundamental right to life, the Church feels in duty bound to speak out with the same courage on behalf of those who have no voice. Hers is always the evangelical cry in defence of the world's poor, those who are threatened and despised and whose human rights are violated".⁷

Today there exists a great multitude of weak and defenceless human beings, unborn children in particular, whose fundamental right to life is being trampled upon. If, at the end of the last century, the Church could not be silent about

the injustices of those times, still less can she be silent today, when the social injustices of the past, unfortunately not yet overcome, are being compounded in many regions of the world by still more grievous forms of injustice and oppression, even if these are being presented as elements of progress in view of a new world order.

The present Encyclical, the fruit of the cooperation of the Episcopate of every country of the world, is therefore meant to be a precise and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability, and at the same time a pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!

May these words reach all the sons and daughters of the Church! May they reach all people of good will who are concerned for the good of every man and woman and for the destiny of the whole of society!

6. In profound communion with all my brothers and sisters in the faith, and inspired by genuine friendship towards all, I wish to meditate upon once more and proclaim the Gospel of life, the splendour of truth which enlightens consciences, the clear light which corrects the darkened gaze, and the unfailing source of faithfulness and steadfastness in facing the ever new challenges which we meet along our path.

As I recall the powerful experience of the Year of the Family, as if to complete the Letter which I wrote "to every particular family in every part of the world", 8 I look with renewed confidence to every household and I pray that at every level a general commitment to support the family will reappear and be strengthened, so that today too—even amid so many difficulties and serious threats—the family will always remain, in accordance with God's plan, the "sanctuary of life".⁹

To all the members of the Church, the people of life and for life, I make this most urgent appeal, that together we may offer this world of ours new signs of hope, and work to ensure that justice and solidarity will increase and that a new culture of human life will be affirmed, for the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love.

CHAPTER I - THE VOICE OF YOUR BROTHER'S BLOOD CRIES TO ME FROM THE GROUND PRESENT-DAY THREATS TO HUMAN LIFE

"Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (Gen 4:8): the roots of violence against life

7. "God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he has created all things that they might exist... God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it" (Wis 1:13-14; 2:23-24).

The Gospel of life, proclaimed in the beginning when man was created in the image of God for a destiny of full and perfect life (cf. Gen 2:7; Wis 9:2-3), is contradicted by the painful experience of death which enters the world and casts its shadow of meaninglessness over man's entire existence. Death came into the world as a result of the devil's envy (cf. Gen 3:1, 4-5) and the sin of our first parents (cf. Gen 2:17, 3:17-19). And death entered it in a violent way, through the killing of Abel by his brother Cain: "And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (Gen 4:8).

This first murder is presented with singular eloquence in a page of the Book of Genesis which has universal significance: it is a page rewritten daily, with inexorable and degrading frequency, in the book of human history.

Let us re-read together this biblical account which, despite its archaic structure and its extreme simplicity, has much to teach us.

"Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had not regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it'.

"Cain said to Abel his brother, 'Let us go out to the field'. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' And the Lord said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth'. Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me this day away from the ground; and from your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me'. Then the Lord said to him, 'Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold'. And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (Gen 4:2-16).

8. Cain was "very angry" and his countenance "fell" because "the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering" (Gen 4:4-5). The biblical text does not reveal the reason why God prefers Abel's sacrifice to Cain's. It clearly shows however that God, although preferring Abel's gift, does not interrupt his dialogue with Cain. He admonishes him, reminding him of his freedom in the face of evil: man is in no way predestined to evil. Certainly, like Adam, he is tempted by the

malevolent force of sin which, like a wild beast, lies in wait at the door of his heart, ready to leap on its prey. But Cain remains free in the face of sin. He can and must overcome it: "Its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:7).

Envy and anger have the upper hand over the Lord's warning, and so Cain attacks his own brother and kills him. As we read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "In the account of Abel's murder by his brother Cain, Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from the beginning of human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man".¹⁰

Brother kills brother. Like the first fratricide, every murder is a violation of the "spiritual" kinship uniting mankind in one great family, in which all share the same fundamental good: equal personal dignity. Not infrequently the kinship "of flesh and blood" is also violated; for example when threats to life arise within the relationship between parents and children, such as happens in abortion or when, in the wider context of family or kinship, euthanasia is encouraged or practised.

At the root of every act of violence against one's neighbour there is a concession to the "thinking" of the evil one, the one who "was a murderer from the beginning" (Jn 8:44). As the Apostle John reminds us: "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother" (1 Jn 3:11-12). Cain's killing of his brother at the very dawn of history is thus a sad witness of how evil spreads with amazing speed: man's revolt against God in the earthly paradise is followed by the deadly combat of man against man.

After the crime, God intervenes to avenge the one killed. Before God, who asks him about the fate of Abel, Cain, instead of showing remorse and apologizing, arrogantly eludes the question: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). "I do not know": Cain tries to cover up his crime with a lie. This was and still is the case, when all kinds of ideologies try to justify and disguise the most atrocious crimes against human beings. "Am I my brother's keeper?": Cain does not wish to think about his brother and refuses to accept the responsibility which every person has towards others. We cannot but think of today's tendency for people to refuse to accept responsibility for their brothers and sisters. Symptoms of this trend include the lack of solidarity towards society's weakest members—such as the elderly, the infirm, immigrants, children—and the indifference frequently found in relations between the world's peoples even when basic values such as survival, freedom and peace are involved.

9. But God cannot leave the crime unpunished: from the ground on which it has been spilt, the blood of the one murdered demands that God should render justice (cf. Gen 37:26; Is 26:21; Ez 24:7-8). From this text the Church has taken the name of the "sins which cry to God for justice", and, first among them, she has included wilful murder. ¹² For the Jewish people, as for many peoples of antiquity, blood is the source of life. Indeed "the blood is the life" (Dt 12:23), and life, especially human life, belongs only to God: for this reason whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself.

Cain is cursed by God and also by the earth, which will deny him its fruit (cf. Gen 4:11-12). He is punished: he will live in the wilderness and the desert. Murderous violence profoundly changes man's environment. From being the "garden of Eden" (Gen 2:15), a place of plenty, of harmonious interpersonal relationships and of friendship with God, the earth becomes "the land of Nod" (Gen 4:16), a place of scarcity, loneliness and separation from God. Cain will be "a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" (Gen 4:14): uncertainty and restlessness will follow him forever.

And yet God, who is always merciful even when he punishes, "put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him" (Gen 4:15). He thus gave him a distinctive sign, not to condemn him to the hatred of others, but to protect and defend him from those wishing to kill him, even out of a desire to avenge Abel's death. Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, and God himself pledges to guarantee this. And it is precisely here that the paradoxical mystery of the merciful justice of God is shown forth. As Saint Ambrose writes: "Once the crime is admitted at the very inception of this sinful act of parricide, then the divine law of God's mercy should be immediately extended. If punishment is forthwith inflicted on the accused, then men in the exercise of justice would in no way observe patience and moderation, but would straightaway condemn the defendant to punishment.... God drove Cain out of his presence and sent him into exile far away from his native land, so that he passed from a life of human kindness to one which was more akin to the rude existence of a wild beast. God, who preferred the correction rather than the death of a sinner, did not desire that a homicide be punished by the exaction of another act of homicide".¹³

"What have you done?" (Gen 4:10): the eclipse of the value of life

10. The Lord said to Cain: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (Gen 4:10). The voice of the blood shed by men continues to cry out, from generation to generation, in ever new and different ways.

The Lord's question: "What have you done?", which Cain cannot escape, is addressed also to the people of today, to make them realize the extent and gravity of the attacks against life which continue to mark human history; to make them discover what causes these attacks and feeds them; and to make them ponder seriously the consequences which derive from these attacks for the existence of individuals and peoples.

Some threats come from nature itself, but they are made worse by the culpable indifference and negligence of those who could in some cases remedy them. Others are the result of situations of violence, hatred and conflicting interests, which lead people to attack others through murder, war, slaughter and genocide.

And how can we fail to consider the violence against life done to millions of human beings, especially children, who are forced into poverty, malnutrition and hunger because of an unjust distribution of resources between peoples and between social classes? And what of the violence inherent not only in wars as such but in the scandalous arms trade, which spawns the many armed conflicts which stain our world with blood? What of the spreading of death caused by reckless tampering with the world's ecological balance, by the criminal spread of drugs, or by the promotion of certain kinds of sexual activity which, besides being morally unacceptable, also involve grave risks to life? It is impossible to catalogue completely the vast array of threats to human life, so many are the forms, whether explicit or hidden, in which they appear today!

11. Here though we shall concentrate particular attention on another category of attacks, affecting life in its earliest and in its final stages, attacks which present new characteristics with respect to the past and which raise questions of extraordinary seriousness. It is not only that in generalized opinion these attacks tend no longer to be considered as "crimes"; paradoxically they assume the nature of "rights", to the point that the State is called upon to give them legal recognition and to make them available through the free services of health-care personnel. Such attacks strike human life at the time of its greatest frailty, when it lacks any means of self-defence. Even more serious is the fact that, most often, those attacks are carried out in the very heart of and with the complicity of the family-the family which by its nature is called to be the "sanctuary of life".

How did such a situation come about? Many different factors have to be taken into account. In the background there is the profound crisis of culture, which generates scepticism in relation to the very foundations of knowledge and ethics, and which makes it increasingly difficult to grasp clearly the meaning of what man is, the meaning of his rights and his duties. Then there are all kinds of existential and interpersonal difficulties, made worse by the complexity of a society in which individuals, couples and families are often left alone with their problems. There are situations of acute poverty, anxiety or frustration in which the struggle to make ends meet, the presence of unbearable pain, or instances of violence, especially against women, make the choice to defend and promote life so demanding as sometimes to reach the point of heroism.

All this explains, at least in part, how the value of life can today undergo a kind of "eclipse", even though conscience does not cease to point to it as a sacred and inviolable value, as is evident in the tendency to disguise certain crimes against life in its early or final stages by using innocuous medical terms which distract attention from the fact that what is involved is the right to life of an actual human person.

12.

In fact, while the climate of widespread moral uncertainty can in some way be explained by the multiplicity and gravity of today's social problems, and these can sometimes mitigate the subjective responsibility of individuals, it is no less true that we are confronted by an even larger reality, which can be described as a veritable structure of sin. This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable "culture of death". This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. Looking at the situation from this point of view, it is possible to speak in a certain sense of a war of the powerful against the weak: a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected in one way or another. A person who, because of illness, handicap or, more simply, just by existing, compromises the well-being or life-style of those who are more favoured tends to be looked upon as an enemy to be resisted or eliminated. In this way a kind of "conspiracy against life" is unleashed. This conspiracy involves not only individuals in their personal, family or group relationships, but goes far beyond, to the point of damaging and distorting, at the international level, relations between peoples and States.

13.

In order to facilitate the spread of abortion, enormous sums of money have been invested and continue to be invested in the production of pharmaceutical products which make it possible to kill the fetus in the mother's womb without recourse to medical assistance. On this point, scientific research itself seems to be almost exclusively preoccupied with developing products which are ever more simple and effective in suppressing life and which at the same time are capable of removing abortion from any kind of control or social responsibility.

It is frequently asserted that contraception, if made safe and available to all, is the most effective remedy against abortion. The Catholic Church is then accused of actually promoting abortion, because she obstinately continues to teach the moral unlawfulness of contraception. When looked at carefully, this objection is clearly unfounded. It may be that many people use contraception with a view to excluding the subsequent temptation of abortion. But the negative values inherent in the "contraceptive mentality"-which is very different from responsible parenthood, lived in respect for the full truth of the conjugal act-are such that they in fact strengthen this temptation when an unwanted life is conceived. Indeed, the pro-abortion culture is especially strong precisely where the Church's teaching on contraception is rejected. Certainly, from the moral point of view contraception and abortion are specifically different evils: the former contradicts the full truth of the sexual act as the proper expression of conjugal love, while the latter destroys the life of

a human being; the former is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage, the latter is opposed to the virtue of justice and directly violates the divine commandment "You shall not kill".

But despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree. It is true that in many cases contraception and even abortion are practised under the pressure of real-life difficulties, which nonetheless can never exonerate from striving to observe God's law fully. Still, in very many other instances such practices are rooted in a hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality, and they imply a self-centered concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfilment. The life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception.

The close connection which exists, in mentality, between the practice of contraception and that of abortion is becoming increasingly obvious. It is being demonstrated in an alarming way by the development of chemical products, intrauterine devices and vaccines which, distributed with the same ease as contraceptives, really act as abortifacients in the very early stages of the development of the life of the new human being.

14. The various techniques of artificial reproduction, which would seem to be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life. Apart from the fact that they are morally unacceptable, since they separate procreation from the fully human context of the conjugal act, 14 these techniques have a high rate of failure: not just failure in relation to fertilization but with regard to the subsequent development of the embryo, which is exposed to the risk of death, generally within a very short space of time. Furthermore, the number of embryos produced is often greater than that needed for implantation in the woman's womb, and these so-called "spare embryos" are then destroyed or used for research which, under the pretext of scientific or medical progress, in fact reduces human life to the level of simple "biological material" to be freely disposed of.

Prenatal diagnosis, which presents no moral objections if carried out in order to identify the medical treatment which may be needed by the child in the womb, all too often becomes an opportunity for proposing and procuring an abortion. This is eugenic abortion, justified in public opinion on the basis of a mentality-mistakenly held to be consistent with the demands of "therapeutic interventions"-which accepts life only under certain conditions and rejects it when it is affected by any limitation, handicap or illness.

Following this same logic, the point has been reached where the most basic care, even nourishment, is denied to babies born with serious handicaps or illnesses. The contemporary scene, moreover, is becoming even more alarming by reason of the proposals, advanced here and there, to justify even infanticide, following the same arguments used to justify the right to abortion. In this way, we revert to a state of barbarism which one hoped had been left behind forever.

15. Threats which are no less serious hang over the incurably ill and the dying. In a social and cultural context which makes it more difficult to face and accept suffering, the temptation becomes all the greater to resolve the problem of suffering by eliminating it at the root, by hastening death so that it occurs at the moment considered most suitable.

Various considerations usually contribute to such a decision, all of which converge in the same terrible outcome. In the sick person the sense of anguish, of severe discomfort, and even of desperation brought on by intense and prolonged suffering can be a decisive factor. Such a situation can threaten the already fragile equilibrium of an individual's personal and family life, with the result that, on the one hand, the sick person, despite the help of increasingly effective medical and social assistance, risks feeling overwhelmed by his or her own frailty; and on the other hand, those close to the sick person can be moved by an understandable even if misplaced compassion. All this is aggravated by a cultural climate which fails to perceive any meaning or value in suffering, but rather considers suffering the epitome of evil, to be eliminated at all costs. This is especially the case in the absence of a religious outlook which could help to provide a positive understanding of the mystery of suffering.

On a more general level, there exists in contemporary culture a certain Promethean attitude which leads people to think that they can control life and death by taking the decisions about them into their own hands. What really happens in this case is that the individual is overcome and crushed by a death deprived of any prospect of meaning or hope. We see a tragic expression of all this in the spread of euthanasia-disguised and surreptitious, or practised openly and even legally. As well as for reasons of a misguided pity at the sight of the patient's suffering, euthanasia is sometimes justified by the utilitarian motive of avoiding costs which bring no return and which weigh heavily on society. Thus it is proposed to eliminate malformed babies, the severely handicapped, the disabled, the elderly, especially when they are not self-sufficient, and the terminally ill. Nor can we remain silent in the face of other more furtive, but no less serious and real, forms of euthanasia. These could occur for example when, in order to increase the availability of organs for transplants, organs are removed without respecting objective and adequate criteria which verify the death of the donor.

16. Another present-day phenomenon, frequently used to justify threats and attacks against life, is the demographic question. This question arises in different ways in different parts of the world. In the rich and developed countries there is a disturbing decline or collapse of the birthrate. The poorer countries, on the other hand, generally have a high rate of population growth, difficult to sustain in the context of low economic and social development, and especially where there is extreme underdevelopment. In the face of over-population in the poorer countries, instead of forms of global intervention at the international level-serious family and social policies, programmes of cultural development and of fair production and distribution of resources-anti-birth policies continue to be enacted.

Contraception, sterilization and abortion are certainly part of the reason why in some cases there is a sharp decline in the birthrate. It is not difficult to be tempted to use the same methods and attacks against life also where there is a situation of "demographic explosion".

The Pharaoh of old, haunted by the presence and increase of the children of Israel, submitted them to every kind of oppression and ordered that every male child born of the Hebrew women was to be killed (cf. Ex 1:7-22). Today not a few of the powerful of the earth act in the same way. They too are haunted by the current demographic growth, and fear that the most prolific and poorest peoples represent a threat for the well-being and peace of their own countries. Consequently, rather than wishing to face and solve these serious problems with respect for the dignity of individuals and families and for every person's inviolable right to life, they prefer to promote and impose by whatever means a massive programme of birth control. Even the economic help which they would be ready to give is unjustly made conditional on the acceptance of an anti-birth policy.

17. Humanity today offers us a truly alarming spectacle, if we consider not only how extensively attacks on life are spreading but also their unheard-of numerical proportion, and the fact that they receive widespread and powerful support from a broad consensus on the part of society, from widespread legal approval and the involvement of certain sectors of health-care personnel.

As I emphatically stated at Denver, on the occasion of the Eighth World Youth Day, "with time the threats against life have not grown weaker. They are taking on vast proportions. They are not only threats coming from the outside, from the forces of nature or the 'Cains' who kill the 'Abels'; no, they are scientifically and systematically programmed threats. The twentieth century will have been an era of massive attacks on life, an endless series of wars and a continual taking of innocent human life. **False prophets and false teachers have had the greatest success**".¹⁵ Aside from intentions, which can be varied and perhaps can seem convincing at times, especially if presented in the name of solidarity, we are in fact faced by an objective "conspiracy against life", involving even international Institutions, engaged in encouraging and carrying out actual campaigns to make contraception, sterilization and abortion widely available. Nor can it be denied that the mass media are often implicated in this conspiracy, by lending credit to that culture which presents recourse to contraception, sterilization, abortion and even euthanasia as a mark of progress and a victory of freedom, while depicting as enemies of freedom and progress those positions which are unreservedly pro-life.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9): a perverse idea of freedom

18. The panorama described needs to be understood not only in terms of the phenomena of death which characterize it but also in the variety of causes which determine it. The Lord's question: "What have you done?" (Gen 4:10), seems almost like an invitation addressed to Cain to go beyond the material dimension of his murderous gesture, in order to recognize in it all the gravity of the motives which occasioned it and the consequences which result from it.

Decisions that go against life sometimes arise from difficult or even tragic situations of profound suffering, loneliness, a total lack of economic prospects, depression and anxiety about the future. Such circumstances can mitigate even to a notable degree subjective responsibility and the consequent culpability of those who make these choices which in themselves are evil. But today the problem goes far beyond the necessary recognition of these personal situations. It is a problem which exists at the cultural, social and political level, where it reveals its more sinister and disturbing aspect in the tendency, ever more widely shared, to interpret the above crimes against life as legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights.

In this way, and with tragic consequences, a long historical process is reaching a turning-point. The process which once led to discovering the idea of "human rights"-rights inherent in every person and prior to any Constitution and State legislation-is today marked by a surprising contradiction. Precisely in an age when the inviolable rights of the person are solemnly proclaimed and the value of life is publicly affirmed, the very right to life is being denied or trampled upon, especially at the more significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death.

On the one hand, the various declarations of human rights and the many initiatives inspired by these declarations show that at the global level there is a growing moral sensitivity, more alert to acknowledging the value and dignity of every individual as a human being, without any distinction of race, nationality, religion, political opinion or social class.

On the other hand, these noble proclamations are unfortunately contradicted by a tragic repudiation of them in practice. This denial is still more distressing, indeed more scandalous, precisely because it is occurring in a society which makes the affirmation and protection of human rights its primary objective and its boast. How can these repeated affirmations of principle be reconciled with the continual increase and widespread justification of attacks on human life? How can we reconcile these declarations with the refusal to accept those who are weak and needy, or elderly, or those who have just been conceived? These attacks go directly against respect for life and they represent a direct threat to the entire culture of human rights. It is a threat capable, in the end, of jeopardizing the very meaning of democratic coexistence: rather than societies of "people living together", our cities risk becoming societies of people who are rejected, marginalized, uprooted and oppressed. If we then look at the wider worldwide perspective, how can we fail to think that the very affirmation of the rights of individuals and peoples made in distinguished international assemblies is a merely futile exercise of rhetoric, if we fail to unmask the selfishness of the rich countries which exclude poorer

countries from access to development or make such access dependent on arbitrary prohibitions against procreation, setting up an opposition between development and man himself? Should we not question the very economic models often adopted by States which, also as a result of international pressures and forms of conditioning, cause and aggravate situations of injustice and violence in which the life of whole peoples is degraded and trampled upon?

19. What are the roots of this remarkable contradiction?

We can find them in an overall assessment of a cultural and moral nature, beginning with the mentality which carries the concept of subjectivity to an extreme and even distorts it, and recognizes as a subject of rights only the person who enjoys full or at least incipient autonomy and who emerges from a state of total dependence on others. But how can we reconcile this approach with the exaltation of man as a being who is "not to be used"? The theory of human rights is based precisely on the affirmation that the human person, unlike animals and things, cannot be subjected to domination by others. We must also mention the mentality which tends to equate personal dignity with the capacity for verbal and explicit, or at least perceptible, communication. It is clear that on the basis of these presuppositions there is no place in the world for anyone who, like the unborn or the dying, is a weak element in the social structure, or for anyone who appears completely at the mercy of others and radically dependent on them, and can only communicate through the silent language of a profound sharing of affection. In this case it is force which becomes the criterion for choice and action in interpersonal relations and in social life. But this is the exact opposite of what a State ruled by law, as a community in which the "reasons of force" are replaced by the "force of reason", historically intended to affirm.

At another level, the roots of the contradiction between the solemn affirmation of human rights and their tragic denial in practice lies in a notion of freedom which exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service of them. While it is true that the taking of life not yet born or in its final stages is sometimes marked by a mistaken sense of altruism and human compassion, it cannot be denied that such a culture of death, taken as a whole, betrays a completely individualistic concept of freedom, which ends up by becoming the freedom of "the strong" against the weak who have no choice but to submit.

It is precisely in this sense that Cain's answer to the Lord's question: "Where is Abel your brother?" can be interpreted: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). Yes, every man is his "brother's keeper", because God entrusts us to one another. And it is also in view of this entrusting that God gives everyone freedom, a freedom which possesses an inherently relational dimension. This is a great gift of the Creator, placed as it is at the service of the person and of his fulfilment through the gift of self and openness to others; but when freedom is made absolute in an individualistic way, it is emptied of its original content, and its very meaning and dignity are contradicted.

There is an even more profound aspect which needs to be emphasized: freedom negates and destroys itself, and becomes a factor leading to the destruction of others, when it no longer recognizes and respects its essential link with the truth. When freedom, out of a desire to emancipate itself from all forms of tradition and authority, shuts out even the most obvious evidence of an objective and universal truth, which is the foundation of personal and social life, then the person ends up by no longer taking as the sole and indisputable point of reference for his own choices the truth about good and evil, but only his subjective and changeable opinion or, indeed, his selfish interest and whim.

20. This view of freedom leads to a serious distortion of life in society. If the promotion of the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy, people inevitably reach the point of rejecting one another. Everyone else is considered an enemy from whom one has to defend oneself. Thus society becomes a mass of individuals placed side by side, but without any mutual bonds. Each one wishes to assert himself independently of the other and in fact intends to make his own interests prevail. Still, in the face of other people's analogous interests, some kind of compromise must be found, if one wants a society in which the maximum possible freedom is guaranteed to each individual. In this way, any reference to common values and to a truth absolutely binding on everyone is lost, and social life ventures on to the shifting sands of complete relativism. At that point, everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining: even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life.

This is what is happening also at the level of politics and government: the original and inalienable right to life is questioned or denied on the basis of a parliamentary vote or the will of one part of the people—even if it is the majority. This is the sinister result of a relativism which reigns unopposed: the "right" ceases to be such, because it is no longer firmly founded on the inviolable dignity of the person, but is made subject to the will of the stronger part. In this way democracy, contradicting its own principles, effectively moves towards a form of totalitarianism. The State is no longer the "common home" where all can live together on the basis of principles of fundamental equality, but is transformed into a tyrant State, which arrogates to itself the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenceless members, from the unborn child to the elderly, in the name of a public interest which is really nothing but the interest of one part. The appearance of the strictest respect for legality is maintained, at least when the laws permitting abortion and euthanasia are the result of a ballot in accordance with what are generally seen as the rules of democracy. Really, what we have here is only the tragic caricature of legality; the democratic ideal, which is only truly such when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person, is betrayed in its very foundations: "How is it still possible to speak of the dignity of every human person when the killing of the weakest and most innocent is permitted? In the name of what justice is the most unjust of discriminations

practised: some individuals are held to be deserving of defence and others are denied that dignity?" 16 When this happens, the process leading to the breakdown of a genuinely human co-existence and the disintegration of the State itself has already begun.

To claim the right to abortion, infanticide and euthanasia, and to recognize that right in law, means to attribute to human freedom a perverse and evil significance: that of an absolute power over others and against others. This is the death of true freedom: "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin" (Jn 8:34).

"And from your face I shall be hidden" (Gen 4:14): the eclipse of the sense of God and of man

21.

In seeking the deepest roots of the struggle between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death", we cannot restrict ourselves to the perverse idea of freedom mentioned above. We have to go to the heart of the tragedy being experienced by modern man: the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, typical of a social and cultural climate dominated by secularism, which, with its ubiquitous tentacles, succeeds at times in putting Christian communities themselves to the test. Those who allow themselves to be influenced by this climate easily fall into a sad vicious circle: when the sense of God is lost, there is also a tendency to lose the sense of man, of his dignity and his life; in turn, the systematic violation of the moral law, especially in the serious matter of respect for human life and its dignity, produces a kind of progressive darkening of the capacity to discern God's living and saving presence.

Once again we can gain insight from the story of Abel's murder by his brother. After the curse imposed on him by God, Cain thus addresses the Lord: "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me this day away from the ground; and from your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me" (Gen 4:13-14). Cain is convinced that his sin will not obtain pardon from the Lord and that his inescapable destiny will be to have to "hide his face" from him. If Cain is capable of confessing that his fault is "greater than he can bear", it is because he is conscious of being in the presence of God and before God's just judgment. It is really only before the Lord that man can admit his sin and recognize its full seriousness. Such was the experience of David who, after "having committed evil in the sight of the Lord", and being rebuked by the Prophet Nathan, exclaimed: "My offences truly I know them; my sin is always before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned; what is evil in your sight I have done" (Ps 51:5-6).

22.

Consequently, when the sense of God is lost, the sense of man is also threatened and poisoned, as the Second Vatican Council concisely states: "Without the Creator the creature would disappear... But when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible".¹⁷ Man is no longer able to see himself as "mysteriously different" from other earthly creatures; he regards himself merely as one more living being, as an organism which, at most, has reached a very high stage of perfection. Enclosed in the narrow horizon of his physical nature, he is somehow reduced to being "a thing", and no longer grasps the "transcendent" character of his "existence as man". He no longer considers life as a splendid gift of God, something "sacred" entrusted to his responsibility and thus also to his loving care and "veneration". Life itself becomes a mere "thing", which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation.

Thus, in relation to life at birth or at death, man is no longer capable of posing the question of the truest meaning of his own existence, nor can he assimilate with genuine freedom these crucial moments of his own history. He is concerned only with "doing", and, using all kinds of technology, he busies himself with programming, controlling and dominating birth and death. Birth and death, instead of being primary experiences demanding to be "lived", become things to be merely "possessed" or "rejected".

Moreover, once all reference to God has been removed, it is not surprising that the meaning of everything else becomes profoundly distorted. Nature itself, from being "mater" (mother), is now reduced to being "matter", and is subjected to every kind of manipulation. This is the direction in which a certain technical and scientific way of thinking, prevalent in present-day culture, appears to be leading when it rejects the very idea that there is a truth of creation which must be acknowledged, or a plan of God for life which must be respected. Something similar happens when concern about the consequences of such a "freedom without law" leads some people to the opposite position of a "law without freedom", as for example in ideologies which consider it unlawful to interfere in any way with nature, practically "divinizing" it. Again, this is a misunderstanding of nature's dependence on the plan of the Creator. Thus it is clear that the loss of contact with God's wise design is the deepest root of modern man's confusion, both when this loss leads to a freedom without rules and when it leaves man in "fear" of his freedom.

By living "as if God did not exist", man not only loses sight of the mystery of God, but also of the mystery of the world and the mystery of his own being.

23. The eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a practical materialism, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism. Here too we see the permanent validity of the words of the Apostle: "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct" (Rom 1:28). The values of being are replaced by those of having. The only goal which counts is the pursuit of one's own material well-being. The so-called "quality of life" is interpreted primarily or exclusively as economic efficiency, inordinate consumerism,

physical beauty and pleasure, to the neglect of the more profound dimensions-interpersonal, spiritual and religious-of existence.

In such a context suffering, an inescapable burden of human existence but also a factor of possible personal growth, is "censored", rejected as useless, indeed opposed as an evil, always and in every way to be avoided. When it cannot be avoided and the prospect of even some future well-being vanishes, then life appears to have lost all meaning and the temptation grows in man to claim the right to suppress it.

Within this same cultural climate, the body is no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world. It is reduced to pure materiality: it is simply a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency. Consequently, sexuality too is depersonalized and exploited: from being the sign, place and language of love, that is, of the gift of self and acceptance of another, in all the other's richness as a person, it increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts. Thus the original import of human sexuality is distorted and falsified, and the two meanings, unitive and procreative, inherent in the very nature of the conjugal act, are artificially separated: in this way the marriage union is betrayed and its fruitfulness is subjected to the caprice of the couple. Procreation then becomes the "enemy" to be avoided in sexual activity: if it is welcomed, this is only because it expresses a desire, or indeed the intention, to have a child "at all costs", and not because it signifies the complete acceptance of the other and therefore an openness to the richness of life which the child represents.

In the materialistic perspective described so far, interpersonal relations are seriously impoverished. The first to be harmed are women, children, the sick or suffering, and the elderly. The criterion of personal dignity-which demands respect, generosity and service-is replaced by the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness: others are considered not for what they "are", but for what they "have, do and produce". This is the supremacy of the strong over the weak.

24. It is at the heart of the moral conscience that the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, with all its various and deadly consequences for life, is taking place. It is a question, above all, of the individual conscience, as it stands before God in its singleness and uniqueness. 18 But it is also a question, in a certain sense, of the "moral conscience" of society: in a way it too is responsible, not only because it tolerates or fosters behaviour contrary to life, but also because it encourages the "culture of death", creating and consolidating actual "structures of sin" which go against life. The moral conscience, both individual and social, is today subjected, also as a result of the penetrating influence of the media, to an extremely serious and mortal danger: that of confusion between good and evil, precisely in relation to the fundamental right to life. A large part of contemporary society looks sadly like that humanity which Paul describes in his Letter to the Romans. It is composed "of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (1:18): having denied God and believing that they can build the earthly city without him, "they became futile in their thinking" so that "their senseless minds were darkened" (1:21); "claiming to be wise, they became fools" (1:22), carrying out works deserving of death, and "they not only do them but approve those who practise them" (1:32). When conscience, this bright lamp of the soul (cf. Mt 6:22-23), calls "evil good and good evil" (Is 5:20), it is already on the path to the most alarming corruption and the darkest moral blindness.

And yet all the conditioning and efforts to enforce silence fail to stifle the voice of the Lord echoing in the conscience of every individual: it is always from this intimate sanctuary of the conscience that a new journey of love, openness and service to human life can begin.

"You have come to the sprinkled blood" (cf. Heb 12: 22, 24): signs of hope and invitation to commitment

25. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (Gen 4:10). It is not only the voice of the blood of Abel, the first innocent man to be murdered, which cries to God, the source and defender of life. The blood of every other human being who has been killed since Abel is also a voice raised to the Lord. In an absolutely singular way, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, the voice of the blood of Christ, of whom Abel in his innocence is a prophetic figure, cries out to God: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God... to the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (12:22, 24).

It is the sprinkled blood. A symbol and prophetic sign of it had been the blood of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, whereby God expressed his will to communicate his own life to men, purifying and consecrating them (cf. Ex 24:8; Lev 17:11). Now all of this is fulfilled and comes true in Christ: his is the sprinkled blood which redeems, purifies and saves; it is the blood of the Mediator of the New Covenant "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). This blood, which flows from the pierced side of Christ on the Cross (cf. Jn 19:34), "speaks more graciously" than the blood of Abel; indeed, it expresses and requires a more radical "justice", and above all it implores mercy, 19 it makes intercession for the brethren before the Father (cf. Heb 7:25), and it is the source of perfect redemption and the gift of new life.

The blood of Christ, while it reveals the grandeur of the Father's love, shows how precious man is in God's eyes and how priceless the value of his life. The Apostle Peter reminds us of this: "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pt 1:18-19). Precisely by contemplating the precious blood of

Christ, the sign of his self-giving love (cf. Jn 13:1), the believer learns to recognize and appreciate the almost divine dignity of every human being and can exclaim with ever renewed and grateful wonder: "How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he 'gained so great a Redeemer' (Exsultet of the Easter Vigil), and if God 'gave his only Son' in order that man 'should not perish but have eternal life' (cf. Jn 3:16)!" 20

Furthermore, Christ's blood reveals to man that his greatness, and therefore his vocation, consists in the sincere gift of self. Precisely because it is poured out as the gift of life, the blood of Christ is no longer a sign of death, of definitive separation from the brethren, but the instrument of a communion which is richness of life for all. Whoever in the Sacrament of the Eucharist drinks this blood and abides in Jesus (cf. Jn 6:56) is drawn into the dynamism of his love and gift of life, in order to bring to its fullness the original vocation to love which belongs to everyone (cf. Gen 1:27; 2:18-24).

It is from the blood of Christ that all draw the strength to commit themselves to promoting life. It is precisely this blood that is the most powerful source of hope, indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God's plan life will be victorious. "And death shall be no more", exclaims the powerful voice which comes from the throne of God in the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:4). And Saint Paul assures us that the present victory over sin is a sign and anticipation of the definitive victory over death, when there "shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'. 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' " (1 Cor 15:54-55).

26. In effect, signs which point to this victory are not lacking in our societies and cultures, strongly marked though they are by the "culture of death". It would therefore be to give a one-sided picture, which could lead to sterile discouragement, if the condemnation of the threats to life were not accompanied by the presentation of the positive signs at work in humanity's present situation.

Unfortunately it is often hard to see and recognize these positive signs, perhaps also because they do not receive sufficient attention in the communications media. Yet, how many initiatives of help and support for people who are weak and defenceless have sprung up and continue to spring up in the Christian community and in civil society, at the local, national and international level, through the efforts of individuals, groups, movements and organizations of various kinds!

There are still many married couples who, with a generous sense of responsibility, are ready to accept children as "the supreme gift of marriage".²¹ Nor is there a lack of families which, over and above their everyday service to life, are willing to accept abandoned children, boys and girls and teenagers in difficulty, handicapped persons, elderly men and women who have been left alone. Many centres in support of life, or similar institutions, are sponsored by individuals and groups which, with admirable dedication and sacrifice, offer moral and material support to mothers who are in difficulty and are tempted to have recourse to abortion. Increasingly, there are appearing in many places groups of volunteers prepared to offer hospitality to persons without a family, who find themselves in conditions of particular distress or who need a supportive environment to help them to overcome destructive habits and discover anew the meaning of life.

Medical science, thanks to the committed efforts of researchers and practitioners, continues in its efforts to discover ever more effective remedies: treatments which were once inconceivable but which now offer much promise for the future are today being developed for the unborn, the suffering and those in an acute or terminal stage of sickness. Various agencies and organizations are mobilizing their efforts to bring the benefits of the most advanced medicine to countries most afflicted by poverty and endemic diseases. In a similar way national and international associations of physicians are being organized to bring quick relief to peoples affected by natural disasters, epidemics or wars. Even if a just international distribution of medical resources is still far from being a reality, how can we not recognize in the steps taken so far the sign of a growing solidarity among peoples, a praiseworthy human and moral sensitivity and a greater respect for life?

27. In view of laws which permit abortion and in view of efforts, which here and there have been successful, to legalize euthanasia, movements and initiatives to raise social awareness in defence of life have sprung up in many parts of the world. When, in accordance with their principles, such movements act resolutely, but without resorting to violence, they promote a wider and more profound consciousness of the value of life, and evoke and bring about a more determined commitment to its defence.

Furthermore, how can we fail to mention all those daily gestures of openness, sacrifice and unselfish care which countless people lovingly make in families, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly and other centres or communities which defend life? Allowing herself to be guided by the example of Jesus the "Good Samaritan" (cf. Lk 10:29-37) and upheld by his strength, the Church has always been in the front line in providing charitable help: so many of her sons and daughters, especially men and women Religious, in traditional and ever new forms, have consecrated and continue to consecrate their lives to God, freely giving of themselves out of love for their neighbour, especially for the weak and needy. These deeds strengthen the bases of the "civilization of love and life", without which the life of individuals and of society itself loses its most genuinely human quality. Even if they go unnoticed and remain hidden to most people, faith assures us that the Father "who sees in secret" (Mt 6:6) not only will reward these actions but already here and now makes them produce lasting fruit for the good of all.

Among the signs of hope we should also count the spread, at many levels of public opinion, of a new sensitivity ever more opposed to war as an instrument for the resolution of conflicts between peoples, and increasingly oriented to

finding effective but "non-violent" means to counter the armed aggressor. In the same perspective there is evidence of a growing public opposition to the death penalty, even when such a penalty is seen as a kind of "legitimate defence" on the part of society. Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform.

Another welcome sign is the growing attention being paid to the quality of life and to ecology, especially in more developed societies, where people's expectations are no longer concentrated so much on problems of survival as on the search for an overall improvement of living conditions. Especially significant is the reawakening of an ethical reflection on issues affecting life. The emergence and ever more widespread development of bioethics is promoting more reflection and dialogue-between believers and non-believers, as well as between followers of different religions-on ethical problems, including fundamental issues pertaining to human life.

28. This situation, with its lights and shadows, ought to make us all fully aware that we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the "culture of death" and the "culture of life". We find ourselves not only "faced with" but necessarily "in the midst of" this conflict: we are all involved and we all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life.

For us too Moses' invitation rings out loud and clear: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil.... I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (Dt 30:15, 19). This invitation is very appropriate for us who are called day by day to the duty of choosing between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death". But the call of Deuteronomy goes even deeper, for it urges us to make a choice which is properly religious and moral. It is a question of giving our own existence a basic orientation and living the law of the Lord faithfully and consistently: "If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live... therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days" (30:16, 19-20).

The unconditional choice for life reaches its full religious and moral meaning when it flows from, is formed by and nourished by faith in Christ. Nothing helps us so much to face positively the conflict between death and life in which we are engaged as faith in the Son of God who became man and dwelt among men so "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). It is a matter of faith in the Risen Lord, who has conquered death; faith in the blood of Christ "that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:24).

With the light and strength of this faith, therefore, in facing the challenges of the present situation, the Church is becoming more aware of the grace and responsibility which come to her from her Lord of proclaiming, celebrating and serving the Gospel of life.

CHAPTER II - I CAME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE CONCERNING LIFE

"The life was made manifest, and we saw it" (1 Jn 1:2): with our gaze fixed on Christ, "the Word of life"

29. Faced with the countless grave threats to life present in the modern world, one could feel overwhelmed by sheer powerlessness: good can never be powerful enough to triumph over evil!

At such times the People of God, and this includes every believer, is called to profess with humility and courage its faith in Jesus Christ, "the Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). The Gospel of life is not simply a reflection, however new and profound, on human life. Nor is it merely a commandment aimed at raising awareness and bringing about significant changes in society. Still less is it an illusory promise of a better future. The Gospel of life is something concrete and personal, for it consists in the proclamation of the very person of Jesus. Jesus made himself known to the Apostle Thomas, and in him to every person, with the words: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). This is also how he spoke of himself to Martha, the sister of Lazarus: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn 11:25-26). Jesus is the Son who from all eternity receives life from the Father (cf. Jn 5:26), and who has come among men to make them sharers in this gift: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

Through the words, the actions and the very person of Jesus, man is given the possibility of "knowing" the complete truth concerning the value of human life. From this "source" he receives, in particular, the capacity to "accomplish" this truth perfectly (cf. Jn 3:21), that is, to accept and fulfil completely the responsibility of loving and serving, of defending and promoting human life. In Christ, the Gospel of life is definitively proclaimed and fully given. This is the Gospel which, already present in the Revelation of the Old Testament, and indeed written in the heart of every man and woman, has echoed in every conscience "from the beginning", from the time of creation itself, in such a way that, despite the negative consequences of sin, it can also be known in its essential traits by human reason. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, Christ "perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself; through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious Resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover, he confirmed with divine

testimony what revelation proclaimed: that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal".²²

30. Hence, with our attention fixed on the Lord Jesus, we wish to hear from him once again "the words of God" (Jn 3:34) and meditate anew on the Gospel of life. The deepest and most original meaning of this meditation on what revelation tells us about human life was taken up by the Apostle John in the opening words of his First Letter: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us-that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us" (1:1-3).

In Jesus, the "Word of life", God's eternal life is thus proclaimed and given. Thanks to this proclamation and gift, our physical and spiritual life, also in its earthly phase, acquires its full value and meaning, for God's eternal life is in fact the end to which our living in this world is directed and called. In this way the Gospel of life includes everything that human experience and reason tell us about the value of human life, accepting it, purifying it, exalting it and bringing it to fulfilment.

"The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" (Ex 15:2): life is always a good

31. The fullness of the Gospel message about life was prepared for in the Old Testament. Especially in the events of the Exodus, the centre of the Old Testament faith experience, Israel discovered the preciousness of its life in the eyes of God. When it seemed doomed to extermination because of the threat of death hanging over all its newborn males (cf. Ex 1:15-22), the Lord revealed himself to Israel as its Saviour, with the power to ensure a future to those without hope. Israel thus comes to know clearly that its existence is not at the mercy of a Pharaoh who can exploit it at his despotic whim. On the contrary, Israel's life is the object of God's gentle and intense love.

Freedom from slavery meant the gift of an identity, the recognition of an indestructible dignity and the beginning of a new history, in which the discovery of God and discovery of self go hand in hand. The Exodus was a foundational experience and a model for the future. Through it, Israel comes to learn that whenever its existence is threatened it need only turn to God with renewed trust in order to find in him effective help: "I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me" (Is 44:21).

Thus, in coming to know the value of its own existence as a people, Israel also grows in its perception of the meaning and value of life itself. This reflection is developed more specifically in the Wisdom Literature, on the basis of daily experience of the precariousness of life and awareness of the threats which assail it. Faced with the contradictions of life, faith is challenged to respond.

More than anything else, it is the problem of suffering which challenges faith and puts it to the test. How can we fail to appreciate the universal anguish of man when we meditate on the Book of Job? The innocent man overwhelmed by suffering is understandably led to wonder: "Why is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it comes not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures?" (3:20-21). But even when the darkness is deepest, faith points to a trusting and adoring acknowledgment of the "mystery": "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

Revelation progressively allows the first notion of immortal life planted by the Creator in the human heart to be grasped with ever greater clarity: "He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind" (Ec 3:11). This first notion of totality and fullness is waiting to be manifested in love and brought to perfection, by God's free gift, through sharing in his eternal life.

"The name of Jesus... has made this man strong" (Acts 3:16): in the uncertainties of human life, Jesus brings life's meaning to fulfilment

32. The experience of the people of the Covenant is renewed in the experience of all the "poor" who meet Jesus of Nazareth. Just as God who "loves the living" (cf. Wis 11:26) had reassured Israel in the midst of danger, so now the Son of God proclaims to all who feel threatened and hindered that their lives too are a good to which the Father's love gives meaning and value.

"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Lk 7:22). With these words of the Prophet Isaiah (35:5-6, 61:1), Jesus sets forth the meaning of his own mission: all who suffer because their lives are in some way "diminished" thus hear from him the "good news" of God's concern for them, and they know for certain that their lives too are a gift carefully guarded in the hands of the Father (cf. Mt 6:25-34).

It is above all the "poor" to whom Jesus speaks in his preaching and actions. The crowds of the sick and the outcasts who follow him and seek him out (cf. Mt 4:23-25) find in his words and actions a revelation of the great value of their lives and of how their hope of salvation is well-founded.

The same thing has taken place in the Church's mission from the beginning. When the Church proclaims Christ as the one who "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38),

she is conscious of being the bearer of a message of salvation which resounds in all its newness precisely amid the hardships and poverty of human life. Peter cured the cripple who daily sought alms at the "Beautiful Gate" of the Temple in Jerusalem, saying: "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6). By faith in Jesus, "the Author of life" (Acts 3:15), life which lies abandoned and cries out for help regains self-esteem and full dignity.

The words and deeds of Jesus and those of his Church are not meant only for those who are sick or suffering or in some way neglected by society. On a deeper level they affect the very meaning of every person's life in its moral and spiritual dimensions. Only those who recognize that their life is marked by the evil of sin can discover in an encounter with Jesus the Saviour the truth and the authenticity of their own existence. Jesus himself says as much: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk 5:31-32).

But the person who, like the rich land-owner in the Gospel parable, thinks that he can make his life secure by the possession of material goods alone, is deluding himself. Life is slipping away from him, and very soon he will find himself bereft of it without ever having appreciated its real meaning: "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Lk 12:20).

33. In Jesus' own life, from beginning to end, we find a singular "dialectic" between the experience of the uncertainty of human life and the affirmation of its value. Jesus' life is marked by uncertainty from the very moment of his birth. He is certainly accepted by the righteous, who echo Mary's immediate and joyful "yes" (cf. Lk 1:38). But there is also, from the start, rejection on the part of a world which grows hostile and looks for the child in order "to destroy him" (Mt 2:13); a world which remains indifferent and unconcerned about the fulfilment of the mystery of this life entering the world: "there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7). In this contrast between threats and insecurity on the one hand and the power of God's gift on the other, there shines forth all the more clearly the glory which radiates from the house at Nazareth and from the manger at Bethlehem: this life which is born is salvation for all humanity (cf. Lk 2:11).

Life's contradictions and risks were fully accepted by Jesus: "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). The poverty of which Paul speaks is not only a stripping of divine privileges, but also a sharing in the lowliest and most vulnerable conditions of human life (cf. Phil 2:6-7). Jesus lived this poverty throughout his life, until the culminating moment of the Cross: "he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name" (Phil 2:8-9). It is precisely by his death that Jesus reveals all the splendour and value of life, inasmuch as his self-oblation on the Cross becomes the source of new life for all people (cf. Jn 12:32). In his journeying amid contradictions and in the very loss of his life, Jesus is guided by the certainty that his life is in the hands of the Father. Consequently, on the Cross, he can say to him: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!" (Lk 23:46), that is, my life. Truly great must be the value of human life if the Son of God has taken it up and made it the instrument of the salvation of all humanity!

"Called... to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:28-29): God's glory shines on the face of man

34. Life is always a good. This is an instinctive perception and a fact of experience, and man is called to grasp the profound reason why this is so.

Why is life a good? This question is found everywhere in the Bible, and from the very first pages it receives a powerful and amazing answer. The life which God gives man is quite different from the life of all other living creatures, inasmuch as man, although formed from the dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7, 3:19; Job 34:15; Ps 103:14; 104:29), is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory (cf. Gen 1:26-27; Ps 8:6). This is what Saint Irenaeus of Lyons wanted to emphasize in his celebrated definition: "Man, living man, is the glory of God".²³ Man has been given a sublime dignity, based on the intimate bond which unites him to his Creator: in man there shines forth a reflection of God himself.

The Book of Genesis affirms this when, in the first account of creation, it places man at the summit of God's creative activity, as its crown, at the culmination of a process which leads from indistinct chaos to the most perfect of creatures. Everything in creation is ordered to man and everything is made subject to him: "Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over... every living thing" (1:28); this is God's command to the man and the woman. A similar message is found also in the other account of creation: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). We see here a clear affirmation of the primacy of man over things; these are made subject to him and entrusted to his responsible care, whereas for no reason can he be made subject to other men and almost reduced to the level of a thing.

In the biblical narrative, the difference between man and other creatures is shown above all by the fact that only the creation of man is presented as the result of a special decision on the part of God, a deliberation to establish a particular and specific bond with the Creator: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). The life which God offers to man is a gift by which God shares something of himself with his creature.

Israel would ponder at length the meaning of this particular bond between man and God. The Book of Sirach too recognizes that God, in creating human beings, "endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own

image" (17:3). The biblical author sees as part of this image not only man's dominion over the world but also those spiritual faculties which are distinctively human, such as reason, discernment between good and evil, and free will: "He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil" (Sir 17:7). The ability to attain truth and freedom are human prerogatives inasmuch as man is created in the image of his Creator, God who is true and just (cf. Dt 32:4). Man alone, among all visible creatures, is "capable of knowing and loving his Creator".²⁴ The life which God bestows upon man is much more than mere existence in time. It is a drive towards fullness of life; it is the seed of an existence which transcends the very limits of time: "For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity" (Wis 2:23).

35. The Yahwist account of creation expresses the same conviction. This ancient narrative speaks of a divine breath which is breathed into man so that he may come to life: "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7).

The divine origin of this spirit of life explains the perennial dissatisfaction which man feels throughout his days on earth. Because he is made by God and bears within himself an indelible imprint of God, man is naturally drawn to God. When he heeds the deepest yearnings of the heart, every man must make his own the words of truth expressed by Saint Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you".²⁵

How very significant is the dissatisfaction which marks man's life in Eden as long as his sole point of reference is the world of plants and animals (cf. Gen 2:20). Only the appearance of the woman, a being who is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones (cf. Gen 2:23), and in whom the spirit of God the Creator is also alive, can satisfy the need for interpersonal dialogue, so vital for human existence. In the other, whether man or woman, there is a reflection of God himself, the definitive goal and fulfilment of every person.

"What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?", the Psalmist wonders (Ps 8:4). Compared to the immensity of the universe, man is very small, and yet this very contrast reveals his greatness: "You have made him little less than a god, and crown him with glory and honour" (Ps 8:5). The glory of God shines on the face of man. In man the Creator finds his rest, as Saint Ambrose comments with a sense of awe: "The sixth day is finished and the creation of the world ends with the formation of that masterpiece which is man, who exercises dominion over all living creatures and is as it were the crown of the universe and the supreme beauty of every created being. Truly we should maintain a reverential silence, since the Lord rested from every work he had undertaken in the world. He rested then in the depths of man, he rested in man's mind and in his thought; after all, he had created man endowed with reason, capable of imitating him, of emulating his virtue, of hungering for heavenly graces. In these his gifts God reposes, who has said: 'Upon whom shall I rest, if not upon the one who is humble, contrite in spirit and trembles at my word?' (Is 66:1-2). I thank the Lord our God who has created so wonderful a work in which to take his rest".²⁶

36. Unfortunately, God's marvellous plan was marred by the appearance of sin in history. Through sin, man rebels against his Creator and ends up by worshipping creatures: "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25). As a result man not only deforms the image of God in his own person, but is tempted to offences against it in others as well, replacing relationships of communion by attitudes of distrust, indifference, hostility and even murderous hatred. When God is not acknowledged as God, the profound meaning of man is betrayed and communion between people is compromised.

In the life of man, God's image shines forth anew and is again revealed in all its fullness at the coming of the Son of God in human flesh. "Christ is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), he "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb 1:3). He is the perfect image of the Father.

The plan of life given to the first Adam finds at last its fulfilment in Christ. Whereas the disobedience of Adam had ruined and marred God's plan for human life and introduced death into the world, the redemptive obedience of Christ is the source of grace poured out upon the human race, opening wide to everyone the gates of the kingdom of life (cf. Rom 5:12-21). As the Apostle Paul states: "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45).

All who commit themselves to following Christ are given the fullness of life: the divine image is restored, renewed and brought to perfection in them. God's plan for human beings is this, that they should "be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). Only thus, in the splendour of this image, can man be freed from the slavery of idolatry, rebuild lost fellowship and rediscover his true identity.

"Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn 11:26): the gift of eternal life

37. The life which the Son of God came to give to human beings cannot be reduced to mere existence in time. The life which was always "in him" and which is the "light of men" (Jn 1:4) consists in being begotten of God and sharing in the fullness of his love: "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn 1:12-13).

Sometimes Jesus refers to this life which he came to give simply as "life", and he presents being born of God as a necessary condition if man is to attain the end for which God has created him: "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3). To give this life is the real object of Jesus' mission: he is the one who "comes down from

heaven, and gives life to the world" (Jn 6:33). Thus can he truly say: "He who follows me... will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12).

At other times, Jesus speaks of "eternal life". Here the adjective does more than merely evoke a perspective which is beyond time. The life which Jesus promises and gives is "eternal" because it is a full participation in the life of the "Eternal One". Whoever believes in Jesus and enters into communion with him has eternal life (cf. Jn 3:15; 6:40) because he hears from Jesus the only words which reveal and communicate to his existence the fullness of life. These are the "words of eternal life" which Peter acknowledges in his confession of faith: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68-69). Jesus himself, addressing the Father in the great priestly prayer, declares what eternal life consists in: "This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). To know God and his Son is to accept the mystery of the loving communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit into one's own life, which even now is open to eternal life because it shares in the life of God.

38. Eternal life is therefore the life of God himself and at the same time the life of the children of God. As they ponder this unexpected and inexpressible truth which comes to us from God in Christ, believers cannot fail to be filled with ever new wonder and unbounded gratitude. They can say in the words of the Apostle John: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.... Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:1-2).

Here the Christian truth about life becomes most sublime. The dignity of this life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact that it comes from God, but also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God in knowledge and love of him. In the light of this truth Saint Irenaeus qualifies and completes his praise of man: "the glory of God" is indeed, "man, living man", but "the life of man consists in the vision of God".²⁷

Immediate consequences arise from this for human life in its earthly state, in which, for that matter, eternal life already springs forth and begins to grow. Although man instinctively loves life because it is a good, this love will find further inspiration and strength, and new breadth and depth, in the divine dimensions of this good. Similarly, the love which every human being has for life cannot be reduced simply to a desire to have sufficient space for self-expression and for entering into relationships with others; rather, it develops in a joyous awareness that life can become the "place" where God manifests himself, where we meet him and enter into communion with him. The life which Jesus gives in no way lessens the value of our existence in time; it takes it and directs it to its final destiny: "I am the resurrection and the life... whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn 11:25-26).

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"From man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting" (Gen 9:5): reverence and love for every human life

39. Man's life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills. God himself makes this clear to Noah after the Flood: "For your own lifeblood, too, I will demand an accounting... and from man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting for human life" (Gen 9:5). The biblical text is concerned to emphasize how the sacredness of life has its foundation in God and in his creative activity: "For God made man in his own image" (Gen 9:6).

Human life and death are thus in the hands of God, in his power: "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind", exclaims Job (12:10). "The Lord brings to death and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam 2:6). He alone can say: "It is I who bring both death and life" (Dt 32:39).

But God does not exercise this power in an arbitrary and threatening way, but rather as part of his care and loving concern for his creatures. If it is true that human life is in the hands of God, it is no less true that these are loving hands, like those of a mother who accepts, nurtures and takes care of her child: "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul" (Ps 131:2; cf. Is 49:15; 66:12-13; Hos 11:4). Thus Israel does not see in the history of peoples and in the destiny of individuals the outcome of mere chance or of blind fate, but rather the results of a loving plan by which God brings together all the possibilities of life and opposes the powers of death arising from sin: "God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist" (Wis 1:13-14).

40. The sacredness of life gives rise to its inviolability, written from the beginning in man's heart, in his conscience. The question: "What have you done?" (Gen 4:10), which God addresses to Cain after he has killed his brother Abel, interprets the experience of every person: in the depths of his conscience, man is always reminded of the inviolability of life-his own life and that of others-as something which does not belong to him, because it is the property and gift of God the Creator and Father.

The commandment regarding the inviolability of human life reverberates at the heart of the "ten words" in the covenant of Sinai (cf. Ex 34:28). In the first place that commandment prohibits murder: "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13); "do not slay the innocent and righteous" (Ex 23:7). But, as is brought out in Israel's later legislation, it also prohibits all personal injury inflicted on another (cf. Ex 21:12-27). Of course we must recognize that in the Old Testament this sense

of the value of life, though already quite marked, does not yet reach the refinement found in the Sermon on the Mount. This is apparent in some aspects of the current penal legislation, which provided for severe forms of corporal punishment and even the death penalty. But the overall message, which the New Testament will bring to perfection, is a forceful appeal for respect for the inviolability of physical life and the integrity of the person. It culminates in the positive commandment which obliges us to be responsible for our neighbour as for ourselves: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18).

41. The commandment "You shall not kill", included and more fully expressed in the positive command of love for one's neighbour, is reaffirmed in all its force by the Lord Jesus. To the rich young man who asks him: "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?", Jesus replies: "If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:16, 17). And he quotes, as the first of these: "You shall not kill" (Mt 19:18). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demands from his disciples a righteousness which surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees, also with regard to respect for life: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment'. But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Mt 5:21-22).

By his words and actions Jesus further unveils the positive requirements of the commandment regarding the inviolability of life. These requirements were already present in the Old Testament, where legislation dealt with protecting and defending life when it was weak and threatened: in the case of foreigners, widows, orphans, the sick and the poor in general, including children in the womb (cf. Ex 21:22; 22:20-26). With Jesus these positive requirements assume new force and urgency, and are revealed in all their breadth and depth: they range from caring for the life of one's brother (whether a blood brother, someone belonging to the same people, or a foreigner living in the land of Israel) to showing concern for the stranger, even to the point of loving one's enemy.

A stranger is no longer a stranger for the person who must become a neighbour to someone in need, to the point of accepting responsibility for his life, as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows so clearly (cf. Lk 10:25-37). Even an enemy ceases to be an enemy for the person who is obliged to love him (cf. Mt 5:38-48; Lk 6:27-35), to "do good" to him (cf. Lk 6:27, 33, 35) and to respond to his immediate needs promptly and with no expectation of repayment (cf. Lk 6:34-35). The height of this love is to pray for one's enemy. By so doing we achieve harmony with the providential love of God: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:44-45; cf. Lk 6:28, 35).

Thus the deepest element of God's commandment to protect human life is the requirement to show reverence and love for every person and the life of every person. This is the teaching which the Apostle Paul, echoing the words of Jesus, addresses to the Christians in Rome: "The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet', and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:9-10).

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28): man's responsibility for life

42. To defend and promote life, to show reverence and love for it, is a task which God entrusts to every man, calling him as his living image to share in his own lordship over the world: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'" (Gen 1:28).

The biblical text clearly shows the breadth and depth of the lordship which God bestows on man. It is a matter first of all of dominion over the earth and over every living creature, as the Book of Wisdom makes clear: "O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy... by your wisdom you have formed man, to have dominion over the creatures you have made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness" (Wis 9:1, 2-3). The Psalmist too extols the dominion given to man as a sign of glory and honour from his Creator: "You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea" (Ps 8:6-8).

As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question-ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to "human ecology" properly speaking²⁸ - which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life. In fact, "the dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use and misuse', or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to 'eat of the fruit of the tree' (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity".²⁹

43. A certain sharing by man in God's lordship is also evident in the specific responsibility which he is given for human life as such. It is a responsibility which reaches its highest point in the giving of life through procreation by man and woman in marriage. As the Second Vatican Council teaches: "God himself who said, 'It is not good for man to be

alone' (Gen 2:18) and 'who made man from the beginning male and female' (Mt 19:4), wished to share with man a certain special participation in his own creative work. Thus he blessed male and female saying: 'Increase and multiply' (Gen 1:28). 30

By speaking of "a certain special participation" of man and woman in the "creative work" of God, the Council wishes to point out that having a child is an event which is deeply human and full of religious meaning, insofar as it involves both the spouses, who form "one flesh" (Gen 2:24), and God who makes himself present. As I wrote in my Letter to Families: "When a new person is born of the conjugal union of the two, he brings with him into the world a particular image and likeness of God himself: the genealogy of the person is inscribed in the very biology of generation. In affirming that the spouses, as parents, cooperate with God the Creator in conceiving and giving birth to a new human being, we are not speaking merely with reference to the laws of biology. Instead, we wish to emphasize that God himself is present in human fatherhood and motherhood quite differently than he is present in all other instances of begetting 'on earth'. Indeed, God alone is the source of that 'image and likeness' which is proper to the human being, as it was received at Creation. Begetting is the continuation of Creation". 31

This is what the Bible teaches in direct and eloquent language when it reports the joyful cry of the first woman, "the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). Aware that God has intervened, Eve exclaims: "I have begotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1). In procreation therefore, through the communication of life from parents to child, God's own image and likeness is transmitted, thanks to the creation of the immortal soul. 32 The beginning of the "book of the genealogy of Adam" expresses it in this way: "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and called them man when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" (Gen 5:1-3). It is precisely in their role as co-workers with God who transmits his image to the new creature that we see the greatness of couples who are ready "to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Saviour, who through them will enlarge and enrich his own family day by day". 33 This is why the Bishop Amphilochius extolled "holy matrimony, chosen and elevated above all other earthly gifts" as "the begetter of humanity, the creator of images of God". 34

Thus, a man and woman joined in matrimony become partners in a divine undertaking: through the act of procreation, God's gift is accepted and a new life opens to the future.

But over and above the specific mission of parents, the task of accepting and serving life involves everyone; and this task must be fulfilled above all towards life when it is at its weakest. It is Christ himself who reminds us of this when he asks to be loved and served in his brothers and sisters who are suffering in any way: the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned... Whatever is done to each of them is done to Christ himself (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

"For you formed my inmost being" (Ps 139:13): the dignity of the unborn child

44. Human life finds itself most vulnerable when it enters the world and when it leaves the realm of time to embark upon eternity. The word of God frequently repeats the call to show care and respect, above all where life is undermined by sickness and old age. Although there are no direct and explicit calls to protect human life at its very beginning, specifically life not yet born, and life nearing its end, this can easily be explained by the fact that the mere possibility of harming, attacking, or actually denying life in these circumstances is completely foreign to the religious and cultural way of thinking of the People of God.

In the Old Testament, sterility is dreaded as a curse, while numerous offspring are viewed as a blessing: "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward" (Ps 127:3; cf. Ps 128:3-4). This belief is also based on Israel's awareness of being the people of the Covenant, called to increase in accordance with the promise made to Abraham: "Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them... so shall your descendants be" (Gen 15:5). But more than anything else, at work here is the certainty that the life which parents transmit has its origins in God. We see this attested in the many biblical passages which respectfully and lovingly speak of conception, of the forming of life in the mother's womb, of giving birth and of the intimate connection between the initial moment of life and the action of God the Creator.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer 1:5): the life of every individual, from its very beginning, is part of God's plan. Job, from the depth of his pain, stops to contemplate the work of God who miraculously formed his body in his mother's womb. Here he finds reason for trust, and he expresses his belief that there is a divine plan for his life: "You have fashioned and made me; will you then turn and destroy me? Remember that you have made me of clay; and will you turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love; and your care has preserved my spirit" (Job 10:8-12). Expressions of awe and wonder at God's intervention in the life of a child in its mother's womb occur again and again in the Psalms. 35

How can anyone think that even a single moment of this marvellous process of the unfolding of life could be separated from the wise and loving work of the Creator, and left prey to human caprice? Certainly the mother of the seven brothers did not think so; she professes her faith in God, both the source and guarantee of life from its very conception, and the foundation of the hope of new life beyond death: "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was

not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws" (2 Mac 7:22-23).

45. The New Testament revelation confirms the indisputable recognition of the value of life from its very beginning. The exaltation of fruitfulness and the eager expectation of life resound in the words with which Elizabeth rejoices in her pregnancy: "The Lord has looked on me... to take away my reproach among men" (Lk 1:25). And even more so, the value of the person from the moment of conception is celebrated in the meeting between the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, and between the two children whom they are carrying in the womb. It is precisely the children who reveal the advent of the Messianic age: in their meeting, the redemptive power of the presence of the Son of God among men first becomes operative. As Saint Ambrose writes: "The arrival of Mary and the blessings of the Lord's presence are also speedily declared... Elizabeth was the first to hear the voice; but John was the first to experience grace. She heard according to the order of nature; he leaped because of the mystery. She recognized the arrival of Mary; he the arrival of the Lord. The woman recognized the woman's arrival; the child, that of the child. The women speak of grace; the babies make it effective from within to the advantage of their mothers who, by a double miracle, prophesy under the inspiration of their children. The infant leaped, the mother was filled with the Spirit. The mother was not filled before the son, but after the son was filled with the Holy Spirit, he filled his mother too".³⁶

"I kept my faith even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted' " (Ps 116:10): life in old age and at times of suffering

46. With regard to the last moments of life too, it would be anachronistic to expect biblical revelation to make express reference to present-day issues concerning respect for elderly and sick persons, or to condemn explicitly attempts to hasten their end by force. The cultural and religious context of the Bible is in no way touched by such temptations; indeed, in that context the wisdom and experience of the elderly are recognized as a unique source of enrichment for the family and for society.

Old age is characterized by dignity and surrounded with reverence (cf. 2 Mac 6:23). The just man does not seek to be delivered from old age and its burden; on the contrary his prayer is this: "You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth... so even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, till I proclaim your might to all the generations to come" (Ps 71:5, 18). The ideal of the Messianic age is presented as a time when "no more shall there be... an old man who does not fill out his days" (Is 65:20).

In old age, how should one face the inevitable decline of life? How should one act in the face of death? The believer knows that his life is in the hands of God: "You, O Lord, hold my lot" (cf. Ps 16:5), and he accepts from God the need to die: "This is the decree from the Lord for all flesh, and how can you reject the good pleasure of the Most High?" (Sir 41:3-4). Man is not the master of life, nor is he the master of death. In life and in death, he has to entrust himself completely to the "good pleasure of the Most High", to his loving plan.

In moments of sickness too, man is called to have the same trust in the Lord and to renew his fundamental faith in the One who "heals all your diseases" (cf. Ps 103:3). When every hope of good health seems to fade before a person's eyes so as to make him cry out: "My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass" (Ps 102:11)- even then the believer is sustained by an unshakable faith in God's life-giving power. Illness does not drive such a person to despair and to seek death, but makes him cry out in hope: "I kept my faith, even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted' " (Ps 116:10); "O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the pit" (Ps 30:2-3).

47. The mission of Jesus, with the many healings he performed, shows God's great concern even for man's bodily life. Jesus, as "the physician of the body and of the spirit",³⁷ was sent by the Father to proclaim the good news to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted (cf. Lk 4:18; Is 61:1). Later, when he sends his disciples into the world, he gives them a mission, a mission in which healing the sick goes hand in hand with the proclamation of the Gospel: "And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Mt 10:7-8; cf. Mk 6:13; 16:18).

Certainly the life of the body in its earthly state is not an absolute good for the believer, especially as he may be asked to give up his life for a greater good. As Jesus says: "Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mk 8:35). The New Testament gives many different examples of this. Jesus does not hesitate to sacrifice himself and he freely makes of his life an offering to the Father (cf. Jn 10:17) and to those who belong to him (cf. Jn 10:15). The death of John the Baptist, precursor of the Saviour, also testifies that earthly existence is not an absolute good; what is more important is remaining faithful to the word of the Lord even at the risk of one's life (cf. Mk 6:17-29). Stephen, losing his earthly life because of his faithful witness to the Lord's Resurrection, follows in the Master's footsteps and meets those who are stoning him with words of forgiveness (cf. Acts 7:59-60), thus becoming the first of a countless host of martyrs whom the Church has venerated since the very beginning.

No one, however, can arbitrarily choose whether to live or die; the absolute master of such a decision is the Creator alone, in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

"All who hold her fast will live" (Bar 4:1): from the law of Sinai to the gift of the Spirit

48. Life is indelibly marked by a truth of its own. By accepting God's gift, man is obliged to maintain life in this truth which is essential to it. To detach oneself from this truth is to condemn oneself to meaninglessness and unhappiness, and possibly to become a threat to the existence of others, since the barriers guaranteeing respect for life and the defence of life, in every circumstance, have been broken down.

The truth of life is revealed by God's commandment. The word of the Lord shows concretely the course which life must follow if it is to respect its own truth and to preserve its own dignity. The protection of life is not only ensured by the specific commandment "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17); the entire Law of the Lord serves to protect life, because it reveals that truth in which life finds its full meaning.

It is not surprising, therefore, that God's Covenant with his people is so closely linked to the perspective of life, also in its bodily dimension. In that Covenant, God's commandment is offered as the path of life: "I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of" (Dt 30:15-16). What is at stake is not only the land of Canaan and the existence of the people of Israel, but also the world of today and of the future, and the existence of all humanity. In fact, it is altogether impossible for life to remain authentic and complete once it is detached from the good; and the good, in its turn, is essentially bound to the commandments of the Lord, that is, to the "law of life" (Sir 17:11). The good to be done is not added to life as a burden which weighs on it, since the very purpose of life is that good and only by doing it can life be built up.

It is thus the Law as a whole which fully protects human life. This explains why it is so hard to remain faithful to the commandment "You shall not kill" when the other "words of life" (cf. Acts 7:38) with which this commandment is bound up are not observed. Detached from this wider framework, the commandment is destined to become nothing more than an obligation imposed from without, and very soon we begin to look for its limits and try to find mitigating factors and exceptions. Only when people are open to the fullness of the truth about God, man and history will the words "You shall not kill" shine forth once more as a good for man in himself and in his relations with others. In such a perspective we can grasp the full truth of the passage of the Book of Deuteronomy which Jesus repeats in reply to the first temptation: "Man does not live by bread alone, but... by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (Dt 8:3; cf. Mt 4:4).

It is by listening to the word of the Lord that we are able to live in dignity and justice. It is by observing the Law of God that we are able to bring forth fruits of life and happiness: "All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die" (Bar 4:1).

49. The history of Israel shows how difficult it is to remain faithful to the Law of life which God has inscribed in human hearts and which he gave on Sinai to the people of the Covenant. When the people look for ways of living which ignore God's plan, it is the Prophets in particular who forcefully remind them that the Lord alone is the authentic source of life. Thus Jeremiah writes: "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (2:13). The Prophets point an accusing finger at those who show contempt for life and violate people's rights: "They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth" (Amos 2:7); "they have filled this place with the blood of innocents" (Jer 19:4). Among them, the Prophet Ezekiel frequently condemns the city of Jerusalem, calling it "the bloody city" (22:2; 24:6, 9), the "city that sheds blood in her own midst" (22:3).

But while the Prophets condemn offences against life, they are concerned above all to awaken hope for a new principle of life, capable of bringing about a renewed relationship with God and with others, and of opening up new and extraordinary possibilities for understanding and carrying out all the demands inherent in the Gospel of life. This will only be possible thanks to the gift of God who purifies and renews: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezek 36:25-26; cf. Jer 31:34). This "new heart" will make it possible to appreciate and achieve the deepest and most authentic meaning of life: namely, that of being a gift which is fully realized in the giving of self. This is the splendid message about the value of life which comes to us from the figure of the Servant of the Lord: "When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his life... he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (Is 53:10, 11).

It is in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth that the Law is fulfilled and that a new heart is given through his Spirit. Jesus does not deny the Law but brings it to fulfilment (cf. Mt 5:17): the Law and the Prophets are summed up in the golden rule of mutual love (cf. Mt 7:12). In Jesus the Law becomes once and for all the "gospel", the good news of God's lordship over the world, which brings all life back to its roots and its original purpose. This is the New Law, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2), and its fundamental expression, following the example of the Lord who gave his life for his friends (cf. Jn 15:13), is the gift of self in love for one's brothers and sisters: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 Jn 3:14). This is the law of freedom, joy and blessedness.

"They shall look on him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19:37): the Gospel of life is brought to fulfilment on the tree of the Cross

50. At the end of this chapter, in which we have reflected on the Christian message about life, I would like to pause with each one of you to contemplate the One who was pierced and who draws all people to himself (cf. Jn 19:37; 12:32). Looking at "the spectacle" of the Cross (cf. Lk 23:48) we shall discover in this glorious tree the fulfilment and the complete revelation of the whole Gospel of life.

In the early afternoon of Good Friday, "there was darkness over the whole land... while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two" (Lk 23:44, 45). This is the symbol of a great cosmic disturbance and a massive conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil, between life and death. Today we too find ourselves in the midst of a dramatic conflict between the "culture of death" and the "culture of life". But the glory of the Cross is not overcome by this darkness; rather, it shines forth ever more radiantly and brightly, and is revealed as the centre, meaning and goal of all history and of every human life.

Jesus is nailed to the Cross and is lifted up from the earth. He experiences the moment of his greatest "powerlessness", and his life seems completely delivered to the derision of his adversaries and into the hands of his executioners: he is mocked, jeered at, insulted (cf. Mk 15:24-36). And yet, precisely amid all this, having seen him breathe his last, the Roman centurion exclaims: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39). It is thus, at the moment of his greatest weakness, that the the Son of God is revealed for who he is: on the Cross his glory is made manifest.

By his death, Jesus sheds light on the meaning of the life and death of every human being. Before he dies, Jesus prays to the Father, asking forgiveness for his persecutors (cf. Lk 23:34), and to the criminal who asks him to remember him in his kingdom he replies: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43). After his death "the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised" (Mt 27:52). The salvation wrought by Jesus is the bestowal of life and resurrection. Throughout his earthly life, Jesus had indeed bestowed salvation by healing and doing good to all (cf. Acts 10:38). But his miracles, healings and even his raising of the dead were signs of another salvation, a salvation which consists in the forgiveness of sins, that is, in setting man free from his greatest sickness and in raising him to the very life of God.

On the Cross, the miracle of the serpent lifted up by Moses in the desert (Jn 3:14-15; cf. Num 21:8-9) is renewed and brought to full and definitive perfection. Today too, by looking upon the one who was pierced, every person whose life is threatened encounters the sure hope of finding freedom and redemption.

51. But there is yet another particular event which moves me deeply when I consider it. "When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished'; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (Jn 19:30). Afterwards, the Roman soldier "pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (Jn 19:34).

Everything has now reached its complete fulfilment. The "giving up" of the spirit describes Jesus' death, a death like that of every other human being, but it also seems to allude to the "gift of the Spirit", by which Jesus ransoms us from death and opens before us a new life.

It is the very life of God which is now shared with man. It is the life which through the Sacraments of the Church—symbolized by the blood and water flowing from Christ's side—is continually given to God's children, making them the people of the New Covenant. From the Cross, the source of life, the "people of life" is born and increases.

The contemplation of the Cross thus brings us to the very heart of all that has taken place. Jesus, who upon entering into the world said: "I have come, O God, to do your will" (cf. Heb 10:9), made himself obedient to the Father in everything and, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1), giving himself completely for them.

He who had come "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45), attains on the Cross the heights of love: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). And he died for us while we were yet sinners (cf. Rom 5:8).

In this way Jesus proclaims that life finds its centre, its meaning and its fulfilment when it is given up.

At this point our meditation becomes praise and thanksgiving, and at the same time urges us to imitate Christ and follow in his footsteps (cf. 1 Pt 2:21).

We too are called to give our lives for our brothers and sisters, and thus to realize in the fullness of truth the meaning and destiny of our existence.

We shall be able to do this because you, O Lord, have given us the example and have bestowed on us the power of your Spirit. We shall be able to do this if every day, with you and like you, we are obedient to the Father and do his will.

Grant, therefore, that we may listen with open and generous hearts to every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. Thus we shall learn not only to obey the commandment not to kill human life, but also to revere life, to love it and to foster it.

CHAPTER III - YOU SHALL NOT KILL GOD'S HOLY LAW

"If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17): Gospel and commandment

52. "And behold, one came up to him, saying, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?' " (Mt 19:6). Jesus replied, "If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17). The Teacher is speaking about eternal life, that is, a sharing in the life of God himself. This life is attained through the observance of the Lord's commandments, including the commandment "You shall not kill". This is the first precept from the Decalogue which Jesus quotes to the young man who asks him what commandments he should observe: "Jesus said, 'You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal...'" (Mt 19:18).

God's commandment is never detached from his love: it is always a gift meant for man's growth and joy. As such, it represents an essential and indispensable aspect of the Gospel, actually becoming "gospel" itself: joyful good news. The Gospel of life is both a great gift of God and an exacting task for humanity. It gives rise to amazement and gratitude in the person graced with freedom, and it asks to be welcomed, preserved and esteemed, with a deep sense of responsibility. In giving life to man, God demands that he love, respect and promote life. The gift thus becomes a commandment, and the commandment is itself a gift.

Man, as the living image of God, is willed by his Creator to be ruler and lord. Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes that "God made man capable of carrying out his role as king of the earth... Man was created in the image of the One who governs the universe. Everything demonstrates that from the beginning man's nature was marked by royalty... Man is a king. Created to exercise dominion over the world, he was given a likeness to the king of the universe; he is the living image who participates by his dignity in the perfection of the divine archetype".³⁸ Called to be fruitful and multiply, to subdue the earth and to exercise dominion over other lesser creatures (cf. Gen 1:28), man is ruler and lord not only over things but especially over himself,³⁹ and in a certain sense, over the life which he has received and which he is able to transmit through procreation, carried out with love and respect for God's plan. Man's lordship however is not absolute, but ministerial: it is a real reflection of the unique and infinite lordship of God. Hence man must exercise it with wisdom and love, sharing in the boundless wisdom and love of God. And this comes about through obedience to God's holy Law: a free and joyful obedience (cf. Ps 119), born of and fostered by an awareness that the precepts of the Lord are a gift of grace entrusted to man always and solely for his good, for the preservation of his personal dignity and the pursuit of his happiness.

With regard to things, but even more with regard to life, man is not the absolute master and final judge, but rather-and this is where his incomparable greatness lies-he is the "minister of God's plan".⁴⁰

Life is entrusted to man as a treasure which must not be squandered, as a talent which must be used well. Man must render an account of it to his Master (cf. Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:12-27).

"From man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting for human life" (Gen 9:5): human life is sacred and inviolable

53. "Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves 'the creative action of God', and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being".⁴¹ With these words the Instruction *Donum Vitae* sets forth the central content of God's revelation on the sacredness and inviolability of human life.

Sacred Scripture in fact presents the precept "You shall not kill" as a divine commandment (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17). As I have already emphasized, this commandment is found in the Decalogue, at the heart of the Covenant which the Lord makes with his chosen people; but it was already contained in the original covenant between God and humanity after the purifying punishment of the Flood, caused by the spread of sin and violence (cf. Gen 9:5-6).

God proclaims that he is absolute Lord of the life of man, who is formed in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-28). Human life is thus given a sacred and inviolable character, which reflects the inviolability of the Creator himself. Precisely for this reason God will severely judge every violation of the commandment "You shall not kill", the commandment which is at the basis of all life together in society. He is the "goel", the defender of the innocent (cf. Gen 4:9-15; Is 41:14; Jer 50:34; Ps 19:14). God thus shows that he does not delight in the death of the living (cf. Wis 1:13). Only Satan can delight therein: for through his envy death entered the world (cf. Wis 2:24). He who is "a murderer from the beginning", is also "a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44). By deceiving man he leads him to projects of sin and death, making them appear as goals and fruits of life.

54. As explicitly formulated, the precept "You shall not kill" is strongly negative: it indicates the extreme limit which can never be exceeded. Implicitly, however, it encourages a positive attitude of absolute respect for life; it leads to the promotion of life and to progress along the way of a love which gives, receives and serves. The people of the Covenant, although slowly and with some contradictions, progressively matured in this way of thinking, and thus prepared for the great proclamation of Jesus that the commandment to love one's neighbour is like the commandment to love God; "on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (cf. Mt 22:36-40). Saint Paul emphasizes that "the commandment... you shall not kill... and any other commandment, are summed up in this phrase: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Rom 13:9; cf. Gal 5:14). Taken up and brought to fulfilment in the New Law, the commandment "You shall not kill" stands as an indispensable condition for being able "to enter life" (cf. Mt 19:16-19).

In this same perspective, the words of the Apostle John have a categorical ring: "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn 3:15).

From the beginning, the living Tradition of the Church-as shown by the Didache, the most ancient non-biblical Christian writing-categorically repeated the commandment "You shall not kill": "There are two ways, a way of life and a way of death; there is a great difference between them... In accordance with the precept of the teaching: you shall not kill... you shall not put a child to death by abortion nor kill it once it is born... The way of death is this:... they show no compassion for the poor, they do not suffer with the suffering, they do not acknowledge their Creator, they kill their children and by abortion cause God's creatures to perish; they drive away the needy, oppress the suffering, they are advocates of the rich and unjust judges of the poor; they are filled with every sin. May you be able to stay ever apart, o children, from all these sins!". 42

As time passed, the Church's Tradition has always consistently taught the absolute and unchanging value of the commandment "You shall not kill". It is a known fact that in the first centuries, murder was put among the three most serious sins-along with apostasy and adultery-and required a particularly heavy and lengthy public penance before the repentant murderer could be granted forgiveness and readmission to the ecclesial community.

55. This should not cause surprise: to kill a human being, in whom the image of God is present, is a particularly serious sin. Only God is the master of life! Yet from the beginning, faced with the many and often tragic cases which occur in the life of individuals and society, Christian reflection has sought a fuller and deeper understanding of what God's commandment prohibits and prescribes. 43 There are in fact situations in which values proposed by God's Law seem to involve a genuine paradox. This happens for example in the case of legitimate defence, in which the right to protect one's own life and the duty not to harm someone else's life are difficult to reconcile in practice. Certainly, the intrinsic value of life and the duty to love oneself no less than others are the basis of a true right to self-defence. The demanding commandment of love of neighbour, set forth in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus, itself presupposes love of oneself as the basis of comparison: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mk 12:31). Consequently, no one can renounce the right to self-defence out of lack of love for life or for self. This can only be done in virtue of a heroic love which deepens and transfigures the love of self into a radical self-offering, according to the spirit of the Gospel Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:38-40). The sublime example of this self-offering is the Lord Jesus himself.

Moreover, "legitimate defence can be not only a right but a grave duty for someone responsible for another's life, the common good of the family or of the State".44 Unfortunately it happens that the need to render the aggressor incapable of causing harm sometimes involves taking his life. In this case, the fatal outcome is attributable to the aggressor whose action brought it about, even though he may not be morally responsible because of a lack of the use of reason. 45

56. This is the context in which to place the problem of the death penalty. On this matter there is a growing tendency, both in the Church and in civil society, to demand that it be applied in a very limited way or even that it be abolished completely. The problem must be viewed in the context of a system of penal justice ever more in line with human dignity and thus, in the end, with God's plan for man and society. The primary purpose of the punishment which society inflicts is "to redress the disorder caused by the offence".46 Public authority must redress the violation of personal and social rights by imposing on the offender an adequate punishment for the crime, as a condition for the offender to regain the exercise of his or her freedom. In this way authority also fulfils the purpose of defending public order and ensuring people's safety, while at the same time offering the offender an incentive and help to change his or her behaviour and be rehabilitated. 47

It is clear that, for these purposes to be achieved, the nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent.

In any event, the principle set forth in the new Catechism of the Catholic Church remains valid: "If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority must limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person".48

57. If such great care must be taken to respect every life, even that of criminals and unjust aggressors, the commandment "You shall not kill" has absolute value when it refers to the innocent person. And all the more so in the case of weak and defenceless human beings, who find their ultimate defence against the arrogance and caprice of others only in the absolute binding force of God's commandment.

In effect, the absolute inviolability of innocent human life is a moral truth clearly taught by Sacred Scripture, constantly upheld in the Church's Tradition and consistently proposed by her Magisterium. This consistent teaching is the evident result of that "supernatural sense of the faith" which, inspired and sustained by the Holy Spirit, safeguards the People of God from error when "it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals".49

Faced with the progressive weakening in individual consciences and in society of the sense of the absolute and grave moral illicitness of the direct taking of all innocent human life, especially at its beginning and at its end, the Church's Magisterium has spoken out with increasing frequency in defence of the sacredness and inviolability of human life. The Papal Magisterium, particularly insistent in this regard, has always been seconded by that of the Bishops, with

numerous and comprehensive doctrinal and pastoral documents issued either by Episcopal Conferences or by individual Bishops. The Second Vatican Council also addressed the matter forcefully, in a brief but incisive passage. 50 Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral. This doctrine, based upon that unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15), is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium. 51

The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end. It is in fact a grave act of disobedience to the moral law, and indeed to God himself, the author and guarantor of that law; it contradicts the fundamental virtues of justice and charity. "Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying. Furthermore, no one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care, nor can he or she consent to it, either explicitly or implicitly. Nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such an action".52

As far as the right to life is concerned, every innocent human being is absolutely equal to all others. This equality is the basis of all authentic social relationships which, to be truly such, can only be founded on truth and justice, recognizing and protecting every man and woman as a person and not as an object to be used. Before the moral norm which prohibits the direct taking of the life of an innocent human being "there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the 'poorest of the poor' on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal".53

"Your eyes beheld my unformed substance" (Ps 139:16): the unspeakable crime of abortion

58. Among all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable. The Second Vatican Council defines abortion, together with infanticide, as an "unspeakable crime".54

But today, in many people's consciences, the perception of its gravity has become progressively obscured. The acceptance of abortion in the popular mind, in behaviour and even in law itself, is a telling sign of an extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense, which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, even when the fundamental right to life is at stake. Given such a grave situation, we need now more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception. In this regard the reproach of the Prophet is extremely straightforward: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Is 5:20). Especially in the case of abortion there is a widespread use of ambiguous terminology, such as "interruption of pregnancy", which tends to hide abortion's true nature and to attenuate its seriousness in public opinion. Perhaps this linguistic phenomenon is itself a symptom of an uneasiness of conscience. But no word has the power to change the reality of things: procured abortion is the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth.

The moral gravity of procured abortion is apparent in all its truth if we recognize that we are dealing with murder and, in particular, when we consider the specific elements involved. The one eliminated is a human being at the very beginning of life. No one more absolutely innocent could be imagined. In no way could this human being ever be considered an aggressor, much less an unjust aggressor! He or she is weak, defenceless, even to the point of lacking that minimal form of defence consisting in the poignant power of a newborn baby's cries and tears. The unborn child is totally entrusted to the protection and care of the woman carrying him or her in the womb. And yet sometimes it is precisely the mother herself who makes the decision and asks for the child to be eliminated, and who then goes about having it done.

It is true that the decision to have an abortion is often tragic and painful for the mother, insofar as the decision to rid herself of the fruit of conception is not made for purely selfish reasons or out of convenience, but out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family. Sometimes it is feared that the child to be born would live in such conditions that it would be better if the birth did not take place. Nevertheless, these reasons and others like them, however serious and tragic, can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being.

59. As well as the mother, there are often other people too who decide upon the death of the child in the womb. In the first place, the father of the child may be to blame, not only when he directly pressures the woman to have an abortion, but also when he indirectly encourages such a decision on her part by leaving her alone to face the problems of pregnancy: 55 in this way the family is thus mortally wounded and profaned in its nature as a community of love and in its vocation to be the "sanctuary of life". Nor can one overlook the pressures which sometimes come from the wider family circle and from friends. Sometimes the woman is subjected to such strong pressure that she feels psychologically forced to have an abortion: certainly in this case moral responsibility lies particularly with those who

have directly or indirectly obliged her to have an abortion. Doctors and nurses are also responsible, when they place at the service of death skills which were acquired for promoting life.

But responsibility likewise falls on the legislators who have promoted and approved abortion laws, and, to the extent that they have a say in the matter, on the administrators of the health-care centres where abortions are performed. A general and no less serious responsibility lies with those who have encouraged the spread of an attitude of sexual permissiveness and a lack of esteem for motherhood, and with those who should have ensured-but did not-effective family and social policies in support of families, especially larger families and those with particular financial and educational needs. Finally, one cannot overlook the network of complicity which reaches out to include international institutions, foundations and associations which systematically campaign for the legalization and spread of abortion in the world. In this sense abortion goes beyond the responsibility of individuals and beyond the harm done to them, and takes on a distinctly social dimension. It is a most serious wound inflicted on society and its culture by the very people who ought to be society's promoters and defenders. As I wrote in my Letter to Families, "we are facing an immense threat to life: not only to the life of individuals but also to that of civilization itself".⁵⁶ We are facing what can be called a "structure of sin" which opposes human life not yet born.

60. Some people try to justify abortion by claiming that the result of conception, at least up to a certain number of days, cannot yet be considered a personal human life. But in fact, "from the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already. This has always been clear, and... modern genetic science offers clear confirmation. It has demonstrated that from the first instant there is established the programme of what this living being will be: a person, this individual person with his characteristic aspects already well determined. Right from fertilization the adventure of a human life begins, and each of its capacities requires time-a rather lengthy time-to find its place and to be in a position to act".⁵⁷ Even if the presence of a spiritual soul cannot be ascertained by empirical data, the results themselves of scientific research on the human embryo provide "a valuable indication for discerning by the use of reason a personal presence at the moment of the first appearance of a human life: how could a human individual not be a human person?".⁵⁸

Furthermore, what is at stake is so important that, from the standpoint of moral obligation, the mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolutely clear prohibition of any intervention aimed at killing a human embryo. Precisely for this reason, over and above all scientific debates and those philosophical affirmations to which the Magisterium has not expressly committed itself, the Church has always taught and continues to teach that the result of human procreation, from the first moment of its existence, must be guaranteed that unconditional respect which is morally due to the human being in his or her totality and unity as body and spirit: "The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life".⁵⁹

61. The texts of Sacred Scripture never address the question of deliberate abortion and so do not directly and specifically condemn it. But they show such great respect for the human being in the mother's womb that they require as a logical consequence that God's commandment "You shall not kill" be extended to the unborn child as well.

Human life is sacred and inviolable at every moment of existence, including the initial phase which precedes birth. All human beings, from their mothers' womb, belong to God who searches them and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny shapeless embryos and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow whose days are numbered and whose vocation is even now written in the "book of life" (cf. Ps 139: 1, 13-16). There too, when they are still in their mothers' womb-as many passages of the Bible bear witness⁶⁰-they are the personal objects of God's loving and fatherly providence.

Christian Tradition-as the Declaration issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith points out so well⁶¹-is clear and unanimous, from the beginning up to our own day, in describing abortion as a particularly grave moral disorder. From its first contacts with the Greco-Roman world, where abortion and infanticide were widely practised, the first Christian community, by its teaching and practice, radically opposed the customs rampant in that society, as is clearly shown by the Didache mentioned earlier.⁶²

Among the Greek ecclesiastical writers, Athenagoras records that Christians consider as murderesses women who have recourse to abortifacient medicines, because children, even if they are still in their mother's womb, "are already under the protection of Divine Providence".⁶³ Among the Latin authors, Tertullian affirms: "It is anticipated murder to prevent someone from being born; it makes little difference whether one kills a soul already born or puts it to death at birth. He who will one day be a man is a man already".⁶⁴

Throughout Christianity's two thousand year history, this same doctrine has been constantly taught by the Fathers of the Church and by her Pastors and Doctors. Even scientific and philosophical discussions about the precise moment of the infusion of the spiritual soul have never given rise to any hesitation about the moral condemnation of abortion.

62. The more recent Papal Magisterium has vigorously reaffirmed this common doctrine. Pius XI in particular, in his Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, rejected the specious justifications of abortion.⁶⁵ Pius XII excluded all direct abortion, i.e., every act tending directly to destroy human life in the womb "whether such destruction is intended as an end or only as a means to an end".⁶⁶ John XXIII reaffirmed that human life is sacred because "from its very beginning it directly

involves God's creative activity".⁶⁷ The Second Vatican Council, as mentioned earlier, sternly condemned abortion: "From the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes".⁶⁸

The Church's canonical discipline, from the earliest centuries, has inflicted penal sanctions on those guilty of abortion. This practice, with more or less severe penalties, has been confirmed in various periods of history. The 1917 Code of Canon Law punished abortion with excommunication.⁶⁹ The revised canonical legislation continues this tradition when it decrees that "a person who actually procures an abortion incurs automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication".⁷⁰ The excommunication affects all those who commit this crime with knowledge of the penalty attached, and thus includes those accomplices without whose help the crime would not have been committed.⁷¹ By this reiterated sanction, the Church makes clear that abortion is a most serious and dangerous crime, thereby encouraging those who commit it to seek without delay the path of conversion. In the Church the purpose of the penalty of excommunication is to make an individual fully aware of the gravity of a certain sin and then to foster genuine conversion and repentance.

Given such unanimity in the doctrinal and disciplinary tradition of the Church, Paul VI was able to declare that this tradition is unchanged and unchangeable.⁷² Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, in communion with the Bishops—who on various occasions have condemned abortion and who in the aforementioned consultation, albeit dispersed throughout the world, have shown unanimous agreement concerning this doctrine—I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.⁷³

No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church.

63. This evaluation of the morality of abortion is to be applied also to the recent forms of intervention on human embryos which, although carried out for purposes legitimate in themselves, inevitably involve the killing of those embryos. This is the case with experimentation on embryos, which is becoming increasingly widespread in the field of biomedical research and is legally permitted in some countries. Although "one must uphold as licit procedures carried out on the human embryo which respect the life and integrity of the embryo and do not involve disproportionate risks for it, but rather are directed to its healing, the improvement of its condition of health, or its individual survival",⁷⁴ it must nonetheless be stated that the use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born, just as to every⁷⁵ person.

This moral condemnation also regards procedures that exploit living human embryos and fetuses—sometimes specifically "produced" for this purpose by in vitro fertilization—either to be used as "biological material" or as providers of organs or tissue for transplants in the treatment of certain diseases. The killing of innocent human creatures, even if carried out to help others, constitutes an absolutely unacceptable act.

Special attention must be given to evaluating the morality of prenatal diagnostic techniques which enable the early detection of possible anomalies in the unborn child. In view of the complexity of these techniques, an accurate and systematic moral judgment is necessary. When they do not involve disproportionate risks for the child and the mother, and are meant to make possible early therapy or even to favour a serene and informed acceptance of the child not yet born, these techniques are morally licit. But since the possibilities of prenatal therapy are today still limited, it not infrequently happens that these techniques are used with a eugenic intention which accepts selective abortion in order to prevent the birth of children affected by various types of anomalies. Such an attitude is shameful and utterly reprehensible, since it presumes to measure the value of a human life only within the parameters of "normality" and physical well-being, thus opening the way to legitimizing infanticide and euthanasia as well.

And yet the courage and the serenity with which so many of our brothers and sisters suffering from serious disabilities lead their lives when they are shown acceptance and love bears eloquent witness to what gives authentic value to life, and makes it, even in difficult conditions, something precious for them and for others. The Church is close to those married couples who, with great anguish and suffering, willingly accept gravely handicapped children. She is also grateful to all those families which, through adoption, welcome children abandoned by their parents because of disabilities or illnesses.

"It is I who bring both death and life" (Dt 32:39): the tragedy of euthanasia

64. At the other end of life's spectrum, men and women find themselves facing the mystery of death. Today, as a result of advances in medicine and in a cultural context frequently closed to the transcendent, the experience of dying is marked by new features. When the prevailing tendency is to value life only to the extent that it brings pleasure and well-being, suffering seems like an unbearable setback, something from which one must be freed at all costs. Death is considered "senseless" if it suddenly interrupts a life still open to a future of new and interesting experiences. But it

becomes a "rightful liberation" once life is held to be no longer meaningful because it is filled with pain and inexorably doomed to even greater suffering.

Furthermore, when he denies or neglects his fundamental relationship to God, man thinks he is his own rule and measure, with the right to demand that society should guarantee him the ways and means of deciding what to do with his life in full and complete autonomy. It is especially people in the developed countries who act in this way: they feel encouraged to do so also by the constant progress of medicine and its ever more advanced techniques. By using highly sophisticated systems and equipment, science and medical practice today are able not only to attend to cases formerly considered untreatable and to reduce or eliminate pain, but also to sustain and prolong life even in situations of extreme frailty, to resuscitate artificially patients whose basic biological functions have undergone sudden collapse, and to use special procedures to make organs available for transplanting.

In this context the temptation grows to have recourse to euthanasia, that is, to take control of death and bring it about before its time, "gently" ending one's own life or the life of others. In reality, what might seem logical and humane, when looked at more closely is seen to be senseless and inhumane. Here we are faced with one of the more alarming symptoms of the "culture of death", which is advancing above all in prosperous societies, marked by an attitude of excessive preoccupation with efficiency and which sees the growing number of elderly and disabled people as intolerable and too burdensome. These people are very often isolated by their families and by society, which are organized almost exclusively on the basis of criteria of productive efficiency, according to which a hopelessly impaired life no longer has any value.

65. For a correct moral judgment on euthanasia, in the first place a clear definition is required. Euthanasia in the strict sense is understood to be an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering. "Euthanasia's terms of reference, therefore, are to be found in the intention of the will and in the methods used".⁷⁶

Euthanasia must be distinguished from the decision to forego so-called "aggressive medical treatment", in other words, medical procedures which no longer correspond to the real situation of the patient, either because they are by now disproportionate to any expected results or because they impose an excessive burden on the patient and his family. In such situations, when death is clearly imminent and inevitable, one can in conscience "refuse forms of treatment that would only secure a precarious and burdensome prolongation of life, so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted".⁷⁷ Certainly there is a moral obligation to care for oneself and to allow oneself to be cared for, but this duty must take account of concrete circumstances. It needs to be determined whether the means of treatment available are objectively proportionate to the prospects for improvement. To forego extraordinary or disproportionate means is not the equivalent of suicide or euthanasia; it rather expresses acceptance of the human condition in the face of death.⁷⁸

In modern medicine, increased attention is being given to what are called "methods of palliative care", which seek to make suffering more bearable in the final stages of illness and to ensure that the patient is supported and accompanied in his or her ordeal. Among the questions which arise in this context is that of the licitness of using various types of painkillers and sedatives for relieving the patient's pain when this involves the risk of shortening life. While praise may be due to the person who voluntarily accepts suffering by forgoing treatment with pain-killers in order to remain fully lucid and, if a believer, to share consciously in the Lord's Passion, such "heroic" behaviour cannot be considered the duty of everyone. Pius XII affirmed that it is licit to relieve pain by narcotics, even when the result is decreased consciousness and a shortening of life, "if no other means exist, and if, in the given circumstances, this does not prevent the carrying out of other religious and moral duties".⁷⁹ In such a case, death is not willed or sought, even though for reasonable motives one runs the risk of it: there is simply a desire to ease pain effectively by using the analgesics which medicine provides. All the same, "it is not right to deprive the dying person of consciousness without a serious reason":⁸⁰ as they approach death people ought to be able to satisfy their moral and family duties, and above all they ought to be able to prepare in a fully conscious way for their definitive meeting with God.

Taking into account these distinctions, in harmony with the Magisterium of my Predecessors⁸¹ and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.⁸²

Depending on the circumstances, this practice involves the malice proper to suicide or murder.

66. Suicide is always as morally objectionable as murder. The Church's tradition has always rejected it as a gravely evil choice.⁸³ Even though a certain psychological, cultural and social conditioning may induce a person to carry out an action which so radically contradicts the innate inclination to life, thus lessening or removing subjective responsibility, suicide, when viewed objectively, is a gravely immoral act. In fact, it involves the rejection of love of self and the renunciation of the obligation of justice and charity towards one's neighbour, towards the communities to which one belongs, and towards society as a whole.⁸⁴ In its deepest reality, suicide represents a rejection of God's absolute sovereignty over life and death, as proclaimed in the prayer of the ancient sage of Israel: "You have power over life and death; you lead men down to the gates of Hades and back again" (Wis 16:13; cf. Tob 13:2).

To concur with the intention of another person to commit suicide and to help in carrying it out through so-called "assisted suicide" means to cooperate in, and at times to be the actual perpetrator of, an injustice which can never be excused, even if it is requested. In a remarkably relevant passage Saint Augustine writes that "it is never licit to kill another: even if he should wish it, indeed if he request it because, hanging between life and death, he begs for help in freeing the soul struggling against the bonds of the body and longing to be released; nor is it licit even when a sick person is no longer able to live".⁸⁵ Even when not motivated by a selfish refusal to be burdened with the life of someone who is suffering, euthanasia must be called a false mercy, and indeed a disturbing "perversion" of mercy. True "compassion" leads to sharing another's pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear. Moreover, the act of euthanasia appears all the more perverse if it is carried out by those, like relatives, who are supposed to treat a family member with patience and love, or by those, such as doctors, who by virtue of their specific profession are supposed to care for the sick person even in the most painful terminal stages.

The choice of euthanasia becomes more serious when it takes the form of a murder committed by others on a person who has in no way requested it and who has never consented to it. The height of arbitrariness and injustice is reached when certain people, such as physicians or legislators, arrogate to themselves the power to decide who ought to live and who ought to die. Once again we find ourselves before the temptation of Eden: to become like God who "knows good and evil" (cf. Gen 3:5). God alone has the power over life and death: "It is I who bring both death and life" (Dt 32:39; cf. 2 Kg 5:7; 1 Sam 2:6). But he only exercises this power in accordance with a plan of wisdom and love. When man usurps this power, being enslaved by a foolish and selfish way of thinking, he inevitably uses it for injustice and death. Thus the life of the person who is weak is put into the hands of the one who is strong; in society the sense of justice is lost, and mutual trust, the basis of every authentic interpersonal relationship, is undermined at its root.

67. Quite different from this is the way of love and true mercy, which our common humanity calls for, and upon which faith in Christ the Redeemer, who died and rose again, sheds ever new light. The request which arises from the human heart in the supreme confrontation with suffering and death, especially when faced with the temptation to give up in utter desperation, is above all a request for companionship, sympathy and support in the time of trial. It is a plea for help to keep on hoping when all human hopes fail. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us: "It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence becomes most acute" and yet "man rightly follows the intuition of his heart when he abhors and repudiates the absolute ruin and total disappearance of his own person. Man rebels against death because he bears in himself an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to mere matter".⁸⁶

This natural aversion to death and this incipient hope of immortality are illumined and brought to fulfilment by Christian faith, which both promises and offers a share in the victory of the Risen Christ: it is the victory of the One who, by his redemptive death, has set man free from death, "the wages of sin" (Rom 6:23), and has given him the Spirit, the pledge of resurrection and of life (cf. Rom 8:11). The certainty of future immortality and hope in the promised resurrection cast new light on the mystery of suffering and death, and fill the believer with an extraordinary capacity to trust fully in the plan of God.

The Apostle Paul expressed this newness in terms of belonging completely to the Lord who embraces every human condition: "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:7-8). Dying to the Lord means experiencing one's death as the supreme act of obedience to the Father (cf. Phil 2:8), being ready to meet death at the "hour" willed and chosen by him (cf. Jn 13:1), which can only mean when one's earthly pilgrimage is completed. Living to the Lord also means recognizing that suffering, while still an evil and a trial in itself, can always become a source of good. It becomes such if it is experienced for love and with love through sharing, by God's gracious gift and one's own personal and free choice, in the suffering of Christ Crucified. In this way, the person who lives his suffering in the Lord grows more fully conformed to him (cf. Phil 3:10; 1 Pet 2:21) and more closely associated with his redemptive work on behalf of the Church and humanity. ⁸⁷ This was the experience of Saint Paul, which every person who suffers is called to relive: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24).

"We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29): civil law and the moral law

68. One of the specific characteristics of present-day attacks on human life-as has already been said several times-consists in the trend to demand a legal justification for them, as if they were rights which the State, at least under certain conditions, must acknowledge as belonging to citizens. Consequently, there is a tendency to claim that it should be possible to exercise these rights with the safe and free assistance of doctors and medical personnel.

It is often claimed that the life of an unborn child or a seriously disabled person is only a relative good: according to a proportionalist approach, or one of sheer calculation, this good should be compared with and balanced against other goods. It is even maintained that only someone present and personally involved in a concrete situation can correctly judge the goods at stake: consequently, only that person would be able to decide on the morality of his choice. The State therefore, in the interest of civil coexistence and social harmony, should respect this choice, even to the point of permitting abortion and euthanasia.

At other times, it is claimed that civil law cannot demand that all citizens should live according to moral standards higher than what all citizens themselves acknowledge and share. Hence the law should always express the opinion and will of the majority of citizens and recognize that they have, at least in certain extreme cases, the right even to abortion and euthanasia. Moreover the prohibition and the punishment of abortion and euthanasia in these cases would inevitably lead-so it is said-to an increase of illegal practices: and these would not be subject to necessary control by society and would be carried out in a medically unsafe way. The question is also raised whether supporting a law which in practice cannot be enforced would not ultimately undermine the authority of all laws.

Finally, the more radical views go so far as to maintain that in a modern and pluralistic society people should be allowed complete freedom to dispose of their own lives as well as of the lives of the unborn: it is asserted that it is not the task of the law to choose between different moral opinions, and still less can the law claim to impose one particular opinion to the detriment of others.

69.

In any case, in the democratic culture of our time it is commonly held that the legal system of any society should limit itself to taking account of and accepting the convictions of the majority. It should therefore be based solely upon what the majority itself considers moral and actually practises. Furthermore, if it is believed that an objective truth shared by all is de facto unattainable, then respect for the freedom of the citizens-who in a democratic system are considered the true rulers-would require that on the legislative level the autonomy of individual consciences be acknowledged. Consequently, when establishing those norms which are absolutely necessary for social coexistence, the only determining factor should be the will of the majority, whatever this may be. Hence every politician, in his or her activity, should clearly separate the realm of private conscience from that of public conduct.

As a result we have what appear to be two diametrically opposed tendencies. On the one hand, individuals claim for themselves in the moral sphere the most complete freedom of choice and demand that the State should not adopt or impose any ethical position but limit itself to guaranteeing maximum space for the freedom of each individual, with the sole limitation of not infringing on the freedom and rights of any other citizen. On the other hand, it is held that, in the exercise of public and professional duties, respect for other people's freedom of choice requires that each one should set aside his or her own convictions in order to satisfy every demand of the citizens which is recognized and guaranteed by law; in carrying out one's duties the only moral criterion should be what is laid down by the law itself. Individual responsibility is thus turned over to the civil law, with a renouncing of personal conscience, at least in the public sphere.

70.

At the basis of all these tendencies lies the ethical relativism which characterizes much of present-day culture. There are those who consider such relativism an essential condition of democracy, inasmuch as it alone is held to guarantee tolerance, mutual respect between people and acceptance of the decisions of the majority, whereas moral norms considered to be objective and binding are held to lead to authoritarianism and intolerance.

But it is precisely the issue of respect for life which shows what misunderstandings and contradictions, accompanied by terrible practical consequences, are concealed in this position.

It is true that history has known cases where crimes have been committed in the name of "truth". But equally grave crimes and radical denials of freedom have also been committed and are still being committed in the name of "ethical relativism". When a parliamentary or social majority decrees that it is legal, at least under certain conditions, to kill unborn human life, is it not really making a "tyrannical" decision with regard to the weakest and most defenceless of human beings? Everyone's conscience rightly rejects those crimes against humanity of which our century has had such sad experience. But would these crimes cease to be crimes if, instead of being committed by unscrupulous tyrants, they were legitimated by popular consensus?

Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality. Fundamentally, democracy is a "system" and as such is a means and not an end. Its "moral" value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behaviour, must be subject: in other words, its morality depends on the morality of the ends which it pursues and of the means which it employs. If today we see an almost universal consensus with regard to the value of democracy, this is to be considered a positive "sign of the times", as the Church's Magisterium has frequently noted. 88 But the value of democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes. Of course, values such as the dignity of every human person, respect for inviolable and inalienable human rights, and the adoption of the "common good" as the end and criterion regulating political life are certainly fundamental and not to be ignored.

The basis of these values cannot be provisional and changeable "majority" opinions, but only the acknowledgment of an objective moral law which, as the "natural law" written in the human heart, is the obligatory point of reference for civil law itself. If, as a result of a tragic obscuring of the collective conscience, an attitude of scepticism were to succeed in bringing into question even the fundamental principles of the moral law, the democratic system itself would be shaken in its foundations, and would be reduced to a mere mechanism for regulating different and opposing interests on a purely empirical basis. 89

Some might think that even this function, in the absence of anything better, should be valued for the sake of peace in society. While one acknowledges some element of truth in this point of view, it is easy to see that without an objective

moral grounding not even democracy is capable of ensuring a stable peace, especially since peace which is not built upon the values of the dignity of every individual and of solidarity between all people frequently proves to be illusory. Even in participatory systems of government, the regulation of interests often occurs to the advantage of the most powerful, since they are the ones most capable of manoeuvring not only the levers of power but also of shaping the formation of consensus. In such a situation, democracy easily becomes an empty word.

71. It is therefore urgently necessary, for the future of society and the development of a sound democracy, to rediscover those essential and innate human and moral values which flow from the very truth of the human being and express and safeguard the dignity of the person: values which no individual, no majority and no State can ever create, modify or destroy, but must only acknowledge, respect and promote.

Consequently there is a need to recover the basic elements of a vision of the relationship between civil law and moral law, which are put forward by the Church, but which are also part of the patrimony of the great juridical traditions of humanity.

Certainly the purpose of civil law is different and more limited in scope than that of the moral law. But "in no sphere of life can the civil law take the place of conscience or dictate norms concerning things which are outside its competence", 90 which is that of ensuring the common good of people through the recognition and defence of their fundamental rights, and the promotion of peace and of public morality. 91 The real purpose of civil law is to guarantee an ordered social coexistence in true justice, so that all may "lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (1 Tim 2:2). Precisely for this reason, civil law must ensure that all members of society enjoy respect for certain fundamental rights which innately belong to the person, rights which every positive law must recognize and guarantee. First and fundamental among these is the inviolable right to life of every innocent human being. While public authority can sometimes choose not to put a stop to something which-were it prohibited- would cause more serious harm, 92 it can never presume to legitimize as a right of individuals-even if they are the majority of the members of society-an offence against other persons caused by the disregard of so fundamental a right as the right to life. The legal toleration of abortion or of euthanasia can in no way claim to be based on respect for the conscience of others, precisely because society has the right and the duty to protect itself against the abuses which can occur in the name of conscience and under the pretext of freedom. 93

In the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII pointed out that "it is generally accepted today that the common good is best safeguarded when personal rights and duties are guaranteed. The chief concern of civil authorities must therefore be to ensure that these rights are recognized, respected, co-ordinated, defended and promoted, and that each individual is enabled to perform his duties more easily. For 'to safeguard the inviolable rights of the human person, and to facilitate the performance of his duties, is the principal duty of every public authority'. Thus any government which refused to recognize human rights or acted in violation of them, would not only fail in its duty; its decrees would be wholly lacking in binding force".94

72. The doctrine on the necessary conformity of civil law with the moral law is in continuity with the whole tradition of the Church. This is clear once more from John XXIII's Encyclical: "Authority is a postulate of the moral order and derives from God. Consequently, laws and decrees enacted in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience...; indeed, the passing of such laws undermines the very nature of authority and results in shameful abuse".95 This is the clear teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who writes that "human law is law inasmuch as it is in conformity with right reason and thus derives from the eternal law. But when a law is contrary to reason, it is called an unjust law; but in this case it ceases to be a law and becomes instead an act of violence".96 And again: "Every law made by man can be called a law insofar as it derives from the natural law. But if it is somehow opposed to the natural law, then it is not really a law but rather a corruption of the law".97

Now the first and most immediate application of this teaching concerns a human law which disregards the fundamental right and source of all other rights which is the right to life, a right belonging to every individual. Consequently, laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law. It might be objected that such is not the case in euthanasia, when it is requested with full awareness by the person involved. But any State which made such a request legitimate and authorized it to be carried out would be legalizing a case of suicide-murder, contrary to the fundamental principles of absolute respect for life and of the protection of every innocent life. In this way the State contributes to lessening respect for life and opens the door to ways of acting which are destructive of trust in relations between people. Laws which authorize and promote abortion and euthanasia are therefore radically opposed not only to the good of the individual but also to the common good; as such they are completely lacking in authentic juridical validity. Disregard for the right to life, precisely because it leads to the killing of the person whom society exists to serve, is what most directly conflicts with the possibility of achieving the common good. Consequently, a civil law authorizing abortion or euthanasia ceases by that very fact to be a true, morally binding civil law.

73. Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection. From the very beginnings of the Church, the apostolic preaching reminded Christians of their duty to obey legitimately constituted public authorities (cf. Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-14), but at the same time it firmly warned that "we must obey

God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). In the Old Testament, precisely in regard to threats against life, we find a significant example of resistance to the unjust command of those in authority. After Pharaoh ordered the killing of all newborn males, the Hebrew midwives refused. "They did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live" (Ex 1:17). But the ultimate reason for their action should be noted: "the midwives feared God" (ibid.). It is precisely from obedience to God—to whom alone is due that fear which is acknowledgment of his absolute sovereignty—that the strength and the courage to resist unjust human laws are born. It is the strength and the courage of those prepared even to be imprisoned or put to the sword, in the certainty that this is what makes for "the endurance and faith of the saints" (Rev 13:10).

In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore never licit to obey it, or to "take part in a propaganda campaign in favour of such a law, or vote for it".⁹⁸

A particular problem of conscience can arise in cases where a legislative vote would be decisive for the passage of a more restrictive law, aimed at limiting the number of authorized abortions, in place of a more permissive law already passed or ready to be voted on. Such cases are not infrequent. It is a fact that while in some parts of the world there continue to be campaigns to introduce laws favouring abortion, often supported by powerful international organizations, in other nations—particularly those which have already experienced the bitter fruits of such permissive legislation—there are growing signs of a rethinking in this matter. In a case like the one just mentioned, when it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality. This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects.

74. The passing of unjust laws often raises difficult problems of conscience for morally upright people with regard to the issue of cooperation, since they have a right to demand not to be forced to take part in morally evil actions. Sometimes the choices which have to be made are difficult; they may require the sacrifice of prestigious professional positions or the relinquishing of reasonable hopes of career advancement. In other cases, it can happen that carrying out certain actions, which are provided for by legislation that overall is unjust, but which in themselves are indifferent, or even positive, can serve to protect human lives under threat. There may be reason to fear, however, that willingness to carry out such actions will not only cause scandal and weaken the necessary opposition to attacks on life, but will gradually lead to further capitulation to a mentality of permissiveness.

In order to shed light on this difficult question, it is necessary to recall the general principles concerning cooperation in evil actions. Christians, like all people of good will, are called upon under grave obligation of conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God's law. Indeed, from the moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil. Such cooperation occurs when an action, either by its very nature or by the form it takes in a concrete situation, can be defined as a direct participation in an act against innocent human life or a sharing in the immoral intention of the person committing it. This cooperation can never be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it. Each individual in fact has moral responsibility for the acts which he personally performs; no one can be exempted from this responsibility, and on the basis of it everyone will be judged by God himself (cf. Rom 2:6; 14:12).

To refuse to take part in committing an injustice is not only a moral duty; it is also a basic human right. Were this not so, the human person would be forced to perform an action intrinsically incompatible with human dignity, and in this way human freedom itself, the authentic meaning and purpose of which are found in its orientation to the true and the good, would be radically compromised. What is at stake therefore is an essential right which, precisely as such, should be acknowledged and protected by civil law. In this sense, the opportunity to refuse to take part in the phases of consultation, preparation and execution of these acts against life should be guaranteed to physicians, health-care personnel, and directors of hospitals, clinics and convalescent facilities. Those who have recourse to conscientious objection must be protected not only from legal penalties but also from any negative effects on the legal, disciplinary, financial and professional plane.

"You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10:27): "promote" life

75. God's commandments teach us the way of life. The negative moral precepts, which declare that the choice of certain actions is morally unacceptable, have an absolute value for human freedom: they are valid always and everywhere, without exception. They make it clear that the choice of certain ways of acting is radically incompatible with the love of God and with the dignity of the person created in his image. Such choices cannot be redeemed by the goodness of any intention or of any consequence; they are irrevocably opposed to the bond between persons; they contradict the fundamental decision to direct one's life to God.

99

In this sense, the negative moral precepts have an extremely important positive function. The "no" which they unconditionally require makes clear the absolute limit beneath which free individuals cannot lower themselves. At the same time they indicate the minimum which they must respect and from which they must start out in order to say "yes" over and over again, a "yes" which will gradually embrace the entire horizon of the good (cf. Mt 5:48). The

commandments, in particular the negative moral precepts, are the beginning and the first necessary stage of the journey towards freedom. As Saint Augustine writes, "the beginning of freedom is to be free from crimes... like murder, adultery, fornication, theft, fraud, sacrilege and so forth. Only when one stops committing these crimes (and no Christian should commit them), one begins to lift up one's head towards freedom. But this is only the beginning of freedom, not perfect freedom".¹⁰⁰

76. The commandment "You shall not kill" thus establishes the point of departure for the start of true freedom. It leads us to promote life actively, and to develop particular ways of thinking and acting which serve life. In this way we exercise our responsibility towards the persons entrusted to us and we show, in deeds and in truth, our gratitude to God for the great gift of life (cf. Ps 139:13-14).

The Creator has entrusted man's life to his responsible concern, not to make arbitrary use of it, but to preserve it with wisdom and to care for it with loving fidelity. The God of the Covenant has entrusted the life of every individual to his or her fellow human beings, brothers and sisters, according to the law of reciprocity in giving and receiving, of self-giving and of the acceptance of others. In the fullness of time, by taking flesh and giving his life for us, the Son of God showed what heights and depths this law of reciprocity can reach. With the gift of his Spirit, Christ gives new content and meaning to the law of reciprocity, to our being entrusted to one another. The Spirit who builds up communion in love creates between us a new fraternity and solidarity, a true reflection of the mystery of mutual self-giving and receiving proper to the Most Holy Trinity. The Spirit becomes the new law which gives strength to believers and awakens in them a responsibility for sharing the gift of self and for accepting others, as a sharing in the boundless love of Jesus Christ himself.

77. This new law also gives spirit and shape to the commandment "You shall not kill". For the Christian it involves an absolute imperative to respect, love and promote the life of every brother and sister, in accordance with the requirements of God's bountiful love in Jesus Christ. "He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn 3:16).

The commandment "You shall not kill", even in its more positive aspects of respecting, loving and promoting human life, is binding on every individual human being. It resounds in the moral conscience of everyone as an irrepressible echo of the original covenant of God the Creator with mankind. It can be recognized by everyone through the light of reason and it can be observed thanks to the mysterious working of the Spirit who, blowing where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8), comes to and involves every person living in this world.

It is therefore a service of love which we are all committed to ensure to our neighbour, that his or her life may be always defended and promoted, especially when it is weak or threatened. It is not only a personal but a social concern which we must all foster: a concern to make unconditional respect for human life the foundation of a renewed society.

We are asked to love and honour the life of every man and woman and to work with perseverance and courage so that our time, marked by all too many signs of death, may at last witness the establishment of a new culture of life, the fruit of the culture of truth and of love.

CHAPTER IV - YOU DID IT TO ME FOR A NEW CULTURE OF HUMAN LIFE

"You are God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet 2:9): a people of life and for life

78. The Church has received the Gospel as a proclamation and a source of joy and salvation. She has received it as a gift from Jesus, sent by the Father "to preach good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). She has received it through the Apostles, sent by Christ to the whole world (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19-20). Born from this evangelizing activity, the Church hears every day the echo of Saint Paul's words of warning: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16). As Paul VI wrote, "evangelization is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize".¹⁰¹

Evangelization is an all-embracing, progressive activity through which the Church participates in the prophetic, priestly and royal mission of the Lord Jesus. It is therefore inextricably linked to preaching, celebration and the service of charity. Evangelization is a profoundly ecclesial act, which calls all the various workers of the Gospel to action, according to their individual charisms and ministry.

This is also the case with regard to the proclamation of the Gospel of life, an integral part of that Gospel which is Jesus Christ himself. We are at the service of this Gospel, sustained by the awareness that we have received it as a gift and are sent to preach it to all humanity, "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). With humility and gratitude we know that we are the people of life and for life, and this is how we present ourselves to everyone.

79. We are the people of life because God, in his unconditional love, has given us the Gospel of life and by this same Gospel we have been transformed and saved. We have been ransomed by the "Author of life" (Acts 3:15) at the price of his precious blood (cf. 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet 1:19). Through the waters of Baptism we have been made a part of him (cf. Rom 6:4-5; Col 2:12), as branches which draw nourishment and fruitfulness from the one tree (cf. Jn 15:5).

Interiorly renewed by the grace of the Spirit, "who is the Lord and giver of life", we have become a people for life and we are called to act accordingly.

We have been sent. For us, being at the service of life is not a boast but rather a duty, born of our awareness of being "God's own people, that we may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light" (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). On our journey we are guided and sustained by the law of love: a love which has as its source and model the Son of God made man, who "by dying gave life to the world".¹⁰²

We have been sent as a people. Everyone has an obligation to be at the service of life. This is a properly "ecclesial" responsibility, which requires concerted and generous action by all the members and by all sectors of the Christian community. This community commitment does not however eliminate or lessen the responsibility of each individual, called by the Lord to "become the neighbour" of everyone: "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37).

Together we all sense our duty to preach the Gospel of life, to celebrate it in the Liturgy and in our whole existence, and to serve it with the various programmes and structures which support and promote life.

"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you" (1 Jn 1:3): proclaiming the Gospel of life

80. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us" (1 Jn 1:1, 3). Jesus is the only Gospel: we have nothing further to say or any other witness to bear.

To proclaim Jesus is itself to proclaim life. For Jesus is "the word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). In him "life was made manifest" (1 Jn 1:2); he himself is "the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1 Jn 1:2). By the gift of the Spirit, this same life has been bestowed on us. It is in being destined to life in its fullness, to "eternal life", that every person's earthly life acquires its full meaning.

Enlightened by this Gospel of life, we feel a need to proclaim it and to bear witness to it in all its marvellous newness. Since it is one with Jesus himself, who makes all things new¹⁰³ and conquers the "oldness" which comes from sin and leads to death,¹⁰⁴ this Gospel exceeds every human expectation and reveals the sublime heights to which the dignity of the human person is raised through grace. This is how Saint Gregory of Nyssa understands it: "Man, as a being, is of no account; he is dust, grass, vanity. But once he is adopted by the God of the universe as a son, he becomes part of the family of that Being, whose excellence and greatness no one can see, hear or understand. What words, thoughts or flight of the spirit can praise the superabundance of this grace? Man surpasses his nature: mortal, he becomes immortal; perishable, he becomes imperishable; fleeting, he becomes eternal; human, he becomes divine".¹⁰⁵

Gratitude and joy at the incomparable dignity of man impel us to share this message with everyone: "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us" (1 Jn 1:3). We need to bring the Gospel of life to the heart of every man and woman and to make it penetrate every part of society.

81. This involves above all proclaiming the core of this Gospel. It is the proclamation of a living God who is close to us, who calls us to profound communion with himself and awakens in us the certain hope of eternal life. It is the affirmation of the inseparable connection between the person, his life and his bodiliness. It is the presentation of human life as a life of relationship, a gift of God, the fruit and sign of his love. It is the proclamation that Jesus has a unique relationship with every person, which enables us to see in every human face the face of Christ. It is the call for a "sincere gift of self" as the fullest way to realize our personal freedom.

It also involves making clear all the consequences of this Gospel. These can be summed up as follows: human life, as a gift of God, is sacred and inviolable. For this reason procured abortion and euthanasia are absolutely unacceptable. Not only must human life not be taken, but it must be protected with loving concern. The meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love, and in this light human sexuality and procreation reach their true and full significance. Love also gives meaning to suffering and death; despite the mystery which surrounds them, they can become saving events. Respect for life requires that science and technology should always be at the service of man and his integral development. Society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person's life.

82. To be truly a people at the service of life we must propose these truths constantly and courageously from the very first proclamation of the Gospel, and thereafter in catechesis, in the various forms of preaching, in personal dialogue and in all educational activity. Teachers, catechists and theologians have the task of emphasizing the anthropological reasons upon which respect for every human life is based. In this way, by making the newness of the Gospel of life shine forth, we can also help everyone discover in the light of reason and of personal experience how the Christian message fully reveals what man is and the meaning of his being and existence. We shall find important points of contact and dialogue also with non-believers, in our common commitment to the establishment of a new culture of life. Faced with so many opposing points of view, and a widespread rejection of sound doctrine concerning human life, we can feel that Paul's entreaty to Timothy is also addressed to us: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching" (2 Tim 4:2). This exhortation should resound with special force in the hearts of those members of the Church who directly share, in different ways, in her mission as "teacher" of the truth. May it resound above all for us who are Bishops: we are the first ones called to be untiring preachers of the Gospel of life. We are also entrusted with the task of ensuring that the doctrine which is once again

being set forth in this Encyclical is faithfully handed on in its integrity. We must use appropriate means to defend the faithful from all teaching which is contrary to it. We need to make sure that in theological faculties, seminaries and Catholic

institutions sound doctrine is taught, explained and more fully investigated. 106 May Paul's exhortation strike a chord in all theologians, pastors, teachers and in all those responsible for catechesis and the formation of consciences. Aware of their specific role, may they never be so grievously irresponsible as to betray the truth and their own mission by proposing personal ideas contrary to the Gospel of life as faithfully presented and interpreted by the Magisterium.

In the proclamation of this Gospel, we must not fear hostility or unpopularity, and we must refuse any compromise or ambiguity which might conform us to the world's way of thinking (cf. Rom 12:2). We must be in the world but not of the world (cf. Jn 15:19; 17:16), drawing our strength from Christ, who by his Death and Resurrection has overcome the world (cf. Jn 16:33).

"I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made" (Ps 139:14): celebrating the Gospel of life

83. Because we have been sent into the world as a "people for life", our proclamation must also become a genuine celebration of the Gospel of life. This celebration, with the evocative power of its gestures, symbols and rites, should become a precious and significant setting in which the beauty and grandeur of this Gospel is handed on.

For this to happen, we need first of all to foster, in ourselves and in others, a contemplative outlook. 107 Such an outlook arises from faith in the God of life, who has created every individual as a "wonder" (cf. Ps 139:14). It is the outlook of those who see life in its deeper meaning, who grasp its utter gratuitousness, its beauty and its invitation to freedom and responsibility. It is the outlook of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the Creator and seeing in every person his living image (cf. Gen 1:27; Ps 8:5). This outlook does not give in to discouragement when confronted by those who are sick, suffering, outcast or at death's door. Instead, in all these situations it feels challenged to find meaning, and precisely in these circumstances it is open to perceiving in the face of every person a call to encounter, dialogue and solidarity.

It is time for all of us to adopt this outlook, and with deep religious awe to rediscover the ability to revere and honour every person, as Paul VI invited us to do in one of his first Christmas messages. 108 Inspired by this contemplative outlook, the new people of the redeemed cannot but respond with songs of joy, praise and thanksgiving for the priceless gift of life, for the mystery of every individual's call to share through Christ in the life of grace and in an existence of unending communion with God our Creator and Father.

84. To celebrate the Gospel of life means to celebrate the God of life, the God who gives life: "We must celebrate Eternal Life, from which every other life proceeds. From this, in proportion to its capacities, every being which in any way participates in life, receives life. This Divine Life, which is above every other life, gives and preserves life. Every life and every living movement proceed from this Life which transcends all life and every principle of life. It is to this that souls owe their incorruptibility; and because of this all animals and plants live, which receive only the faintest glimmer of life. To men, beings made of spirit and matter, Life grants life. Even if we should abandon Life, because of its overflowing love for man, it converts us and calls us back to itself. Not only this: it promises to bring us, soul and body, to perfect life, to immortality. It is too little to say that this Life is alive: it is the Principle of life, the Cause and sole Wellspring of life. Every living thing must contemplate it and give it praise: it is Life which overflows with life".¹⁰⁹

Like the Psalmist, we too, in our daily prayer as individuals and as a community, praise and bless God our Father, who knitted us together in our mother's womb, and saw and loved us while we were still without form (cf. Ps 139:13, 15-16). We exclaim with overwhelming joy: "I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works. You know me through and through" (Ps 139:14). Indeed, "despite its hardships, its hidden mysteries, its suffering and its inevitable frailty, this mortal life is a most beautiful thing, a marvel ever new and moving, an event worthy of being exalted in joy and glory".¹¹⁰ Moreover, man and his life appear to us not only as one of the greatest marvels of creation: for God has granted to man a dignity which is near to divine (Ps 8:5-6). In every child which is born and in every person who lives or dies we see the image of God's glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being, a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ.

We are called to express wonder and gratitude for the gift of life and to welcome, savour and share the Gospel of life not only in our personal and community prayer, but above all in the celebrations of the liturgical year. Particularly important in this regard are the Sacraments, the efficacious signs of the presence and saving action of the Lord Jesus in Christian life. The Sacraments make us sharers in divine life, and provide the spiritual strength necessary to experience life, suffering and death in their fullest meaning. Thanks to a genuine rediscovery and a better appreciation of the significance of these rites, our liturgical celebrations, especially celebrations of the Sacraments, will be ever more capable of expressing the full truth about birth, life, suffering and death, and will help us to live these moments as a participation in the Paschal Mystery of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

85.

In celebrating the Gospel of life we also need to appreciate and make good use of the wealth of gestures and symbols present in the traditions and customs of different cultures and peoples. There are special times and ways in which the

peoples of different nations and cultures express joy for a newborn life, respect for and protection of individual human lives, care for the suffering or needy, closeness to the elderly and the dying, participation in the sorrow of those who mourn, and hope and desire for immortality.

In view of this and following the suggestion made by the Cardinals in the Consistory of 1991, I propose that a Day for Life be celebrated each year in every country, as already established by some Episcopal Conferences. The celebration of this Day should be planned and carried out with the active participation of all sectors of the local Church. Its primary purpose should be to foster in individual consciences, in families, in the Church and in civil society a recognition of the meaning and value of human life at every stage and in every condition. Particular attention should be drawn to the seriousness of abortion and euthanasia, without neglecting other aspects of life which from time to time deserve to be given careful consideration, as occasion and circumstances demand.

86.

As part of the spiritual worship acceptable to God (cf. Rom 12:1), the Gospel of life is to be celebrated above all in daily living, which should be filled with self-giving love for others. In this way, our lives will become a genuine and responsible acceptance of the gift of life and a heartfelt song of praise and gratitude to God who has given us this gift. This is already happening in the many different acts of selfless generosity, often humble and hidden, carried out by men and women, children and adults, the young and the old, the healthy and the sick.

It is in this context, so humanly rich and filled with love, that heroic actions too are born. These are the most solemn celebration of the Gospel of life, for they proclaim it by the total gift of self. They are the radiant manifestation of the highest degree of love, which is to give one's life for the person loved (cf. Jn 15:13). They are a sharing in the mystery of the Cross, in which Jesus reveals the value of every person, and how life attains its fullness in the sincere gift of self. Over and above such outstanding moments, there is an everyday heroism, made up of gestures of sharing, big or small, which build up an authentic culture of life. A particularly praiseworthy example of such gestures is the donation of organs, performed in an ethically acceptable manner, with a view to offering a chance of health and even of life itself to the sick who sometimes have no other hope.

Part of this daily heroism is also the silent but effective and eloquent witness of all those "brave mothers who devote themselves to their own family without reserve, who suffer in giving birth to their children and who are ready to make any effort, to face any sacrifice, in order to pass on to them the best of themselves".¹¹¹ In living out their mission "these heroic women do not always find support in the world around them. On the contrary, the cultural models frequently promoted and broadcast by the media do not encourage motherhood. In the name of progress and modernity the values of fidelity, chastity, sacrifice, to which a host of Christian wives and mothers have borne and continue to bear outstanding witness, are presented as obsolete... We thank you, heroic mothers, for your invincible love! We thank you for your intrepid trust in God and in his love. We thank you for the sacrifice of your life... In the Paschal Mystery, Christ restores to you the gift you gave him. Indeed, he has the power to give you back the life you gave him as an offering".¹¹²

"What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works?" (Jas 2:14): serving the Gospel of life

87. By virtue of our sharing in Christ's royal mission, our support and promotion of human life must be accomplished through the service of charity, which finds expression in personal witness, various forms of volunteer work, social activity and political commitment. This is a particularly pressing need at the present time, when the "culture of death" so forcefully opposes the "culture of life" and often seems to have the upper hand. But even before that it is a need which springs from "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). As the Letter of James admonishes us: "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled', without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (2:14-17).

In our service of charity, we must be inspired and distinguished by a specific attitude: we must care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to become neighbours to everyone (cf. Lk 10:29-37), and to show special favour to those who are poorest, most alone and most in need. In helping the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned-as well as the child in the womb and the old person who is suffering or near death-we have the opportunity to serve Jesus. He himself said: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Hence we cannot but feel called to account and judged by the ever relevant words of Saint John Chrysostom: "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not neglect it when you find it naked. Do not do it homage here in the church with silk fabrics only to neglect it outside where it suffers cold and nakedness".¹¹³

Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to "show care" for all life and for the life of everyone. Indeed, at an even deeper level, we need to go to the very roots of life and love.

It is this deep love for every man and woman which has given rise down the centuries to an outstanding history of charity, a history which has brought into being in the Church and society many forms of service to life which evoke

admiration from all unbiased observers. Every Christian community, with a renewed sense of responsibility, must continue to write this history through various kinds of pastoral and social activity. To this end, appropriate and effective programmes of support for new life must be implemented, with special closeness to mothers who, even without the help of the father, are not afraid to bring their child into the world and to raise it. Similar care must be shown for the life of the marginalized or suffering, especially in its final phases.

88. All of this involves a patient and fearless work of education aimed at encouraging one and all to bear each other's burdens (cf. Gal 6:2). It requires a continuous promotion of vocations to service, particularly among the young. It involves the implementation of long-term practical projects and initiatives inspired by the Gospel.

Many are the means towards this end which need to be developed with skill and serious commitment. At the first stage of life, centres for natural methods of regulating fertility should be promoted as a valuable help to responsible parenthood, in which all individuals, and in the first place the child, are recognized and respected in their own right, and where every decision is guided by the ideal of the sincere gift of self. Marriage and family counselling agencies by their specific work of guidance and prevention, carried out in accordance with an anthropology consistent with the Christian vision of the person, of the couple and of sexuality, also offer valuable help in rediscovering the meaning of love and life, and in supporting and accompanying every family in its mission as the "sanctuary of life". Newborn life is also served by centres of assistance and homes or centres where new life receives a welcome. Thanks to the work of such centres, many unmarried mothers and couples in difficulty discover new hope and find assistance and support in overcoming hardship and the fear of accepting a newly conceived life or life which has just come into the world.

When life is challenged by conditions of hardship, maladjustment, sickness or rejection, other programmes-such as communities for treating drug addiction, residential communities for minors or the mentally ill, care and relief centres for AIDS patients, associations for solidarity especially towards the disabled-are eloquent expressions of what charity is able to devise in order to give everyone new reasons for hope and practical possibilities for life.

And when earthly existence draws to a close, it is again charity which finds the most appropriate means for enabling the elderly, especially those who can no longer look after themselves, and the terminally ill to enjoy genuinely humane assistance and to receive an adequate response to their needs, in particular their anxiety and their loneliness. In these cases the role of families is indispensable; yet families can receive much help from social welfare agencies and, if necessary, from recourse to palliative care, taking advantage of suitable medical and social services available in public institutions or in the home.

In particular, the role of hospitals, clinics and convalescent homes needs to be reconsidered. These should not merely be institutions where care is provided for the sick or the dying. Above all they should be places where suffering, pain and death are acknowledged and understood in their human and specifically Christian meaning. This must be especially evident and effective in institutes staffed by Religious or in any way connected with the Church.

89. Agencies and centres of service to life, and all other initiatives of support and solidarity which circumstances may from time to time suggest, need to be directed by people who are generous in their involvement and fully aware of the importance of the Gospel of life for the good of individuals and society.

A unique responsibility belongs to health-care personnel: doctors, pharmacists, nurses, chaplains, men and women religious, administrators and volunteers. Their profession calls for them to be guardians and servants of human life. In today's cultural and social context, in which science and the practice of medicine risk losing sight of their inherent ethical dimension, health-care professionals can be strongly tempted at times to become manipulators of life, or even agents of death. In the face of this temptation their responsibility today is greatly increased. Its deepest inspiration and strongest support lie in the intrinsic and undeniable ethical dimension of the health-care profession, something already recognized by the ancient and still relevant Hippocratic Oath, which requires every doctor to commit himself to absolute respect for human life and its sacredness.

Absolute respect for every innocent human life also requires the exercise of conscientious objection in relation to procured abortion and euthanasia. "Causing death" can never be considered a form of medical treatment, even when the intention is solely to comply with the patient's request. Rather, it runs completely counter to the health-care profession, which is meant to be an impassioned and unflinching affirmation of life. Bio-medical research too, a field which promises great benefits for humanity, must always reject experimentation, research or applications which disregard the inviolable dignity of the human being, and thus cease to be at the service of people and become instead means which, under the guise of helping people, actually harm them.

90. Volunteer workers have a specific role to play: they make a valuable contribution to the service of life when they combine professional ability and generous, selfless love. The Gospel of life inspires them to lift their feelings of good will towards others to the heights of Christ's charity; to renew every day, amid hard work and weariness, their awareness of the dignity of every person; to search out people's needs and, when necessary, to set out on new paths where needs are greater but care and support weaker.

If charity is to be realistic and effective, it demands that the Gospel of life be implemented also by means of certain forms of social activity and commitment in the political field, as a way of defending and promoting the value of life in our ever more complex and pluralistic societies. Individuals, families, groups and associations, albeit for different reasons and in different ways, all have a responsibility for shaping society and developing cultural, economic, political and legislative projects which, with respect for all and in keeping with democratic principles, will contribute to the

building of a society in which the dignity of each person is recognized and protected and the lives of all are defended and enhanced.

This task is the particular responsibility of civil leaders. Called to serve the people and the common good, they have a duty to make courageous choices in support of life, especially through legislative measures. In a democratic system, where laws and decisions are made on the basis of the consensus of many, the sense of personal responsibility in the consciences of individuals invested with authority may be weakened. But no one can ever renounce this responsibility, especially when he or she has a legislative or decision-making mandate, which calls that person to answer to God, to his or her own conscience and to the whole of society for choices which may be contrary to the common good. Although laws are not the only means of protecting human life, nevertheless they do play a very important and sometimes decisive role in influencing patterns of thought and behaviour. I repeat once more that a law which violates an innocent person's natural right to life is unjust and, as such, is not valid as a law. For this reason I urgently appeal once more to all political leaders not to pass laws which, by disregarding the dignity of the person, undermine the very fabric of society.

The Church well knows that it is difficult to mount an effective legal defence of life in pluralistic democracies, because of the presence of strong cultural currents with differing outlooks. At the same time, certain that moral truth cannot fail to make its presence deeply felt in every conscience, the Church encourages political leaders, starting with those who are Christians, not to give in, but to make those choices which, taking into account what is realistically attainable, will lead to the re-establishment of a just order in the defence and promotion of the value of life. Here it must be noted that it is not enough to remove unjust laws. The underlying causes of attacks on life have to be eliminated, especially by ensuring proper support for families and motherhood. A family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies. For this reason there need to be set in place social and political initiatives capable of guaranteeing conditions of true freedom of choice in matters of parenthood. It is also necessary to rethink labour, urban, residential and social service policies so as to harmonize working schedules with time available for the family, so that it becomes effectively possible to take care of children and the elderly.

91. Today an important part of policies which favour life is the issue of population growth. Certainly public authorities have a responsibility to "intervene to orient the demography of the population".¹¹⁴ But such interventions must always take into account and respect the primary and inalienable responsibility of married couples and families, and cannot employ methods which fail to respect the person and fundamental human rights, beginning with the right to life of every innocent human being. It is therefore morally unacceptable to encourage, let alone impose, the use of methods such as contraception, sterilization and abortion in order to regulate births. The ways of solving the population problem are quite different. Governments and the various international agencies must above all strive to create economic, social, public health and cultural conditions which will enable married couples to make their choices about procreation in full freedom and with genuine responsibility. They must then make efforts to ensure "greater opportunities and a fairer distribution of wealth so that everyone can share equitably in the goods of creation. Solutions must be sought on the global level by establishing a true economy of communion and sharing of goods, in both the national and international order".¹¹⁵ This is the only way to respect the dignity of persons and families, as well as the authentic cultural patrimony of peoples.

Service of the Gospel of life is thus an immense and complex task. This service increasingly appears as a valuable and fruitful area for positive cooperation with our brothers and sisters of other Churches and ecclesial communities, in accordance with the practical ecumenism which the Second Vatican Council authoritatively encouraged.¹¹⁶ It also appears as a providential area for dialogue and joint efforts with the followers of other religions and with all people of good will. No single person or group has a monopoly on the defence and promotion of life. These are everyone's task and responsibility. On the eve of the Third Millennium, the challenge facing us is an arduous one: only the concerted efforts of all those who believe in the value of life can prevent a setback of unforeseeable consequences for civilization.

"Your children will be like olive shoots around your table" (Ps 128:3): the family as the "sanctuary of life"

92. Within the "people of life and the people for life", the family has a decisive responsibility. This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to "guard, reveal and communicate love".¹¹⁷ Here it is a matter of God's own love, of which parents are co-workers and as it were interpreters when they transmit life and raise it according to his fatherly plan.¹¹⁸ This is the love that becomes selflessness, receptiveness and gift. Within the family each member is accepted, respected and honoured precisely because he or she is a person; and if any family member is in greater need, the care which he or she receives is all the more intense and attentive.

The family has a special role to play throughout the life of its members, from birth to death. It is truly "the sanctuary of life: the place in which life—the gift of God—can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth".¹¹⁹ Consequently the role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable.

As the domestic church, the family is summoned to proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life. This is a responsibility which first concerns married couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an ever greater awareness

of the meaning of procreation as a unique event which clearly reveals that human life is a gift received in order then to be given as a gift. In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, "as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them".¹²⁰

It is above all in raising children that the family fulfils its mission to proclaim the Gospel of life. By word and example, in the daily round of relations and choices, and through concrete actions and signs, parents lead their children to authentic freedom, actualized in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity and all the other values which help people to live life as a gift. In raising children Christian parents must be concerned about their children's faith and help them to fulfil the vocation God has given them. The parents' mission as educators also includes teaching and giving their children an example of the true meaning of suffering and death. They will be able to do this if they are sensitive to all kinds of suffering around them and, even more, if they succeed in fostering attitudes of closeness, assistance and sharing towards sick or elderly members of the family.

93. The family celebrates the Gospel of life through daily prayer, both individual prayer and family prayer. The family prays in order to glorify and give thanks to God for the gift of life, and implores his light and strength in order to face times of difficulty and suffering without losing hope. But the celebration which gives meaning to every other form of prayer and worship is found in the family's actual daily life together, if it is a life of love and self-giving.

This celebration thus becomes a service to the Gospel of life, expressed through solidarity as experienced within and around the family in the form of concerned, attentive and loving care shown in the humble, ordinary events of each day. A particularly significant expression of solidarity between families is a willingness to adopt or take in children abandoned by their parents or in situations of serious hardship. True parental love is ready to go beyond the bonds of flesh and blood in order to accept children from other families, offering them whatever is necessary for their well-being and full development. Among the various forms of adoption, consideration should be given to adoption-at-a-distance, preferable in cases where the only reason for giving up the child is the extreme poverty of the child's family. Through this type of adoption, parents are given the help needed to support and raise their children, without their being uprooted from their natural environment.

As "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good",¹²¹ solidarity also needs to be practised through participation in social and political life. Serving the Gospel of life thus means that the family, particularly through its membership of family associations, works to ensure that the laws and institutions of the State in no way violate the right to life, from conception to natural death, but rather protect and promote it.

94. Special attention must be given to the elderly. While in some cultures older people remain a part of the family with an important and active role, in others the elderly are regarded as a useless burden and are left to themselves. Here the temptation to resort to euthanasia can more easily arise.

Neglect of the elderly or their outright rejection are intolerable. Their presence in the family, or at least their closeness to the family in cases where limited living space or other reasons make this impossible, is of fundamental importance in creating a climate of mutual interaction and enriching communication between the different age-groups. It is therefore important to preserve, or to re-establish where it has been lost, a sort of "covenant" between generations. In this way parents, in their later years, can receive from their children the acceptance and solidarity which they themselves gave to their children when they brought them into the world. This is required by obedience to the divine commandment to honour one's father and mother (cf. Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3). But there is more. The elderly are not only to be considered the object of our concern, closeness and service. They themselves have a valuable contribution to make to the Gospel of life. Thanks to the rich treasury of experiences they have acquired through the years, the elderly can and must be sources of wisdom and witnesses of hope and love.

Although it is true that "the future of humanity passes by way of the family",¹²² it must be admitted that modern social, economic and cultural conditions make the family's task of serving life more difficult and demanding. In order to fulfil its vocation as the "sanctuary of life", as the cell of a society which loves and welcomes life, the family urgently needs to be helped and supported. Communities and States must guarantee all the support, including economic support, which families need in order to meet their problems in a truly human way. For her part, the Church must untiringly promote a plan of pastoral care for families, capable of making every family rediscover and live with joy and courage its mission to further the Gospel of life.

"Walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8): bringing about a transformation of culture

95. "Walk as children of light... and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph 5:8, 10-11). In our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death", there is need to develop a deep critical sense, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs.

What is urgently called for is a general mobilization of consciences and a united ethical effort to activate a great campaign in support of life. All together, we must build a new culture of life: new, because it will be able to confront and solve today's unprecedented problems affecting human life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper and more dynamic conviction by all Christians; new, because it will be capable of bringing about a serious and courageous

cultural dialogue among all parties. While the urgent need for such a cultural transformation is linked to the present historical situation, it is also rooted in the Church's mission of evangelization. The purpose of the Gospel, in fact, is "to transform humanity from within and to make it new".¹²³ Like the yeast which leavens the whole measure of dough (cf. Mt 13:33), the Gospel is meant to permeate all cultures and give them life from within,¹²⁴ so that they may express the full truth about the human person and about human life.

We need to begin with the renewal of a culture of life within Christian communities themselves. Too often it happens that believers, even those who take an active part in the life of the Church, end up by separating their Christian faith from its ethical requirements concerning life, and thus fall into moral subjectivism and certain objectionable ways of acting. With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread is the culture of life today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth. At the same time, we need to promote a serious and in-depth exchange about basic issues of human life with everyone, including non-believers, in intellectual circles, in the various professional spheres and at the level of people's everyday life.

96. The first and fundamental step towards this cultural transformation consists in forming consciences with regard to the incomparable and inviolable worth of every human life. It is of the greatest importance to re-establish the essential connection between life and freedom. These are inseparable goods: where one is violated, the other also ends up being violated. There is no true freedom where life is not welcomed and loved; and there is no fullness of life except in freedom. Both realities have something inherent and specific which links them inextricably: the vocation to love. Love, as a sincere gift of self,¹²⁵ is what gives the life and freedom of the person their truest meaning.

No less critical in the formation of conscience is the recovery of the necessary link between freedom and truth. As I have frequently stated, when freedom is detached from objective truth it becomes impossible to establish personal rights on a firm rational basis; and the ground is laid for society to be at the mercy of the unrestrained will of individuals or the oppressive totalitarianism of public authority.¹²⁶

It is therefore essential that man should acknowledge his inherent condition as a creature to whom God has granted being and life as a gift and a duty. Only by admitting his innate dependence can man live and use his freedom to the full, and at the same time respect the life and freedom of every other person. Here

especially one sees that "at the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God".¹²⁷ Where God is denied and people live as though he did not exist, or his commandments are not taken into account, the dignity of the human person and the inviolability of human life also end up being rejected or compromised.

97. Closely connected with the formation of conscience is the work of education, which helps individuals to be ever more human, leads them ever more fully to the truth, instils in them growing respect for life, and trains them in right interpersonal relationships.

In particular, there is a need for education about the value of life from its very origins. It is an illusion to think that we can build a true culture of human life if we do not help the young to accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and in their close interconnection. Sexuality, which enriches the whole person, "manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift

of self in love".¹²⁸ The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which have led to contempt for new life. Only a true love is able to protect life. There can be no avoiding the duty to offer, especially to adolescents and young adults, an authentic education in sexuality and in love, an education which involves training in chastity as a virtue which fosters personal maturity and makes one capable of respecting the "spousal" meaning of the body.

The work of educating in the service of life involves the training of married couples in responsible procreation. In its true meaning, responsible procreation requires couples to be obedient to the Lord's call and to act as faithful interpreters of his plan. This happens when the family is generously open to new lives, and when couples maintain an attitude of openness and service to life, even if, for serious reasons and in respect for the moral law, they choose to avoid a new birth for the time being or indefinitely. The moral law obliges them in every case to control the impulse of instinct and passion, and to respect the biological laws inscribed in their person. It is precisely this respect which makes legitimate, at the service of responsible procreation, the use of natural methods of regulating fertility. From the scientific point of view, these methods are becoming more and more accurate and make it possible in practice to make choices in harmony with moral values. An honest appraisal of their effectiveness should dispel certain prejudices which are still widely held, and should convince married couples, as well as health-care and social workers, of the importance of proper training in this area. The Church is grateful to those who, with personal sacrifice and often unacknowledged dedication, devote themselves to the study and spread of these methods, as well to the promotion of education in the moral values which they presuppose.

The work of education cannot avoid a consideration of suffering and death. These are a part of human existence, and it is futile, not to say misleading, to try to hide them or ignore them. On the contrary, people must be helped to understand their profound mystery in all its harsh reality. Even pain and suffering have meaning and value when they are experienced in close connection with love received and given. In this regard, I have called for the yearly celebration of the World Day of the Sick, emphasizing "the salvific nature of the offering up of suffering which, experienced in

communion with Christ, belongs to the very essence of the Redemption".¹²⁹ Death itself is anything but an event without hope. It is the door which opens wide on eternity and, for those who live in Christ, an experience of participation in the mystery of his Death and Resurrection.

98. In a word, we can say that the cultural change which we are calling for demands from everyone the courage to adopt a new life-style, consisting in making practical choices-at the personal, family, social and international level-on the basis of a correct scale of values: the primacy of being over having, ¹³⁰ of the person over things. ¹³¹ This renewed life-style involves a passing from indifference to concern for others, from rejection to acceptance of them. Other people are not rivals from whom we must defend ourselves, but brothers and sisters to be supported. They are to be loved for their own sakes, and they enrich us by their very presence.

In this mobilization for a new culture of life no one must feel excluded: everyone has an important role to play. Together with the family, teachers and educators have a particularly valuable contribution to make. Much will depend on them if young people, trained in true freedom, are to be able to preserve for themselves and make known to others new, authentic ideals of life, and if they are to grow in respect for and service to every other person, in the family and in society.

Intellectuals can also do much to build a new culture of human life. A special task falls to Catholic intellectuals, who are called to be present and active in the leading centres where culture is formed, in schools and universities, in places of scientific and technological research, of artistic creativity and of the study of man. Allowing their talents and activity to be nourished by the living force of the Gospel, they ought to place themselves at the service of a new culture of life by offering serious and well documented contributions, capable of commanding general respect and interest by reason of their merit. It was precisely for this purpose that I established the Pontifical Academy for Life, assigning it the task of "studying and providing information and training about the principal problems of law and biomedicine pertaining to the promotion of life, especially in the direct relationship they have with Christian morality and the directives of the Church's Magisterium".¹³² A specific contribution will also have to come from Universities, particularly from Catholic Universities, and from Centres, Institutes and Committees of Bioethics.

An important and serious responsibility belongs to those involved in the mass media, who are called to ensure that the messages which they so effectively transmit will support the culture of life. They need to present noble models of life and make room for instances of people's positive and sometimes heroic love for others. With great respect they should also present the positive values of sexuality and human love, and not insist on what defiles and cheapens human dignity. In their interpretation of things, they should refrain from emphasizing anything that suggests or fosters feelings or attitudes of indifference, contempt or rejection in relation to life. With scrupulous concern for factual truth, they are called to combine freedom of information with respect for every person and a profound sense of humanity.

99. In transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a "new feminism" which rejects the temptation of imitating models of "male domination", in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.

Making my own the words of the concluding message of the Second Vatican Council, I address to women this urgent appeal: "Reconcile people with life".¹³³ You are called to bear witness to the meaning of genuine love, of that gift of self and of that acceptance of others which are present in a special way in the relationship of husband and wife, but which ought also to be at the heart of every other interpersonal relationship. The experience of motherhood makes you acutely aware of the other person and, at the same time, confers on you a particular task: "Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb... This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings not only towards her own child, but every human being,

which profoundly marks the woman's personality".¹³⁴ A mother welcomes and carries in herself another human being, enabling it to grow inside her, giving it room, respecting it in its otherness. Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health. This is the fundamental contribution which the Church and humanity expect from women. And it is the indispensable prerequisite for an authentic cultural change.

I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.

100. In this great endeavour to create a new culture of life we are inspired and sustained by the confidence that comes from knowing that the Gospel of life, like the Kingdom of God itself, is growing and producing abundant fruit (cf. Mk 4:26-29). There is certainly an enormous disparity between the powerful resources available to the forces promoting the "culture of death" and the means at the disposal of those working for a "culture of life and love". But we know that we can rely on the help of God, for whom nothing is impossible (cf. Mt 19:26).

Filled with this certainty, and moved by profound concern for the destiny of every man and woman, I repeat what I said to those families who carry out their challenging mission amid so many difficulties: 135 a great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Through special initiatives and in daily prayer, may an impassioned plea rise to God, the Creator and lover of life, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family and from the heart of every believer. Jesus himself has shown us by his own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil (cf. Mt 4:1-11). As he taught his disciples, some demons cannot be driven out except in this way (cf. Mk 9:29). Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit: the walls which conceal from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil of practices and laws which are hostile to life. May this same power turn their hearts to resolutions and goals inspired by the civilization of life and love.

"We are writing this that our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 1:4): the Gospel of life is for the whole of human society

101. "We are writing you this that our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 1:4). The revelation of the Gospel of life is given to us as a good to be shared with all people: so that all men and women may have fellowship with us and with the Trinity (cf. 1 Jn 1:3). Our own joy would not be complete if we failed to share this Gospel with others but kept it only for ourselves.

The Gospel of life is not for believers alone: it is for everyone. The issue of life and its defence and promotion is not a concern of Christians alone. Although faith provides special light and strength, this question arises in every human conscience which seeks the truth and which cares about the future of humanity. Life certainly has a sacred and religious value, but in no way is that value a concern only of believers. The value at stake is one which every human being can grasp by the light of reason; thus it necessarily concerns everyone.

Consequently, all that we do as the "people of life and for life" should be interpreted correctly and welcomed with favour. When the Church declares that unconditional respect for the right to life of every innocent person—from conception to natural death—is one of the pillars on which every civil society stands, she "wants simply to promote a human State. A State which recognizes the defence of the fundamental rights of the human person, especially of the weakest, as its primary duty".¹³⁶

The Gospel of life is for the whole of human society. To be actively pro-life is to contribute to the renewal of society through the promotion of the common good. It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society, such as democracy and peace.

There can be no true democracy without a recognition of every person's dignity and without respect for his or her rights.

Nor can there be true peace unless life is defended and promoted. As Paul VI pointed out: "Every crime against life is an attack on peace, especially if it strikes at the moral conduct of people... But where human rights are truly professed and publicly recognized and defended, peace becomes the joyful and operative climate of life in society".¹³⁷

The "people of life" rejoices in being able to share its commitment with so many others. Thus may the "people for life" constantly grow in number and may a new culture of love and solidarity develop for the true good of the whole of human society.

CONCLUSION

102. At the end of this Encyclical, we naturally look again to the Lord Jesus, "the Child born for us" (cf. Is 9:6), that in him we may contemplate "the Life" which "was made manifest" (1 Jn 1:2). In the mystery of Christ's Birth the encounter of God with man takes place and the earthly journey of the Son of God begins, a journey which will culminate in the gift of his life on the Cross. By his death Christ will conquer death and become for all humanity the source of new life.

The one who accepted "Life" in the name of all and for the sake of all was Mary, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely and personally associated with the Gospel of life. Mary's consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity (cf. Jn 10:10). Through her

acceptance and loving care for the life of the Incarnate Word, human life has been rescued from condemnation to final and eternal death.

For this reason, Mary, "like the Church of which she is the type, is a mother of all who are reborn to life. She is in fact the mother of the Life by which everyone lives, and when she brought it forth from herself she in some way brought to rebirth all those who were to live by that Life".¹³⁸

As the Church contemplates Mary's motherhood, she discovers the meaning of her own motherhood and the way in which she is called to express it. At the same time, the Church's experience of motherhood leads to a most profound understanding of Mary's experience as the incomparable model of how life should be welcomed and cared for.

"A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun" (Rev 12:1): the motherhood of Mary and of the Church

103. The mutual relationship between the mystery of the Church and Mary appears clearly in the "great portent" described in the Book of Revelation: "A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (12:1). In this sign the Church recognizes an image of her own mystery: present in history, she knows that she transcends history, inasmuch as she constitutes on earth the "seed and beginning" of the Kingdom of God. ¹³⁹ The Church sees this mystery fulfilled in complete and exemplary fashion in Mary. She is the woman of glory in whom God's plan could be carried out with supreme perfection.

The "woman clothed with the sun"-the Book of Revelation tells us-"was with child" (12:2). The Church is fully aware that she bears within herself the Saviour of the world, Christ the Lord. She is aware that she is called to offer Christ to the world, giving men and women new birth into God's own life. But the Church cannot forget that her mission was made possible by the motherhood of Mary, who conceived and bore the One who is "God from God", "true God from true God". Mary is truly the Mother of God, the Theotokos, in whose motherhood the vocation to motherhood bestowed by God on every woman is raised to its highest level. Thus Mary becomes the model of the Church, called to be the "new Eve", the mother of believers, the mother of the "living" (cf. Gen 3:20).

The Church's spiritual motherhood is only achieved-the Church knows this too-through the pangs and "the labour" of childbirth (cf. Rev 12:2), that is to say, in constant tension with the forces of evil which still roam the world and affect human hearts, offering resistance to Christ: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:4-5).

Like the Church, Mary too had to live her motherhood amid suffering: "This child is set... for a sign that is spoken against-and a sword will pierce through your own soul also-that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:34-35). The words which Simeon addresses to Mary at the very beginning of the Saviour's earthly life sum up and prefigure the rejection of Jesus, and with him of Mary, a rejection which will reach its culmination on Calvary. "Standing by the cross of Jesus" (Jn 19:25), Mary shares in the gift which the Son makes of himself: she offers Jesus, gives him over, and begets him to the end for our sake. The "yes" spoken on the day of the Annunciation reaches full maturity on the day of the Cross, when the time comes for Mary to receive and beget as her children all those who become disciples, pouring out upon them the saving love of her Son: "When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' " (Jn 19:26).

"And the dragon stood before the woman... that he might devour her child when she brought it forth" (Rev 12:4): life menaced by the forces of evil

104. In the Book of Revelation, the "great portent" of the "woman" (12:1) is accompanied by "another portent which appeared in heaven": "a great red dragon" (Rev 12:3), which represents Satan, the personal power of evil, as well as all the powers of evil at work in history and opposing the Church's mission.

Here too Mary sheds light on the Community of Believers. The hostility of the powers of evil is, in fact, an insidious opposition which, before affecting the disciples of Jesus, is directed against his mother. To save the life of her Son from those who fear him as a dangerous threat, Mary has to flee with Joseph and the Child into Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-15).

Mary thus helps the Church to realize that life is always at the centre of a great struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. The dragon wishes to devour "the child brought forth" (cf. Rev 12:4), a figure of Christ, whom Mary brought forth "in the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4) and whom the Church must unceasingly offer to people in every age. But in a way that child is also a figure of every person, every child, especially every helpless baby whose life is threatened, because-as the Council reminds us-"by his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person".¹⁴⁰ It is precisely in the "flesh" of every person that Christ continues to reveal himself and to enter into fellowship with us, so that rejection of human life, in whatever form that rejection takes, is really a rejection of Christ. This is the fascinating but also demanding truth which Christ reveals to us and which his Church continues untiringly to proclaim: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mt 18:5); "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

"Death shall be no more" (Rev 21:4): the splendour of the Resurrection

105. The angel's Annunciation to Mary is framed by these reassuring words: "Do not be afraid, Mary" and "with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:30, 37). The whole of the Virgin Mother's life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care. The same is true of the Church, which finds "a place prepared by God" (Rev 12:6) in the desert, the place of trial but also of the manifestation of God's love for his people (cf. Hos 2:16). Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated: "Death with life contended: combat strangely ended! Life's own Champion, slain, yet lives to reign".¹⁴¹

The Lamb who was slain is alive, bearing the marks of his Passion in the splendour of the Resurrection. He alone is master of all the events of history: he opens its "seals" (cf. Rev 5:1-10) and proclaims, in time and beyond, the power of life over death. In the "new Jerusalem", that new world towards which human history is travelling, "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). And as we, the pilgrim people, the people of life and for life, make our way in confidence towards "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1), we look to her who is for us "a sign of sure hope and solace".¹⁴²

O Mary,
bright dawn of the new world,
Mother of the living,
to you do we entrust the cause of life
Look down, O Mother,
upon the vast numbers
of babies not allowed to be born,
of the poor whose lives are made difficult,
of men and women
who are victims of brutal violence,
of the elderly and the sick killed
by indifference or out of misguided mercy.
Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love
to the people of our time.
Obtain for them the grace
to accept that Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it with gratitude
throughout their lives
and the courage to bear witness to it
resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of life.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, in the year 1995, the seventeenth of my Pontificate.

1 The expression "Gospel of life" is not found as such in Sacred Scripture. But it does correspond to an essential dimension of the biblical message.

2 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

3 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 10; AAS 71 (1979), 275.

4 Cf. *ibid.*, 14: *loc.cit.*, 285.

5 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

6 Cf. Letter to all my Brothers in the Episcopate regarding the "Gospel of Life" (19 May 1991): *Insegnamenti XIV*, 1 (1991), 1293-1296.

7 *Ibid.*, *loc.cit.*, p. 1294.

8 Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane* (2 February 1994), 4: AAS 86 (1994), 871.

9 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 39: AAS 83 (1991), 842.

10 No. 2259.

11 Saint Ambrose, *De Noe*, 26:94-96: CSEL 32, 480-481.

12 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 1867 and 2268.

- 13 De Cain et Abel, II, 10, 38: CSEL, 32, 408.
- 14 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae*: AAS 80 (1988), 70-102.
- 15 Address during the Prayer Vigil for the Eighth World Youth Day, Denver, 14 August 1993, II, 3: AAS 86 (1994), 419.
- 16 John Paul II, Address to the Participants at the Study Conference on "The Right to Life and Europe", 18 December 1987: *Insegnamenti*, X, 3 (1987), 1446-1447.
- 17 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.
- 18 Cf. *ibid.*, 16.
- 19 Cf. Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, 13, 23: CCL 143A, 683.
- 20 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 10; AAS 71 (1979), 274.
- 21 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.
- 22 Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 4.
- 23 "Gloria Dei vivens homo": *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7: SCh 100/2, 648-649.
- 24 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 12.
- 25 *Confessions*, I, 1: CCL 27, 1.
- 26 *Exameron*, VI, 75-76: CSEL 32, 260-261.
- 27 "Vita autem hominis visio Dei": *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7: SCh 100/2, 648-649.
- 28 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 38: AAS 83 (1991), 840-841.
- 29 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 34: AAS 80 (1988), 560.
- 30 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.
- 31 Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane* (2 February 1994), 9: AAS 86 (1994), 878; cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 574.
- 32 "Animas enim a Deo immediate creari catholica fides nos retinere iubet": Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 575.
- 33 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50; cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 28: AAS 74 (1982), 114.
- 34 *Homilies*, II, 1; CCSG 3, 39.
- 35 See, for example, Psalms 22:10-11; 71:6; 139:13-14.
- 36 *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, II, 22-23: CCL, 14, 40-41.
- 37 Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians, 7, 2: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. Funk, II, 82.
- 38 *De Hominis Opificio*, 4: PG 44, 136.
- 39 Cf. Saint John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 2, 12: PG 94, 920.922, quoted in Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Prologue.
- 40 Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (25 July 1968), 13: AAS 60 (1968), 489.
- 41 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), Introduction, No. 5: AAS 80 (1988), 76-77; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2258.
- 42 *Didache*, I, 1; II, 1-2; V, 1 and 3: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. Funk, I, 2-3, 6-9, 14-17; cf. Letter of Pseudo-Barnabas, XIX, 5: *loc. cit.*, 90-93.
- 43 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 2263-2269; cf. also Catechism of the Council of Trent III, §§ 327-332.
- 44 Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2265.
- 45 Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 64, a. 7; Saint Alphonsus De' Liguori, *Theologia Moralis*, I, III, tr. 4, c. 1, dub.3.
- 46 Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2266.
- 47 Cf. *ibid.*
- 48 No. 2267.
- 49 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 12.
- 50 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.
- 51 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.
- 52 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia *Iura et Bona* (5 May 1980), II: AAS 72 (1980), 546.
- 53 Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 96: AAS 85 (1993), 1209.
- 54 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 51, "Abortus necnon infanticidium nefanda sunt crimina".
- 55 Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 14: AAS 80 (1988), 1686.

56 No. 21: AAS 86 (1994), 920.

57 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Procured Abortion (18 November 1974), Nos. 12-13: AAS 66 (1974), 738.

58 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), I, No. 1: AAS 80 (1988), 78-79.

59 *Ibid.*, loc. cit., 79.

60 Hence the Prophet Jeremiah: "The word of the Lord came to me saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations'" (1:4-5). The Psalmist, for his part, addresses the Lord in these words: "Upon you I have leaned from my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb" (Ps 71:6; cf. Is 46:3; Job 10:8-12; Ps 22:10-11). So too the Evangelist Luke - in the magnificent episode of the meeting of the two mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, and their two sons, John the Baptist and Jesus, still hidden in their mothers' wombs (cf. 1:39-45) - emphasizes how even before their birth the two little ones are able to communicate: the child recognizes the coming of the Child and leaps for joy.

61 Cf. Declaration on Procured Abortion (18 November 1974), No. 7: AAS 66 (1974), 740-747.

62 "You shall not kill a child by abortion nor shall you kill it once it is born": V, 2: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. Funk, I, 17.

63 *Apologia* on behalf of the Christians, 35: PG 6, 969.

64 *Apologeticum*, IX, 8: CSEL 69, 24.

65 Cf. Encyclical Letter *Casti Connubii* (31 December 1930), II: AAS 22 (1930), 562-592.

66 Address to the Biomedical Association "San Luca" (12 November 1944): *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, VI (1944-1945), 191; cf. Address to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives (29 October 1951), No. 2: AAS 43 (1951), 838.

67 Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961), 3: AAS 53 (1961), 447.

68 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 51.

69 Canon 2350, § 1.

70 Code of Canon Law, canon 1398; cf. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, canon 1450, § 2.

71 Cf. *ibid.*, canon 1329; also Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, canon 1417.

72 Cf. Address to the National Congress of Italian Jurists (9 December 1972): AAS 64 (1972), 777; Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (25 July 1968), 14: AAS 60 (1968), 490.

73 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

74 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), I, 3: AAS 80 (1988), 80.

75 Charter of the Rights of the Family (22 October 1983), article 4b: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1983.

76 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia *Iura et Bona* (5 May 1980), II: AAS 72 (1980), 546.

77 *Ibid.*, IV: loc. cit., 551.

78 Cf. *ibid.*

79 Pius XII, Address to an International Group of Physicians (24 February 1957), III: AAS 49 (1957), 147; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia *Iura et Bona*, III: AAS 72 (1980), 547-548.

80 Pius XII, Address to an International Group of Physicians (24 February 1957), III: AAS 49 (1957), 145.

81 Pius XII, Address to an International Group of Physicians (24 February 1957): loc. cit., 129-147; Congregation of the Holy Office, *Decretum de directa insontium occisione* (2 December 1940): AAS 32 (1940), 553-554; Paul VI, Message to French Television: "Every life is sacred" (27 January 1971): *Insegnamenti* IX (1971), 57-58; Address to the International College of Surgeons (1 June 1972): AAS 64 (1972), 432-436; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

82 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

83 Cf. Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* I, 20: CCL 47, 22; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 6, a. 5.

84 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia *Iura et Bona* (5 May 1980), I: AAS 72 (1980), 545; Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 2281-2283.

85 Ep. 204, 5: CSEL 57, 320.

86 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 18.

87 Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (11 February 1984), 14-24: AAS 76 (1984), 214-234.

88 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 46: AAS 83 (1991), 850; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message (24 December 1944): AAS 37 (1945), 10-20.

89 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 97 and 99: AAS 85 (1993), 1209-1211.

90 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), III: AAS 80 (1988), 98.

91 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7.

92 Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 96, a. 2.

93 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7.

- 94 Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), II: AAS 55 (1963), 273-274. The internal quote is from Pius XII, Radio Message of Pentecost 1941 (1 June 1941): AAS 33 (1941), 200. On this topic, the Encyclical cites: Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mit brennender Sorge* (14 March 1937): AAS 29 (1937), 159; Encyclical Letter *Divini Redemptoris* (19 March 1937), III: AAS 29 (1937), 79; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message (24 December 1942): AAS 35 (1943), 9-24.
- 95 Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), II: loc. cit., 271.
- 96 *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 93, a. 3, ad 2um.
- 97 *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 95, a. 2. Aquinas quotes Saint Augustine: "Non videtur esse lex, quae iusta non fuerit", *De Libero Arbitrio*, I, 5, 11: PL 32, 1227.
- 98 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Procured Abortion (18 November 1974), No. 22: AAS 66 (1974), 744.
- 99 Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 1753-1755; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 81-82: AAS 85 (1993), 1198-1199.
- 100 In *Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 41, 10: CCL 36, 363; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 13: AAS 85 (1993), 1144.
- 101 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 14: AAS 68 (1976), 13.
- 102 Cf. Roman Missal, prayer of the celebrant before communion.
- 103 Cf. Saint Irenaeus: "Omnem novitatem attulit, semetipsum afferens, qui fuerat annuntiatus", *Adversus Haereses*: IV, 34, 1: SCh 100/2, 846-847.
- 104 Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, "Peccator inveterascit, recedens a novitate Christi", In *Psalmos Davidis Lectura*: 6, 5.
- 105 *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VII: PG 44, 1280.
- 106 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 116: AAS 85 (1993), 1224.
- 107 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 37: AAS 83 (1991), 840.
- 108 Cf. Message for Christmas 1967: AAS 60 (1968), 40.
- 109 Pseudo- Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, 6, 1-3: PG 3, 856-857.
- 110 Paul VI, *Pensiero alla Morte*, Istituto Paolo VI, Brescia 1988, 24.
- 111 John Paul II, Homily for the Beatification of Isidore Bakanja, Elisabetta Canori Mora and Gianna Beretta Molla (24 April 1994): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25-26 April 1994, 5.
- 112 *Ibid.*
- 113 In *Matthaeum*, Hom. L, 3: PG 58, 508.
- 114 Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2372.
- 115 John Paul II, Address to the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo (12 October 1992), No. 15: AAS 85 (1993), 819.
- 116 Cf. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 90.
- 117 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 17: AAS 74 (1982), 100.
- 118 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.
- 119 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 39: AAS 83 (1991), 842.
- 120 John Paul II, Address to Participants in the Seventh Symposium of European Bishops, on the theme of "Contemporary Attitudes towards Life and Death: a Challenge for Evangelization" (17 October 1989), No. 5: *Insegnamenti XII*, 2 (1989), 945. Children are presented in the Biblical tradition precisely as God's gift (cf. Ps 127:3) and as a sign of his blessing on those who walk in his ways (cf. Ps 128:3-4).
- 121 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 38: AAS 80 (1988), 565-566.
- 122 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 86: AAS 74 (1982), 188.
- 123 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 18: AAS 68 (1976), 17.
- 124 Cf. *ibid.*, 20: loc. cit., 18.
- 125 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
- 126 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 17: AAS 83 (1991), 814; Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 95-101: AAS 85 (1993), 1208-1213.
- 127 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 24: AAS 83 (1991), 822.
- 128 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 37: AAS 74 (1982), 128.
- 129 Letter establishing the World Day of the Sick (13 May 1992), No. 2: *Insegnamenti XV*, 1 (1992), 1410.
- 130 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 35; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 15: AAS 59 (1967), 265.
- 131 Cf. John Paul II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane* (2 February 1994), 13: AAS 86 (1994), 892.

- 132 John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Vitae Mysterium* (11 February 1994), 4: AAS 86 (1994), 386-387.
- 133 Closing Message of the Council (8 December 1965): To Women.
- 134 John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 18: AAS 80 (1988), 1696.
- 135 Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families Gratissimam sane* (2 February 1994), 5: AAS 86 (1994), 872.
- 136 John Paul II, *Address to Participants in the Study Conference on "The Right to Life in Europe"* (18 December 1987): *Insegnamenti X*, 3 (1987), 1446.
- 137 *Message for the 1977 World Day of Peace*: AAS 68 (1976), 711-712.
- 138 *Blessed Gueric of Igny, In Assumptione B. Mariae, Sermo I, 2*: PL 185, 188.
- 139 *Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, 5.
- 140 *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- 141 *Roman Missal, Sequence for Easter Sunday*.
- 142 *Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, 68.

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Ioannes Paulus PP. II
1993.08.06

Blessing

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, Health and the Apostolic Blessing!

The splendour of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26). Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord. Hence the Psalmist prays: "Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord" (Ps 4:6).

INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ, the true light that enlightens everyone

1. Called to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, "the true light that enlightens everyone" (Jn 1:9), people become "light in the Lord" and "children of light" (Eph 5:8), and are made holy by "obedience to the truth" (1 Pet 1:22).

This obedience is not always easy. As a result of that mysterious original sin, committed at the prompting of Satan, the one who is "a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44), man is constantly tempted to turn his gaze away from the living and true God in order to direct it towards idols (cf. 1 Thes 1:9), exchanging "the truth about God for a lie" (Rom 1:25). Man's capacity to know the truth is also darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened. Thus, giving himself over to relativism and scepticism (cf. Jn 18:38), he goes off in search of an illusory freedom apart from truth itself.

But no darkness of error or of sin can totally take away from man the light of God the Creator. In the depths of his heart there always remains a yearning for absolute truth and a thirst to attain full knowledge of it. This is eloquently proved by man's tireless search for knowledge in all fields. It is proved even more by his search for the meaning of life. The development of science and technology, this splendid testimony of the human capacity for understanding and for perseverance, does not free humanity from the obligation to ask the ultimate religious questions. Rather, it spurs us on to face the most painful and decisive of struggles, those of the heart and of the moral conscience.

2. No one can escape from the fundamental questions: What must I do? How do I distinguish good from evil? The answer is only possible thanks to the splendour of the truth which shines forth deep within the human spirit, as the Psalmist bears witness: "There are many who say: 'O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord' " (Ps 4:6).

The light of God's face shines in all its beauty on the countenance of Jesus Christ, "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), the "reflection of God's glory" (Heb 1:3), "full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). Consequently the decisive answer to every one of man's questions, his religious and moral questions in particular, is given by Jesus Christ, or rather is Jesus Christ himself, as the Second Vatican Council recalls: "In fact, it is only in the mystery of the Word incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of man. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of the future man, namely, of Christ the Lord. It is Christ, the last Adam, who fully discloses man to himself and unfolds his noble calling by revealing the mystery of the Father and the Father's love".¹

Jesus Christ, the "light of the nations", shines upon the face of his Church, which he sends forth to the whole world to proclaim the Gospel to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15).² Hence the Church, as the People of God among the nations,³ while attentive to the new challenges of history and to mankind's efforts to discover the meaning of life, offers to everyone the answer which comes from the truth about Jesus Christ and his Gospel. The Church remains deeply conscious of her "duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, so that she can offer in a manner appropriate to each generation replies to the continual human questionings on the meaning of this life and the life to come and on how they are related".⁴

3. The Church's Pastors, in communion with the Successor of Peter, are close to the faithful in this effort; they guide and accompany them by their authoritative teaching, finding ever new ways of speaking with love and mercy not only to believers but to all people of good will. The Second Vatican Council remains an extraordinary witness of this attitude on the part of the Church which, as an "expert in humanity",⁵ places herself at the service of every individual and of the whole world.⁶

The Church knows that the issue of morality is one which deeply touches every person; it involves all people, even those who do not know Christ and his Gospel or God himself. She knows that it is precisely on the path of the moral life that the way of salvation is open to all. The Second Vatican Council clearly recalled this when it stated that "those who without any fault do not know anything about Christ or his Church, yet who search for God with a sincere heart and under the influence of grace, try to put into effect the will of God as known to them through the dictate of conscience... can obtain eternal salvation". The Council added: "Nor does divine Providence deny the helps that are necessary for salvation to those who, through no fault of their own, have not yet attained to the express recognition of God, yet who strive, not without divine grace, to lead an upright life. For whatever goodness and truth is found in them

is considered by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel and bestowed by him who enlightens everyone that they may in the end have life".⁷

The purpose of the present Encyclical

4. At all times, but particularly in the last two centuries, the Popes, whether individually or together with the College of Bishops, have developed and proposed a moral teaching regarding the many different spheres of human life. In Christ's name and with his authority they have exhorted, passed judgment and explained. In their efforts on behalf of humanity, in fidelity to their mission, they have confirmed, supported and consoled. With the guarantee of assistance from the Spirit of truth they have contributed to a better understanding of moral demands in the areas of human sexuality, the family, and social, economic and political life. In the tradition of the Church and in the history of humanity, their teaching represents a constant deepening of knowledge with regard to morality.⁸

Today, however, it seems necessary to reflect on the whole of the Church's moral teaching, with the precise goal of recalling certain fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine which, in the present circumstances, risk being distorted or denied. In fact, a new situation has come about within the Christian community itself, which has experienced the spread of numerous doubts and objections of a human and psychological, social and cultural, religious and even properly theological nature, with regard to the Church's moral teachings. It is no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent, but of an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine, on the basis of certain anthropological and ethical presuppositions. At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth. Thus the traditional doctrine regarding the natural law, and the universality and the permanent validity of its precepts, is rejected; certain of the Church's moral teachings are found simply unacceptable; and the Magisterium itself is considered capable of intervening in matters of morality only in order to "exhort consciences" and to "propose values", in the light of which each individual will independently make his or her decisions and life choices.

In particular, note should be taken of the lack of harmony between the traditional response of the Church and certain theological positions, encountered even in Seminaries and in Faculties of Theology, with regard to questions of the greatest importance for the Church and for the life of faith of Christians, as well as for the life of society itself. In particular, the question is asked: do the commandments of God, which are written on the human heart and are part of the Covenant, really have the capacity to clarify the daily decisions of individuals and entire societies? Is it possible to obey God and thus love God and neighbour, without respecting these commandments in all circumstances? Also, an opinion is frequently heard which questions the intrinsic and unbreakable bond between faith and morality, as if membership in the Church and her internal unity were to be decided on the basis of faith alone, while in the sphere of morality a pluralism of opinions and of kinds of behaviour could be tolerated, these being left to the judgment of the individual subjective conscience or to the diversity of social and cultural contexts.

5. Given these circumstances, which still exist, I came to the decision - as I announced in my Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini*, issued on 1 August 1987 on the second centenary of the death of Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori - to write an Encyclical with the aim of treating "more fully and more deeply the issues regarding the very foundations of moral theology",⁹ foundations which are being undermined by certain present day tendencies.

I address myself to you, Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, who share with me the responsibility of safeguarding "sound teaching" (2 Tim 4:3), with the intention of clearly setting forth certain aspects of doctrine which are of crucial importance in facing what is certainly a genuine crisis, since the difficulties which it engenders have most serious implications for the moral life of the faithful and for communion in the Church, as well as for a just and fraternal social life.

If this Encyclical, so long awaited, is being published only now, one of the reasons is that it seemed fitting for it to be preceded by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which contains a complete and systematic exposition of Christian moral teaching. The Catechism presents the moral life of believers in its fundamental elements and in its many aspects as the life of the "children of God": "Recognizing in the faith their new dignity, Christians are called to lead henceforth a life 'worthy of the Gospel of Christ' (Phil 1:27).

Through the sacraments and prayer they receive the grace of Christ and the gifts of his Spirit which make them capable of such a life".¹⁰ Consequently, while referring back to the Catechism "as a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine",¹¹ the Encyclical will limit itself to dealing with certain fundamental questions regarding the Church's moral teaching, taking the form of a necessary discernment about issues being debated by ethicists and moral theologians. The specific purpose of the present Encyclical is this: to set forth, with regard to the problems being discussed, the principles of a moral teaching based upon Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition,¹² and at the same time to shed light on the presuppositions and consequences of the dissent which that teaching has met.

CHAPTER I - "TEACHER, WHAT GOOD MUST I DO...?" (Mt 19:16) - Christ and the answer to the question about morality

"Someone came to him..." (Mt 19:16)

6.

The dialogue of Jesus with the rich young man, related in the nineteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, can serve as a useful guide for listening once more in a lively and direct way to his moral teaching: "Then someone came to him and said, 'Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments. He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these; what do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me' " (Mt 19:16-21).¹³

7.

"Then someone came to him...". In the young man, whom Matthew's Gospel does not name, we can recognize every person who, consciously or not, approaches Christ the Redeemer of man and questions him about morality. For the young man, the question is not so much about rules to be followed, but about the full meaning of life. This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion. This question is ultimately an appeal to the absolute Good which attracts us and beckons us; it is the echo of a call from God who is the origin and goal of man's life. Precisely in this perspective the Second Vatican Council called for a renewal of moral theology, so that its teaching would display the lofty vocation which the faithful have received in Christ, the only response fully capable of satisfying the desire of the human heart.

In order to make this "encounter" with Christ possible, God willed his Church. Indeed, the Church "wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life".¹⁵

"Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16)

8. The question which the rich young man puts to Jesus of Nazareth is one which rises from the depths of his heart. It is an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man, for it is about the moral good which must be done, and about eternal life. The young man senses that there is a connection between moral good and the fulfilment of his own destiny. He is a devout Israelite, raised as it were in the shadow of the Law of the Lord. If he asks Jesus this question, we can presume that it is not because he is ignorant of the answer contained in the Law. It is more likely that the attractiveness of the person of Jesus had prompted within him new questions about moral good. He feels the need to draw near to the One who had begun his preaching with this new and decisive proclamation: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15).

People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil. Christ is the Teacher, the Risen One who has life in himself and who is always present in his Church and in the world. It is he who opens up to the faithful the book of the Scriptures and, by fully revealing the Father's will, teaches the truth about moral action. At the source and summit of the economy of salvation, as the Alpha and the Omega of human history (cf. Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), Christ sheds light on man's condition and his integral vocation. Consequently, "the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly - and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being - must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter him with all his own self; he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deeper wonder at himself".¹⁶

If we therefore wish to go to the heart of the Gospel's moral teaching and grasp its profound and unchanging content, we must carefully inquire into the meaning of the question asked by the rich young man in the Gospel and, even more, the meaning of Jesus' reply, allowing ourselves to be guided by him. Jesus, as a patient and sensitive teacher, answers the young man by taking him, as it were, by the hand, and leading him step by step to the full truth.

"There is only one who is good" (Mt 19:17)

9. Jesus says: "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17). In the versions of the Evangelists Mark and Luke the question is phrased in this way: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10:18; cf. Lk 18:19).

Before answering the question, Jesus wishes the young man to have a clear idea of why he asked his question. The "Good Teacher" points out to him - and to all of us - that the answer to the question, "What good must I do to have eternal life?" can only be found by turning one's mind and heart to the "One" who is good: "No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10:18; cf. Lk 18:19). Only God can answer the question about what is good, because he is the Good itself.

To ask about the good, in fact, ultimately means to turn towards God, the fullness of goodness. Jesus shows that the young man's question is really a religious question, and that the goodness that attracts and at the same time obliges man

has its source in God, and indeed is God himself. God alone is worthy of being loved "with all one's heart, and with all one's soul, and with all one's mind" (Mt 22:37). He is the source of man's happiness. Jesus brings the question about morally good action back to its religious foundations, to the acknowledgment of God, who alone is goodness, fullness of life, the final end of human activity, and perfect happiness.

10. The Church, instructed by the Teacher's words, believes that man, made in the image of the Creator, redeemed by the Blood of Christ and made holy by the presence of the Holy Spirit, has as the ultimate purpose of his life to live "for the praise of God's glory" (cf. Eph 1:12), striving to make each of his actions reflect the splendour of that glory. "Know, then, O beautiful soul, that you are the image of God", writes Saint Ambrose. "Know that you are the glory of God (1 Cor 11:7). Hear how you are his glory. The Prophet says: Your knowledge has become too wonderful for me (cf. Ps. 138:6, Vulg.). That is to say, in my work your majesty has become more wonderful; in the counsels of men your wisdom is exalted. When I consider myself, such as I am known to you in my secret thoughts and deepest emotions, the mysteries of your knowledge are disclosed to me. Know then, O man, your greatness, and be vigilant".¹⁷ What man is and what he must do becomes clear as soon as God reveals himself. The Decalogue is based on these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex 20:2-3). In the "ten words" of the Covenant with Israel, and in the whole Law, God makes himself known and acknowledged as the One who "alone is good"; the One who despite man's sin remains the "model" for moral action, in accordance with his command, "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2); as the One who, faithful to his love for man, gives him his Law (cf. Ex 19:9-24 and 20:18-21) in order to restore man's original and peaceful harmony with the Creator and with all creation, and, what is more, to draw him into his divine love: "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev 26:12).

The moral life presents itself as the response due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man. It is a response of love, according to the statement made in Deuteronomy about the fundamental commandment: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children" (Dt 6:4-7). Thus the moral life, caught up in the gratuitousness of God's love, is called to reflect his glory: "For the one who loves God it is enough to be pleasing to the One whom he loves: for no greater reward should be sought than that love itself; charity in fact is of God in such a way that God himself is charity".¹⁸

11. The statement that "There is only one who is good" thus brings us back to the "first tablet" of the commandments, which calls us to acknowledge God as the one Lord of all and to worship him alone for his infinite holiness (cf. Ex 20:2-11). The good is belonging to God, obeying him, walking humbly with him in doing justice and in loving kindness (cf. Mic 6:8). Acknowledging the Lord as God is the very core, the heart of the Law, from which the particular precepts flow and towards which they are ordered. In the morality of the commandments the fact that the people of Israel belongs to the Lord is made evident, because God alone is the One who is good. Such is the witness of Sacred Scripture, imbued in every one of its pages with a lively perception of God's absolute holiness: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (Is 6:3).

But if God alone is the Good, no human effort, not even the most rigorous observance of the commandments, succeeds in "fulfilling" the Law, that is, acknowledging the Lord as God and rendering him the worship due to him alone (cf. Mt 4:10). This "fulfilment" can come only from a gift of God: the offer of a share in the divine Goodness revealed and communicated in Jesus, the one whom the rich young man addresses with the words "Good Teacher" (Mk 10:17; Lk 18:18). What the young man now perhaps only dimly perceives will in the end be fully revealed by Jesus himself in the invitation: "Come, follow me" (Mt 19:21).

"If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17)

12. Only God can answer the question about the good, because he is the Good. But God has already given an answer to this question: he did so by creating man and ordering him with wisdom and love to his final end, through the law which is inscribed in his heart (cf. Rom 2:15), the "natural law". The latter "is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation".¹⁹ He also did so in the history of Israel, particularly in the "ten words", the commandments of Sinai, whereby he brought into existence the people of the Covenant (cf. Ex 24) and called them to be his "own possession among all peoples", "a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6), which would radiate his holiness to all peoples (cf. Wis 18:4; Ez 20:41). The gift of the Decalogue was a promise and sign of the New Covenant, in which the law would be written in a new and definitive way upon the human heart (cf. Jer 31:31-34), replacing the law of sin which had disfigured that heart (cf. Jer 17:1). In those days, "a new heart" would be given, for in it would dwell "a new spirit", the Spirit of God (cf. Ez 36:24-28).²⁰

Consequently, after making the important clarification: "There is only one who is good", Jesus tells the young man: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17). In this way, a close connection is made between eternal life and obedience to God's commandments: God's commandments show man the path of life and they lead to it. From the very lips of Jesus, the new Moses, man is once again given the commandments of the Decalogue. Jesus himself definitively confirms them and proposes them to us as the way and condition of salvation. The commandments

are linked to a promise. In the Old Covenant the object of the promise was the possession of a land where the people would be able to live in freedom and in accordance with righteousness (cf. Dt 6:20-25). In the New Covenant the object of the promise is the "Kingdom of Heaven", as Jesus declares at the beginning of the "Sermon on the Mount" - a sermon which contains the fullest and most complete formulation of the New Law (cf. Mt 5-7), clearly linked to the Decalogue entrusted by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. This same reality of the Kingdom is referred to in the expression "eternal life", which is a participation in the very life of God. It is attained in its perfection only after death, but in faith it is even now a light of truth, a source of meaning for life, an inchoate share in the full following of Christ. Indeed, Jesus says to his disciples after speaking to the rich young man: "Every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29).

13. Jesus' answer is not enough for the young man, who continues by asking the Teacher about the commandments which must be kept: "He said to him, 'Which ones?' " (Mt 19:18). He asks what he must do in life in order to show that he acknowledges God's holiness. After directing the young man's gaze towards God, Jesus reminds him of the commandments of the Decalogue regarding one's neighbour: "Jesus said: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbour as yourself' " (Mt 19:18-19).

From the context of the conversation, and especially from a comparison of Matthew's text with the parallel passages in Mark and Luke, it is clear that Jesus does not intend to list each and every one of the commandments required in order to "enter into life", but rather wishes to draw the young man's attention to the "centrality" of the Decalogue with regard to every other precept, inasmuch as it is the interpretation of what the words "I am the Lord your God" mean for man. Nevertheless we cannot fail to notice which commandments of the Law the Lord recalls to the young man. They are some of the commandments belonging to the so-called "second tablet" of the Decalogue, the summary (cf. Rom 13: 8-10) and foundation of which is the commandment of love of neighbour: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 19:19; cf. Mk 12:31). In this commandment we find a precise expression of the singular dignity of the human person, "the only creature that God has wanted for its own sake".²¹ The different commandments of the Decalogue are really only so many reflections of the one commandment about the good of the person, at the level of the many different goods which characterize his identity as a spiritual and bodily being in relationship with God, with his neighbour and with the material world. As we read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "the Ten Commandments are part of God's Revelation. At the same time, they teach us man's true humanity. They shed light on the essential duties, and so indirectly on the fundamental rights, inherent in the nature of the human person".²²

The commandments of which Jesus reminds the young man are meant to safeguard the good of the person, the image of God, by protecting his goods. "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness" are moral rules formulated in terms of prohibitions. These negative precepts express with particular force the ever urgent need to protect human life, the communion of persons in marriage, private property, truthfulness and people's good name.

The commandments thus represent the basic condition for love of neighbour; at the same time they are the proof of that love. They are the first necessary step on the journey towards freedom, its starting-point. "The beginning of freedom", Saint Augustine writes, "is to be free from crimes... such as murder, adultery, fornication, theft, fraud, sacrilege and so forth. When once one is without these crimes (and every Christian should be without them), one begins to lift up one's head towards freedom. But this is only the beginning of freedom, not perfect freedom...".²³

14. This certainly does not mean that Christ wishes to put the love of neighbour higher than, or even to set it apart from, the love of God. This is evident from his conversation with the teacher of the Law, who asked him a question very much like the one asked by the young man. Jesus refers him to the two commandments of love of God and love of neighbour (cf. Lk 10:25-27), and reminds him that only by observing them will he have eternal life: "Do this, and you will live" (Lk 10:28). Nonetheless it is significant that it is precisely the second of these commandments which arouses the curiosity of the teacher of the Law, who asks him: "And who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10:29). The Teacher replies with the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is critical for fully understanding the commandment of love of neighbour (cf. Lk 10:30-37).

These two commandments, on which "depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 22:40), are profoundly connected and mutually related. Their inseparable unity is attested to by Christ in his words and by his very life: his mission culminates in the Cross of our Redemption (cf. Jn 3:14-15), the sign of his indivisible love for the Father and for humanity (cf. Jn 13:1).

Both the Old and the New Testaments explicitly affirm that without love of neighbour, made concrete in keeping the commandments, genuine love for God is not possible. Saint John makes the point with extraordinary forcefulness: "If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (Jn 4:20). The Evangelist echoes the moral preaching of Christ, expressed in a wonderful and unambiguous way in the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:30-37) and in his words about the final judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

15. In the "Sermon on the Mount", the magna charta of Gospel morality, Jesus says: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Mt 5:17). Christ is the key to

the Scriptures: "You search the Scriptures...; and it is they that bear witness to me" (Jn 5:39). Christ is the centre of the economy of salvation, the recapitulation of the Old and New Testaments, of the promises of the Law and of their fulfilment in the Gospel; he is the living and eternal link between the Old and the New Covenants. Commenting on Paul's statement that "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom 10:4), Saint Ambrose writes: "end not in the sense of a deficiency, but in the sense of the fullness of the Law: a fullness which is achieved in Christ (plenitudo legis in Christo est), since he came not to abolish the Law but to bring it to fulfilment. In the same way that there is an Old Testament, but all truth is in the New Testament, so it is for the Law: what was given through Moses is a figure of the true law. Therefore, the Mosaic Law is an image of the truth".²⁵

Jesus brings God's commandments to fulfilment, particularly the commandment of love of neighbour, by interiorizing their demands and by bringing out their fullest meaning. Love of neighbour springs from a loving heart which, precisely because it loves, is ready to live out the loftiest challenges. Jesus shows that the commandments must not be understood as a minimum limit not to be gone beyond, but rather as a path involving a moral and spiritual journey towards perfection, at the heart of which is love (cf. Col 3:14). Thus the commandment "You shall not murder" becomes a call to an attentive love which protects and promotes the life of one's neighbour. The precept prohibiting adultery becomes an invitation to a pure way of looking at others, capable of respecting the spousal meaning of the body: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment'. But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'. But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:21-22, 27-28). Jesus himself is the living "fulfilment" of the Law inasmuch as he fulfils its authentic meaning by the total gift of himself: he himself becomes a living and personal Law, who invites people to follow him; through the Spirit, he gives the grace to share his own life and love and provides the strength to bear witness to that love in personal choices and actions (cf. Jn 13:34-35).

"If you wish to be perfect" (Mt 19:21)

16. The answer he receives about the commandments does not satisfy the young man, who asks Jesus a further question. "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" (Mt 19:20). It is not easy to say with a clear conscience "I have kept all these", if one has any understanding of the real meaning of the demands contained in God's Law. And yet, even though he is able to make this reply, even though he has followed the moral ideal seriously and generously from childhood, the rich young man knows that he is still far from the goal: before the person of Jesus he realizes that he is still lacking something. It is his awareness of this insufficiency that Jesus addresses in his final answer. Conscious of the young man's yearning for something greater, which would transcend a legalistic interpretation of the commandments, the Good Teacher invites him to enter upon the path of perfection: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Mt 19:21).

Like the earlier part of Jesus' answer, this part too must be read and interpreted in the context of the whole moral message of the Gospel, and in particular in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12), the first of which is precisely the Beatitude of the poor, the "poor in spirit" as Saint Matthew makes clear (Mt 5:3), the humble. In this sense it can be said that the Beatitudes are also relevant to the answer given by Jesus to the young man's question: "What good must I do to have eternal life?". Indeed, each of the Beatitudes promises, from a particular viewpoint, that very "good" which opens man up to eternal life, and indeed is eternal life.

The Beatitudes are not specifically concerned with certain particular rules of behaviour. Rather, they speak of basic attitudes and dispositions in life and therefore they do not coincide exactly with the commandments. On the other hand, there is no separation or opposition between the Beatitudes and the commandments: both refer to the good, to eternal life. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the proclamation of the Beatitudes, but also refers to the commandments (cf. Mt 5:20-48). At the same time, the Sermon on the Mount demonstrates the openness of the commandments and their orientation towards the horizon of the perfection proper to the Beatitudes. These latter are above all promises, from which there also indirectly flow normative indications for the moral life. In their originality and profundity they are a sort of self-portrait of Christ, and for this very reason are invitations to discipleship and to communion of life with Christ.²⁶

17. We do not know how clearly the young man in the Gospel understood the profound and challenging import of Jesus' first reply: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments". But it is certain that the young man's commitment to respect all the moral demands of the commandments represents the absolutely essential ground in which the desire for perfection can take root and mature, the desire, that is, for the meaning of the commandments to be completely fulfilled in following Christ. Jesus' conversation with the young man helps us to grasp the conditions for the moral growth of man, who has been called to perfection: the young man, having observed all the commandments, shows that he is incapable of taking the next step by himself alone. To do so requires mature human freedom ("If you wish to be perfect") and God's gift of grace ("Come, follow me").

Perfection demands that maturity in self-giving to which human freedom is called. Jesus points out to the young man that the commandments are the first and indispensable condition for having eternal life; on the other hand, for the

young man to give up all he possesses and to follow the Lord is presented as an invitation: "If you wish...". These words of Jesus reveal the particular dynamic of freedom's growth towards maturity, and at the same time they bear witness to the fundamental relationship between freedom and divine law. Human freedom and God's law are not in opposition; on the contrary, they appeal one to the other. The follower of Christ knows that his vocation is to freedom. "You were called to freedom, brethren" (Gal 5:13), proclaims the Apostle Paul with joy and pride. But he immediately adds: "only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (ibid.). The firmness with which the Apostle opposes those who believe that they are justified by the Law has nothing to do with man's "liberation" from precepts. On the contrary, the latter are at the service of the practice of love: "For he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the Law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet, ' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' " (Rom 13:8-9). Saint Augustine, after speaking of the observance of the commandments as being a kind of incipient, imperfect freedom, goes on to say: "Why, someone will ask, is it not yet perfect? Because 'I see in my members another law at war with the law of my reason'... In part freedom, in part slavery: not yet complete freedom, not yet pure, not yet whole, because we are not yet in eternity. In part we retain our weakness and in part we have attained freedom. All our sins were destroyed in Baptism, but does it follow that no weakness remained after iniquity was destroyed? Had none remained, we would live without sin in this life. But who would dare to say this except someone who is proud, someone unworthy of the mercy of our deliverer?... Therefore, since some weakness has remained in us, I dare to say that to the extent to which we serve God we are free, while to the extent that we follow the law of sin, we are still slaves".²⁷

18. Those who live "by the flesh" experience God's law as a burden, and indeed as a denial or at least a restriction of their own freedom. On the other hand, those who are impelled by love and "walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16), and who desire to serve others, find in God's Law the fundamental and necessary way in which to practise love as something freely chosen and freely lived out. Indeed, they feel an interior urge - a genuine "necessity" and no longer a form of coercion - not to stop at the minimum demands of the Law, but to live them in their "fullness". This is a still uncertain and fragile journey as long as we are on earth, but it is one made possible by grace, which enables us to possess the full freedom of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:21) and thus to live our moral life in a way worthy of our sublime vocation as "sons in the Son".

This vocation to perfect love is not restricted to a small group of individuals. The invitation, "go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor", and the promise "you will have treasure in heaven", are meant for everyone, because they bring out the full meaning of the commandment of love for neighbour, just as the invitation which follows, "Come, follow me", is the new, specific form of the commandment of love of God. Both the commandments and Jesus' invitation to the rich young man stand at the service of a single and indivisible charity, which spontaneously tends towards that perfection whose measure is God alone: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus makes even clearer the meaning of this perfection: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36).

"Come, follow me" (Mt 19:21)

19. The way and at the same time the content of this perfection consist in the following of Jesus, sequela Christi, once one has given up one's own wealth and very self. This is precisely the conclusion of Jesus' conversation with the young man: "Come, follow me" (Mt 19:21). It is an invitation the marvellous grandeur of which will be fully perceived by the disciples after Christ's Resurrection, when the Holy Spirit leads them to all truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

It is Jesus himself who takes the initiative and calls people to follow him. His call is addressed first to those to whom he entrusts a particular mission, beginning with the Twelve; but it is also clear that every believer is called to be a follower of Christ (cf. Acts 6:1). Following Christ is thus the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality: just as the people of Israel followed God who led them through the desert towards the Promised Land (cf. Ex 13:21), so every disciple must follow Jesus, towards whom he is drawn by the Father himself (cf. Jn 6:44).

This is not a matter only of disposing oneself to hear a teaching and obediently accepting a commandment. More radically, it involves holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father. By responding in faith and following the one who is Incarnate Wisdom, the disciple of Jesus truly becomes a disciple of God (cf. Jn 6:45). Jesus is indeed the light of the world, the light of life (cf. Jn 8:12). He is the shepherd who leads his sheep and feeds them (cf. Jn 10:11-16); he is the way, and the truth, and the life (cf. Jn 14:6). It is Jesus who leads to the Father, so much so that to see him, the Son, is to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:6-10). And thus to imitate the Son, "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), means to imitate the Father.

20. Jesus asks us to follow him and to imitate him along the path of love, a love which gives itself completely to the brethren out of love for God: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). The word "as" requires imitation of Jesus and of his love, of which the washing of feet is a sign: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:14-15). Jesus' way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule of Christian life. Indeed, his actions, and in particular his Passion and Death on the Cross, are

the living revelation of his love for the Father and for others. This is exactly the love that Jesus wishes to be imitated by all who follow him. It is the "new" commandment: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

The word "as" also indicates the degree of Jesus' love, and of the love with which his disciples are called to love one another. After saying: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12), Jesus continues with words which indicate the sacrificial gift of his life on the Cross, as the witness to a love "to the end" (Jn 13:1): "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).

As he calls the young man to follow him along the way of perfection, Jesus asks him to be perfect in the command of love, in "his" commandment: to become part of the unfolding of his complete giving, to imitate and rekindle the very love of the "Good" Teacher, the one who loved "to the end". This is what Jesus asks of everyone who wishes to follow him: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24).

21. Following Christ is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of his being. Being a follower of Christ means becoming conformed to him who became a servant even to giving himself on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:5-8). Christ dwells by faith in the heart of the believer (cf. Eph 3:17), and thus the disciple is conformed to the Lord. This is the effect of grace, of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Having become one with Christ, the Christian becomes a member of his Body, which is the Church (cf. Cor 12:13, 27). By the work of the Spirit, Baptism radically configures the faithful to Christ in the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection; it "clothes him" in Christ (cf. Gal 3:27): "Let us rejoice and give thanks", exclaims Saint Augustine speaking to the baptized, "for we have become not only Christians, but Christ (...). Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ!".²⁸ Having died to sin, those who are baptized receive new life (cf. Rom 6:3-11): alive for God in Christ Jesus, they are called to walk by the Spirit and to manifest the Spirit's fruits in their lives (cf. Gal 5:16-25). Sharing in the Eucharist, the sacrament of the New Covenant (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-29), is the culmination of our assimilation to Christ, the source of "eternal life" (cf. Jn 6:51-58), the source and power of that complete gift of self, which Jesus - according to the testimony handed on by Paul - commands us to commemorate in liturgy and in life: "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

"With God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26)

22. The conclusion of Jesus' conversation with the rich young man is very poignant: "When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had many possessions" (Mt 19:22). Not only the rich man but the disciples themselves are taken aback by Jesus' call to discipleship, the demands of which transcend human aspirations and abilities: "When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?" " (Mt 19:25). But the Master refers them to God's power: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26).

In the same chapter of Matthew's Gospel (19:3-10), Jesus, interpreting the Mosaic Law on marriage, rejects the right to divorce, appealing to a "beginning" more fundamental and more authoritative than the Law of Moses: God's original plan for mankind, a plan which man after sin has no longer been able to live up to: "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19:8). Jesus' appeal to the "beginning" dismays the disciples, who remark: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry" (Mt 19:10). And Jesus, referring specifically to the charism of celibacy "for the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 19:12), but stating a general rule, indicates the new and surprising possibility opened up to man by God's grace. "He said to them: 'Not everyone can accept this saying, but only those to whom it is given' " (Mt 19:11).

To imitate and live out the love of Christ is not possible for man by his own strength alone. He becomes capable of this love only by virtue of a gift received. As the Lord Jesus receives the love of his Father, so he in turn freely communicates that love to his disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love" (Jn 15:9). Christ's gift is his Spirit, whose first "fruit" (cf. Gal 5:22) is charity: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Saint Augustine asks: "Does love bring about the keeping of the commandments, or does the keeping of the commandments bring about love?" And he answers: "But who can doubt that love comes first? For the one who does not love has no reason for keeping the commandments".²⁹

23. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2). With these words the Apostle Paul invites us to consider in the perspective of the history of salvation, which reaches its fulfilment in Christ, the relationship between the (Old) Law and grace (the New Law). He recognizes the pedagogic function of the Law, which, by enabling sinful man to take stock of his own powerlessness and by stripping him of the presumption of his self-sufficiency, leads him to ask for and to receive "life in the Spirit". Only in this new life is it possible to carry out God's commandments. Indeed, it is through faith in Christ that we have been made righteous (cf. Rom 3:28): the "righteousness" which the Law demands, but is unable to give, is found by every believer to be revealed and granted by the Lord Jesus. Once again it is Saint Augustine who admirably sums up this Pauline dialectic of law and grace: "The law was given that grace might be sought; and grace was given, that the law might be fulfilled".³⁰

Love and life according to the Gospel cannot be thought of first and foremost as a kind of precept, because what they demand is beyond man's abilities. They are possible only as the result of a gift of God who heals, restores and

transforms the human heart by his grace: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (Jn 1:17). The promise of eternal life is thus linked to the gift of grace, and the gift of the Spirit which we have received is even now the "guarantee of our inheritance" (Eph 1:14).

24. And so we find revealed the authentic and original aspect of the commandment of love and of the perfection to which it is ordered: we are speaking of a possibility opened up to man exclusively by grace, by the gift of God, by his love. On the other hand, precisely the awareness of having received the gift, of possessing in Jesus Christ the love of God, generates and sustains the free response of a full love for God and the brethren, as the Apostle John insistently reminds us in his first Letter: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love... Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another... We love, because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:7-8, 11, 19).

This inseparable connection between the Lord's grace and human freedom, between gift and task, has been expressed in simple yet profound words by Saint Augustine in his prayer: "Da quod iubes et iube quod vis" (grant what you command and command what you will).³¹

The gift does not lessen but reinforces the moral demands of love: "This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another just as he has commanded us" (1 Jn 3:32). One can "abide" in love only by keeping the commandments, as Jesus states: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (Jn 15:10).

Going to the heart of the moral message of Jesus and the preaching of the Apostles, and summing up in a remarkable way the great tradition of the Fathers of the East and West, and of Saint Augustine in particular, ³² Saint Thomas was able to write that the New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Christ. ³³ The external precepts also mentioned in the Gospel dispose one for this grace or produce its effects in one's life. Indeed, the New Law is not content to say what must be done, but also gives the power to "do what is true" (cf. Jn 3:21). Saint John Chrysostom likewise observed that the New Law was promulgated at the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven on the day of Pentecost, and that the Apostles "did not come down from the mountain carrying, like Moses, tablets of stone in their hands; but they came down carrying the Holy Spirit in their hearts... having become by his grace a living law, a living book".³⁴

"Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20)

25.

Jesus' conversation with the rich young man continues, in a sense, in every period of history, including our own. The question: "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" arises in the heart of every individual, and it is Christ alone who is capable of giving the full and definitive answer. The Teacher who expounds God's commandments, who invites others to follow him and gives the grace for a new life, is always present and at work in our midst, as he himself promised: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). Christ's relevance for people of all times is shown forth in his body, which is the Church. For this reason the Lord promised his disciples the Holy Spirit, who would "bring to their remembrance" and teach them to understand his commandments (cf. Jn 14:26), and who would be the principle and constant source of a new life in the world (cf. Jn 3:5-8; Rom 8:1-13).

The moral prescriptions which God imparted in the Old Covenant, and which attained their perfection in the New and Eternal Covenant in the very person of the Son of God made man, must be faithfully kept and continually put into practice in the various different cultures throughout the course of history. The task of interpreting these prescriptions was entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and to their successors, with the special assistance of the Spirit of truth: "He who hears you hears me" (Lk 10:16). By the light and the strength of this Spirit the Apostles carried out their mission of preaching the Gospel and of pointing out the "way" of the Lord (cf. Acts 18:25), teaching above all how to follow and imitate Christ: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21).

26.

In the moral catechesis of the Apostles, besides exhortations and directions connected to specific historical and cultural situations, we find an ethical teaching with precise rules of behaviour. This is seen in their Letters, which contain the interpretation, made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of the Lord's precepts as they are to be lived in different cultural circumstances (cf. Rom 12-15; 1 Cor 11-14; Gal 5-6; Eph 4-6; Col 3-4; 1 Pt and Jas). From the Church's beginnings, the Apostles, by virtue of their pastoral responsibility to preach the Gospel, were vigilant over the right conduct of Christians, ³⁵ just as they were vigilant for the purity of the faith and the handing down of the divine gifts in the sacraments.³⁶ The first Christians, coming both from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, differed from the pagans not only in their faith and their liturgy but also in the witness of their moral conduct, which was inspired by the New Law.³⁷ The Church is in fact a communion both of faith and of life; her rule of life is "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6).

No damage must be done to the harmony between faith and life: the unity of the Church is damaged not only by Christians who reject or distort the truths of faith but also by those who disregard the moral obligations to which they are called by the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-13). The Apostles decisively rejected any separation between the commitment of

the heart and the actions which express or prove it (cf. 1 Jn 2:3-6). And ever since Apostolic times the Church's Pastors have unambiguously condemned the behaviour of those who fostered division by their teaching or by their actions.³⁸

27. Within the unity of the Church, promoting and preserving the faith and the moral life is the task entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles (cf. Mt 28:19-20), a task which continues in the ministry of their successors. This is apparent from the living Tradition, whereby - as the Second Vatican Council teaches - "the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to every generation all that she is and all that she believes. This Tradition which comes from the Apostles, progresses in the Church under the assistance of the Holy Spirit".³⁹ In the Holy Spirit, the Church receives and hands down the Scripture as the witness to the "great things" which God has done in history (cf. Lk 1:49); she professes by the lips of her Fathers and Doctors the truth of the Word made flesh, puts his precepts and love into practice in the lives of her Saints and in the sacrifice of her Martyrs, and celebrates her hope in him in the Liturgy. By this same Tradition Christians receive "the living voice of the Gospel", ⁴⁰ as the faithful expression of God's wisdom and will.

Within Tradition, the authentic interpretation of the Lord's law develops, with the help of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who is at the origin of the Revelation of Jesus' commandments and teachings guarantees that they will be reverently preserved, faithfully expounded and correctly applied in different times and places. This constant "putting into practice" of the commandments is the sign and fruit of a deeper insight into Revelation and of an understanding in the light of faith of new historical and cultural situations. Nevertheless, it can only confirm the permanent validity of Revelation and follow in the line of the interpretation given to it by the great Tradition of the Church's teaching and life, as witnessed by the teaching of the Fathers, the lives of the Saints, the Church's Liturgy and the teaching of the Magisterium.

In particular, as the Council affirms, "the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether in its written form or in that of Tradition, has been entrusted only to those charged with the Church's living Magisterium, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ".⁴¹ The Church, in her life and teaching, is thus revealed as "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), including the truth regarding moral action. Indeed, "the Church has the right always and everywhere to proclaim moral principles, even in respect of the social order, and to make judgments about any human matter in so far as this is required by fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls".⁴²

Precisely on the questions frequently debated in moral theology today and with regard to which new tendencies and theories have developed, the Magisterium, in fidelity to Jesus Christ and in continuity with the Church's tradition, senses more urgently the duty to offer its own discernment and teaching, in order to help man in his journey towards truth and freedom.

CHAPTER II -"DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD " (Rom 12:2) -The Church and the discernment of certain tendencies in present-day moral theology

Teaching what befits sound doctrine (cf. Tit 2:1)

28. Our meditation on the dialogue between Jesus and the rich young man has enabled us to bring together the essential elements of Revelation in the Old and New Testament with regard to moral action. These are: the subordination of man and his activity to God, the One who "alone is good"; the relationship clearly indicated in the divine commandments, between the moral good of human acts and eternal life; Christian discipleship, which opens up before man the perspective of perfect love; and finally the gift of the Holy Spirit, source and means of the moral life of the "new creation" (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).

In her reflection on morality, the Church has always kept in mind the words of Jesus to the rich young man. Indeed, Sacred Scripture remains the living and fruitful source of the Church's moral doctrine; as the Second Vatican Council recalled, the Gospel is "the source of all saving truth and moral teaching".⁴³ The Church has faithfully preserved what the word of God teaches, not only about truths which must be believed but also about moral action, action pleasing to God (cf. 1 Th 4:1); she has achieved a doctrinal development analogous to that which has taken place in the realm of the truths of faith. Assisted by the Holy Spirit who leads her into all the truth (cf. Jn 16:13), the Church has not ceased, nor can she ever cease,

to contemplate the "mystery of the Word Incarnate", in whom "light is shed on the mystery of man".⁴⁴

29. The Church's moral reflection, always conducted in the light of Christ, the "Good Teacher", has also developed in the specific form of the theological science called "moral theology ", a science which accepts and examines Divine Revelation while at the same time responding to the demands of human reason. Moral theology is a reflection concerned with "morality", with the good and the evil of human acts and of the person who performs them; in this sense it is accessible to all people. But it is also "theology", inasmuch as it acknowledges that the origin and end of moral action are found in the One who "alone is good" and who, by giving himself to man in Christ, offers him the happiness of divine life.

The Second Vatican Council invited scholars to take "special care for the renewal of moral theology", in such a way that "its scientific presentation, increasingly based on the teaching of Scripture, will cast light on the exalted vocation of

the faithful in Christ and on their obligation to bear fruit in charity for the life of the world".⁴⁵ The Council also encouraged theologians, "while respecting the methods and requirements of theological science, to look for a more appropriate way of communicating doctrine to the people of their time; since there is a difference between the deposit or the truths of faith and the manner in which they are expressed, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment".⁴⁶ This led to a further invitation, one extended to all the faithful, but addressed to theologians in particular: "The faithful should live in the closest contact with others of their time, and should work for a perfect understanding of their modes of thought and feelings as expressed in their culture".⁴⁷

The work of many theologians who found support in the Council's encouragement has already borne fruit in interesting and helpful reflections about the truths of faith to be believed and applied in life, reflections offered in a form better suited to the sensitivities and questions of our contemporaries. The Church, and particularly the Bishops, to whom Jesus Christ primarily entrusted the ministry of teaching, are deeply appreciative of this work, and encourage theologians to continue their efforts, inspired by that profound and authentic "fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom" (cf. Prov 1:7).

At the same time, however, within the context of the theological debates which followed the Council, there have developed certain interpretations of Christian morality which are not consistent with "sound teaching" (2 Tim 4:3). Certainly the Church's Magisterium does not intend to impose upon the faithful any particular theological system, still less a philosophical one. Nevertheless, in order to "reverently preserve and faithfully expound" the word of God, ⁴⁸ the Magisterium has the duty to state that some trends of theological thinking and certain philosophical affirmations are incompatible with revealed truth.⁴⁹

30. In addressing this Encyclical to you, my Brother Bishops, it is my intention to state the principles necessary for discerning what is contrary to "sound doctrine", drawing attention to those elements of the Church's moral teaching which today appear particularly exposed to error, ambiguity or neglect. Yet these are the very elements on which there depends "the answer to the obscure riddles of the human condition which today also, as in the past, profoundly disturb the human heart. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of our life? What is good and what is sin? What origin and purpose do sufferings have? What is the way to attaining true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? Lastly, what is that final, unutterable mystery which embraces our lives and from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?".⁵⁰ These and other questions, such as: what is freedom and what is its relationship to the truth contained in God's law? what is the role of conscience in man's moral development? how do we determine, in accordance with the truth about the good, the specific rights and duties of the human person?

- can all be summed up in the fundamental question which the young man in the Gospel put to Jesus: "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" Because the Church has been sent by Jesus to preach the Gospel and to "make disciples of all nations..., teaching them to observe all" that he has commanded (cf. Mt 28:19-20), she today once more puts forward the Master's reply, a reply that possesses a light and a power capable of answering even the most controversial and complex questions. This light and power also impel the Church constantly to carry out not only her dogmatic but also her moral reflection within an interdisciplinary context, which is especially necessary in facing new issues.⁵¹

It is in the same light and power that the Church's Magisterium continues to carry out its task of discernment, accepting and living out the admonition addressed by the Apostle Paul to Timothy: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time will come when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (2 Tim 4:1-5; cf. Tit 1:10, 13-14).

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32)

31. The human issues most frequently debated and differently resolved in contemporary moral reflection are all closely related, albeit in various ways, to a crucial issue: human freedom.

Certainly people today have a particularly strong sense of freedom. As the Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* had already observed, "the dignity of the human person is a concern of which people of our time are becoming increasingly more aware".⁵² Hence the insistent demand that people be permitted to "enjoy the use of their own responsible judgment and freedom, and decide on their actions on grounds of duty and conscience, without external pressure or coercion".⁵³ In particular, the right to religious freedom and to respect for conscience on its journey towards the truth is increasingly perceived as the foundation of the cumulative rights of the person.⁵⁴

This heightened sense of the dignity of the human person and of his or her uniqueness, and of the respect due to the journey of conscience, certainly represents one of the positive achievements of modern culture. This perception, authentic as it is, has been expressed in a number of more or less adequate ways, some of which however diverge from the truth about man as a creature and the image of God, and thus need to be corrected and purified in the light of faith.⁵⁵

32. Certain currents of modern thought have gone so far as to exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values. This is the direction taken by doctrines which have lost the sense of the transcendent or which are explicitly atheist. The individual conscience is accorded the status of a supreme tribunal

of moral judgment which hands down categorical and infallible decisions about good and evil. To the affirmation that one has a duty to follow one's conscience is unduly added the affirmation that one's moral judgment is true merely by the fact that it has its origin in the conscience. But in this way the inescapable claims of truth disappear, yielding their place to a criterion of sincerity, authenticity and "being at peace with oneself", so much so that some have come to adopt a radically subjectivistic conception of moral judgment.

As is immediately evident, the crisis of truth is not unconnected with this development. Once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person's intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly. Such an outlook is quite congenial to an individualist ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others. Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature.

These different notions are at the origin of currents of thought which posit a radical opposition between moral law and conscience, and between nature and freedom.

33.

Side by side with its exaltation of freedom, yet oddly in contrast with it, modern culture radically questions the very existence of this freedom. A number of disciplines, grouped under the name of the "behavioural sciences", have rightly drawn attention to the many kinds of psychological and social conditioning which influence the exercise of human freedom. Knowledge of these conditionings and the study they have received represent important achievements which have found application in various areas, for example in pedagogy or the administration of justice. But some people, going beyond the conclusions which can be legitimately drawn from these observations, have come to question or even deny the very reality of human freedom.

Mention should also be made here of theories which misuse scientific research about the human person. Arguing from the great variety of customs, behaviour patterns and institutions present in humanity, these theories end up, if not with an outright denial of universal human values, at least with a relativistic conception of morality.

34.

"Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?". The question of morality, to which Christ provides the answer, cannot prescind from the issue of freedom. Indeed, it considers that issue central, for there can be no morality without freedom: "It is only in freedom that man can turn to what is good".⁵⁶ But what sort of freedom? The Council, considering our contemporaries who "highly regard" freedom and "assiduously pursue" it, but who "often cultivate it in wrong ways as a licence to do anything they please, even evil", speaks of "genuine" freedom: "Genuine freedom is an outstanding manifestation of the divine image in man. For God willed to leave man "in the power of his own counsel" (cf. Sir 15:14), so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would freely arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God".⁵⁷

Although each individual has a right to be respected in his own journey in search of the truth, there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known.⁵⁸ As Cardinal John Henry Newman, that outstanding defender of the rights of conscience, forcefully put it: "Conscience has rights because it has duties".⁵⁹

Certain tendencies in contemporary moral theology, under the influence of the currents of subjectivism and individualism just mentioned, involve novel interpretations of the relationship of freedom to the moral law, human nature and conscience, and propose novel criteria for the moral evaluation of acts. Despite their variety, these tendencies are at one in lessening or even denying the dependence of freedom on truth.

If we wish to undertake a critical discernment of these tendencies - a discernment capable of acknowledging what is legitimate, useful and of value in them, while at the same time pointing out their ambiguities, dangers and errors - we must examine them in the light of the fundamental dependence of freedom upon truth, a dependence which has found its clearest and most authoritative expression in the words of Christ: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32).

I. Freedom and Law

"Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen 2:17)

35. In the Book of Genesis we read: "The Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may eat freely of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die' " (Gen 2:16-17).

With this imagery, Revelation teaches that the power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man, but to God alone. The man is certainly free, inasmuch as he can understand and accept God's commands. And he possesses an extremely far-reaching freedom, since he can eat "of every tree of the garden". But his freedom is not unlimited: it must halt before the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil", for it is called to accept the moral law given

by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfilment precisely in the acceptance of that law. God, who alone is good, knows perfectly what is good for man, and by virtue of his very love proposes this good to man in the commandments.

God's law does not reduce, much less do away with human freedom; rather, it protects and promotes that freedom. In contrast, however, some present-day cultural tendencies have given rise to several currents of thought in ethics which centre upon an alleged conflict between freedom and law. These doctrines would grant to individuals or social groups the right to determine what is good or evil. Human freedom would thus be able to "create values" and would enjoy a primacy over truth, to the point that truth itself would be considered a creation of freedom. Freedom would thus lay claim to a moral autonomy which would actually amount to an absolute sovereignty.

36. The modern concern for the claims of autonomy has not failed to exercise an influence also in the sphere of Catholic moral theology. While the latter has certainly never attempted to set human freedom against the divine law or to question the existence of an ultimate religious foundation for moral norms, it has, nonetheless, been led to undertake a profound rethinking about the role of reason and of faith in identifying moral norms with reference to specific "innerworldly" kinds of behaviour involving oneself, others and the material world.

It must be acknowledged that underlying this work of rethinking there are certain positive concerns which to a great extent belong to the best tradition of Catholic thought. In response to the encouragement of the Second Vatican Council, 60 there has been a desire to foster dialogue with modern culture, emphasizing the rational - and thus universally understandable and communicable - character of moral norms belonging

to the sphere of the natural moral law.⁶¹ There has also been an attempt to reaffirm the interior character of the ethical requirements deriving from that law, requirements which create an obligation for the will only because such an obligation was previously acknowledged by human reason and, concretely, by personal conscience.

Some people, however, disregarding the dependence of human reason on Divine Wisdom and the need, given the present state of fallen nature, for Divine Revelation as an effective means for knowing moral truths, even those of the natural order, 62 have actually posited a complete sovereignty of reason in the domain of moral norms regarding the right ordering of life in this world. Such norms would constitute the boundaries for a merely "human" morality; they would be the expression of a law which man in an autonomous manner lays down for himself and which has its source exclusively in human reason. In no way could God be considered the Author of this law, except in the sense that human reason exercises its autonomy in setting down laws by virtue of a primordial and total mandate given to man by God. These trends of thought have led to a denial, in opposition to Sacred Scripture (cf. Mt 15:3-6) and the Church's constant teaching, of the fact that the natural moral law has God as its author, and that man, by the use of reason, participates in the eternal law, which it is not for him to establish.

37. In their desire, however, to keep the moral life in a Christian context, certain moral theologians have introduced a sharp distinction, contrary to Catholic doctrine, 63 between an ethical order, which would be human in origin and of value for this world alone, and an order of salvation, for which only certain intentions and interior attitudes regarding God and neighbour would be significant. This has then led to an actual denial that there exists, in Divine Revelation, a specific and determined moral content, universally valid and permanent. The word of God would be limited to proposing an exhortation, a generic paraenesis, which the autonomous reason alone would then have the task of completing with normative directives which are truly "objective", that is, adapted to the concrete historical situation. Naturally, an autonomy conceived in this way also involves the denial of a specific doctrinal competence on the part of the Church and her Magisterium with regard to particular moral norms which deal with the so-called "human good". Such norms would not be part of the proper content of Revelation, and would not in themselves be relevant for salvation.

No one can fail to see that such an interpretation of the autonomy of human reason involves positions incompatible with Catholic teaching.

In such a context it is absolutely necessary to clarify, in the light of the word of God and the living Tradition of the Church, the fundamental notions of human freedom and of the moral law, as well as their profound and intimate relationship. Only thus will it be possible to respond to the rightful claims of human reason in a way which accepts the valid elements present in certain currents of contemporary moral theology without compromising the Church's heritage of moral teaching with ideas derived from an erroneous concept of autonomy.

"God left man in the power of his own counsel" (Sir 15:14)

38. Taking up the words of Sirach, the Second Vatican Council explains the meaning of that "genuine freedom" which is "an outstanding manifestation of the divine image" in man: "God willed to leave man in the power of his own counsel, so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would freely arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God".⁶⁴ These words indicate the wonderful depth of the sharing in God's dominion to which man has been called: they indicate that man's dominion extends in a certain sense over man himself. This has been a constantly recurring theme in theological reflection on human freedom, which is described as a form of kingship. For example, Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes: "The soul shows its royal and exalted character... in that it is free and self-governed, swayed autonomously by its own will. Of whom else can this be said, save a king?... Thus

human nature, created to rule other creatures, was by its likeness to the King of the universe made as it were a living image, partaking with the Archetype both in dignity and in name".⁶⁵

The exercise of dominion over the world represents a great and responsible task for man, one which involves his freedom in obedience to the Creator's command: "Fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). In view of this, a rightful autonomy is due to every man, as well as to the human community, a fact to which the Council's Constitution *Gaudium et spes* calls special attention. This is the autonomy of earthly realities, which means that "created things have their own laws and values which are to be gradually discovered, utilized and ordered by man".⁶⁶

39. Not only the world, however, but also man himself has been entrusted to his own care and responsibility. God left man "in the power of his own counsel" (Sir 15:14), that he might seek his Creator and freely attain perfection. Attaining such perfection means personally building up that perfection in himself. Indeed, just as man in exercising his dominion over the world shapes it in accordance with his own intelligence and will, so too in performing morally good acts, man strengthens, develops and consolidates within himself his likeness to God.

Even so, the Council warns against a false concept of the autonomy of earthly realities, one which would maintain that "created things are not dependent on God and that man can use them without reference to their Creator".⁶⁷ With regard to man himself, such a concept of autonomy produces particularly baneful effects, and eventually leads to atheism: "Without its Creator the creature simply disappears... If God is ignored the creature itself is impoverished".⁶⁸

40. The teaching of the Council emphasizes, on the one hand, the role of human reason in discovering and applying the moral law: the moral life calls for that creativity and originality typical of the person, the source and cause of his own deliberate acts. On the other hand, reason draws its own truth and authority from the eternal law, which is none other than divine wisdom itself.⁶⁹ At the heart of the moral life we thus find the principle of a "rightful autonomy"⁷⁰ of man, the personal subject of his actions. The moral law has its origin in God and always finds its source in him: at the same time, by virtue of natural reason, which derives from divine wisdom, it is a properly human law. Indeed, as we have seen, the natural law "is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation".⁷¹ The rightful autonomy of the practical reason means that man possesses in himself his own law, received from the Creator. Nevertheless, the autonomy of reason cannot mean that reason itself creates values and moral norms. ⁷² Were this autonomy to imply a denial of the participation of the practical reason in the wisdom of the divine Creator and Lawgiver, or were it to suggest a freedom which creates moral norms, on the basis of historical contingencies or the diversity of societies and cultures, this sort of alleged autonomy would contradict the Church's teaching on the truth about man.⁷³ It would be the death of true freedom: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:17).

41. Man's genuine moral autonomy in no way means the rejection but rather the acceptance of the moral law, of God's command: "The Lord God gave this command to the man..." (Gen 2:16). Human freedom and God's law meet and are called to intersect, in the sense of man's free obedience to God and of God's completely gratuitous benevolence towards man. Hence obedience to God is not, as some would believe, a heteronomy, as if the moral life were subject to the will of something all-powerful, absolute, ex- traneous to man and intolerant of his freedom. If in fact a heteronomy of morality were to mean a denial of man's self-determination or the imposition of norms unrelated to his good, this would be in contradiction to the Revelation of the Covenant and of the redemptive Incarnation. Such a heteronomy would be nothing but a form of alienation, contrary to divine wisdom and to the dignity of the human person.

Others speak, and rightly so, of theonomy, or participated theonomy, since man's free obedience to God's law effectively implies that human reason and human will participate in God's wisdom and providence. By forbidding man to "eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil", God makes it clear that man does not originally possess such "knowledge" as something properly his own, but only participates in it by the light of natural reason and of Divine Revelation, which manifest to him the requirements and the promptings of eternal wisdom. Law must therefore be considered an expression of divine wisdom: by submitting to the law, freedom submits to the truth of creation. Consequently one must acknowledge in the freedom of the human person the image and the nearness of God, who is present in all (cf. Eph 4:6). But one must likewise acknowledge the majesty of the God of the universe and revere the holiness of the law of God, who is infinitely transcendent: *Deus semper maior*. ⁷⁴

Blessed is the man who takes delight in the law of the Lord (cf. Ps 1:1-2)

42. Patterned on God's freedom, man's freedom is not negated by his obedience to the divine law; indeed, only through this obedience does it abide in the truth and conform to human dignity. This is clearly stated by the Council: "Human dignity requires man to act through conscious and free choice, as motivated and prompted personally from within, and not through blind internal impulse or merely external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when he frees himself from all subservience to his feelings, and in a free choice of the good, pursues his own end by effectively and assiduously marshalling the appropriate means".⁷⁵

In his journey towards God, the One who "alone is good", man must freely do good and avoid evil. But in order to accomplish this he must be able to distinguish good from evil. And this takes place above all thanks to the light of natural reason, the reflection in man of the splendour of God's countenance. Thus Saint Thomas, commenting on a

verse of Psalm 4, writes: "After saying: Offer right sacrifices (Ps 4:5), as if some had then asked him what right works were, the Psalmist adds: There are many who say: Who will make us see good? And in reply to the question he says: The light of your face, Lord, is signed upon us, thereby implying that the light of natural reason whereby we discern good from evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else but an imprint on us of the divine light".⁷⁶ It also becomes clear why this law is called the natural law: it receives this name not because it refers to the nature of irrational beings but because the reason which promulgates it is proper to human nature.⁷⁷

43. The Second Vatican Council points out that the "supreme rule of life is the divine law itself, the eternal, objective and universal law by which God out of his wisdom and love arranges, directs and governs the whole world and the paths of the human community. God has enabled man to share in this divine law, and hence man is able under the gentle guidance of God's providence increasingly to recognize the unchanging truth".⁷⁸

The Council refers back to the classic teaching on God's eternal law. Saint Augustine defines this as "the reason or the will of God, who commands us to respect the natural order and forbids us to disturb it".⁷⁹ Saint Thomas identifies it with "the type of the divine wisdom as moving all things to their due end".⁸⁰ And God's wisdom is providence, a love which cares. God himself loves and cares, in the most literal and basic sense, for all creation (cf. Wis 7:22; 8:11). But God provides for man differently from the way in which he provides for beings which are not persons. He cares for man not "from without", through the laws of physical nature, but "from within", through reason, which, by its natural knowledge of God's eternal law, is consequently able to show man the right direction to take in his free actions.⁸¹ In this way God calls man to participate in his own providence, since he desires to guide the world - not only the world of nature but also the world of human persons - through man himself, through man's reasonable and responsible care. The natural law enters here as the human expression of God's eternal law. Saint Thomas writes: "Among all others, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in the most excellent way, insofar as it partakes of a share of providence, being provident both for itself and for others. Thus it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end. This participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called natural law".⁸²

44. The Church has often made reference to the Thomistic doctrine of natural law, including it in her own teaching on morality. Thus my Venerable Predecessor Leo XIII emphasized the essential subordination of reason and human law to the Wisdom of God and to his law. After stating that "the natural law is written and engraved in the heart of each and every man, since it is none other than human reason itself which commands us to do good and counsels us not to sin", Leo XIII appealed to the "higher reason" of the divine Lawgiver: "But this prescription of human reason could not have the force of law unless it were the voice and the interpreter of some higher reason to which our spirit and our freedom must be subject". Indeed, the force of law consists in its authority to impose duties, to confer rights and to sanction certain behaviour: "Now all of this, clearly, could not exist in man if, as his own supreme legislator, he gave himself the rule of his own actions". And he concluded: "It follows that the natural law is itself the eternal law, implanted in beings endowed with reason, and inclining them towards their right action and end; it is none other than the eternal reason of the Creator and Ruler of the universe".⁸³

Man is able to recognize good and evil thanks to that discernment of good from evil which he himself carries out by his reason, in particular by his reason enlightened by Divine Revelation and by faith, through the law which God gave to the Chosen People, beginning with the commandments on Sinai. Israel was called to accept and to live out God's law as a particular gift and sign of its election and of the divine Covenant, and also as a pledge of God's blessing. Thus Moses could address the children of Israel and ask them: "What great nation is that that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?" (Dt 4:7-8). In the Psalms we encounter the sentiments of praise, gratitude and veneration which the Chosen People is called to show towards God's law, together with an exhortation to know it, ponder it and translate it into life. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1-2). "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps 1819:8-9).

45. The Church gratefully accepts and lovingly preserves the entire deposit of Revelation, treating it with religious respect and fulfilling her mission of authentically interpreting God's law in the light of the Gospel. In addition, the Church receives the gift of the New Law, which is the "fulfilment" of God's law in Jesus Christ and in his Spirit. This is an "interior" law (cf. Jer 31:31-33), "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3); a law of perfection and of freedom (cf. 2 Cor 3:17); "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2). Saint Thomas writes that this law "can be called law in two ways. First, the law of the spirit is the Holy Spirit... who, dwelling in the soul, not only teaches what it is necessary to do by enlightening the intellect on the things to be done, but also inclines the affections to act with uprightness... Second, the law of the spirit can be called the proper effect of the Holy Spirit, and thus faith working through love (cf. Gal 5:6), which teaches inwardly about the things to be done... and inclines the affections to act".⁸⁴

Even if moral-theological reflection usually distinguishes between the positive or revealed law of God and the natural law, and, within the economy of salvation, between the "old" and the "new" law, it must not be forgotten that these and

other useful distinctions always refer to that law whose author is the one and the same God and which is always meant for man. The different ways in which God, acting in history, cares for the world and for mankind are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they support each other and intersect. They have their origin and goal in the eternal, wise and loving counsel whereby God predestines men and women "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). God's plan poses no threat to man's genuine freedom; on the contrary, the acceptance of God's plan is the only way to affirm that freedom.

"What the law requires is written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15)

46. The alleged conflict between freedom and law is forcefully brought up once again today with regard to the natural law, and particularly with regard to nature. Debates about nature and freedom have always marked the history of moral reflection; they grew especially heated at the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation, as can be seen from the teaching of the Council of Trent.⁸⁵ Our own age is marked, though in a different sense, by a similar tension. The penchant for empirical observation, the procedures of scientific objectification, technological progress and certain forms of liberalism have led to these two terms being set in opposition, as if a dialectic, if not an absolute conflict, between freedom and nature were characteristic of the structure of human history. At other periods, it seemed that "nature" subjected man totally to its own dynamics and even its own unbreakable laws. Today too, the situation of the world of the senses within space and time, physio-chemical constants, bodily processes, psychological impulses and forms of social conditioning seem to many people the only really decisive factors of human reality. In this context even moral facts, despite their specificity, are frequently treated as if they were statistically verifiable data, patterns of behaviour which can be subject to observation or explained exclusively in categories of psychosocial processes. As a result, some ethicists, professionally engaged in the study of human realities and behaviour, can be tempted to take as the standard for their discipline and even for its operative norms the results of a statistical study of concrete human behaviour patterns and the opinions about morality encountered in the majority of people.

Other moralists, however, in their concern to stress the importance of values, remain sensitive to the dignity of freedom, but they frequently conceive of freedom as somehow in opposition to or in conflict with material and biological nature, over which it must progressively assert itself. Here various approaches are at one in overlooking the created dimension of nature and in misunderstanding its integrity. For some, "nature" becomes reduced to raw material for human activity and for its power: thus nature needs to be profoundly transformed, and indeed overcome by freedom, inasmuch as it represents a limitation and denial of freedom. For others, it is in the untrammelled advancement of man's power, or of his freedom, that economic, cultural, social and even moral values are established: nature would thus come to mean everything found in man and the world apart from freedom. In such an understanding, nature would include in the first place the human body, its make-up and its processes: against this physical datum would be opposed whatever is "constructed", in other words "culture", seen as the product and result of freedom.

Human nature, understood in this way, could be reduced to and treated as a readily available biological or social material. This ultimately means making freedom self-defining and a phenomenon creative of itself and its values. Indeed, when all is said and done man would not even have a nature; he would be his own personal life-project. Man would be nothing more than his own freedom!

47.

In this context, objections of physicalism and naturalism have been levelled against the traditional conception of the natural law, which is accused of presenting as moral laws what are in themselves mere biological laws. Consequently, in too superficial a way, a permanent and unchanging character would be attributed to certain kinds of human behaviour, and, on the basis of this, an attempt would be made to formulate universally valid moral norms. According to certain theologians, this kind of "biologistic or naturalistic argumentation" would even be present in certain documents of the Church's Magisterium, particularly those dealing with the area of sexual and conjugal ethics. It was, they maintain, on the basis of a naturalistic understanding of the sexual act that contraception, direct sterilization, autoeroticism, pre-marital sexual relations, homosexual relations and artificial insemination were condemned as morally unacceptable. In the opinion of these same theologians, a morally negative evaluation of such acts fails to take into adequate consideration both man's character as a rational and free being and the cultural conditioning of all moral norms. In their view, man, as a rational being, not only can but actually must freely determine the meaning of his behaviour. This process of "determining the meaning" would obviously have to take into account the many limitations of the human being, as existing in a body and in history. Furthermore, it would have to take into consideration the behavioural models and the meanings which the latter acquire in any given culture. Above all, it would have to respect the fundamental commandment of love of God and neighbour. Still, they continue, God made man as a rationally free being; he left him "in the power of his own counsel" and he expects him to shape his life in a personal and rational way. Love of neighbour would mean above all and even exclusively respect for his freedom to make his own decisions. The workings of typically human behaviour, as well as the so-called "natural inclinations", would establish at the most - so they say - a general orientation towards correct behaviour, but they cannot determine the moral assessment of individual human acts, so complex from the viewpoint of situations.

48.

Faced with this theory, one has to consider carefully the correct relationship existing between freedom and human nature, and in particular the place of the human body in questions of natural law.

A freedom which claims to be absolute ends up treating the human body as a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design. Consequently, human nature and the body appear as presuppositions or preambles, materially necessary for freedom to make its choice, yet extrinsic to the person, the subject and the human act. Their functions would not be able to constitute reference points for moral decisions, because the finalities of these inclinations would be merely "physical" goods, called by some "pre-moral". To refer to them, in order to find in them rational indications with regard to the order of morality, would be to expose oneself to the accusation of physicalism or biologism. In this way of thinking, the tension between freedom and a nature conceived of in a reductive way is resolved by a division within man himself.

This moral theory does not correspond to the truth about man and his freedom. It contradicts the Church's teachings on the unity of the human person, whose rational soul is per se et essentialiter the form of his body.⁸⁶ The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole - corpore et anima unus ⁸⁷ - as a person. These definitions not only point out that the body, which has been promised the resurrection, will also share in glory. They also remind us that reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties. The person, including the body, is completely entrusted to himself, and it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts. The person, by the light of reason and the support of virtue, discovers in the body the anticipatory signs, the expression and the promise of the gift of self, in conformity with the wise plan of the Creator. It is in the light of the dignity of the human person - a dignity which must be affirmed for its own sake - that reason grasps the specific moral value of certain goods towards which the person is naturally inclined. And since the human person cannot be reduced to a freedom which is self-designing, but entails a particular spiritual and bodily structure, the primordial moral requirement of loving and respecting the person as an end and never as a mere means also implies, by its very nature, respect for certain fundamental goods, without which one would fall into relativism and arbitrariness.

49.

A doctrine which dissociates the moral act from the bodily dimensions of its exercise is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and Tradition. Such a doctrine revives, in new forms, certain ancient errors which have always been opposed by the Church, inasmuch as they reduce the human person to a "spiritual" and purely formal freedom. This reduction misunderstands the moral meaning of the body and of kinds of behaviour involving it (cf. 1 Cor 6:19). Saint Paul declares that "the immoral, idolaters, adulterers, sexual perverts, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers" are excluded from the Kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:9). This condemnation - repeated by the Council of Trent⁸⁸ - lists as "mortal sins" or "immoral practices" certain specific kinds of behaviour the wilful acceptance of which prevents believers from sharing in the inheritance promised to them. In fact, body and soul are inseparable: in the person, in the willing agent and in the deliberate act, they stand or fall together.

50.

At this point the true meaning of the natural law can be understood: it refers to man's proper and primordial nature, the "nature of the human person", ⁸⁹ which is the person himself in the unity of soul and body, in the unity of his spiritual and biological inclinations and of all the other specific characteristics necessary for the pursuit of his end. "The natural moral law expresses and lays down the purposes, rights and duties which are based upon the bodily and spiritual nature of the human person. Therefore this law cannot be thought of as simply a set of norms on the biological level; rather it must be defined as the rational order whereby man is called by the Creator to direct and regulate his life and actions and in particular to make use of his own body".⁹⁰ To give an example, the origin and the foundation of the duty of absolute respect for human life are to be found in the dignity proper to the person and not simply in the natural inclination to preserve one's own physical life. Human life, even though it is a fundamental good of man, thus acquires a moral significance in reference to the good of the person, who must always be affirmed for his own sake. While it is always morally illicit to kill an innocent human being, it can be licit, praiseworthy or even imperative to give up one's own life (cf. Jn 15:13) out of love of neighbour or as a witness to the truth. Only in reference to the human person in his "unified totality", that is, as "a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit", ⁹¹ can the specifically human meaning of the body be grasped. Indeed, natural inclinations take on moral relevance only insofar as they refer to the human person and his authentic fulfilment, a fulfilment which for that matter can take place always and only in human nature. By rejecting all manipulations of corporeity which alter its human meaning, the Church serves man and shows him the path of true love, the only path on which he can find the true God.

The natural law thus understood does not allow for any division between freedom and nature. Indeed, these two realities are harmoniously bound together, and each is intimately linked to the other. "From the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19:8)

51. The alleged conflict between freedom and nature also has repercussions on the interpretation of certain specific aspects of the natural law, especially its universality and immutability. "Where then are these rules written", Saint Augustine wondered, "except in the book of that light which is called truth? From thence every just law is transcribed and transferred to the heart of the man who works justice, not by wandering but by being, as it were, impressed upon it, just as the image from the ring passes over to the wax, and yet does not leave the ring".⁹²

Precisely because of this "truth" the natural law involves universality. Inasmuch as it is inscribed in the rational nature of the person, it makes itself felt to all beings endowed with reason and living in history. In order to perfect himself in his specific order, the person must do good and avoid evil, be concerned for the transmission and preservation of life, refine and develop the riches of the material world, cultivate social life, seek truth, practise good and contemplate beauty.⁹³

The separation which some have posited between the freedom of individuals and the nature which all have in common, as it emerges from certain philosophical theories which are highly influential in present-day culture, obscures the perception of the universality of the moral law on the part of reason. But inasmuch as the natural law expresses the dignity of the human person and lays the foundation for his fundamental rights and duties, it is universal in its precepts and its authority extends to all mankind. This universality does not ignore the individuality of human beings, nor is it opposed to the absolute uniqueness of each person. On the contrary, it embraces at its root each of the person's free acts, which are meant to bear witness to the universality of the true good. By submitting to the common law, our acts build up the true communion of persons and, by God's grace, practise charity, "which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). When on the contrary they disregard the law, or even are merely ignorant of it, whether culpably or not, our acts damage the communion of persons, to the detriment of each.

52. It is right and just, always and for everyone, to serve God, to render him the worship which is his due and to honour one's parents as they deserve. Positive precepts such as these, which order us to perform certain actions and to cultivate certain dispositions, are universally binding; they are "unchanging".⁹⁴ They unite in the same common good all people of every period of history, created for "the same divine calling and destiny".⁹⁵ These universal and permanent laws correspond to things known by the practical reason and are applied to particular acts through the judgment of conscience. The acting subject personally assimilates the truth contained in the law. He appropriates this truth of his being and makes it his own by his acts and the corresponding virtues. The negative precepts of the natural law are universally valid. They oblige each and every individual, always and in every circumstance. It is a matter of prohibitions which forbid a given action *semper et pro semper*, without exception, because the choice of this kind of behaviour is in no case compatible with the goodness of the will of the acting person, with his vocation to life with God and to communion with his neighbour. It is prohibited - to everyone and in every case - to violate these precepts. They oblige everyone, regardless of the cost, never to offend in anyone, beginning with oneself, the personal dignity common to all.

On the other hand, the fact that only the negative commandments oblige always and under all circumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandments. The reason is this: the commandment of love of God and neighbour does not have in its dynamic any higher limit, but it does have a lower limit, beneath which the commandment is broken. Furthermore, what must be done in any given situation depends on the circumstances, not all of which can be foreseen; on the other hand there are kinds of behaviour which can never, in any situation, be a proper response - a response which is in conformity with the dignity of the person. Finally, it is always possible that man, as the result of coercion or other circumstances, can be hindered from doing certain good actions; but he can never be hindered from not doing certain actions, especially if he is prepared to die rather than to do evil.

The Church has always taught that one may never choose kinds of behaviour prohibited by the moral commandments expressed in negative form in the Old and New Testaments. As we have seen, Jesus himself reaffirms that these prohibitions allow no exceptions: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments... You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness" (Mt 19:17-18).

53. The great concern of our contemporaries for historicity and for culture has led some to call into question the immutability of the natural law itself, and thus the existence of "objective norms of morality" ⁹⁶ valid for all people of the present and the future, as for those of the past. Is it ever possible, they ask, to consider as universally valid and always binding certain rational determinations established in the past, when no one knew the progress humanity would make in the future?

It must certainly be admitted that man always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture. Moreover, the very progress of cultures demonstrates that there is something in man which transcends those cultures. This "something" is precisely human nature: this nature is itself the measure of culture and the condition ensuring that man does not become the prisoner of any of his cultures, but asserts his personal dignity by living in accordance with the profound truth of his being. To call into question the permanent structural elements of man which are connected with his own bodily dimension would not only conflict with common experience, but would render meaningless Jesus' reference to the "beginning", precisely where the social and cultural context of the time had distorted the primordial meaning and the role of certain moral norms (cf. Mt 19:1-9). This is the reason why "the Church affirms that underlying so many changes there are some things which do not change and are ultimately founded upon Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and for ever".⁹⁷ Christ is the "Beginning" who, having taken on human nature, definitively illumines it in its constitutive elements and in its dynamism of charity towards God and neighbour.⁹⁸

Certainly there is a need to seek out and to discover the most adequate formulation for universal and permanent moral norms in the light of different cultural contexts, a formulation most capable of ceaselessly expressing their historical

relevance, of making them understood and of authentically interpreting their truth. This truth of the moral law - like that of the "deposit of faith" - unfolds down the centuries: the norms expressing that truth remain valid in their substance, but must be specified and determined "eodem sensu eademque sententia" 99 in the light of historical circumstances by the Church's Magisterium, whose decision is preceded and accompanied by the work of interpretation and formulation characteristic of the reason of individual believers and of theological reflection.¹⁰⁰

II. Conscience and truth

Man's sanctuary

54. The relationship between man's freedom and God's law is most deeply lived out in the "heart" of the person, in his moral conscience. As the Second Vatican Council observed: "In the depths of his conscience man detects a law which he does not impose on himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience can when necessary speak to his heart more specifically: 'do this, shun that'. For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged (cf. Rom 2:14-16)".¹⁰¹

The way in which one conceives the relationship between freedom and law is thus intimately bound up with one's understanding of the moral conscience. Here the cultural tendencies referred to above - in which freedom and law are set in opposition to each other and kept apart, and freedom is exalted almost to the point of idolatry - lead to a "creative" understanding of moral conscience, which diverges from the teaching of the Church's tradition and her Magisterium.

55. According to the opinion of some theologians, the function of conscience had been reduced, at least at a certain period in the past, to a simple application of general moral norms to individual cases in the life of the person. But those norms, they continue, cannot be expected to foresee and to respect all the individual concrete acts of the person in all their uniqueness and particularity. While such norms might somehow be useful for a correct assessment of the situation, they cannot replace the individual personal decision on how to act in particular cases. The critique already mentioned of the traditional understanding of human nature and of its importance for the moral life has even led certain authors to state that these norms are not so much a binding objective criterion for judgments of conscience, but a general perspective which helps man tentatively to put order into his personal and social life. These authors also stress the complexity typical of the phenomenon of conscience, a complexity profoundly related to the whole sphere of psychology and the emotions, and to the numerous influences exerted by the individual's social and cultural environment. On the other hand, they give maximum attention to the value of conscience, which the Council itself defined as "the sanctuary of man, where he is alone with God whose voice echoes within him".¹⁰² This voice, it is said, leads man not so much to a meticulous observance of universal norms as to a creative and responsible acceptance of the personal tasks entrusted to him by God.

In their desire to emphasize the "creative" character of conscience, certain authors no longer call its actions "judgments" but "decisions": only by making these decisions "autonomously" would man be able to attain moral maturity. Some even hold that this process of maturing is inhibited by the excessively categorical position adopted by the Church's Magisterium in many moral questions; for them, the Church's interventions are the cause of unnecessary conflicts of conscience.

56. In order to justify these positions, some authors have proposed a kind of double status of moral truth. Beyond the doctrinal and abstract level, one would have to acknowledge the priority of a certain more concrete existential consideration. The latter, by taking account of circumstances and the situation, could legitimately be the basis of certain exceptions to the general rule and thus permit one to do in practice and in good conscience what is qualified as intrinsically evil by the moral law. A separation, or even an opposition, is thus established in some cases between the teaching of the precept, which is valid in general, and the norm of the individual conscience, which would in fact make the final decision about what is good and what is evil. On this basis, an attempt is made to legitimize so-called "pastoral" solutions contrary to the teaching of the Magisterium, and to justify a "creative" hermeneutic according to which the moral conscience is in no way obliged, in every case, by a particular negative precept.

No one can fail to realize that these approaches pose a challenge to the very identity of the moral conscience in relation to human freedom and God's law. Only the clarification made earlier with regard to the relationship, based on truth, between freedom and law makes possible a discernment concerning this "creative" understanding of conscience.

The judgment of conscience

57.

The text of the Letter to the Romans which has helped us to grasp the essence of the natural law also indicates the biblical understanding of conscience, especially in its specific connection with the law: "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law unto themselves, even though they do not have the law. They

show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them" (Rom 2:14-15).

According to Saint Paul, conscience in a certain sense confronts man with the law, and thus becomes a "witness" for man: a witness of his own faithfulness or unfaithfulness with regard to the law, of his essential moral rectitude or iniquity. Conscience is the only witness, since what takes place in the heart of the person is hidden from the eyes of everyone outside. Conscience makes its witness known only to the person himself. And, in turn, only the person himself knows what his own response is to the voice of conscience.

58.

The importance of this interior dialogue of man with himself can never be adequately appreciated. But it is also a dialogue of man with God, the author of the law, the primordial image and final end of man. Saint Bonaventure teaches that "conscience is like God's herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God's authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. This is why conscience has binding force".¹⁰³ Thus it can be said that conscience bears witness to man's own rectitude or iniquity to man himself but, together with this and indeed even beforehand, conscience is the witness of God himself, whose voice and judgment penetrate the depths of man's soul, calling him fortiter et suaviter to obedience. "Moral conscience does not close man within an insurmountable and impenetrable solitude, but opens him to the call, to the voice of God. In this, and not in anything else, lies the entire mystery and the dignity of the moral conscience: in being the place, the sacred place where God speaks to man".¹⁰⁴

59. Saint Paul does not merely acknowledge that conscience acts as a "witness"; he also reveals the way in which conscience performs that function. He speaks of "conflicting thoughts" which accuse or excuse the Gentiles with regard to their behaviour (cf. Rom 2:15). The term "conflicting thoughts" clarifies the precise nature of conscience: it is a moral judgment about man and his actions, a judgment either of acquittal or of condemnation, according as human acts are in conformity or not with the law of God written on the heart. In the same text the Apostle clearly speaks of the judgment of actions, the judgment of their author and the moment when that judgment will be definitively rendered: "(This will take place) on that day when, according to my Gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom 2:16).

The judgment of conscience is a practical judgment, a judgment which makes known what man must do or not do, or which assesses an act already performed by him. It is a judgment which applies to a concrete situation the rational conviction that one must love and do good and avoid evil. This first principle of practical reason is part of the natural law; indeed it constitutes the very foundation of the natural law, inasmuch as it expresses that primordial insight about good and evil, that reflection of God's creative wisdom which, like an imperishable spark (*scintilla animae*), shines in the heart of every man. But whereas the natural law discloses the objective and universal demands of the moral good, conscience is the application of the law to a particular case; this application of the law thus becomes an inner dictate for the individual, a summons to do what is good in this particular situation. Conscience thus formulates moral obligation in the light of the natural law: it is the obligation to do what the individual, through the workings of his conscience, knows to be a good he is called to do here and now. The universality of the law and its obligation are acknowledged, not suppressed, once reason has established the law's application in concrete present circumstances. The judgment of conscience states "in an ultimate way" whether a certain particular kind of behaviour is in conformity with the law; it formulates the proximate norm of the morality of a voluntary act, "applying the objective law to a particular case".¹⁰⁵

60.

Like the natural law itself and all practical knowledge, the judgment of conscience also has an imperative character: man must act in accordance with it. If man acts against this judgment or, in a case where he lacks certainty about the rightness and goodness of a determined act, still performs that act, he stands condemned by his own conscience, the proximate norm of personal morality. The dignity of this rational forum and the authority of its voice and judgments derive from the truth about moral good and evil, which it is called to listen to and to express. This truth is indicated by the "divine law", the universal and objective norm of morality. The judgment of conscience does not establish the law; rather it bears witness to the authority of the natural law and of the practical reason with reference to the supreme good, whose attractiveness the human person perceives and whose commandments he accepts. "Conscience is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it a principle of obedience vis-à-vis the objective norm which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behaviour".¹⁰⁶

61.

The truth about moral good, as that truth is declared in the law of reason, is practically and concretely recognized by the judgment of conscience, which leads one to take responsibility for the good or the evil one has done. If man does evil, the just judgment of his conscience remains within him as a witness to the universal truth of the good, as well as to the malice of his particular choice. But the verdict of conscience remains in him also as a pledge of hope and mercy: while bearing witness to the evil he has done, it also reminds him of his need, with the help of God's grace, to ask forgiveness, to do good and to cultivate virtue constantly.

Consequently in the practical judgment of conscience, which imposes on the person the obligation to perform a given act, the link between freedom and truth is made manifest. Precisely for this reason conscience expresses itself in acts of

"judgment" which reflect the truth about the good, and not in arbitrary "decisions". The maturity and responsibility of these judgments - and, when all is said and done, of the individual who is their subject - are not measured by the liberation of the conscience from objective truth, in favour of an alleged autonomy in personal decisions, but, on the contrary, by an insistent search for truth and by allowing oneself to be guided by that truth in one's actions.

Seeking what is true and good

62. Conscience, as the judgment of an act, is not exempt from the possibility of error. As the Council puts it, "not infrequently conscience can be mistaken as a result of invincible ignorance, although it does not on that account forfeit its dignity; but this cannot be said when a man shows little concern for seeking what is true and good, and conscience gradually becomes almost blind from being accustomed to sin".¹⁰⁷ In these brief words the Council sums up the doctrine which the Church down the centuries has developed with regard to the erroneous conscience.

Certainly, in order to have a "good conscience" (1 Tim 1:5), man must seek the truth and must make judgments in accordance with that same truth. As the Apostle Paul says, the conscience must be "confirmed by the Holy Spirit" (cf. Rom 9:1); it must be "clear" (2 Tim 1:3); it must not "practise cunning and tamper with God's word", but "openly state the truth" (cf. 2 Cor 4:2). On the other hand, the Apostle also warns Christians: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

Paul's admonition urges us to be watchful, warning us that in the judgments of our conscience the possibility of error is always present. Conscience is not an infallible judge; it can make mistakes. However, error of conscience can be the result of an invincible ignorance, an ignorance of which the subject is not aware and which he is unable to overcome by himself.

The Council reminds us that in cases where such invincible ignorance is not culpable, conscience does not lose its dignity, because even when it directs us to act in a way not in conformity with the objective moral order, it continues to speak in the name of that truth about the good which the subject is called to seek sincerely.

63. In any event, it is always from the truth that the dignity of conscience derives. In the case of the correct conscience, it is a question of the objective truth received by man; in the case of the erroneous conscience, it is a question of what man, mistakenly, subjectively considers to be true. It is never acceptable to confuse a "subjective" error about moral good with the "objective" truth rationally proposed to man in virtue of his end, or to make the moral value of an act performed with a true and correct conscience equivalent to the moral value of an act performed by following the judgment of an erroneous conscience.¹⁰⁸ It is possible that the evil done as the result of invincible ignorance or a non-culpable error of judgment may not be imputable to the agent; but even in this case it does not cease to be an evil, a disorder in relation to the truth about the good. Furthermore, a good act which is not recognized as such does not contribute to the moral growth of the person who performs it; it does not perfect him and it does not help to dispose him for the supreme good. Thus, before feeling easily justified in the name of our conscience, we should reflect on the words of the Psalm: "Who can discern his errors? Clear me from hidden faults" (Ps 19:12). There are faults which we fail to see but which nevertheless remain faults, because we have refused to walk towards the light (cf. Jn 9:39-41).

Conscience, as the ultimate concrete judgment, compromises its dignity when it is culpably erroneous, that is to say, "when man shows little concern for seeking what is true and good, and conscience gradually becomes almost blind from being accustomed to sin".¹⁰⁹ Jesus alludes to the danger of the conscience being deformed when he warns: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Mt 6:22-23).

64. The words of Jesus just quoted also represent a call to form our conscience, to make it the object of a continuous conversion to what is true and to what is good. In the same vein, Saint Paul exhorts us not to be conformed to the mentality of this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind (cf. Rom 12:2).

It is the "heart" converted to the Lord and to the love of what is good which is really the source of true judgments of conscience. Indeed, in order to "prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2), knowledge of God's law in general is certainly necessary, but it is not sufficient: what is essential is a sort of "connaturality" between man and the true good. ¹¹⁰ Such a connaturality is rooted in and develops through the virtuous attitudes of the individual himself: prudence and the other cardinal virtues, and even before these the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. This is the meaning of Jesus' saying: "He who does what is true comes to the light" (Jn 3:21). Christians have a great help for the formation of conscience in the Church and her Magisterium. As the Council affirms: "In forming their consciences the Christian faithful must give careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church is by the will of Christ the teacher of truth. Her charge is to announce and teach authentically that truth which is Christ, and at the same time with her authority to declare and confirm the principles of the moral order which derive from human nature itself".¹¹¹ It follows that the authority of the Church, when she pronounces on moral questions, in no way undermines the freedom of conscience of Christians. This is so not only because freedom of conscience is never freedom "from" the truth but always and only freedom "in" the truth, but also because the Magisterium does not bring to the Christian conscience truths which are extraneous to it; rather it brings to light the truths which it ought already to possess, developing them from the starting point of the primordial act

of faith. The Church puts herself always and only at the service of conscience, helping it to avoid being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine proposed by human deceit (cf. Eph 4:14), and helping it not to swerve from the truth about the good of man, but rather, especially in more difficult questions, to attain the truth with certainty and to abide in it.

III. Fundamental choice and specific kinds of behaviour

"Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal 5:13)

65. The heightened concern for freedom in our own day has led many students of the behavioural and the theological sciences to develop a more penetrating analysis of its nature and of its dynamics. It has been rightly pointed out that freedom is not only the choice for one or another particular action; it is also, within that choice, a decision about oneself and a setting of one's own life for or against the Good, for or against the Truth, and ultimately for or against God. Emphasis has rightly been placed on the importance of certain choices which "shape" a person's entire moral life, and which serve as bounds within which other particular everyday choices can be situated and allowed to develop.

Some authors, however, have proposed an even more radical revision of the relationship between person and acts. They speak of a "fundamental freedom", deeper than and different from freedom of choice, which needs to be considered if human actions are to be correctly understood and evaluated. According to these authors, the key role in the moral life is to be attributed to a "fundamental option", brought about by that fundamental freedom whereby the person makes an overall self-determination, not through a specific and conscious decision on the level of reflection, but in a "transcendental" and "athematic" way. Particular acts which flow from this option would constitute only partial and never definitive attempts to give it expression; they would only be its "signs" or symptoms. The immediate object of such acts would not be absolute Good (before which the freedom of the person would be expressed on a transcendental level), but particular (also termed "categorical") goods. In the opinion of some theologians, none of these goods, which by their nature are partial, could determine the freedom of man as a person in his totality, even though it is only by bringing them about or refusing to do so that man is able to express his own fundamental option.

A distinction thus comes to be introduced between the fundamental option and deliberate choices of a concrete kind of behaviour. In some authors this division tends to become a separation, when they expressly limit moral "good" and "evil" to the transcendental dimension proper to the fundamental option, and describe as "right" or "wrong" the choices of particular "innerworldly" kinds of behaviour: those, in other words, concerning man's relationship with himself, with others and with the material world. There thus appears to be established within human acting a clear disjunction between two levels of morality: on the one hand the order of good and evil, which is dependent on the will, and on the other hand specific kinds of behaviour, which are judged to be morally right or wrong only on the basis of a technical calculation of the proportion between the "pre-moral" or "physical" goods and evils which actually result from the action. This is pushed to the point where a concrete kind of behaviour, even one freely chosen, comes to be considered as a merely physical process, and not according to the criteria proper to a human act. The conclusion to which this eventually leads is that the properly moral assessment of the person is reserved to his fundamental option, prescinding in whole or in part from his choice of particular actions, of concrete kinds of behaviour.

66. There is no doubt that Christian moral teaching, even in its Biblical roots, acknowledges the specific importance of a fundamental choice which qualifies the moral life and engages freedom on a radical level before God. It is a question of the decision of faith, of the obedience of faith (cf. Rom 16:26) "by which man makes a total and free self-commitment to God, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God as he reveals' ".¹¹² This faith, which works through love (cf. Gal 5:6), comes from the core of man, from his "heart" (cf. Rom 10:10), whence it is called to bear fruit in works (cf. Mt 12:33-35; Lk 6:43-45; Rom 8:5-10; Gal 5:22). In the Decalogue one finds, as an introduction to the various commandments, the basic clause: "I am the Lord your God..." (Ex 20:2), which, by impressing upon the numerous and varied particular prescriptions their primordial meaning, gives the morality of the Covenant its aspect of completeness, unity and profundity. Israel's fundamental decision, then, is about the fundamental commandment (cf. Jos 24:14-25; Ex 19:3-8; Mic 6:8). The morality of the New Covenant is similarly dominated by the fundamental call of Jesus to follow him - thus he also says to the young man: "If you wish to be perfect... then come, follow me" (Mt 19:21); to this call the disciple must respond with a radical decision and choice. The Gospel parables of the treasure and the pearl of great price, for which one sells all one's possessions, are eloquent and effective images of the radical and unconditional nature of the decision demanded by the Kingdom of God. The radical nature of the decision to follow Jesus is admirably expressed in his own words: "Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it" (Mk 8:35).

Jesus' call to "come, follow me" marks the greatest possible exaltation of human freedom, yet at the same time it witnesses to the truth and to the obligation of acts of faith and of decisions which can be described as involving a fundamental option. We find a similar exaltation of human freedom in the words of Saint Paul: "You were called to freedom, brethren" (Gal 5:13). But the Apostle immediately adds a grave warning: "Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh". This warning echoes his earlier words: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1). Paul encourages us to be watchful, because freedom

is always threatened by slavery. And this is precisely the case when an act of faith - in the sense of a fundamental option - becomes separated from the choice of particular acts, as in the tendencies mentioned above.

67. These tendencies are therefore contrary to the teaching of Scripture itself, which sees the fundamental option as a genuine choice of freedom and links that choice profoundly to particular acts. By his fundamental choice, man is capable of giving his life direction and of progressing, with the help of grace, towards his end, following God's call. But this capacity is actually exercised in the particular choices of specific actions, through which man deliberately conforms himself to God's will, wisdom and law. It thus needs to be stated that the so-called fundamental option, to the extent that it is distinct from a generic intention and hence one not yet determined in such a way that freedom is obligated, is always brought into play through conscious and free decisions. Precisely for this reason, it is revoked when man engages his freedom in conscious decisions to the contrary, with regard to morally grave matter.

To separate the fundamental option from concrete kinds of behaviour means to contradict the substantial integrity or personal unity of the moral agent in his body and in his soul. A fundamental option understood without explicit consideration of the potentialities which it puts into effect and the determinations which express it does not do justice to the rational finality immanent in man's acting and in each of his deliberate decisions. In point of fact, the morality of human acts is not deduced only from one's intention, orientation or fundamental option, understood as an intention devoid of a clearly determined binding content or as an intention with no corresponding positive effort to fulfil the different obligations of the moral life. Judgments about morality cannot be made without taking into consideration whether or not the deliberate choice of a specific kind of behaviour is in conformity with the dignity and integral vocation of the human person. Every choice always implies a reference by the deliberate will to the goods and evils indicated by the natural law as goods to be pursued and evils to be avoided. In the case of the positive moral precepts, prudence always has the task of verifying that they apply in a specific situation, for example, in view of other duties which may be more important or urgent. But the negative moral precepts, those prohibiting certain concrete actions or kinds of behaviour as intrinsically evil, do not allow for any legitimate exception. They do not leave room, in any morally acceptable way, for the "creativity" of any contrary determination whatsoever. Once the moral species of an action prohibited by a universal rule is concretely recognized, the only morally good act is that of obeying the moral law and of refraining from the action which it forbids.

68. Here an important pastoral consideration must be added. According to the logic of the positions mentioned above, an individual could, by virtue of a fundamental option, remain faithful to God independently of whether or not certain of his choices and his acts are in conformity with specific moral norms or rules. By virtue of a primordial option for charity, that individual could continue to be morally good, persevere in God's grace and attain salvation, even if certain of his specific kinds of behaviour were deliberately and gravely contrary to God's commandments as set forth by the Church.

In point of fact, man does not suffer perdition only by being unfaithful to that fundamental option whereby he has made "a free self-commitment to God".¹¹³ With every freely committed mortal sin, he offends God as the giver of the law and as a result becomes guilty with regard to the entire law (cf. Jas 2:8-11); even if he perseveres in faith, he loses "sanctifying grace", "charity" and "eternal happiness".¹¹⁴ As the Council of Trent teaches, "the grace of justification once received is lost not only by apostasy, by which faith itself is lost, but also by any other mortal sin".¹¹⁵

Mortal and venial sin

69. As we have just seen, reflection on the fundamental option has also led some theologians to undertake a basic revision of the traditional distinction between mortal sins and venial sins. They insist that the opposition to God's law which causes the loss of sanctifying grace - and eternal damnation, when one dies in such a state of sin - could only be the result of an act which engages the person in his totality: in other words, an act of fundamental option. According to these theologians, mortal sin, which separates man from God, only exists in the rejection of God, carried out at a level of freedom which is neither to be identified with an act of choice nor capable of becoming the object of conscious awareness. Consequently, they go on to say, it is difficult, at least psychologically, to accept the fact that a Christian, who wishes to remain united to Jesus Christ and to his Church, could so easily and repeatedly commit mortal sins, as the "matter" itself of his actions would sometimes indicate. Likewise, it would be hard to accept that man is able, in a brief lapse of time, to sever radically the bond of communion with God and afterwards be converted to him by sincere repentance. The gravity of sin, they maintain, ought to be measured by the degree of engagement of the freedom of the person performing an act, rather than by the matter of that act.

70. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* reaffirmed the importance and permanent validity of the distinction between mortal and venial sins, in accordance with the Church's tradition. And the 1983 Synod of Bishops, from which that Exhortation emerged, "not only reaffirmed the teaching of the Council of Trent concerning the existence and nature of mortal and venial sins, but it also recalled that mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent".¹¹⁶

The statement of the Council of Trent does not only consider the "grave matter" of mortal sin; it also recalls that its necessary condition is "full awareness and deliberate consent". In any event, both in moral theology and in pastoral practice one is familiar with cases in which an act which is grave by reason of its matter does not constitute a mortal sin

because of a lack of full awareness or deliberate consent on the part of the person performing it. Even so, "care will have to be taken not to reduce mortal sin to an act of 'fundamental option' - as is commonly said today - against God", seen either as an explicit and formal rejection of God and neighbour or as an implicit and unconscious rejection of love. "For mortal sin exists also when a person knowingly and willingly, for whatever reason, chooses something gravely disordered. In fact, such a choice already includes contempt for the divine law, a rejection of God's love for humanity and the whole of creation: the person turns away from God and loses charity. Consequently, the fundamental orientation can be radically changed by particular acts. Clearly, situations can occur which are very complex and obscure from a psychological viewpoint, and which influence the sinner's subjective imputability. But from a consideration of the psychological sphere one cannot proceed to create a theological category, which is precisely what the 'fundamental option' is, understanding it in such a way that it objectively changes or casts doubt upon the traditional concept of mortal sin".¹¹⁷

The separation of fundamental option from deliberate choices of particular kinds of behaviour, disordered in themselves or in their circumstances, which would not engage that option, thus involves a denial of Catholic doctrine on mortal sin: "With the whole tradition of the Church, we call mortal sin the act by which man freely and consciously rejects God, his law, the covenant of love that God offers, preferring to turn in on himself or to some created and finite reality, something contrary to the divine will (*conversio ad creaturam*). This can occur in a direct and formal way, in the sins of idolatry, apostasy and atheism; or in an equivalent way, as in every act of disobedience to God's commandments in a grave matter".¹¹⁸

IV. The moral act

Teleology and teleologism

71. The relationship between man's freedom and God's law, which has its intimate and living centre in the moral conscience, is manifested and realized in human acts. It is precisely through his acts that man attains perfection as man, as one who is called to seek his Creator of his own accord and freely to arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him.¹¹⁹

Human acts are moral acts because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them.¹²⁰ They do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man but, to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his profound spiritual traits. This was perceptively noted by Saint Gregory of Nyssa: "All things subject to change and to becoming never remain constant, but continually pass from one state to another, for better or worse... Now, human life is always subject to change; it needs to be born ever anew...

But here birth does not come about by a foreign intervention, as is the case with bodily beings...; it is the result of a free choice. Thus we are in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions".¹²¹

72. The morality of acts is defined by the relationship of man's freedom with the authentic good. This good is established, as the eternal law, by Divine Wisdom which orders every being towards its end: this eternal law is known both by man's natural reason (hence it is "natural law"), and - in an integral and perfect way - by God's supernatural Revelation (hence it is called "divine law"). Acting is morally good when the choices of freedom are in conformity with man's true good and thus express the voluntary ordering of the person towards his ultimate end: God himself, the supreme good in whom man finds his full and perfect happiness. The first question in the young man's conversation with Jesus: "What good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:6) immediately brings out the essential connection between the moral value of an act and man's final end. Jesus, in his reply, confirms the young man's conviction: the performance of good acts, commanded by the One who "alone is good", constitutes the indispensable condition of and path to eternal blessedness: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17). Jesus' answer and his reference to the commandments also make it clear that the path to that end is marked by respect for the divine laws which safeguard human good. Only the act in conformity with the good can be a path that leads to life.

The rational ordering of the human act to the good in its truth and the voluntary pursuit of that good, known by reason, constitute morality. Hence human activity cannot be judged as morally good merely because it is a means for attaining one or another of its goals, or simply because the subject's intention is good.¹²² Activity is morally good when it attests to and expresses the voluntary ordering of the person to his ultimate end and the conformity of a concrete action with the human good as it is acknowledged in its truth by reason. If the object of the concrete action is not in harmony with the true good of the person, the choice of that action makes our will and ourselves morally evil, thus putting us in conflict with our ultimate end, the supreme good, God himself.

73. The Christian, thanks to God's Revelation and to faith, is aware of the "newness" which characterizes the morality of his actions: these actions are called to show either consistency or inconsistency with that dignity and vocation which have been bestowed on him by grace. In Jesus Christ and in his Spirit, the Christian is a "new creation", a child of God; by his actions he shows his likeness or unlikeness to the image of the Son who is the first-born among many brethren (cf. Rom 8:29), he lives out his fidelity or

infidelity to the gift of the Spirit, and he opens or closes himself to eternal life, to the communion of vision, love and happiness with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹²³ As Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes, Christ "forms us according to his image, in such a way that the traits of his divine nature shine forth in us through sanctification and justice and the life which is good and in conformity with virtue... The beauty of this image shines forth in us who are in Christ, when we show ourselves to be good in our works".¹²⁴

Consequently the moral life has an essential "teleological" character, since it consists in the deliberate ordering of human acts to God, the supreme good and ultimate end (telos) of man. This is attested to once more by the question posed by the young man to Jesus: "What good must I do to have eternal life? ". But this ordering to one's ultimate end is not something subjective, dependent solely upon one's intention. It presupposes that such acts are in themselves capable of being ordered to this end, insofar as they are in conformity with the authentic moral good of man, safeguarded by the commandments. This is what Jesus himself points out in his reply to the young man: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17).

Clearly such an ordering must be rational and free, conscious and deliberate, by virtue of which man is "responsible" for his actions and subject to the judgment of God, the just and good judge who, as the Apostle Paul reminds us, rewards good and punishes evil: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor 5:10).

74. But on what does the moral assessment of man's free acts depend? What is it that ensures this ordering of human acts to God? Is it the intention of the acting subject, the circumstances - and in particular the consequences - of his action, or the object itself of his act?

This is what is traditionally called the problem of the "sources of morality". Precisely with regard to this problem there have emerged in the last few decades new or newly-revived theological and cultural trends which call for careful discernment on the part of the Church's Magisterium.

Certain ethical theories, called "teleological", claim to be concerned for the conformity of human acts with the ends pursued by the agent and with the values intended by him. The criteria for evaluating the moral rightness of an action are drawn from the weighing of the non-moral or pre-moral goods to be gained and the corresponding non-moral or pre-moral values to be respected. For some, concrete behaviour would be right or wrong according as whether or not it is capable of producing a better state of affairs for all concerned. Right conduct would be the one capable of "maximizing" goods and "minimizing" evils.

Many of the Catholic moralists who follow in this direction seek to distance themselves from utilitarianism and pragmatism, where the morality of human acts would be judged without any reference to the man's true ultimate end. They rightly recognize the need to find ever more consistent rational arguments in order to justify the requirements and to provide a foundation for the norms of the moral life. This kind of investigation is legitimate and necessary, since the moral order, as established by the natural law, is in principle accessible to human reason. Furthermore, such investigation is well-suited to meeting the demands of dialogue and cooperation with non-Catholics and non-believers, especially in pluralistic societies.

75. But as part of the effort to work out such a rational morality (for this reason it is sometimes called an "autonomous morality") there exist false solutions, linked in particular to an inadequate understanding of the object of moral action. Some authors do not take into sufficient consideration the fact that the will is involved in the concrete choices which it makes: these choices are a condition of its moral goodness and its being ordered to the ultimate end of the person. Others are inspired by a notion of freedom which prescind from the actual conditions of its exercise, from its objective reference to the truth about the good, and from its determination through choices of concrete kinds of behaviour. According to these theories, free will would neither be morally subjected to specific obligations nor shaped by its choices, while nonetheless still remaining responsible for its own acts and for their consequences. This "teleologism", as a method for discovering the moral norm, can thus be called - according to terminology and approaches imported from different currents of thought - "consequentialism" or "proportionalism". The former claims to draw the criteria of the rightness of a given way of acting solely from a calculation of foreseeable consequences deriving from a given choice. The latter, by weighing the various values and goods being sought, focuses rather on the proportion acknowledged between the good and bad effects of that choice, with a view to the "greater good" or "lesser evil" actually possible in a particular situation.

The teleological ethical theories (proportionalism, consequentialism), while acknowledging that moral values are indicated by reason and by Revelation, maintain that it is never possible to formulate an absolute prohibition of particular kinds of behaviour which would be in conflict, in every circumstance and in every culture, with those values. The acting subject would indeed be responsible for attaining the values pursued, but in two ways: the values or goods involved in a human act would be, from one viewpoint, of the moral order (in relation to properly moral values, such as love of God and neighbour, justice, etc.) and, from another viewpoint, of the pre-moral order, which some term non-moral, physical or ontic (in relation to the advantages and disadvantages accruing both to the agent and to all other persons possibly involved, such as, for example, health or its endangerment, physical integrity, life, death, loss of material goods, etc.). In a world where goodness is always mixed with evil, and every good effect linked to other evil effects, the morality of an act would be judged in two different ways: its moral "goodness" would be judged on the basis of the subject's intention in reference to moral goods, and its "rightness" on the basis of a consideration of its

foreseeable effects or consequences and of their proportion. Consequently, concrete kinds of behaviour could be described as "right" or "wrong", without it being thereby possible to judge as morally "good" or "bad" the will of the person choosing them. In this way, an act which, by contradicting a universal negative norm, directly violates goods considered as "pre-moral" could be qualified as morally acceptable if the intention of the subject is focused, in accordance with a "responsible" assessment of the goods involved in the concrete action, on the moral value judged to be decisive in the situation.

The evaluation of the consequences of the action, based on the proportion between the act and its effects and between the effects themselves, would regard only the pre-moral order. The moral specificity of acts, that is their goodness or evil, would be determined exclusively by the faithfulness of the person to the highest values of charity and prudence, without this faithfulness necessarily being incompatible with choices contrary to certain particular moral precepts. Even when grave matter is concerned, these precepts should be considered as operative norms which are always relative and open to exceptions.

In this view, deliberate consent to certain kinds of behaviour declared illicit by traditional moral theology would not imply an objective moral evil.

The object of the deliberate act

76. These theories can gain a certain persuasive force from their affinity to the scientific mentality, which is rightly concerned with ordering technical and economic activities on the basis of a calculation of resources and profits, procedures and their effects. They seek to provide liberation from the constraints of a voluntaristic and arbitrary morality of obligation which would ultimately be dehumanizing.

Such theories however are not faithful to the Church's teaching, when they believe they can justify, as morally good, deliberate choices of kinds of behaviour contrary to the commandments of the divine and natural law. These theories cannot claim to be grounded in the Catholic moral tradition. Although the latter did witness the development of a casuistry which tried to assess the best ways to achieve the good in certain concrete situations, it is nonetheless true that this casuistry concerned only cases in which the law was uncertain, and thus the absolute validity of negative moral precepts, which oblige without exception, was not called into question. The faithful are obliged to acknowledge and respect the specific moral precepts declared and taught by the Church in the name of God, the Creator and Lord.¹²⁵ When the Apostle Paul sums up the fulfilment of the law in the precept of love of neighbour as oneself (cf. Rom 13:8-10), he is not weakening the commandments but reinforcing them, since he is revealing their requirements and their gravity. Love of God and of one's neighbour cannot be separated from the observance of the commandments of the Covenant renewed in the blood of Jesus Christ and in the gift of the Spirit. It is an honour characteristic of Christians to obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 4:19; 5:29) and accept even martyrdom as a consequence, like the holy men and women of the Old and New Testaments, who are considered such because they gave their lives rather than perform this or that particular act contrary to faith or virtue.

77.

In order to offer rational criteria for a right moral decision, the theories mentioned above take account of the intention and consequences of human action. Certainly there is need to take into account both the intention - as Jesus forcefully insisted in clear disagreement with the scribes and Pharisees, who prescribed in great detail certain outward practices without paying attention to the heart (cf. Mk 7:20-21; Mt 15:19) - and the goods obtained and the evils avoided as a result of a particular act. Responsibility demands as much. But the consideration of these consequences, and also of intentions, is not sufficient for judging the moral quality of a concrete choice. The weighing of the goods and evils foreseeable as the consequence of an action is not an adequate method for determining whether the choice of that concrete kind of behaviour is "according to its species", or "in itself", morally good or bad, licit or illicit. The foreseeable consequences are part of those circumstances of the act, which, while capable of lessening the gravity of an evil act, nonetheless cannot alter its moral species.

Moreover, everyone recognizes the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of evaluating all the good and evil consequences and effects - defined as pre-moral - of one's own acts: an exhaustive rational calculation is not possible. How then can one go about establishing proportions which depend on a measuring, the criteria of which remain obscure? How could an absolute obligation be justified on the basis of such debatable calculations?

78.

The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the "object" rationally chosen by the deliberate will, as is borne out by the insightful analysis, still valid today, made by Saint Thomas.¹²⁶ In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person. The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behaviour. To the extent that it is in conformity with the order of reason, it is the cause of the goodness of the will; it perfects us morally, and disposes us to recognize our ultimate end in the perfect good, primordial love. By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world. Rather, that object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person. Consequently, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches,

"there are certain specific kinds of behaviour that are always wrong to choose, because choosing them involves a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil".¹²⁷ And Saint Thomas observes that "it often happens that man acts with a good intention, but without spiritual gain, because he lacks a good will. Let us say that someone robs in order to feed the poor: in this case, even though the intention is good, the uprightness of the will is lacking. Consequently, no evil done with a good intention can be excused. 'There are those who say: And why not do evil that good may come? Their condemnation is just' (Rom 3:8)".¹²⁸

The reason why a good intention is not itself sufficient, but a correct choice of actions is also needed, is that the human act depends on its object, whether that object is capable or not of being ordered to God, to the One who "alone is good", and thus brings about the perfection of the person. An act is therefore good if its object is in conformity with the good of the person with respect for the goods morally relevant for him. Christian ethics, which pays particular attention to the moral object, does not refuse to consider the inner "teleology" of acting, inasmuch as it is directed to promoting the true good of the person; but it recognizes that it is really pursued only when the essential elements of human nature are respected. The human act, good according to its object, is also capable of being ordered to its ultimate end. That same act then attains its ultimate and decisive perfection when the will actually does order it to God through charity. As the Patron of moral theologians and confessors teaches: "It is not enough to do good works; they need to be done well. For our works to be good and perfect, they must be done for the sole purpose of pleasing God".¹²⁹

"Intrinsic evil": it is not licit to do evil that good may come of it (cf. Rom 3:8)

79. One must therefore reject the thesis, characteristic of teleological and proportionalist theories, which holds that it is impossible to qualify as morally evil according to its species - its "object" - the deliberate choice of certain kinds of behaviour or specific acts, apart from a consideration of the intention for which the choice is made or the totality of the foreseeable consequences of that act for all persons concerned.

The primary and decisive element for moral judgment is the object of the human act, which establishes whether it is capable of being ordered to the good and to the ultimate end, which is God. This capability is grasped by reason in the very being of man, considered in his integral truth, and therefore in his natural inclinations, his motivations and his finalities, which always have a spiritual dimension as well. It is precisely these which are the contents of the natural law and hence that ordered complex of "personal goods" which serve the "good of the person": the good which is the person himself and his perfection. These are the goods safeguarded by the commandments, which, according to Saint Thomas, contain the whole natural law.¹³⁰

80. Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature "incapable of being ordered" to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church's moral tradition, have been termed "intrinsically evil" (intrinsic malum): they are such always and per se, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances. Consequently, without in the least denying the influence on morality exercised by circumstances and especially by intentions, the Church teaches that "there exist acts which per se and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object".¹³¹ The Second Vatican Council itself, in discussing the respect due to the human person, gives a number of examples of such acts: "Whatever is hostile to life itself, such as any kind of homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide; whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture and attempts to coerce the spirit; whatever is offensive to human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children; degrading conditions of work which treat labourers as mere instruments of profit, and not as free responsible persons: all these and the like are a disgrace, and so long as they infect human civilization they contaminate those who inflict them more than those who suffer injustice, and they are a negation of the honour due to the Creator".¹³²

With regard to intrinsically evil acts, and in reference to contraceptive practices whereby the conjugal act is intentionally rendered infertile, Pope Paul VI teaches: "Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (cf. Rom 3:8) - in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general".¹³³

81. In teaching the existence of intrinsically evil acts, the Church accepts the teaching of Sacred Scripture. The Apostle Paul emphatically states: "Do not be deceived: neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9-10).

If acts are intrinsically evil, a good intention or particular circumstances can diminish their evil, but they cannot remove it. They remain "irremediably" evil acts; per se and in themselves they are not capable of being ordered to God and to the good of the person. "As for acts which are themselves sins (cum iam opera ipsa peccata sunt), Saint Augustine writes, like theft, fornication, blasphemy, who would dare affirm that, by doing them for good motives (causis bonis), they would no longer be sins, or, what is even more absurd, that they would be sins that are justified?".¹³⁴

Consequently, circumstances or intentions can never transform an act intrinsically evil by virtue of its object into an act "subjectively" good or defensible as a choice.

82. Furthermore, an intention is good when it has as its aim the true good of the person in view of his ultimate end. But acts whose object is "not capable of being ordered" to God and "unworthy of the human person" are always and in every case in conflict with that good. Consequently, respect for norms which prohibit such acts and oblige semper et pro semper, that is, without any exception, not only does not inhibit a good intention, but actually represents its basic expression.

The doctrine of the object as a source of morality represents an authentic explicitation of the Biblical morality of the Covenant and of the commandments, of charity and of the virtues. The moral quality of human acting is dependent on this fidelity to the commandments, as an expression of obedience and of love. For this reason - we repeat - the opinion must be rejected as erroneous which maintains that it is impossible to qualify as morally evil according to its species the deliberate choice of certain kinds of behaviour or specific acts, without taking into account the intention for which the choice was made or the totality of the foreseeable consequences of that act for all persons concerned. Without the rational determination of the morality of human acting as stated above, it would be impossible to affirm the existence of an "objective moral order"¹³⁵ and to establish any particular norm the content of which would be binding without exception. This would be to the detriment of human fraternity and the truth about the good, and would be injurious to ecclesial communion as well.

83. As is evident, in the question of the morality of human acts, and in particular the question of whether there exist intrinsically evil acts, we find ourselves faced with the question of man himself, of his truth and of the moral consequences flowing from that truth. By acknowledging and teaching the existence of intrinsic evil in given human acts, the Church remains faithful to the integral truth about man; she thus respects and promotes man in his dignity and vocation. Consequently, she must reject the theories set forth above, which contradict this truth.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, we must not be content merely to warn the faithful about the errors and dangers of certain ethical theories. We must first of all show the inviting splendour of that truth which is Jesus Christ himself. In him, who is the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6), man can understand fully and live perfectly, through his good actions, his vocation to freedom in obedience to the divine law summarized in the commandment of love of God and neighbour. And this is what takes place through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, of freedom and of love: in him we are enabled to interiorize the law, to receive it and to live it as the motivating force of true personal freedom: "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (Jas 1:25).

CHAPTER III - "LEST THE CROSS OF CHRIST BE EMPTIED OF ITS POWER (1 Cor 1:17) - Moral good for the life of the Church and of the world

"For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1).

84. The fundamental question which the moral theories mentioned above pose in a particularly forceful way is that of the relationship of man's freedom to God's law; it is ultimately the question of the relationship between freedom and truth.

According to Christian faith and the Church's teaching, "only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good. The good of the person is to be in the Truth and to do the Truth".¹³⁶

A comparison between the Church's teaching and today's social and cultural situation immediately makes clear the urgent need for the Church herself to develop an intense pastoral effort precisely with regard to this fundamental question. "This essential bond between Truth, the Good and Freedom has been largely lost sight of by present-day culture. As a result, helping man to rediscover it represents nowadays one of the specific requirements of the Church's mission, for the salvation of the world. Pilate's question: "What is truth" reflects the distressing perplexity of a man who often no longer knows who he is, whence he comes and where he is going. Hence we not infrequently witness the fearful plunging of the human person into situations of gradual self-destruction. According to some, it appears that one no longer need acknowledge the enduring absoluteness of any moral value. All around us we encounter contempt for human life after conception and before birth; the ongoing violation of basic rights of the person; the unjust destruction of goods minimally necessary for a human life. Indeed, something more serious has happened: man is no longer convinced that only in the truth can he find salvation. The saving power of the truth is contested, and freedom alone, uprooted from any objectivity, is left to decide by itself what is good and what is evil. This relativism becomes, in the field of theology, a lack of trust in the wisdom of God, who guides man with the moral law. Concrete situations are unfavourably contrasted with the precepts of the moral law, nor is it any longer maintained that, when all is said and done, the law of God is always the one true good of man".¹³⁷

85. The discernment which the Church carries out with regard to these ethical theories is not simply limited to denouncing and refuting them. In a positive way, the Church seeks, with great love, to help all the faithful to form a moral conscience which will make judgments and lead to decisions in accordance with the truth, following the exhortation of the Apostle Paul: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). This effort by the

Church finds its support - the "secret" of its educative power - not so much in doctrinal statements and pastoral appeals to vigilance, as in constantly looking to the Lord Jesus. Each day the Church looks to Christ with unfailing love, fully aware that the true and final answer to the problem of morality lies in him alone. In a particular way, it is in the Crucified Christ that the Church finds the answer to the question troubling so many people today: how can obedience to universal and unchanging moral norms respect the uniqueness and individuality of the person, and not represent a threat to his freedom and dignity? The Church makes her own the Apostle Paul's awareness of the mission he had received: "Christ... sent me... to preach the Gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.... We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:17, 23-24). The Crucified Christ reveals the authentic meaning of freedom; he lives it fully in the total gift of himself and calls his disciples to share in his freedom.

86. Rational reflection and daily experience demonstrate the weakness which marks man's freedom. That freedom is real but limited: its absolute and unconditional origin is not in itself, but in the life within which it is situated and which represents for it, at one and the same time, both a limitation and a possibility. Human freedom belongs to us as creatures; it is a freedom which is given as a gift, one to be received like a seed and to be cultivated responsibly. It is an essential part of that creaturely image which is the basis of the dignity of the person. Within that freedom there is an echo of the primordial vocation whereby the Creator calls man to the true Good, and even more, through Christ's Revelation, to become his friend and to share his own divine life. It is at once inalienable self-possession and openness to all that exists, in passing beyond self to knowledge and love of the other.¹³⁸ Freedom then is rooted in the truth about man, and it is ultimately directed towards communion.

Reason and experience not only confirm the weakness of human freedom; they also confirm its tragic aspects. Man comes to realize that his freedom is in some mysterious way inclined to betray this openness to the True and the Good, and that all too often he actually prefers to choose finite, limited and ephemeral goods. What is more, within his errors and negative decisions, man glimpses the source of a deep rebellion, which leads him to reject the Truth and the Good in order to set himself up as an absolute principle unto himself: "You will be like God" (Gen 3:5). Consequently, freedom itself needs to be set free. It is Christ who sets it free: he "has set us free for freedom" (cf. Gal 5:1).

87. Christ reveals, first and foremost, that the frank and open acceptance of truth is the condition for authentic freedom: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32).¹³⁹ This is truth which sets one free in the face of worldly power and which gives the strength to endure martyrdom. So it was with Jesus before Pilate: "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37). The true worshippers of God must thus worship him "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23): in this worship they become free. Worship of God and a relationship with truth are revealed in Jesus Christ as the deepest foundation of freedom.

Furthermore, Jesus reveals by his whole life, and not only by his words, that freedom is acquired in love, that is, in the gift of self. The one who says: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13), freely goes out to meet his Passion (cf. Mt 26:46), and in obedience to the Father gives his life on the Cross for all men (cf. Phil 2:6-11). Contemplation of Jesus Crucified is thus the highroad which the Church must tread every day if she wishes to understand the full meaning of freedom: the gift of self in service to God and one's brethren. Communion with the Crucified and Risen Lord is the never-ending source from which the Church draws unceasingly in order to live in freedom, to give of herself and to serve. Commenting on the verse in Psalm 100 "Serve the Lord with gladness", Saint Augustine says: "In the house of the Lord, slavery is free. It is free because it serves not out of necessity, but out of charity... Charity should make you a servant, just as truth has made you free... you are at once both a servant and free: a servant, because you have become such; free, because you are loved by God your Creator; indeed, you have also been enabled to love your Creator... You are a servant of the Lord and you are a freedman of the Lord. Do not go looking for a liberation which will lead you far from the house of your liberator!"¹⁴⁰

The Church, and each of her members, is thus called to share in the munus regale of the Crucified Christ (cf. Jn 12:32), to share in the grace and in the responsibility of the Son of man who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).¹⁴¹

Jesus, then, is the living, personal summation of perfect freedom in total obedience to the will of God. His crucified flesh fully reveals the unbreakable bond between freedom and truth, just as his Resurrection from the dead is the supreme exaltation of the fruitfulness and saving power of a freedom lived out in truth.

Walking in the light (cf. 1 Jn 1:7)

88. The attempt to set freedom in opposition to truth, and indeed to separate them radically, is the consequence, manifestation and consummation of another more serious and destructive dichotomy, that which separates faith from morality.

This separation represents one of the most acute pastoral concerns of the Church amid today's growing secularism, wherein many, indeed too many, people think and live "as if God did not exist". We are speaking of a mentality which affects, often in a profound, extensive and all-embracing way, even the attitudes and behaviour of Christians, whose faith is weakened and loses its character as a new and original criterion for thinking and acting in personal, family and social life. In a widely dechristianized culture, the criteria employed by believers themselves in making judgments and decisions often appear extraneous or even contrary to those of the Gospel.

It is urgent then that Christians should rediscover the newness of the faith and its power to judge a prevalent and all-intrusive culture. As the Apostle Paul admonishes us: "Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of the light (for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful words of darkness, but instead expose them... Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:8-11, 15-16; cf. 1 Th 5:4-8).

It is urgent to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with intellectual assent. Rather, faith is a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and a truth to be lived out. A word, in any event, is not truly received until it passes into action, until it is put into practice. Faith is a decision involving one's whole existence. It is an encounter, a dialogue, a communion of love and of life between the believer and Jesus Christ, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6). It entails an act of trusting abandonment to Christ, which enables us to live as he lived (cf. Gal 2:20), in profound love of God and of our brothers and sisters.

89. Faith also possesses a moral content. It gives rise to and calls for a consistent life commitment; it entails and brings to perfection the acceptance and observance of God's commandments. As Saint John writes, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth... And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 Jn 1:5-6; 2:3-6).

Through the moral life, faith becomes "confession", not only before God but also before men: it becomes witness. "You are the light of the world", said Jesus; "a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:14-16). These works are above all those of charity (cf. Mt 25:31-46) and of the authentic freedom which is manifested and lived in the gift of self, even to the total gift of self, like that of Jesus, who on the Cross "loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). Christ's witness is the source, model and means for the witness of his disciples, who are called to walk on the same road: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23). Charity, in conformity with the radical demands of the Gospel, can lead the believer to the supreme witness of martyrdom. Once again this means imitating Jesus who died on the Cross: "Be imitators of God, as beloved children", Paul writes to the Christians of Ephesus, "and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1-2).

Martyrdom, the exaltation of the inviolable holiness of God's law

90.

The relationship between faith and morality shines forth with all its brilliance in the unconditional respect due to the insistent demands of the personal dignity of every man, demands protected by those moral norms which prohibit without exception actions which are intrinsically evil. The universality and the immutability of the moral norm make manifest and at the same time serve to protect the personal dignity and inviolability of man, on whose face is reflected the splendour of God (cf. Gen 9:5-6).

The unacceptability of "teleological", "consequentialist" and "proportionalist" ethical theories, which deny the existence of negative moral norms regarding specific kinds of behaviour, norms which are valid without exception, is confirmed in a particularly eloquent way by Christian martyrdom, which has always accompanied and continues to accompany the life of the Church even today.

91.

In the Old Testament we already find admirable witnesses of fidelity to the holy law of God even to the point of a voluntary acceptance of death. A prime example is the story of Susanna: in reply to the two unjust judges who threatened to have her condemned to death if she refused to yield to their sinful passion, she says: "I am hemmed in on every side. For if I do this thing, it is death for me; and if I do not, I shall not escape your hands. I choose not to do it and to fall into your hands, rather than to sin in the sight of the Lord!" (Dan 13:22-23). Susanna, preferring to "fall innocent" into the hands of the judges, bears witness not only to her faith and trust in God but also to her obedience to the truth and to the absoluteness of the moral order. By her readiness to die a martyr, she proclaims that it is not right to do what God's law qualifies as evil in order to draw some good from it. Susanna chose for herself the "better part": hers was a perfectly clear witness, without any compromise, to the truth about the good and to the God of Israel. By her acts, she revealed the holiness of God.

At the dawn of the New Testament, John the Baptist, unable to refrain from speaking of the law of the Lord and rejecting any compromise with evil, "gave his life in witness to truth and justice", 142 and thus also became the forerunner of the Messiah in the way he died (cf. Mk 6:17-29). "The one who came to bear witness to the light and who

deserved to be called by that same light, which is Christ, a burning and shining lamp, was cast into the darkness of prison... The one to whom it was granted to baptize the Redeemer of the world was thus baptized in his own blood".¹⁴³ In the New Testament we find many examples of followers of Christ, beginning with the deacon Stephen (cf. Acts 6:8-7:60) and the Apostle James (cf. Acts 12:1-2), who died as martyrs in order to profess their faith and their love for Christ, unwilling to deny him. In this they followed the Lord Jesus who "made the good confession" (1 Tim 6:13) before Caiaphas and Pilate, confirming the truth of his message at the cost of his life. Countless other martyrs accepted persecution and death rather than perform the idolatrous act of burning incense before the statue of the Emperor (cf. Rev 13:7-10). They even refused to feign such worship, thereby giving an example of the duty to refrain from performing even a single concrete act contrary to God's love and the witness of faith. Like Christ himself, they obediently trusted and handed over their lives to the Father, the one who could free them from death (cf. Heb 5:7).

The Church proposes the example of numerous Saints who bore witness to and defended moral truth even to the point of enduring martyrdom, or who preferred death to a single mortal sin. In raising them to the honour of the altars, the Church has canonized their witness and declared the truth of their judgment, according to which the love of God entails the obligation to respect his commandments, even in the most dire of circumstances, and the refusal to betray those commandments, even for the sake of saving one's own life.

92. Martyrdom, accepted as an affirmation of the inviolability of the moral order, bears splendid witness both to the holiness of God's law and to the inviolability of the personal dignity of man, created in God's image and likeness. This dignity may never be disparaged or called into question, even with good intentions, whatever the difficulties involved. Jesus warns us most sternly: "What does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? " (Mk 8:36).

Martyrdom rejects as false and illusory whatever "human meaning" one might claim to attribute, even in "exceptional" conditions, to an act morally evil in itself. Indeed, it even more clearly unmasks the true face of such an act: it is a violation of man's "humanity", in the one perpetrating it even before the one enduring it.¹⁴⁴ Hence martyrdom is also the exaltation of a person's perfect "humanity" and of true "life", as is attested by Saint Ignatius of Antioch, addressing the Christians of Rome, the place of his own martyrdom: "Have mercy on me, brethren: do not hold me back from living; do not wish that I die... Let me arrive at the pure light; once there I will be truly a man. Let me imitate the passion of my God".¹⁴⁵

93. Finally, martyrdom is an outstanding sign of the holiness of the Church. Fidelity to God's holy law, witnessed to by death, is a solemn proclamation and missionary commitment usque ad sanguinem, so that the splendour of moral truth may be undimmed in the behaviour and thinking of individuals and society. This witness makes an extraordinarily valuable contribution to warding off, in civil society and within the ecclesial communities themselves, a headlong plunge into the most dangerous crisis which can afflict man: the confusion between good and evil, which makes it impossible to build up and to preserve the moral order of individuals and communities. By their eloquent and attractive example of a life completely transfigured by the splendour of moral truth, the martyrs and, in general, all the Church's Saints, light up every period of history by reawakening its moral sense. By witnessing fully to the good, they are a living reproof to those who transgress the law (cf. Wis 2:12), and they make the words of the Prophet echo ever afresh: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Is 5:20).

Although martyrdom represents the high point of the witness to moral truth, and one to which relatively few people are called, there is nonetheless a consistent witness which all Christians must daily be ready to make, even at the cost of suffering and grave sacrifice. Indeed, faced with the many difficulties which fidelity to the moral order can demand, even in the most ordinary circumstances, the Christian is called, with the grace of God invoked in prayer, to a sometimes heroic commitment. In this he or she is sustained by the virtue of fortitude, whereby - as Gregory the Great teaches - one can actually "love the difficulties of this world for the sake of eternal rewards".¹⁴⁶

94. In this witness to the absoluteness of the moral good Christians are not alone: they are supported by the moral sense present in peoples and by the great religious and sapiential traditions of East and West, from which the interior and mysterious workings of God's Spirit are not absent. The words of the Latin poet Juvenal apply to all: "Consider it the greatest of crimes to prefer survival to honour and, out of love of physical life, to lose the very reason for living".¹⁴⁷ The voice of conscience has always clearly recalled that there are truths and moral values for which one must be prepared to give up one's life. In an individual's words and above all in the sacrifice of his life for a moral value, the Church sees a single testimony to that truth which, already present in creation, shines forth in its fullness on the face of Christ. As Saint Justin put it, "the Stoics, at least in their teachings on ethics, demonstrated wisdom, thanks to the seed of the Word present in all peoples, and we know that those who followed their doctrines met with hatred and were killed".¹⁴⁸

Universal and unchanging moral norms at the service of the person and of society

95. The Church's teaching, and in particular her firmness in defending the universal and permanent validity of the precepts prohibiting intrinsically evil acts, is not infrequently seen as the sign of an intolerable intransigence, particularly with regard to the enormously complex and conflict-filled situations present in the moral life of individuals and of society today; this intransigence is said to be in contrast with the Church's motherhood. The Church, one hears,

is lacking in understanding and compassion. But the Church's motherhood can never in fact be separated from her teaching mission, which she must always carry out as the faithful Bride of Christ, who is the Truth in person. "As Teacher, she never tires of proclaiming the moral norm... The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection".¹⁴⁹

In fact, genuine understanding and compassion must mean love for the person, for his true good, for his authentic freedom. And this does not result, certainly, from concealing or weakening moral truth, but rather from proposing it in its most profound meaning as an outpouring of God's eternal Wisdom, which we have received in Christ, and as a service to man, to the growth of his freedom and to the attainment of his happiness.¹⁵⁰

Still, a clear and forceful presentation of moral truth can never be separated from a profound and heartfelt respect, born of that patient and trusting love which man always needs along his moral journey, a journey frequently wearisome on account of difficulties, weakness and painful situations. The Church can never renounce the "the principle of truth and consistency, whereby she does not agree to call good evil and evil good";¹⁵¹ she must always be careful not to break the bruised reed or to quench the dimly burning wick (cf. Is 42:3). As Paul VI wrote: "While it is an outstanding manifestation of charity towards souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ, this must always be joined with tolerance and charity, as Christ himself showed by his conversations and dealings with men. Having come not to judge the world but to save it, he was uncompromisingly stern towards sin, but patient and rich in mercy towards sinners".¹⁵²

96.

The Church's firmness in defending the universal and unchanging moral norms is not demeaning at all. Its only purpose is to serve man's true freedom. Because there can be no freedom apart from or in opposition to the truth, the categorical - unyielding and uncompromising - defence of the absolutely essential demands of man's personal dignity must be considered the way and the condition for the very existence of freedom.

This service is directed to every man, considered in the uniqueness and singularity of his being and existence: only by obedience to universal moral norms does man find full confirmation of his personal uniqueness and the possibility of authentic moral growth. For this very reason, this service is also directed to all mankind: it is not only for individuals but also for the community, for society as such. These norms in fact represent the unshakable foundation and solid guarantee of a just and peaceful human coexistence, and hence of genuine democracy, which can come into being and develop only on the basis of the equality of all its members, who possess common rights and duties. When it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the "poorest of the poor" on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal.

97.

In this way, moral norms, and primarily the negative ones, those prohibiting evil, manifest their meaning and force, both personal and social. By protecting the inviolable personal dignity of every human being they help to preserve the human social fabric and its proper and fruitful development. The commandments of the second table of the Decalogue in particular - those which Jesus quoted to the young man of the Gospel (cf. Mt 19:19) - constitute the indispensable rules of all social life.

These commandments are formulated in general terms. But the very fact that "the origin, the subject and the purpose of all social institutions is and should be the human person" ¹⁵³ allows for them to be specified and made more explicit in a detailed code of behaviour. The fundamental moral rules of social life thus entail specific demands to which both public authorities and citizens are required to pay heed. Even though intentions may sometimes be good, and circumstances frequently difficult, civil authorities and particular individuals never have authority to violate the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. In the end, only a morality which acknowledges certain norms as valid always and for everyone, with no exception, can guarantee the ethical foundation of social coexistence, both on the national and international levels.

Morality and the renewal of social and political life

98. In the face of serious forms of social and economic injustice and political corruption affecting entire peoples and nations, there is a growing reaction of indignation on the part of very many people whose fundamental human rights have been trampled upon and held in contempt, as well as an ever more widespread and acute sense of the need for a radical personal and social renewal capable of ensuring justice, solidarity, honesty and openness.

Certainly there is a long and difficult road ahead; bringing about such a renewal will require enormous effort, especially on account of the number and the gravity of the causes giving rise to and aggravating the situations of injustice present in the world today. But, as history and personal experience show, it is not difficult to discover at the bottom of these situations causes which are properly "cultural", linked to particular ways of looking at man, society and the world. Indeed, at the heart of the issue of culture we find the moral sense, which is in turn rooted and fulfilled in the religious sense. ¹⁵⁴

99. Only God, the Supreme Good, constitutes the unshakable foundation and essential condition of morality, and thus of the commandments, particularly those negative commandments which always and in every case prohibit behaviour and actions incompatible with the personal dignity of every man. The Supreme Good and the moral good meet in truth: the truth of God, the Creator and Redeemer, and the truth of man, created and redeemed by him. Only upon this truth is it possible to construct a renewed society and to solve the complex and weighty problems affecting it, above all the problem of overcoming the various forms of totalitarianism, so as to make way for the authentic freedom of the person. "Totalitarianism arises out of a denial of truth in the objective sense. If there is no transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people. Their self-interest as a class, group or nation would inevitably set them in opposition to one another. If one does not acknowledge transcendent truth, then the force of power takes over, and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others.... Thus, the root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is therefore by his very nature the subject of rights which no one may violate - no individual, group, class, nation or State. Not even the majority of a social body may violate these rights, by going against the minority, by isolating, oppressing, or exploiting it, or by attempting to annihilate it".¹⁵⁵

Consequently, the inseparable connection between truth and freedom - which expresses the essential bond between God's wisdom and will - is extremely significant for the life of persons in the socio-economic and socio-political sphere. This is clearly seen in the Church's social teaching - which "belongs to the field... of theology and particularly of moral theology" ¹⁵⁶ - and from her presentation of commandments governing social, economic and political life, not only with regard to general attitudes but also to precise and specific kinds of behaviour and concrete acts.

100. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that "in economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of temperance, to moderate our attachment to the goods of this world; of the virtue of justice, to preserve our neighbour's rights and to render what is his or her due; and of solidarity, following the Golden Rule and in keeping with the generosity of the Lord, who 'though he was rich, yet for your sake... became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (2 Cor 8:9)".¹⁵⁷ The Catechism goes on to present a series of kinds of behaviour and actions contrary to human dignity: theft, deliberate retention of goods lent or objects lost, business fraud (cf. Dt 25:13-16), unjust wages (cf. Dt 24:14-15), forcing up prices by trading on the ignorance or hardship of another (cf. Am 8:4-6), the misappropriation and private use of the corporate property of an enterprise, work badly done, tax fraud, forgery of cheques and invoices, excessive expenses, waste, etc.¹⁵⁸ It continues: "The seventh commandment prohibits actions or enterprises which for any reason - selfish or ideological, commercial or totalitarian - lead to the enslavement of human beings, disregard for their personal dignity, buying or selling or exchanging them like merchandise. Reducing persons by violence to use-value or a source of profit is a sin against their dignity as persons and their fundamental rights. Saint Paul set a Christian master right about treating his Christian slave 'no longer as a slave but... as a brother... in the Lord' (Philem 16)".¹⁵⁹

101. In the political sphere, it must be noted that truthfulness in the relations between those governing and those governed, openness in public administration, impartiality in the service of the body politic, respect for the rights of political adversaries, safeguarding the rights of the accused against summary trials and convictions, the just and honest use of public funds, the rejection of equivocal or illicit means in order to gain, preserve or increase power at any cost - all these are principles which are primarily rooted in, and in fact derive their singular urgency from, the transcendent value of the person and the objective moral demands of the functioning of States.¹⁶⁰ When these principles are not observed, the very basis of political coexistence is weakened and the life of society itself is gradually jeopardized, threatened and doomed to decay (cf. Ps 14:3-4; Rev 18:2-3, 9-24). Today, when many countries have seen the fall of ideologies which bound politics to a totalitarian conception of the world - Marxism being the foremost of these - there is no less grave a danger that the fundamental rights of the human person will be denied and that the religious yearnings which arise in the heart of every human being will be absorbed once again into politics. This is the risk of an alliance between democracy and ethical relativism, which would remove any sure moral reference point from political and social life, and on a deeper level make the acknowledgement of truth impossible. Indeed, "if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism".¹⁶¹

Thus, in every sphere of personal, family, social and political life, morality - founded upon truth and open in truth to authentic freedom - renders a primordial, indispensable and immensely valuable service not only for the individual person and his growth in the good, but also for society and its genuine development.

Grace and obedience to God's law

102. Even in the most difficult situations man must respect the norm of morality so that he can be obedient to God's holy commandment and consistent with his own dignity as a person. Certainly, maintaining a harmony between freedom and truth occasionally demands uncommon sacrifices, and must be won at a high price: it can even involve martyrdom. But, as universal and daily experience demonstrates, man is tempted to break that harmony: "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want" (Rom 7:15, 19).

What is the ultimate source of this inner division of man? His history of sin begins when he no longer acknowledges the Lord as his Creator and himself wishes to be the one who determines, with complete independence, what is good and what is evil. "You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5): this was the first temptation, and it is echoed in all the other temptations to which man is more easily inclined to yield as a result of the original Fall.

But temptations can be overcome, sins can be avoided, because together with the commandments the Lord gives us the possibility of keeping them: "His eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin" (Sir 15:19-20). Keeping God's law in particular situations can be difficult, extremely difficult, but it is never impossible. This is the constant teaching of the Church's tradition, and was expressed by the Council of Trent: "But no one, however much justified, ought to consider himself exempt from the observance of the commandments, nor should he employ that rash statement, forbidden by the Fathers under anathema, that the commandments of God are impossible of observance by one who is justified. For God does not command the impossible, but in commanding he admonishes you to do what you can and to pray for what you cannot, and he gives his aid to enable you. His commandments are not burdensome (cf. 1 Jn 5:3); his yoke is easy and his burden light (cf. Mt 11:30)".¹⁶²

103. Man always has before him the spiritual horizon of hope, thanks to the help of divine grace and with the cooperation of human freedom.

It is in the saving Cross of Jesus, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the Sacraments which flow forth from the pierced side of the Redeemer (cf. Jn 19:34), that believers find the grace and the strength always to keep God's holy law, even amid the gravest of hardships. As Saint Andrew of Crete observes, the law itself "was enlivened by grace and made to serve it in a harmonious and fruitful combination. Each element preserved its characteristics without change or confusion. In a divine manner, he turned what could be burdensome and tyrannical into what is easy to bear and a source of freedom".¹⁶³

Only in the mystery of Christ's Redemption do we discover the "concrete" possibilities of man. "It would be a very serious error to conclude... that the Church's teaching is essentially only an "ideal" which must then be adapted, proportioned, graduated to the so-called concrete possibilities of man, according to a "balancing of the goods in question". But what are the "concrete possibilities of man" ? And of which man are we speaking? Of man dominated by lust or of man redeemed by Christ? This is what is at stake: the reality of Christ's redemption. Christ has redeemed us! This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing the entire truth of our being; he has set our freedom free from the domination of concupiscence. And if redeemed man still sins, this is not due to an imperfection of Christ's redemptive act, but to man's will not to avail himself of the grace which flows from that act. God's command is of course proportioned to man's capabilities; but to the capabilities of the man to whom the Holy Spirit has been given; of the man who, though he has fallen into sin, can always obtain pardon and enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit".¹⁶⁴

104. In this context, appropriate allowance is made both for God's mercy towards the sinner who converts and for the understanding of human weakness. Such understanding never means compromising and falsifying the standard of good and evil in order to adapt it to particular circumstances. It is quite human for the sinner to acknowledge his weakness and to ask mercy for his failings; what is unacceptable is the attitude of one who makes his own weakness the criterion of the truth about the good, so that he can feel self-justified, without even the need to have recourse to God and his mercy. An attitude of this sort corrupts the morality of society as a whole, since it encourages doubt about the objectivity of the moral law in general and a rejection of the absoluteness of moral prohibitions regarding specific human acts, and it ends up by confusing all judgments about values.

Instead, we should take to heart the message of the Gospel parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (cf. Lk 18:9-14). The tax collector might possibly have had some justification for the sins he committed, such as to diminish his responsibility. But his prayer does not dwell on such justifications, but rather on his own unworthiness before God's infinite holiness: "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Lk 18:13). The Pharisee, on the other hand, is self-justified, finding some excuse for each of his failings. Here we encounter two different attitudes of the moral conscience of man in every age. The tax collector represents a "repentant" conscience, fully aware of the frailty of its own nature and seeing in its own failings, whatever their subjective justifications, a confirmation of its need for redemption. The Pharisee represents a "self-satisfied" conscience, under the illusion that it is able to observe the law without the help of grace and convinced that it does not need mercy.

105. All people must take great care not to allow themselves to be tainted by the attitude of the Pharisee, which would seek to eliminate awareness of one's own limits and of one's own sin. In our own day this attitude is expressed particularly in the attempt to adapt the moral norm to one's own capacities and personal interests, and even in the rejection of the very idea of a norm. Accepting, on the other hand, the "disproportion" between the law and human ability (that is, the capacity of the moral forces of man left to himself) kindles the desire for grace and prepares one to receive it. "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" asks the Apostle Paul. And in an outburst of joy and gratitude he replies: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:24-25).

We find the same awareness in the following prayer of Saint Ambrose of Milan: "What then is man, if you do not visit him? Remember, Lord, that you have made me as one who is weak, that you formed me from dust. How can I stand, if you do not constantly look upon me, to strengthen this clay, so that my strength may proceed from your face? When you hide your face, all grows weak (Ps 104:29): if you turn to look at me, woe is me! You have nothing to see in me

but the stain of my crimes; there is no gain either in being abandoned or in being seen, because when we are seen, we offend you. Still, we can imagine that God does not reject those he sees, because he purifies those upon whom he gazes. Before him burns a fire capable of consuming our guilt (cf. Joel 2:3)".165

Morality and new evangelization

106. Evangelization is the most powerful and stirring challenge which the Church has been called to face from her very beginning. Indeed, this challenge is posed not so much by the social and cultural milieu which she encounters in the course of history, as by the mandate of the Risen Christ, who defines the very reason for the Church's existence: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15).

At least for many peoples, however, the present time is instead marked by a formidable challenge to undertake a "new evangelization", a proclamation of the Gospel which is always new and always the bearer of new things, an evangelization which must be "new in its ardour, methods and expression".166 Dechristianization, which weighs heavily upon entire peoples and communities once rich in faith and Christian life, involves not only the loss of faith or in any event its becoming irrelevant for everyday life, but also, and of necessity, a decline or obscuring of the moral sense. This comes about both as a result of a loss of awareness of the originality of Gospel morality and as a result of an eclipse of fundamental principles and ethical values themselves. Today's widespread tendencies towards subjectivism, utilitarianism and relativism appear not merely as pragmatic attitudes or patterns of behaviour, but rather as approaches having a basis in theory and claiming full cultural and social legitimacy.

107. Evangelization - and therefore the "new evangelization" - also involves the proclamation and presentation of morality. Jesus himself, even as he preached the Kingdom of God and its saving love, called people to faith and conversion (cf. Mk 1:15). And when Peter, with the other Apostles, proclaimed the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, he held out a new life to be lived, a "way" to be followed, for those who would be disciples of the Risen One (cf. Acts 2:37-41; 3:17-20).

Just as it does in proclaiming the truths of faith, and even more so in presenting the foundations and content of Christian morality, the new evangelization will show its authenticity and unleash all its missionary force when it is carried out through the gift not only of the word proclaimed but also of the word lived. In particular, the life of holiness which is resplendent in so many members of the People of God, humble and often unseen, constitutes the simplest and most attractive way to perceive at once the beauty of truth, the liberating force of God's love, and the value of unconditional fidelity to all the demands of the Lord's law, even in the most difficult situations. For this reason, the Church, as a wise teacher of morality, has always invited believers to seek and to find in the Saints, and above all in the Virgin Mother of God "full of grace" and "all-holy", the model, the strength and the joy needed to live a life in accordance with God's commandments and the Beatitudes of the Gospel.

The lives of the saints, as a reflection of the goodness of God - the One who "alone is good" - constitute not only a genuine profession of faith and an incentive for sharing it with others, but also a glorification of God and his infinite holiness. The life of holiness thus brings to full expression and effectiveness the threefold and unitary munus propheticum, sacerdotale et regale which every Christian receives as a gift by being born again "of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5) in Baptism. His moral life has the value of a "spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1; cf. Phil 3:3), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist: by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ's self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds. In the moral life the Christian's royal service is also made evident and effective: with the help of grace, the more one obeys the new law of the Holy Spirit, the more one grows in the freedom to which he or she is called by the service of truth, charity and justice.

108. At the heart of the new evangelization and of the new moral life which it proposes and awakens by its fruits of holiness and missionary zeal, there is the Spirit of Christ, the principle and strength of the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church. As Pope Paul VI reminded us: "Evangelization will never be possible

without the action of the Holy Spirit".167 The Spirit of Jesus, received by the humble and docile heart of the believer, brings about the flourishing of Christian moral life and the witness of holiness amid the great variety of vocations, gifts, responsibilities, conditions and life situations. As Novatian once pointed out, here expressing the authentic faith of the Church, it is the Holy Spirit "who confirmed the hearts and minds of the disciples, who revealed the mysteries of the Gospel, who shed upon them the light of things divine. Strengthened by his gift, they did not fear either prisons or chains for the name of the Lord; indeed they even trampled upon the powers and torments of the world, armed and strengthened by him, having in themselves the gifts which this same Spirit bestows and directs like jewels to the Church, the Bride of Christ. It is in fact he who raises up prophets in the Church, instructs teachers, guides tongues, works wonders and healings, accomplishes miracles, grants the discernment of spirits, assigns governance, inspires counsels, distributes and harmonizes every other charismatic gift. In this way he completes and perfects the Lord's Church everywhere and in all things".168

In the living context of this new evangelization, aimed at generating and nourishing "the faith which works through love" (cf. Gal 5:6), and in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit, we can now understand the proper place which

continuing theological reflection about the moral life holds in the Church, the community of believers. We can likewise speak of the mission and the responsibility proper to moral theologians.

The service of moral theologians

109. The whole Church is called to evangelization and to the witness of a life of faith, by the fact that she has been made a sharer in the munus propheticum of the Lord Jesus through the gift of his Spirit. Thanks to the permanent presence of the Spirit of truth in the Church (cf. Jn 14:16-17), "the universal body of the faithful who have received the anointing of the holy one (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27) cannot be mistaken in belief. It displays this particular quality through a supernatural sense of the faith in the whole people when, 'from the Bishops to the last of the lay faithful', it expresses the consensus of all in matters of faith and morals".¹⁶⁹

In order to carry out her prophetic mission, the Church must constantly reawaken or "rekindle" her own life of faith (cf. 2 Tim 1:6), particularly through an ever deeper reflection, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, upon the content of faith itself. The "vocation" of the theologian in the Church is specifically at the service of this "believing effort to understand the faith". As the Instruction *Donum Veritatis* teaches: "Among the vocations awakened by the Spirit in the Church is that of the theologian. His role is to pursue in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the word of God found in the inspired Scriptures and handed on by the living Tradition of the Church. He does this in communion with the Magisterium, which has been charged with the responsibility of preserving the deposit of faith. By its nature, faith appeals to reason because it reveals to man the truth of his destiny and the way to attain it. Revealed truth, to be sure, surpasses our telling. All our concepts fall short of its ultimately unfathomable grandeur (cf. Eph 3:19). Nonetheless, revealed truth beckons reason - God's gift fashioned for the assimilation of truth - to enter into its light and thereby come to understand in a certain measure what it has believed. Theological science responds to the invitation of truth as it seeks to understand the faith. It thereby aids the People of God in fulfilling the Apostle's command (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) to give an accounting for their hope to those who ask it".¹⁷⁰

It is fundamental for defining the very identity of theology, and consequently for theology to carry out its proper mission, to recognize its profound and vital connection with the Church, her mystery, her life and her mission: "Theology is an ecclesial science because it grows in the Church and works on the Church... It is a service to the Church and therefore ought to feel itself actively involved in the mission of the Church, particularly in its prophetic mission".¹⁷¹ By its very nature and procedures, authentic theology can flourish and develop only through a committed and responsible participation in and "belonging" to the Church as a "community of faith". In turn, the fruits of theological research and deeper insight become a source of enrichment for the Church and her life of faith.

110. All that has been said about theology in general can and must also be said for moral theology, seen in its specific nature as a scientific reflection on the Gospel as the gift and commandment of new life, a reflection on the life which "professes the truth in love" (cf. Eph 4:15) and on the Church's life of holiness, in which there shines forth the truth about the good brought to its perfection. The Church's Magisterium intervenes not only in the sphere of faith, but also, and inseparably so, in the sphere of morals. It has the task of "discerning, by means of judgments normative for the consciences of believers, those acts which in themselves conform to the demands of faith and foster their expression in life and those which, on the contrary, because intrinsically evil, are incompatible with such demands".¹⁷² In proclaiming the commandments of God and the charity of Christ, the Church's Magisterium also teaches the faithful specific particular precepts and requires that they consider them in conscience as morally binding. In addition, the Magisterium carries out an important work of vigilance, warning the faithful of the presence of possible errors, even merely implicit ones, when their consciences fail to acknowledge the correctness and the truth of the moral norms which the Magisterium teaches.

This is the point at which to consider the specific task of all those who by mandate of their legitimate Pastors teach moral theology in Seminaries and Faculties of Theology. They have the grave duty to instruct the faithful - especially future Pastors - about all those commandments and practical norms authoritatively declared by the Church.¹⁷³ While recognizing the possible limitations of the human

arguments employed by the Magisterium, moral theologians are called to develop a deeper understanding of the reasons underlying its teachings and to expound the validity and obligatory nature of the precepts it proposes, demonstrating their connection with one another and their relation with man's ultimate end.¹⁷⁴ Moral theologians are to set forth the Church's teaching and to give, in the exercise of their ministry, the example of a loyal assent, both internal and external, to the Magisterium's teaching in the areas of both dogma and morality.¹⁷⁵ Working together in cooperation with the hierarchical Magisterium, theologians will be deeply concerned to clarify ever more fully the biblical foundations, the ethical significance and the anthropological concerns which underlie the moral doctrine and the vision of man set forth by the Church.

111. The service which moral theologians are called to provide at the present time is of the utmost importance, not only for the Church's life and mission, but also for human society and culture. Moral theologians have the task, in close and vital connection with biblical and dogmatic theology, to highlight through their scientific reflection "that dynamic aspect which will elicit the response that man must give to the divine call which comes in the process of his growth in love, within a community of salvation. In this way, moral theology will acquire an inner spiritual dimension in response

to the need to develop fully the imago Dei present in man, and in response to the laws of spiritual development described by Christian ascetical and mystical theology".176

Certainly moral theology and its teaching are meeting with particular difficulty today. Because the Church's morality necessarily involves a normative dimension, moral theology cannot be reduced to a body of knowledge worked out purely in the context of the so-called behavioural sciences. The latter are concerned with the phenomenon of morality as a historical and social fact; moral theology, however, while needing to make use of the behavioural and natural sciences, does not rely on the results of formal empirical observation or phenomenological understanding alone. Indeed, the relevance of the behavioural sciences for moral theology must always be measured against the primordial question: What is good or evil? What must be done to have eternal life?

112. The moral theologian must therefore exercise careful discernment in the context of today's prevalently scientific and technical culture, exposed as it is to the dangers of relativism, pragmatism and positivism. From the theological viewpoint, moral principles are not dependent upon the historical moment in which they are discovered. Moreover, the fact that some believers act without following the teachings of the Magisterium, or erroneously consider as morally correct a kind of behaviour declared by their Pastors as contrary to the law of God, cannot be a valid argument for rejecting the truth of the moral norms taught by the Church. The affirmation of moral principles is not within the competence of formal empirical methods. While not denying the validity of such methods, but at the same time not restricting its viewpoint to them, moral theology, faithful to the supernatural sense of the faith, takes into account first and foremost the spiritual dimension of the human heart and its vocation to divine love.

In fact, while the behavioural sciences, like all experimental sciences, develop an empirical and statistical concept of "normality", faith teaches that this normality itself bears the traces of a fall from man's original situation - in other words, it is affected by sin. Only Christian faith points out to man the way to return to "the beginning" (cf. Mt 19:8), a way which is often quite different from that of empirical normality. Hence the behavioural sciences, despite the great value of the information which they provide, cannot be considered decisive indications of moral norms. It is the Gospel which reveals the full truth about man and his moral journey, and thus enlightens and admonishes sinners; it proclaims to them God's mercy, which is constantly at work to preserve them both from despair at their inability fully to know and keep God's law and from the presumption that they can be saved without merit. God also reminds sinners of the joy of forgiveness, which alone grants the strength to see in the moral law a liberating truth, a grace-filled source of hope, a path of life.

113. Teaching moral doctrine involves the conscious acceptance of these intellectual, spiritual and pastoral responsibilities. Moral theologians, who have accepted the charge of teaching the Church's doctrine, thus have a grave duty to train the faithful to make this moral discernment, to be committed to the true good and to have confident recourse to God's grace.

While exchanges and conflicts of opinion may constitute normal expressions of public life in a representative democracy, moral teaching certainly cannot depend simply upon respect for a process: indeed, it is in no way established by following the rules and deliberative procedures typical of a democracy. Dissent, in the form of carefully orchestrated protests and polemics carried on in the media, is opposed to ecclesial communion and to a correct understanding of the hierarchical constitution of the People of God. Opposition to the teaching of the Church's Pastors cannot be seen as a legitimate expression either of Christian freedom or of the diversity of the Spirit's gifts. When this happens, the Church's Pastors have the duty to act in conformity with their apostolic mission, insisting that the right of the faithful to receive Catholic doctrine in its purity and integrity must always be respected. "Never forgetting that he too is a member of the People of God, the theologian must be respectful of them, and be committed to offering them a teaching which in no way does harm to the doctrine of the faith".177

Our own responsibilities as Pastors

114. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, responsibility for the faith and the life of faith of the People of God is particularly incumbent upon the Church's Pastors: "Among the principal tasks of Bishops the preaching of the Gospel is pre-eminent. For the Bishops are the heralds of the faith who bring new disciples to Christ. They are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people entrusted to them the faith to be believed and put into practice; they illustrate this faith in the light of the Holy Spirit, drawing out of the treasury of Revelation things old and new (cf. Mt 13:52); they make it bear fruit and they vigilantly ward off errors that are threatening their flock (cf. 2 Tim 4:1-4)".178

It is our common duty, and even before that our common grace, as Pastors and Bishops of the Church, to teach the faithful the things which lead them to God, just as the Lord Jesus did with the young man in the Gospel. Replying to the question: "What good must I do to have eternal life?", Jesus referred the young man to God, the Lord of creation and of the Covenant. He reminded him of the moral commandments already revealed in the Old Testament and he indicated their spirit and deepest meaning by inviting the young man to follow him in poverty, humility and love: "Come, follow me!". The truth of this teaching was sealed on the Cross in the Blood of Christ: in the Holy Spirit, it has become the new law of the Church and of every Christian.

This "answer" to the question about morality has been entrusted by Jesus Christ in a particular way to us, the Pastors of the Church; we have been called to make it the object of our preaching, in the fulfilment of our munus propheticum. At the same time, our responsibility as Pastors with regard to Christian moral teaching must also be exercised as part of the munus sacerdotale: this happens when we dispense to the faithful the gifts of grace and sanctification as an effective means for obeying God's holy law, and when with our constant and confident prayers we support believers in their efforts to be faithful to the demands of the faith and to live in accordance with the Gospel (cf. Col 1:9-12). Especially today, Christian moral teaching must be one of the chief areas in which we exercise our pastoral vigilance, in carrying out our munus regale.

115. This is the first time, in fact, that the Magisterium of the Church has set forth in detail the fundamental elements of this teaching, and presented the principles for the pastoral discernment necessary in practical and cultural situations which are complex and even crucial.

In the light of Revelation and of the Church's constant teaching, especially that of the Second Vatican Council, I have briefly recalled the essential characteristics of freedom, as well as the fundamental values connected with the dignity of the person and the truth of his acts, so as to be able to discern in obedience to the moral law a grace and a sign of our adoption in the one Son (cf. Eph 1:4-6). Specifically, this Encyclical has evaluated certain trends in moral theology today. I now pass this evaluation on to you, in obedience to the word of the Lord who entrusted to Peter the task of strengthening his brethren (cf. Lk 22:32), in order to clarify and aid our common discernment.

Each of us knows how important is the teaching which represents the central theme of this Encyclical and which is today being restated with the authority of the Successor of Peter. Each of us can see the seriousness of what is involved, not only for individuals but also for the whole of society, with thereaffirmation of the universality and immutability of the moral commandments, particularly those which prohibit always and without exception intrinsically evil acts.

In acknowledging these commandments, Christian hearts and our pastoral charity listen to the call of the One who "first loved us" (1Jn 4:19). God asks us to be holy as he is holy (cf. Lev 19:2), to be - in Christ - perfect as he is perfect (cf. Mt 5:48). The unwavering demands of that commandment are based upon God's infinitely merciful love (cf. Lk 6:36), and the purpose of that commandment is to lead us, by the grace of Christ, on the path of that fullness of life proper to the children of God.

116. We have the duty, as Bishops, to be vigilant that the word of God is faithfully taught. My Brothers in the Episcopate, it is part of our pastoral ministry to see to it that this moral teaching is faithfully handed down and to have recourse to appropriate measures to ensure that the faithful are guarded from every doctrine and theory contrary to it. In carrying out this task we are all assisted by theologians; even so, theological opinions constitute neither the rule nor the norm of our teaching. Its authority is derived, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit and in communion cum Petro et sub Petro, from our fidelity to the Catholic faith which comes from the Apostles. As Bishops, we have the grave obligation to be personally vigilant that the "sound doctrine" (1 Tim 1:10) of faith and morals is taught in our Dioceses.

A particular responsibility is incumbent upon Bishops with regard to Catholic institutions. Whether these are agencies for the pastoral care of the family or for social work, or institutions dedicated to teaching or health care, Bishops can canonically erect and recognize these structures and delegate certain responsibilities to them. Nevertheless, Bishops are never relieved of their own personal obligations. It falls to them, in communion with the Holy See, both to grant the title "Catholic" to Church-related schools, 179 universities, 180 health-care facilities and counselling services, and, in cases of a serious failure to live up to that title, to take it away.

117. In the heart of every Christian, in the inmost depths of each person, there is always an echo of the question which the young man in the Gospel once asked Jesus: "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16). Everyone, however, needs to address this question to the "Good Teacher", since he is the only one who can answer in the fullness of truth, in all situations, in the most varied of circumstances. And when Christians ask him the question which rises from their conscience, the Lord replies in the words of the New Covenant which have been entrusted to his Church. As the Apostle Paul said of himself, we have been sent "to preach the Gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 1:17). The Church's answer to man's question contains the wisdom and power of Christ Crucified, the Truth which gives of itself.

When people ask the Church the questions raised by their consciences, when the faithful in the Church turn to their Bishops and Pastors, the Church's reply contains the voice of Jesus Christ, the voice of the truth about good and evil. In the words spoken by the Church there resounds, in people's inmost being, the voice of God who "alone is good" (cf. Mt 19:17), who alone "is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16).

Through the anointing of the Spirit this gentle but challenging word becomes light and life for man. Again the Apostle Paul invites us to have confidence, because "our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit... The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:5-6, 17-18).

CONCLUSION

Mary, Mother of Mercy

118. At the end of these considerations, let us entrust ourselves, the sufferings and the joys of our life, the moral life of believers and people of good will, and the research of moralists, to Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Mercy.

Mary is Mother of Mercy because her Son, Jesus Christ, was sent by the Father as the revelation of God's mercy (cf. Jn 3:16-18). Christ came not to condemn but to forgive, to show mercy (cf. Mt 9:13). And the greatest mercy of all is found in his being in our midst and calling us to meet him and to confess, with Peter, that he is "the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). No human sin can erase the mercy of God, or prevent him from unleashing all his triumphant power, if we only call upon him. Indeed, sin itself makes

even more radiant the love of the Father who, in order to ransom a slave, sacrificed his Son:181 his mercy towards us is Redemption. This mercy reaches its fullness in the gift of the Spirit who bestows new life and demands that it be lived. No matter how many and great the obstacles put in his way by human frailty and sin, the Spirit, who renews the face of the earth (cf. Ps 104:30), makes possible the miracle of the perfect accomplishment of the good. This renewal, which gives the ability to do what is good, noble, beautiful, pleasing to God and in conformity with his will, is in some way the flowering of the gift of mercy, which offers liberation from the slavery of evil and gives the strength to sin no more. Through the gift of new life, Jesus makes us sharers in his love and leads us to the Father in the Spirit.

119. Such is the consoling certainty of Christian faith, the source of its profound humanity and extraordinary simplicity. At times, in the discussions about new and complex moral problems, it can seem that Christian morality is in itself too demanding, difficult to understand and almost impossible to practise. This is untrue, since Christian morality consists, in the simplicity of the Gospel, in following Jesus Christ, in abandoning oneself to him, in letting oneself be transformed by his grace and renewed by his mercy, gifts which come to us in the living communion of his Church. Saint Augustine reminds us that "he who would live has a place to live, and has everything needed to live. Let him draw near, let him believe, let him become part of the body, that he may have life. Let him not shrink from the unity of the members".182 By the light of the Holy Spirit, the living essence of Christian morality can be understood by everyone, even the least learned, but particularly those who are able to preserve an "undivided heart" (Ps 86:11). On the other hand, this evangelical simplicity does not exempt one from facing reality in its complexity; rather it can lead to a more genuine understanding of reality, inasmuch as following Christ will gradually bring out the distinctive character of authentic Christian morality, while providing the vital energy needed to carry it out. It is the task of the Church's Magisterium to see that the dynamic process of following Christ develops in an organic manner, without the falsification or obscuring of its moral demands, with all their consequences. The one who loves Christ keeps his commandments (cf. Jn 14:15).

120. Mary is also Mother of Mercy because it is to her that Jesus entrusts his Church and all humanity. At the foot of the Cross, when she accepts John as her son, when she asks, together with Christ, forgiveness from the Father for those who do not know what they do (cf. Lk 23:34), Mary experiences, in perfect docility to the Spirit, the richness and the universality of God's love, which opens her heart and enables it to embrace the entire human race. Thus Mary becomes Mother of each and every one of us, the Mother who obtains for us divine mercy.

Mary is the radiant sign and inviting model of the moral life. As Saint Ambrose put it, "The life of this one person can serve as a model for everyone", 183 and while speaking specifically to virgins but within a context open to all, he affirmed: "The first stimulus to learning is the nobility of the teacher. Who can be more noble than the Mother of God? Who can be more glorious than the one chosen by Glory Itself?".184

Mary lived and exercised her freedom precisely by giving herself to God and accepting God's gift within herself. Until the time of his birth, she sheltered in her womb the Son of God who became man; she raised him and enabled him to grow, and she accompanied him in that supreme act of freedom which is the complete sacrifice of his own life. By the gift of herself, Mary entered fully into the plan of God who gives himself to the world. By accepting and pondering in her heart events which she did not always understand (cf. Lk 2:19), she became the model of all those who hear the word of God and keep it (cf. Lk 11:28), and merited the title of "Seat of Wisdom". This Wisdom is Jesus Christ himself, the Eternal Word of God, who perfectly reveals and accomplishes the will of the Father (cf. Heb 10:5-10). Mary invites everyone to accept this Wisdom. To us too she addresses the command she gave to the servants at Cana in Galilee during the marriage feast: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

Mary shares our human condition, but in complete openness to the grace of God. Not having known sin, she is able to have compassion on every kind of weakness. She understands sinful man and loves him with a Mother's love. Precisely for this reason she is on the side of truth and shares the Church's burden in recalling always and to everyone the demands of morality. Nor does she permit sinful man to be deceived by those who claim to love him by justifying his sin, for she knows that the sacrifice of Christ her Son would thus be emptied of its power. No absolution offered by beguiling doctrines, even in the areas of philosophy and theology, can make man truly happy: only the Cross and the glory of the Risen Christ can grant peace to his conscience and salvation to his life.

O Mary,
Mother of Mercy,

watch over all people,
 that the Cross of Christ
 may not be emptied of its power,
 that man may not stray
 from the path of the good
 or become blind to sin,
 but may put his hope ever more fully in God
 who is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4).
 May he carry out the good works prepared
 by God beforehand (cf. Eph 2:10)
 and so live completely
 "for the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:12).

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 6 August, Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, in the year 1993, the fifteenth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
2. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
3. Cf. *ibid.*, 9.
4. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.
5. Paul VI, Address to the General Assembly of the United Nation (October 4, 1965), 1: AAS 57 (1965), 878; cf. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967), 13: AAS 59 (1967), 263-264.
6. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.
7. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16.
8. Pius XII had already pointed out this doctrinal development: cf. Radio Message for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII (June 1, 1941): AAS 33 (1941), 195-205. Also John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961): AAS 53 (1961), 410-413.
9. Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini* (August 1, 1987): AAS 79 (1987), 1374.
10. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1692.
11. Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum* (October 11, 1992), 4.
12. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 10.
13. Cf. Apostolic Epistle *Parati Semper* to the Young People of the World on the occasion of the International Year of Youth (March 31, 1985), 2-8: AAS 77 (1985), 581-600.
14. Cf. Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius*, 16.
15. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), 13: AAS 71 (1979), 282.
16. *Ibid.*, 10: loc. cit., 274.
17. *Exameron*, Dies VI, *Sermo IX*, 8, 50: CSEL 32, 24.
18. Saint Leo the Great, *Sermo XCII*, Chap. III: PL 54, 454.
19. Saint Thomas Aquinas, In *Duo Praecepta Caritatis et in Cecem Legis Praecepta*. Prologus: *Opuscula Theologica*, II, No. 1129, Ed. Taurinen (1954), 245; cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2; Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1955.
20. Cf. Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, Q. 64: PG 90, 723-728.
21. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
22. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2070.
23. In *Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 41, 10: CCL 36, 363.
24. Cf. Saint Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, I, 1, 1: CCL 35, 1-2.
25. In *Psalmum CXVIII Expositio*, *Sermo 18*, 37: PL 15, 1541; cf. Saint Chromatius of Aquileia, *Tractatus in Matthaeum*, XX, I, 1-4: CCL 9/A, 291-292.
26. Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1717.
27. In *Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 41, 10: CCL 36, 363.
28. *Ibid.*, 21, 8: CCL 36, 216.
29. *Ibid.*, 82, 3: CCL 36, 533.
30. *De Spiritu et Littera*, 19, 34: CSEL 60, 187.
31. *Confessiones*, X, 29, 40: CCL 27, 176; cf. *De Gratia et Livero Arbitrio*, XV: PL 44, 899.
32. Cf. *De Spiritu et Littera*, 21, 36; 26, 46: CSEL 60, 189-190; 200-201.
33. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 106, a. 1 conclusion and ad 2um.

34. In *Matthaeum*, Hom. I, 1: PG 57, 15.
35. Cf. Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 26, 2-5: SCh 100/12, 718-729.
36. Cf. Saint Justin, *Apologia*, I, 66: PG 6, 427-430.
37. Cf. 1 Pt 2:12ff; cf. *Didache*, II, 2: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F. X. Funk, I, 6-9; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, I, 10; II, 10: PG 8, 3ff-364; 497-536; Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, IX, 8: CSEL, 69, 24.
38. Cf. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Magnesios*, VI, 1-2: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F. X. Funk, I, 234-235; Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 33:1, 6, 7: SCh 100/ 2, 802-805; 814-815; 816-819.
39. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 8.
40. Cf. *ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, 10.
42. Code of Canon Law, Canon 747, 2.
43. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 7.
44. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
45. Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius*, 16.
46. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 62.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 10.
49. Cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, Chap. 4: DS, 3018.
50. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 1.
51. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 43-44.
52. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1, referring to John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963): AAS 55 (1963), 279; *ibid.*, 265, and to Pius XII, Radio Message (December 24, 1944): AAS 37 (1945), 14.
53. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1.
54. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), 17: AAS 71 (1979), 295-300; Address to those taking part in the Fifth International Colloquium of Juridical Studies (March 10, 1984), 4: *Insegnamenti VII*, 1 (1984), 656; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986), 19: AAS 79 (1987), 561.
55. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.
56. *Ibid.*, 17.
57. *Ibid.*
58. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2; cf. also Gregory XVI, Encyclical Epistle *Mirari Vos Arbitramur* (August 15, 1832): *Acta Gregorae Papae XVI*, I, 169-174; Pius IX, Encyclical Epistle *Quanta Cura* (December 8, 1864): *Pii IX P.M. Acta*, I, 3, 687-700; Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum* (June 20, 1888): *Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, VIII, Romae 1889, 212-246.
59. A Letter Addressed to His Grace the Duke of Norfolk: Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching (Uniform Edition: Longman, Green and Company, London, 1868-1881), vol. 2, p. 250.
60. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 40 and 43.
61. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 71, a. 6; see also *ad Sum.*
62. Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (August 12, 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 561-562.
63. Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Sess. VI, Decree on Justification *Cum Hoc Tempore*, Canons 19-21: DS, 1569-1571.
64. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 17.
65. *De Hominis Opificio*, Chap. 4: PG 44, 135-136.
66. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*
69. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 93, a. 3, *ad 2um*, cited by John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963): AAS 55 (1963), 271.
70. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 41.
71. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *In Duo Praecepta Caritatis et in Decem Legis Praecepta*. Prologus: *Opuscula Theologica*, II, No. 1129, Ed. Taurinen. (1954), 245.
72. Cf. Address to a Group of Bishops from the United States on the occasion of their *ad Limina* Visit (October 15, 1988), 6: *Insegnamenti*, XI, 3 (1988), 1228.

73. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 47
74. Cf. Saint Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum LXII*, 16: CCL 39, 804.
75. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 17.
76. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.
77. Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No.1955.
78. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3.
79. *Contra Faustum*, Bk 22, Chap. 27: PL 42, 418.
80. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 93, a. 1.
81. Cf. *ibid.*, I-II, q. 90, a.4, ad 1um.
82. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 91, a.2.
83. Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum* (June 20, 1888): Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, VIII, Romae 1889, 219.
84. In *Epistulam ad Romanos*, c. VIII, lect. 1.
85. Cf. Sess. IV, Decree on Justification *Cum Hoc Tempore*, Chap. 1: DS, 1521.
86. Cf. Ecumenical Council of Vienne, Constitution *Fidei Catholicae*: DS, 902; Fifth Lateran Ecumenical Council, Bull *Apostolici Regiminis*: DS, 1440.
87. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 14.
88. Cf. Sess. VI, Decree on Justification *Cum Hoc Tempore*, Chap. 15: DS, 1544. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today cites other texts of the Old and New Testaments which condemn as mortal sins certain modes of conduct involving the body: cf. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 17: AAS 77 (1985), 218-223.
89. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 51.
90. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (February 22, 1987), Introduction, 3: AAS 80 (1988), 74; cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968), 10: AAS 60 (1968), 487-488.
91. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 11: AAS 74 (1982), 92.
92. *De Trinitate*, XIV, 15, 21: CCL 50/A, 451.
93. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a.2.
94. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 10; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics *Persona Humana* (December 29, 1975), 4: AAS 68 (1976), 80: "But in fact, divine Revelation and, in its own proper order, philosophical wisdom, emphasize the authentic exigencies of human nature. They thereby necessarily manifest the existence of immutable laws inscribed in the constitutive elements of human nature and which are revealed to be identical in all beings endowed with reason."
95. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 29.
96. Cf. *ibid.*, 16.
97. *Ibid.*, 10.
98. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.108, a. 1. St. Thomas bases the fact that moral norms, even in the context of the New Law, are not merely formal in character but have a determined content, upon the assumption of human nature by the Word.
99. Saint Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium Primum*, c. 23: PG 50, 668.
100. The development of the Church's moral doctrine is similar to that of the doctrine of the faith (cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, Chap. 4: DS, 3020, and Canon 4: DS, 3024). The words spoken by John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council can also be applied to moral doctrine: "This certain and unchanging teaching (i.e., Christian doctrine in its completeness), to which the faithful owe obedience, needs to be more deeply understood and set forth in a way adapted to the needs of our time. Indeed, this deposit of the faith, the truths contained in our time-honored teaching, is one thing; the manner in which these truths are set forth (with their meaning preserved intact) is something else": AAS 54 (1962), 792; cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 12, 1962, p. 2.
101. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.
102. *Ibid.*
103. In *II Librum Sentent.*, dist. 39, a. 1, q. 3, conclusion; Ed. *Ad Claras Aquas*, II 907b.
104. Address (General Audience, August 17, 1983), 2: *Insegnamenti*, VI, 2 (1983), 256.
105. Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, Instruction on "Situation Ethics" *Contra Doctrinam* (February 2, 1956): AAS 48 (1956), 144.

106. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (May 18, 1986), 43: AAS 78 (1986), 859; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 16; Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3.
107. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.
108. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 4.
109. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.
110. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-11, q. 45, a. 2.
111. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 14.
112. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 5; cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, Chap. 3: DS, 3008.
113. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 5. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Certain Questions regarding Sexual Ethics *Persona Humana* (December 29, 1975), 10: AAS 68 (1976), 88-90.
114. Cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 17; AAS 77 (1985), 218-223.
115. Sess. VI, Decree on Justification *Cum Hoc Tempore*, Chap. 15: DS, 1544; Canon 19: DS, 1569.
116. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 17: AAS 77 (1985), 221.
117. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 223.
118. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 222.
119. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 17.
120. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 3: "Idem sunt actus morales et actus humani."
121. *De Vita Moysis*, II, 2-3: PG 44, 327-328.
122. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-11, q. 148, a. 3.
123. The Second Vatican Council, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, makes this clear: "This applies not only to Christians but to all men of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work. Since Christ died for all and since man's ultimate calling comes from God and is therefore a universal one, we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery in a manner known to God": *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
124. *Tractatus ad Tiberium Diaconum sociosque*, II. *Responsiones ad Tiberium Diaconum sociosque*: Saint Cyril of Alexandria, In *Divi Johannis Evangelium*, vol. III, ed. Philip Edward Pusey, Brussels, Culture et Civilisation (1965), 590.
125. Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session VI, Decree on Justification *Cum Hoc Tempore*, Canon 19: DS, 1569. See also: Clement XI, Constitution *Unigenitus Dei Filius* (September 8, 1713) against the Errors of Paschasius Quesnel, Nos. 53-56: DS, 2453-2456.
126. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 6.
127. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1761.
128. In *Duo Praecepta Caritatis et in Decem Legis Praecepta. De Dilectione Dei: Opuscula Theologica*, II, No. 1168, Ed. Taurinen. (1954), 250.
129. Saint Alphonsus Maria De Liguori, *Pratica di amar Gesù Cristo*, VII, 3.
130. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 100, a. 1.
131. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 17: AAS 77 (1985), 221; cf. Paul VI, Address to Members of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, (September 1967): AAS 59 (1967), 962: "Far be it from Christians to be led to embrace another opinion, as if the Council taught that nowadays some things are permitted which the Church had previously declared intrinsically evil. Who does not see in this the rise of a depraved moral relativism, one that clearly endangers the Church's entire doctrinal heritage?"
132. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.
133. Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968), 14: AAS 60 (1968), 490-491.
134. *Contra Mendacium*, VII, 18: PL 40, 528; cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, IX, q. 7, a. 2; Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 1753-1755.
135. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7.
136. Address to those taking part in the International Congress of Moral Theology (April 10, 1986), 1; *Insegnamenti IX*, 1 (1986), 970.
137. *Ibid.*, 2: loc. cit., 970-971.
138. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
139. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), 12: AAS 71

- (1979), 280-281.
140. Enarratio in Psalmum XCIX, 7: CCL 39, 1397.
 141. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 36; cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), 21: AAS 71 (1979), 316-317.
 142. Roman Missal, Prayer for the Memorial of the Beheading of John the Baptist, Martyr, August 29.
 143. Saint Bede the Venerable, *Homeliarum Evangelii Libri*, II, 23: CCL 122, 556-557.
 144. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.
 145. *Ad Romanos*, VI, 2-3: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F. X. Funk, I, 260-261.
 146. *Moralia in Job*, VII, 21, 24: PL 75, 778: "huius mundi aspera pro aeternis praemiis amore."
 147. "Summum crede nefas animam praeferre pudori et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas": *Satirae*, VIII, 83-84.
 148. *Apologia* II, 8: PG 6, 457-458.
 149. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 33: AAS 74 (1982), 120.
 150. Cf. *Ibid.*, 34: loc. cit., 123-125.
 151. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 34: AAS 77 (1985), 272.
 152. Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968), 29: AAS 60 (1968), 501.
 153. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 25.
 154. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), 24: AAS 83 (1991), 821-822.
 155. *Ibid.*, 44: loc. cit., 848-849; cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum* (June 20, 1888), *Leonis XIII P.M. Acts*, VIII, Romae 1889, 224-226.
 156. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), 41: AAS 80 (1988), 571.
 157. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2407.
 158. Cf. *ibid.*, Nos. 2408-2413.
 159. *Ibid.*, No. 2414.
 160. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 42: AAS 81 (1989), 472-476.
 161. Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), 46: AAS 83 (1991), 850.
 162. Sess. VI, Decree on Justification *Cum Hoc Tempore*, Chap. 11: DS, 1536; cf. Canon 18. DS, 1568. The celebrated text from Saint Augustine, which the Council cites is found in *De Natura et Gratia*, 43, 40 (CSEL 60, 270).
 163. *Oratio I*: PG 97, 805-806.
 164. Address to those taking part in a course on "responsible parenthood" (March 1, 1984), 4: *Insegnamenti VII*, 1 (1984), 583.
 165. *De Interpellatione David*, IV, 6, 22: CSEL 3212, 283-284.
 166. Address to the Bishops of CELAM (March 9, 1983), III: *Insegnamenti VI*, 1 (1983), 698.
 167. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), 75: AAS 68 (1976), 64.
 168. *De Trinitate*, XXIX, 9-10: CCL 4, 70.
 169. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 12.
 170. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum Veritatis* (May 24, 1990), 6: AAS 82 (1990), 1552.
 171. Address to the Professors and Students of the Pontifical Gregorian University (December 15, 1979), 6: *Insegnamenti XI*, 2 (1979), 1424.
 172. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum Veritatis* (May 24, 1990), 16: AAS 82 (1990), 1557.
 173. Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canons 252, 1; 659, 3.
 174. Cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, Chap. 4: DS, 3016.
 175. Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968), 28: AAS 60 (1968), 501.
 176. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Theological formation of Future Priests* (February 22, 1976), No. 100. See Nos. 95-101, which present the prospects and conditions for a fruitful renewal of moral theology: loc. cit., 39-41.
 177. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum Veritatis* (May 24, 1990), 11: AAS 82 (1990), 1554; cf. in particular Nos. 32-39, devoted to the problem of dissent: *ibid.*, loc. cit., 1562-1568.
 178. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.
 179. Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 803, 3.
 180. Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 808.
 181. "O inestimabilis dilectio caritatis: ut servum redimeres, Filium tradidisti!" *Missale Romanum*, In Resurrectione Domini, *Praeconium Paschale*.
 182. In *Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 26, 13: CCL, 36, 266.
 183. *De Virginibus*, Bk. II, Chap. II, 15: PL 16, 222.

184. Ibid., Bk. II, Chap. II, 7: PL 16, 220.

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Ioannes Paulus PP. II
 To His Venerable Brothers
 in the Episcopate
 the Priests and Deacons
 Families of Men and Women religious
 all the Christian Faithful
 and to all men and women
 of good will
 on the hundredth anniversary of
 Rerum Novarum

1991.05.01

Blessing

Venerable Brothers,

Beloved Sons and Daughters,

Health and the Apostolic Blessing!

INTRODUCTION

1. The Centenary of the promulgation of the Encyclical which begins with the words "Rerum novarum", 1 by my predecessor of venerable memory Pope Leo XIII, is an occasion of great importance for the present history of the Church and for my own Pontificate. It is an Encyclical that has the distinction of having been commemorated by solemn Papal documents from its fortieth anniversary to its ninetieth. It may be said that its path through history has been marked by other documents which paid tribute to it and applied it to the circumstances of the day.²

In doing likewise for the hundredth anniversary, in response to requests from many Bishops, Church institutions, and study centres, as well as business leaders and workers, both individually and as members of associations, I wish first and foremost to satisfy the debt of gratitude which the whole Church owes to this great Pope and his "immortal document".³ I also mean to show that the vital energies rising from that root have not been spent with the passing of the years, but rather have increased even more. This is evident from the various initiatives which have preceded, and which are to accompany and follow the celebration, initiatives promoted by Episcopal Conferences, by international agencies, universities and academic institutes, by professional associations and by other institutions and individuals in many parts of the world.

2. The present Encyclical is part of these celebrations, which are meant to thank God - the origin of "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (Jas 1:17) - for having used a document published a century ago by the See of Peter to achieve so much good and to radiate so much light in the Church and in the world. Although the commemoration at hand is meant to honour Rerum novarum, it also honours those Encyclicals and other documents of my Predecessors which have helped to make Pope Leo's Encyclical present and alive in history, thus constituting what would come to be called the Church's "social doctrine", "social teaching" or even "social magisterium".

The validity of this teaching has already been pointed out in two Encyclicals published during my Pontificate: *Laborem exercens* on human work, and *Sollicitudo rei socialis* on current problems regarding the development of individuals and peoples.⁴

3. I now wish to propose a "re-reading" of Pope Leo's Encyclical by issuing an invitation to "look back" at the text itself in order to discover anew the richness of the fundamental principles which it formulated for dealing with the question of the condition of workers. But this is also an invitation to "look around" at the "new things" which surround us and in which we find ourselves caught up, very different from the "new things" which characterized the final decade of the last century. Finally, it is an invitation to "look to the future" at a time when we can already glimpse the third Millennium of the Christian era, so filled with uncertainties but also with promises - uncertainties and promises which appeal to our imagination and creativity, and which reawaken our responsibility, as disciples of the "one teacher" (cf. Mt 23:8), to show the way, to proclaim the truth and to communicate the life which is Christ (cf. Jn 14:6).

A re-reading of this kind will not only confirm the permanent value of such teaching, but will also manifest the true meaning of the Church's Tradition which, being ever living and vital, builds upon the foundation laid by our fathers in the faith, and particularly upon what "the Apostles passed down to the Church"⁵ in the name of Jesus Christ, who is her irreplaceable foundation (cf. 1 Cor 3:11).

It was out of an awareness of his mission as the Successor of Peter that Pope Leo XIII proposed to speak out, and Peter's Successor today is moved by that same awareness. Like Pope Leo and the Popes before and after him, I take my inspiration from the Gospel image of "the scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven", whom the Lord compares to "a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Mt 13:52). The treasure is the

great outpouring of the Church's Tradition, which contains "what is old" - received and passed on from the very beginning - and which enables us to interpret the "new things" in the midst of which the life of the Church and the world unfolds.

Among the things which become "old" as a result of being incorporated into Tradition, and which offer opportunities and material for enriching both Tradition and the life of faith, there is the fruitful activity of many millions of people, who, spurred on by the social Magisterium, have sought to make that teaching the inspiration for their involvement in the world. Acting either as individuals or joined together in various groups, associations and organizations, these people represent a great movement for the defence of the human person and the safeguarding of human dignity. Amid changing historical circumstances, this movement has contributed to the building up of a more just society or at least to the curbing of injustice.

The present Encyclical seeks to show the fruitfulness of the principles enunciated by Leo XIII, which belong to the Church's doctrinal patrimony and, as such, involve the exercise of her teaching authority. But pastoral solicitude also prompts me to propose an analysis of some events of recent history. It goes without saying that part of the responsibility of Pastors is to give careful consideration to current events in order to discern the new requirements of evangelization. However, such an analysis is not meant to pass definitive judgments since this does not fall per se within the Magisterium's specific domain.

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF "RERUM NOVARUM"

4. Towards the end of the last century the Church found herself facing an historical process which had already been taking place for some time, but which was by then reaching a critical point. The determining factor in this process was a combination of radical changes which had taken place in the political, economic and social fields, and in the areas of science and technology, to say nothing of the wide influence of the prevailing ideologies. In the sphere of politics, the result of these changes was a new conception of society and of the State, and consequently of authority itself. A traditional society was passing away and another was beginning to be formed - one which brought the hope of new freedoms but also the threat of new forms of injustice and servitude.

In the sphere of economics, in which scientific discoveries and their practical application come together, new structures for the production of consumer goods had progressively taken shape. A new form of property had appeared - capital; and a new form of labour - labour for wages, characterized by high rates of production which lacked due regard for sex, age or family situation, and were determined solely by efficiency, with a view to increasing profits.

In this way labour became a commodity to be freely bought and sold on the market, its price determined by the law of supply and demand, without taking into account the bare minimum required for the support of the individual and his family. Moreover, the worker was not even sure of being able to sell "his own commodity", continually threatened as he was by unemployment, which, in the absence of any kind of social security, meant the spectre of death by starvation. The result of this transformation was a society "divided into two classes, separated by a deep chasm".⁶ This situation was linked to the marked change taking place in the political order already mentioned. Thus the prevailing political theory of the time sought to promote total economic freedom by appropriate laws, or, conversely, by a deliberate lack of any intervention. At the same time, another conception of property and economic life was beginning to appear in an organized and often violent form, one which implied a new political and social structure.

At the height of this clash, when people finally began to realize fully the very grave injustice of social realities in many places and the danger of a revolution fanned by ideals which were then called "socialist", Pope Leo XIII intervened with a document which dealt in a systematic way with the "condition of the workers". The Encyclical had been preceded by others devoted to teachings of a political character; still others would appear later.⁷ Here, particular mention must be made of the Encyclical *Libertas praestantissimum*, which called attention to the essential bond between human freedom and truth, so that freedom which refused to be bound to the truth would fall into arbitrariness and end up submitting itself to the vilest of passions, to the point of selfdestruction. Indeed, what is the origin of all the evils to which *Rerum novarum* wished to respond, if not a kind of freedom which, in the area of economic and social activity, cuts itself off from the truth about man?

The Pope also drew inspiration from the teaching of his Predecessors, as well as from the many documents issued by Bishops, from scientific studies promoted by members of the laity, from the work of Catholic movements and associations, and from the Church's practical achievements in the social field during the second half of the nineteenth century.

5. The "new things" to which the Pope devoted his attention were anything but positive. The first paragraph of the Encyclical describes in strong terms the "new things" (*rerum novarum*) which gave it its name: "That the spirit of revolutionary change which has long been disturbing the nations of the world should have passed beyond the sphere of politics and made its influence felt in the related sphere of practical economics is not surprising. Progress in industry, the development of new trades, the changing relationship between employers and workers, the enormous wealth of a few as opposed to the poverty of the many, the increasing self-reliance of the workers and their closer association with each other, as well as a notable decline in morality: all these elements have led to the conflict now taking place".⁸

The Pope and the Church with him were confronted, as was the civil community, by a society which was torn by a conflict all the more harsh and inhumane because it knew no rule or regulation. It was the conflict between capital and labour, or - as the Encyclical puts it - the worker question. It is precisely about this conflict, in the very pointed terms in which it then appeared, that the Pope did not hesitate to speak.

Here we find the first reflection for our times as suggested by the Encyclical. In the face of a conflict which set man against man, almost as if they were "wolves", a conflict between the extremes of mere physical survival on the one side and opulence on the other, the Pope did not hesitate to intervene by virtue of his "apostolic office",⁹ that is, on the basis of the mission received from Jesus Christ himself to "feed his lambs and tend his sheep" (cf. Jn 21:15-17), and to "bind and loose" on earth for the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Mt 16:19). The Pope's intention was certainly to restore peace, and the present-day reader cannot fail to note his severe condemnation, in no uncertain terms, of the class struggle.¹⁰ However, the Pope was very much aware that peace is built on the foundation of justice: what was essential to the Encyclical was precisely its proclamation of the fundamental conditions for justice in the economic and social situation of the time.¹¹

In this way, Pope Leo XIII, in the footsteps of his Predecessors, created a lasting paradigm for the Church. The Church, in fact, has something to say about specific human situations, both individual and communal, national and international. She formulates a genuine doctrine for these situations, a corpus which enables her to analyze social realities, to make judgments about them and to indicate directions to be taken for the just resolution of the problems involved.

In Pope Leo XIII's time such a concept of the Church's right and duty was far from being commonly admitted. Indeed, a two-fold approach prevailed: one directed to this world and this life, to which faith ought to remain extraneous; the other directed towards a purely other-worldly salvation, which neither enlightens nor directs existence on earth. The Pope's approach in publishing *Rerum novarum* gave the Church "citizenship status" as it were, amid the changing realities of public life, and this standing would be more fully confirmed later on. In effect, to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour. This doctrine is likewise a source of unity and peace in dealing with the conflicts which inevitably arise in social and economic life. Thus it is possible to meet these new situations without degrading the human person's transcendent dignity, either in oneself or in one's adversaries, and to direct those situations towards just solutions.

Today, at a distance of a hundred years, the validity of this approach affords me the opportunity to contribute to the development of Christian social doctrine. The "new evangelization", which the modern world urgently needs and which I have emphasized many times, must include among its essential elements a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine. As in the days of Pope Leo XIII, this doctrine is still suitable for indicating the right way to respond to the great challenges of today, when ideologies are being increasingly discredited. Now, as then, we need to repeat that there can be no genuine solution of the "social question" apart from the Gospel, and that the "new things" can find in the Gospel the context for their correct understanding and the proper moral perspective for judgment on them.

6. With the intention of shedding light on the conflict which had arisen between capital and labour, Pope Leo XIII affirmed the fundamental rights of workers. Indeed, the key to reading the Encyclical is the dignity of the worker as such, and, for the same reason, the dignity of work, which is defined as follows: "to exert oneself for the sake of procuring what is necessary for the various purposes of life, and first of all for self-preservation".¹² The Pope describes work as "personal, inasmuch as the energy expended is bound up with the personality and is the exclusive property of him who acts, and, furthermore, was given to him for his advantage".¹³ Work thus belongs to the vocation of every person; indeed, man expresses and fulfils himself by working. At the same time, work has a "social" dimension through its intimate relationship not only to the family, but also to the common good, since "it may truly be said that it is only by the labour of working-men that States grow rich".¹⁴ These are themes that I have taken up and developed in my Encyclical *Laborem exercens*.¹⁵

Another important principle is undoubtedly that of the right to "private property".¹⁶ The amount of space devoted to this subject in the Encyclical shows the importance attached to it. The Pope is well aware that private property is not an absolute value, nor does he fail to proclaim the necessary complementary principles, such as the universal destination of the earth's goods.¹⁷

On the other hand, it is certainly true that the type of private property which Leo XIII mainly considers is land ownership.¹⁸ But this does not mean that the reasons adduced to safeguard private property or to affirm the right to possess the things necessary for one's personal development and the development of one's family, whatever the concrete form which that right may assume, are not still valid today. This is something which must be affirmed once more in the face of the changes we are witnessing in systems formerly dominated by collective ownership of the means of production, as well as in the face of the increasing instances of poverty or, more precisely, of hindrances to private ownership in many parts of the world, including those where systems predominate which are based on an affirmation of the right to private property. As a result of these changes and of the persistence of poverty, a deeper analysis of the problem is called for, an analysis which will be developed later in this document.

7. In close connection with the right to private property, Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical also affirms other rights as inalienable and proper to the human person. Prominent among these, because of the space which the Pope devotes to it

and the importance which he attaches to it, is the "natural human right" to form private associations. This means above all the right to establish professional associations of employers and workers, or of workers alone.¹⁹ Here we find the reason for the Church's defence and approval of the establishment of what are commonly called trade unions: certainly not because of ideological prejudices or in order to surrender to a class mentality, but because the right of association is a natural right of the human being, which therefore precedes his or her incorporation into political society. Indeed, the formation of unions "cannot... be prohibited by the State", because "the State is bound to protect natural rights, not to destroy them; and if it forbids its citizens to form associations, it contradicts the very principle of its own existence".²⁰ Together with this right, which - it must be stressed - the Pope explicitly acknowledges as belonging to workers, or, using his own language, to "the working class", the Encyclical affirms just as clearly the right to the "limitation of working hours", the right to legitimate rest and the right of children and women²¹ to be treated differently with regard to the type and duration of work.

If we keep in mind what history tells us about the practices permitted or at least not excluded by law regarding the way in which workers were employed, without any guarantees as to working hours or the hygienic conditions of the work-place, or even regarding the age and sex of apprentices, we can appreciate the Pope's severe statement: "It is neither just nor human so to grind men down with excessive labour as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies". And referring to the "contract" aimed at putting into effect "labour relations" of this sort, he affirms with greater precision, that "in all agreements between employers and workers there is always the condition expressed or understood" that proper rest be allowed, proportionate to "the wear and tear of one's strength". He then concludes: "To agree in any other sense would be against what is right and just".²²

8. The Pope immediately adds another right which the worker has as a person. This is the right to a "just wage", which cannot be left to the "free consent of the parties, so that the employer, having paid what was agreed upon, has done his part and seemingly is not called upon to do anything beyond".²³ It was said at the time that the State does not have the power to intervene in the terms of these contracts, except to ensure the fulfilment of what had been explicitly agreed upon. This concept of relations between employers and employees, purely pragmatic and inspired by a thorough-going individualism, is severely censured in the Encyclical as contrary to the twofold nature of work as a personal and necessary reality. For if work as something personal belongs to the sphere of the individual's free use of his own abilities and energy, as something necessary it is governed by the grave obligation of every individual to ensure "the preservation of life". "It necessarily follows", the Pope concludes, "that every individual has a natural right to procure what is required to live; and the poor can procure that in no other way than by what they can earn through their work".²⁴

A workman's wages should be sufficient to enable him to support himself, his wife and his children. "If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice".²⁵

Would that these words, written at a time when what has been called "unbridled capitalism" was pressing forward, should not have to be repeated today with the same severity. Unfortunately, even today one finds instances of contracts between employers and employees which lack reference to the most elementary justice regarding the employment of children or women, working hours, the hygienic condition of the work-place and fair pay; and this is the case despite the International Declarations and Conventions on the subject²⁶ and the internal laws of States. The Pope attributed to the "public authority" the "strict duty" of providing properly for the welfare of the workers, because a failure to do so violates justice; indeed, he did not hesitate to speak of "distributive justice".²⁷

9. To these rights Pope Leo XIII adds another right regarding the condition of the working class, one which I wish to mention because of its importance: namely, the right to discharge freely one's religious duties. The Pope wished to proclaim this right within the context of the other rights and duties of workers, notwithstanding the general opinion, even in his day, that such questions pertained exclusively to an individual's private life. He affirms the need for Sunday rest so that people may turn their thoughts to heavenly things and to the worship which they owe to Almighty God.²⁸ No one can take away this human right, which is based on a commandment; in the words of the Pope: "no man may with impunity violate that human dignity which God himself treats with great reverence", and consequently, the State must guarantee to the worker the exercise of this freedom.²⁹

It would not be mistaken to see in this clear statement a springboard for the principle of the right to religious freedom, which was to become the subject of many solemn International Declarations and Conventions, ³⁰ as well as of the Second Vatican Council's well-known Declaration and of my own repeated teaching.³¹ In this regard, one may ask whether existing laws and the practice of industrialized societies effectively ensure in our own day the exercise of this basic right to Sunday rest.

10. Another important aspect, which has many applications to our own day, is the concept of the relationship between the State and its citizens. *Rerum novarum* criticizes two social and economic systems: socialism and liberalism. The opening section, in which the right to private property is reaffirmed, is devoted to socialism. Liberalism is not the subject of a special section, but it is worth noting that criticisms of it are raised in the treatment of the duties of the State.³² The State cannot limit itself to "favouring one portion of the citizens", namely the rich and prosperous, nor can it "neglect the other", which clearly represents the majority of society. Otherwise, there would be a violation of that law of justice which ordains that every person should receive his due. "When there is question of defending the rights of

individuals, the defenceless and the poor have a claim to special consideration. The richer class has many ways of shielding itself, and stands less in need of help from the State; whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back on, and must chiefly depend on the assistance of the State. It is for this reason that wage-earners, since they mostly belong to the latter class, should be specially cared for and protected by the Government".³³

These passages are relevant today, especially in the face of the new forms of poverty in the world, and also because they are affirmations which do not depend on a specific notion of the State or on a particular political theory. Leo XIII is repeating an elementary principle of sound political organization, namely, the more that individuals are defenceless within a given society, the more they require the care and concern of others, and in particular the intervention of governmental authority.

In this way what we nowadays call the principle of solidarity, the validity of which both in the internal order of each nation and in the international order I have discussed in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*,³⁴ is clearly seen to be one of the fundamental principles of the Christian view of social and political organization. This principle is frequently stated by Pope Leo XIII, who uses the term "friendship", a concept already found in Greek philosophy. Pope Pius XI refers to it with the equally meaningful term "social charity". Pope Paul VI, expanding the concept to cover the many modern aspects of the social question, speaks of a "civilization of love".³⁵

11. Re-reading the Encyclical in the light of contemporary realities enables us to appreciate the Church's constant concern for and dedication to categories of people who are especially beloved to the Lord Jesus. The content of the text is an excellent testimony to the continuity within the Church of the so-called "preferential option for the poor", an option which I defined as a "special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity".³⁶ Pope Leo's Encyclical on the "condition of the workers" is thus an Encyclical on the poor and on the terrible conditions to which the new and often violent process of industrialization had reduced great multitudes of people. Today, in many parts of the world, similar processes of economic, social and political transformation are creating the same evils.

If Pope Leo XIII calls upon the State to remedy the condition of the poor in accordance with justice, he does so because of his timely awareness that the State has the duty of watching over the common good and of ensuring that every sector of social life, not excluding the economic one, contributes to achieving that good, while respecting the rightful autonomy of each sector. This should not however lead us to think that Pope Leo expected the State to solve every social problem. On the contrary, he frequently insists on necessary limits to the State's intervention and on its instrumental character, inasmuch as the individual, the family and society are prior to the State, and inasmuch as the State exists in order to protect their rights and not stifle them.³⁷

The relevance of these reflections for our own day is inescapable. It will be useful to return later to this important subject of the limits inherent in the nature of the state. For now, the points which have been emphasized (certainly not the only ones in the Encyclical) are situated in continuity with the Church's social teaching, and in the light of a sound view of private property, work, the economic process, the reality of the State and, above all, of man himself. Other themes will be mentioned later when we examine certain aspects of the contemporary situation. From this point forward it will be necessary to keep in mind that the main thread and, in a certain sense, the guiding principle of Pope Leo's Encyclical, and of all of the Church's social doctrine, is a correct view of the human person and of his unique value, inasmuch as "man... is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself".³⁸ God has imprinted his own image and likeness on man (cf. Gen 1:26), conferring upon him an incomparable dignity, as the Encyclical frequently insists. In effect, beyond the rights which man acquires by his own work, there exist rights which do not correspond to any work he performs, but which flow from his essential dignity as a person.

II. TOWARDS THE "NEW THINGS" OF TODAY

12. The commemoration of *Rerum novarum* would be incomplete unless reference were also made to the situation of the world today. The document lends itself to such a reference, because the historical picture and the prognosis which it suggests have proved to be surprisingly accurate in the light of what has happened since then.

This is especially confirmed by the events which took place near the end of 1989 and at the beginning of 1990. These events, and the radical transformations which followed, can only be explained by the preceding situations which, to a certain extent, crystallized or institutionalized Leo XIII's predictions and the increasingly disturbing signs noted by his Successors. Pope Leo foresaw the negative consequences - political, social and economic - of the social order proposed by "socialism", which at that time was still only a social philosophy and not yet a fully structured movement. It may seem surprising that "socialism" appeared at the beginning of the Pope's critique of solutions to the "question of the working class" at a time when "socialism" was not yet in the form of a strong and powerful State, with all the resources which that implies, as was later to happen. However, he correctly judged the danger posed to the masses by the attractive presentation of this simple and radical solution to the "question of the working class" of the time - all the more so when one considers the terrible situation of injustice in which the working classes of the recently industrialized nations found themselves.

Two things must be emphasized here: first, the great clarity in perceiving, in all its harshness, the actual condition of the working class - men, women and children; secondly, equal clarity in recognizing the evil of a solution which, by appearing to reverse the positions of the poor and the rich, was in reality detrimental to the very people whom it was

meant to help. The remedy would prove worse than the sickness. By defining the nature of the socialism of his day as the suppression of private property, Leo XIII arrived at the crux of the problem.

His words deserve to be re-read attentively: "To remedy these wrongs (the unjust distribution of wealth and the poverty of the workers), the Socialists encourage the poor man's envy of the rich and strive to do away with private property, contending that individual possessions should become the common property of all...; but their contentions are so clearly powerless to end the controversy that, were they carried into effect, the working man himself would be among the first to suffer. They are moreover emphatically unjust, for they would rob the lawful possessor, distort the functions of the State, and create utter confusion in the community".³⁹ The evils caused by the setting up of this type of socialism as a State system - what would later be called "Real Socialism" - could not be better expressed.

13. Continuing our reflections, and referring also to what has been said in the Encyclicals *Laborem exercens* and *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, we have to add that the fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism. Socialism likewise maintains that the good of the individual can be realized without reference to his free choice, to the unique and exclusive responsibility which he exercises in the face of good or evil. Man is thus reduced to a series of social relationships, and the concept of the person as the autonomous subject of moral decision disappears, the very subject whose decisions build the social order. From this mistaken conception of the person there arise both a distortion of law, which defines the sphere of the exercise of freedom, and an opposition to private property. A person who is deprived of something he can call "his own", and of the possibility of earning a living through his own initiative, comes to depend on the social machine and on those who control it. This makes it much more difficult for him to recognize his dignity as a person, and hinders progress towards the building up of an authentic human community.

In contrast, from the Christian vision of the human person there necessarily follows a correct picture of society. According to *Rerum novarum* and the whole social doctrine of the Church, the social nature of man is not completely fulfilled in the State, but is realized in various intermediary groups, beginning with the family and including economic, social, political and cultural groups which stem from human nature itself and have their own autonomy, always with a view to the common good. This is what I have called the "subjectivity" of society which, together with the subjectivity of the individual, was cancelled out by "Real Socialism".⁴⁰

If we then inquire as to the source of this mistaken concept of the nature of the person and the "subjectivity" of society, we must reply that its first cause is atheism. It is by responding to the call of God contained in the being of things that man becomes aware of his transcendent dignity. Every individual must give this response, which constitutes the apex of his humanity, and no social mechanism or collective subject can substitute for it. The denial of God deprives the person of his foundation, and consequently leads to a reorganization of the social order without reference to the person's dignity and responsibility.

The atheism of which we are speaking is also closely connected with the rationalism of the Enlightenment, which views human and social reality in a mechanistic way. Thus there is a denial of the supreme insight concerning man's true greatness, his transcendence in respect to earthly realities, the contradiction in his heart between the desire for the fullness of what is good and his own inability to attain it and, above all, the need for salvation which results from this situation.

14. From the same atheistic source, socialism also derives its choice of the means of action condemned in *Rerum novarum*, namely, class struggle. The Pope does not, of course, intend to condemn every possible form of social conflict. The Church is well aware that in the course of history conflicts of interest between different social groups inevitably arise, and that in the face of such conflicts Christians must often take a position, honestly and decisively. The Encyclical *Laborem exercens* moreover clearly recognized the positive role of conflict when it takes the form of a "struggle for social justice";⁴¹ *Quadragesimo anno* had already stated that "if the class struggle abstains from enmities and mutual hatred, it gradually changes into an honest discussion of differences founded on a desire for justice".⁴²

However, what is condemned in class struggle is the idea that conflict is not restrained by ethical or juridical considerations, or by respect for the dignity of others (and consequently of oneself); a reasonable compromise is thus excluded, and what is pursued is not the general good of society, but a partisan interest which replaces the common good and sets out to destroy whatever stands in its way. In a word, it is a question of transferring to the sphere of internal conflict between social groups the doctrine of "total war", which the militarism and imperialism of that time brought to bear on international relations. As a result of this doctrine, the search for a proper balance between the interests of the various nations was replaced by attempts to impose the absolute domination of one's own side through the destruction of the other side's capacity to resist, using every possible means, not excluding the use of lies, terror tactics against citizens, and weapons of utter destruction (which precisely in those years were beginning to be designed). Therefore class struggle in the Marxist sense and militarism have the same root, namely, atheism and contempt for the human person, which place the principle of force above that of reason and law.

15. *Rerum novarum* is opposed to State control of the means of production, which would reduce every citizen to being a "cog" in the State machine. It is no less forceful in criticizing a concept of the State which completely excludes the economic sector from the State's range of interest and action. There is certainly a legitimate sphere of autonomy in economic life which the State should not enter. The State, however, has the task of determining the juridical framework

within which economic affairs are to be conducted, and thus of safeguarding the prerequisites of a free economy, which presumes a certain equality between the parties, such that one party would not be so powerful as practically to reduce the other to subservience.⁴³

In this regard, *Rerum novarum* points the way to just reforms which can restore dignity to work as the free activity of man. These reforms imply that society and the State will both assume responsibility, especially for protecting the worker from the nightmare of unemployment. Historically, this has happened in two converging ways: either through economic policies aimed at ensuring balanced growth and full employment, or through unemployment insurance and retraining programmes capable of ensuring a smooth transfer of workers from crisis sectors to those in expansion.

Furthermore, society and the State must ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family, including a certain amount for savings. This requires a continuous effort to improve workers' training and capability so that their work will be more skilled and productive, as well as careful controls and adequate legislative measures to block shameful forms of exploitation, especially to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable workers, of immigrants and of those on the margins of society. The role of trade unions in negotiating minimum salaries and working conditions is decisive in this area.

Finally, "humane" working hours and adequate free-time need to be guaranteed, as well as the right to express one's own personality at the work-place without suffering any affront to one's conscience or personal dignity. This is the place to mention once more the role of trade unions, not only in negotiating contracts, but also as "places" where workers can express themselves. They serve the development of an authentic culture of work and help workers to share in a fully human way in the life of their place of employment.⁴⁴

The State must contribute to the achievement of these goals both directly and indirectly. Indirectly and according to the principle of subsidiarity, by creating favourable conditions for the free exercise of economic activity, which will lead to abundant opportunities for employment and sources of wealth. Directly and according to the principle of solidarity, by defending the weakest, by placing certain limits on the autonomy of the parties who determine working conditions, and by ensuring in every case the necessary minimum support for the unemployed worker.⁴⁵

The Encyclical and the related social teaching of the Church had far-reaching influence in the years bridging the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This influence is evident in the numerous reforms which were introduced in the areas of social security, pensions, health insurance and compensation in the case of accidents, within the framework of greater respect for the rights of workers.⁴⁶

16. These reforms were carried out in part by States, but in the struggle to achieve them the role of the workers' movement was an important one. This movement, which began as a response of moral conscience to unjust and harmful situations, conducted a widespread campaign for reform, far removed from vague ideology and closer to the daily needs of workers. In this context its efforts were often joined to those of Christians in order to improve workers' living conditions. Later on, this movement was dominated to a certain extent by the Marxist ideology against which *Rerum novarum* had spoken.

These same reforms were also partly the result of an open process by which society organized itself through the establishment of effective instruments of solidarity, which were capable of sustaining an economic growth more respectful of the values of the person. Here we should remember the numerous efforts to which Christians made a notable contribution in establishing producers', consumers' and credit cooperatives, in promoting general education and professional training, in experimenting with various forms of participation in the life of the work-place and in the life of society in general.

Thus, as we look at the past, there is good reason to thank God that the great Encyclical was not without an echo in human hearts and indeed led to a generous response on the practical level. Still, we must acknowledge that its prophetic message was not fully accepted by people at the time. Precisely for this reason there ensued some very serious tragedies.

17. Reading the Encyclical within the context of Pope Leo's whole magisterium, ⁴⁷ we see how it points essentially to the socio-economic consequences of an error which has even greater implications. As has been mentioned, this error consists in an understanding of human freedom which detaches it from obedience to the truth, and consequently from the duty to respect the rights of others. The essence of freedom then becomes self-love carried to the point of contempt for God and neighbour, a self-love which leads to an unbridled affirmation of self-interest and which refuses to be limited by any demand of justice.⁴⁸

This very error had extreme consequences in the tragic series of wars which ravaged Europe and the world between 1914 and 1945. Some of these resulted from militarism and exaggerated nationalism, and from related forms of totalitarianism; some derived from the class struggle; still others were civil wars or wars of an ideological nature. Without the terrible burden of hatred and resentment which had built up as a result of so many injustices both on the international level and within individual States, such cruel wars would not have been possible, in which great nations invested their energies and in which there was no hesitation to violate the most sacred human rights, with the extermination of entire peoples and social groups being planned and carried out. Here we recall the Jewish people in particular, whose terrible fate has become a symbol of the aberration of which man is capable when he turns against God.

However, it is only when hatred and injustice are sanctioned and organized by the ideologies based on them, rather than on the truth about man, that they take possession of entire nations and drive them to act.⁴⁹ Rerum novarum opposed ideologies of hatred and showed how violence and resentment could be overcome by justice. May the memory of those terrible events guide the actions of everyone, particularly the leaders of nations in our own time, when other forms of injustice are fuelling new hatreds and when new ideologies which exalt violence are appearing on the horizon.

18. While it is true that since 1945 weapons have been silent on the European continent, it must be remembered that true peace is never simply the result of military victory, but rather implies both the removal of the causes of war and genuine reconciliation between peoples. For many years there has been in Europe and the world a situation of non-war rather than genuine peace. Half of the continent fell under the domination of a Communist dictatorship, while the other half organized itself in defence against this threat. Many peoples lost the ability to control their own destiny and were enclosed within the suffocating boundaries of an empire in which efforts were made to destroy their historical memory and the centuries-old roots of their culture. As a result of this violent division of Europe, enormous masses of people were compelled to leave their homeland or were forcibly deported.

An insane arms race swallowed up the resources needed for the development of national economies and for assistance to the less developed nations. Scientific and technological progress, which should have contributed to man's well-being, was transformed into an instrument of war: science and technology were directed to the production of ever more efficient and destructive weapons. Meanwhile, an ideology, a perversion of authentic philosophy, was called upon to provide doctrinal justification for the new war. And this war was not simply expected and prepared for, but was actually fought with enormous bloodshed in various parts of the world. The logic of power blocs or empires, denounced in various Church documents and recently in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*,⁵⁰ led to a situation in which controversies and disagreements among Third World countries were systematically aggravated and exploited in order to create difficulties for the adversary.

Extremist groups, seeking to resolve such controversies through the use of arms, found ready political and military support and were equipped and trained for war; those who tried to find peaceful and humane solutions, with respect for the legitimate interests of all parties, remained isolated and often fell victim to their opponents. In addition, the precariousness of the peace which followed the Second World War was one of the principal causes of the militarization of many Third World countries and the fratricidal conflicts which afflicted them, as well as of the spread of terrorism and of increasingly barbaric means of political and military conflict. Moreover, the whole world was oppressed by the threat of an atomic war capable of leading to the extinction of humanity. Science used for military purposes had placed this decisive instrument at the disposal of hatred, strengthened by ideology. But if war can end without winners or losers in a suicide of humanity, then we must repudiate the logic which leads to it: the idea that the effort to destroy the enemy, confrontation and war itself are factors of progress and historical advancement.⁵¹ When the need for this repudiation is understood, the concepts of "total war" and "class struggle" must necessarily be called into question.

19. At the end of the Second World War, however, such a development was still being formed in people's consciences. What received attention was the spread of Communist totalitarianism over more than half of Europe and over other parts of the world. The war, which should have re-established freedom and restored the right of nations, ended without having attained these goals. Indeed, in a way, for many peoples, especially those which had suffered most during the war, it openly contradicted these goals. It may be said that the situation which arose has evoked different responses.

Following the destruction caused by the war, we see in some countries and under certain aspects a positive effort to rebuild a democratic society inspired by social justice, so as to deprive Communism of the revolutionary potential represented by masses of people subjected to exploitation and oppression. In general, such attempts endeavour to preserve free market mechanisms, ensuring, by means of a stable currency and the harmony of social relations, the conditions for steady and healthy economic growth in which people through their own work can build a better future for themselves and their families. At the same time, these attempts try to avoid making market mechanisms the only point of reference for social life, and they tend to subject them to public control which upholds the principle of the common destination of material goods. In this context, an abundance of work opportunities, a solid system of social security and professional training, the freedom to join trade unions and the effective action of unions, the assistance provided in cases of unemployment, the opportunities for democratic participation in the life of society - all these are meant to deliver work from the mere condition of "a commodity", and to guarantee its dignity.

Then there are the other social forces and ideological movements which oppose Marxism by setting up systems of "national security", aimed at controlling the whole of society in a systematic way, in order to make Marxist infiltration impossible. By emphasizing and increasing the power of the State, they wish to protect their people from Communism, but in doing so they run the grave risk of destroying the freedom and values of the person, the very things for whose sake it is necessary to oppose Communism.

Another kind of response, practical in nature, is represented by the affluent society or the consumer society. It seeks to defeat Marxism on the level of pure materialism by showing how a free-market society can achieve a greater satisfaction of material human needs than Communism, while equally excluding spiritual values. In reality, while on the one hand it is true that this social model shows the failure of Marxism to contribute to a humane and better society, on the other hand, insofar as it denies an autonomous existence and value to morality, law, culture and religion, it

agrees with Marxism, in the sense that it totally reduces man to the sphere of economics and the satisfaction of material needs.

20. During the same period a widespread process of "decolonization" occurred, by which many countries gained or regained their independence and the right freely to determine their own destiny. With the formal re-acquisition of State sovereignty, however, these countries often find themselves merely at the beginning of the journey towards the construction of genuine independence. Decisive sectors of the economy still remain de facto in the hands of large foreign companies which are unwilling to commit themselves to the long-term development of the host country. Political life itself is controlled by foreign powers, while within the national boundaries there are tribal groups not yet amalgamated into a genuine national community. Also lacking is a class of competent professional people capable of running the State apparatus in an honest and just way, nor are there qualified personnel for managing the economy in an efficient and responsible manner.

Given this situation, many think that Marxism can offer a sort of short-cut for building up the nation and the State; thus many variants of socialism emerge with specific national characteristics. Legitimate demands for national recovery, forms of nationalism and also of militarism, principles drawn from ancient popular traditions (which are sometimes in harmony with Christian social doctrine) and Marxist-Leninist concepts and ideas - all these mingle in the many ideologies which take shape in ways that differ from case to case.

21. Lastly, it should be remembered that after the Second World War, and in reaction to its horrors, there arose a more lively sense of human rights, which found recognition in a number of International Documents⁵² and, one might say, in the drawing up of a new "right of nations", to which the Holy See has constantly contributed. The focal point of this evolution has been the United Nations Organization. Not only has there been a development in awareness of the rights of individuals, but also in awareness of the rights of nations, as well as a clearer realization of the need to act in order to remedy the grave imbalances that exist between the various geographical areas of the world. In a certain sense, these imbalances have shifted the centre of the social question from the national to the international level.⁵³

While noting this process with satisfaction, nevertheless one cannot ignore the fact that the overall balance of the various policies of aid for development has not always been positive. The United Nations, moreover, has not yet succeeded in establishing, as alternatives to war, effective means for the resolution of international conflicts. This seems to be the most urgent problem which the international community has yet to resolve.

III. THE YEAR 1989

22. It is on the basis of the world situation just described, and already elaborated in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, that the unexpected and promising significance of the events of recent years can be understood. Although they certainly reached their climax in 1989 in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, they embrace a longer period of time and a wider geographical area. In the course of the 80s, certain dictatorial and oppressive regimes fell one by one in some countries of Latin America and also of Africa and Asia. In other cases there began a difficult but productive transition towards more participatory and more just political structures. An important, even decisive, contribution was made by the Church's commitment to defend and promote human rights. In situations strongly influenced by ideology, in which polarization obscured the awareness of a human dignity common to all, the Church affirmed clearly and forcefully that every individual - whatever his or her personal convictions - bears the image of God and therefore deserves respect. Often, the vast majority of people identified themselves with this kind of affirmation, and this led to a search for forms of protest and for political solutions more respectful of the dignity of the person.

From this historical process new forms of democracy have emerged which offer a hope for change in fragile political and social structures weighed down by a painful series of injustices and resentments, as well as by a heavily damaged economy and serious social conflicts. Together with the whole Church, I thank God for the often heroic witness borne in such difficult circumstances by many Pastors, entire Christian communities, individual members of the faithful, and other people of good will; at the same time I pray that he will sustain the efforts being made by everyone to build a better future. This is, in fact, a responsibility which falls not only to the citizens of the countries in question, but to all Christians and people of good will. It is a question of showing that the complex problems faced by those peoples can be resolved through dialogue and solidarity, rather than by a struggle to destroy the enemy through war.

23. Among the many factors involved in the fall of oppressive regimes, some deserve special mention. Certainly, the decisive factor which gave rise to the changes was the violation of the rights of workers. It cannot be forgotten that the fundamental crisis of systems claiming to express the rule and indeed the dictatorship of the working class began with the great upheavals which took place in Poland in the name of solidarity. It was the throngs of working people which foreswore the ideology which presumed to speak in their name. On the basis of a hard, lived experience of work and of oppression, it was they who recovered and, in a sense, rediscovered the content and principles of the Church's social doctrine.

Also worthy of emphasis is the fact that the fall of this kind of "bloc" or empire was accomplished almost everywhere by means of peaceful protest, using only the weapons of truth and justice. While Marxism held that only by exacerbating social conflicts was it possible to resolve them through violent confrontation, the protests which led to the

collapse of Marxism tenaciously insisted on trying every avenue of negotiation, dialogue, and witness to the truth, appealing to the conscience of the adversary and seeking to reawaken in him a sense of shared human dignity.

It seemed that the European order resulting from the Second World War and sanctioned by the Yalta Agreements could only be overturned by another war. Instead, it has been overcome by the non-violent commitment of people who, while always refusing to yield to the force of power, succeeded time after time in finding effective ways of bearing witness to the truth. This disarmed the adversary, since violence always needs to justify itself through deceit, and to appear, however falsely, to be defending a right or responding

to a threat posed by others.⁵⁴ Once again I thank God for having sustained people's hearts amid difficult trials, and I pray that this example will prevail in other places and other circumstances. May people learn to fight for justice without violence, renouncing class struggle in their internal disputes, and war in international ones.

24. The second factor in the crisis was certainly the inefficiency of the economic system, which is not to be considered simply as a technical problem, but rather a consequence of the violation of the human rights to private initiative, to ownership of property and to freedom in the economic sector. To this must be added the cultural and national dimension: it is not possible to understand man on the basis of economics alone, nor to define him simply on the basis of class membership. Man is understood in a more complete way when he is situated within the sphere of culture through his language, history, and the position he takes towards the fundamental events of life, such as birth, love, work and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. When this question is eliminated, the culture and moral life of nations are corrupted. For this reason the struggle to defend work was spontaneously linked to the struggle for culture and for national rights.

But the true cause of the new developments was the spiritual void brought about by atheism, which deprived the younger generations of a sense of direction and in many cases led them, in the irrepressible search for personal identity and for the meaning of life, to rediscover the religious roots of their national cultures, and to rediscover the person of Christ himself as the existentially adequate response to the desire in every human heart for goodness, truth and life. This search was supported by the witness of those who, in difficult circumstances and under persecution, remained faithful to God. Marxism had promised to uproot the need for God from the human heart, but the results have shown that it is not possible to succeed in this without throwing the heart into turmoil.

25. The events of 1989 are an example of the success of willingness to negotiate and of the Gospel spirit in the face of an adversary determined not to be bound by moral principles. These events are a warning to those who, in the name of political realism, wish to banish law and morality from the political arena. Undoubtedly, the struggle which led to the changes of 1989 called for clarity, moderation, suffering and sacrifice. In a certain sense, it was a struggle born of prayer, and it would have been unthinkable without immense trust in God, the Lord of history, who carries the human heart in his hands. It is by uniting his own sufferings for the sake of truth and freedom to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross that man is able to accomplish the miracle of peace and is in a position to discern the often narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil and the violence which, under the illusion of fighting evil, only makes it worse.

Nevertheless, it cannot be forgotten that the manner in which the individual exercises his freedom is conditioned in innumerable ways. While these certainly have an influence on freedom, they do not determine it; they make the exercise of freedom more difficult or less difficult, but they cannot destroy it. Not only is it wrong from the ethical point of view to disregard human nature, which is made for freedom, but in practice it is impossible to do so. Where society is so organized as to reduce arbitrarily or even suppress the sphere in which freedom is legitimately exercised, the result is that the life of society becomes progressively disorganized and goes into decline.

Moreover, man, who was created for freedom, bears within himself the wound of original sin, which constantly draws him towards evil and puts him in need of redemption. Not only is this doctrine an integral part of Christian revelation; it also has great hermeneutical value insofar as it helps one to understand human reality. Man tends towards good, but he is also capable of evil. He can transcend his immediate interest and still remain bound to it. The social order will be all the more stable, the more it takes this fact into account and does not place in opposition personal interest and the interests of society as a whole, but rather seeks ways to bring them into fruitful harmony. In fact, where self-interest is violently suppressed, it is replaced by a burdensome system of bureaucratic control which dries up the wellsprings of initiative and creativity. When people think they possess the secret of a perfect social organization which makes evil impossible, they also think that they can use any means, including violence and deceit, in order to bring that organization into being. Politics then becomes a "secular religion" which operates under the illusion of creating paradise in this world. But no political society - which possesses its own autonomy and laws⁵⁵ - can ever be confused with the Kingdom of God. The Gospel parable of the weeds among the wheat (cf. Mt 13:24-30; 36-43) teaches that it is for God alone to separate the subjects of the Kingdom from the subjects of the Evil One, and that this judgment will take place at the end of time. By presuming to anticipate judgment here and now, man puts himself in the place of God and sets himself against the patience of God.

Through Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, the victory of the Kingdom of God has been achieved once and for all. Nevertheless, the Christian life involves a struggle against temptation and the forces of evil. Only at the end of history will the Lord return in glory for the final judgment (cf. Mt 25:31) with the establishment of a new heaven and a new

earth (cf. 2 Pt 3:13; Rev 21:1); but as long as time lasts the struggle between good and evil continues even in the human heart itself.

What Sacred Scripture teaches us about the prospects of the Kingdom of God is not without consequences for the life of temporal societies, which, as the adjective indicates, belong to the realm of time, with all that this implies of imperfection and impermanence. The Kingdom of God, being in the world without being of the world, throws light on the order of human society, while the power of grace penetrates that order and gives it life. In this way the requirements of a society worthy of man are better perceived, deviations are corrected, the courage to work for what is good is reinforced. In union with all people of good will, Christians, especially the laity, are called to this task of imbuing human realities with the Gospel.⁵⁶

26. The events of 1989 took place principally in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. However, they have worldwide importance because they have positive and negative consequences which concern the whole human family. These consequences are not mechanistic or fatalistic in character, but rather are opportunities for human freedom to cooperate with the merciful plan of God who acts within history.

The first consequence was an encounter in some countries between the Church and the workers' movement, which came about as a result of an ethical and explicitly Christian reaction against a widespread situation of injustice. For about a century the workers' movement had fallen in part under the dominance of Marxism, in the conviction that the working class, in order to struggle effectively against oppression, had to appropriate its economic and materialistic theories.

In the crisis of Marxism, the natural dictates of the consciences of workers have re-emerged in a demand for justice and a recognition of the dignity of work, in conformity with the social doctrine of the Church.⁵⁷ The worker movement is part of a more general movement among workers and other people of good will for the liberation of the human person and for the affirmation of human rights. It is a movement which today has spread to many countries, and which, far from opposing the Catholic Church, looks to her with interest.

The crisis of Marxism does not rid the world of the situations of injustice and oppression which Marxism itself exploited and on which it fed. To those who are searching today for a new and authentic theory and praxis of liberation, the Church offers not only her social doctrine and, in general, her teaching about the human person redeemed in Christ, but also her concrete commitment and material assistance in the struggle against marginalization and suffering.

In the recent past, the sincere desire to be on the side of the oppressed and not to be cut off from the course of history has led many believers to seek in various ways an impossible compromise between Marxism and Christianity. Moving beyond all that was short-lived in these attempts, present circumstances are leading to a reaffirmation of the positive value of an authentic theology of integral human liberation.⁵⁸ Considered from this point of view, the events of 1989 are proving to be important also for the countries of the Third World, which are searching for their own path to development, just as they were important for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

27. The second consequence concerns the peoples of Europe themselves. Many individual, social, regional and national injustices were committed during and prior to the years in which Communism dominated; much hatred and ill-will have accumulated. There is a real danger that these will re-explode after the collapse of dictatorship, provoking serious conflicts and casualties, should there be a lessening of the moral commitment and conscious striving to bear witness to the truth which were the inspiration for past efforts. It is to be hoped that hatred and violence will not triumph in people's hearts, especially among those who are struggling for justice, and that all people will grow in the spirit of peace and forgiveness.

What is needed are concrete steps to create or consolidate international structures capable of intervening through appropriate arbitration in the conflicts which arise between nations, so that each nation can uphold its own rights and reach a just agreement and peaceful settlement vis-à-vis the rights of others. This is especially needed for the nations of Europe, which are closely united in a bond of common culture and an age old history. A great effort is needed to rebuild morally and economically the countries which have abandoned Communism. For a long time the most elementary economic relationships were distorted, and basic virtues of economic life, such as truthfulness, trustworthiness and hard work were denigrated. A patient material and moral reconstruction is needed, even as people, exhausted by longstanding privation, are asking their governments for tangible and immediate results in the form of material benefits and an adequate fulfilment of their legitimate aspirations.

The fall of Marxism has naturally had a great impact on the division of the planet into worlds which are closed to one another and in jealous competition. It has further highlighted the reality of interdependence among peoples, as well as the fact that human work, by its nature, is meant to unite peoples, not divide them. Peace and prosperity, in fact, are goods which belong to the whole human race: it is not possible to enjoy them in a proper and lasting way if they are achieved and maintained at the cost of other peoples and nations, by violating their rights or excluding them from the sources of well-being.

28. In a sense, for some countries of Europe the real post-war period is just beginning. The radical reordering of economic systems, hitherto collectivized, entails problems and sacrifices comparable to those which the countries of Western Europe had to face in order to rebuild after the Second World War. It is right that in the present difficulties the formerly Communist countries should be aided by the united effort of other nations. Obviously they themselves must be the primary agents of their own development, but they must also be given a reasonable opportunity to accomplish

this goal, something that cannot happen without the help of other countries. Moreover, their present condition, marked by difficulties and shortages, is the result of an historical process in which the formerly Communist countries were often objects and not subjects. Thus they find themselves in the present situation not as a result of free choice or mistakes which were made, but as a consequence of tragic historical events which were violently imposed on them, and which prevented them from following the path of economic and social development.

Assistance from other countries, especially the countries of Europe which were part of that history and which bear responsibility for it, represents a debt in justice. But it also corresponds to the interest and welfare of Europe as a whole, since Europe cannot live in peace if the various conflicts which have arisen as a result of the past are to become more acute because of a situation of economic disorder, spiritual dissatisfaction and desperation.

This need, however, must not lead to a slackening of efforts to sustain and assist the countries of the Third World, which often suffer even more serious conditions of poverty and want.⁵⁹ What is called for is a special effort to mobilize resources, which are not lacking in the world as a whole, for the purpose of economic growth and common development, redefining the priorities and hierarchies of values on the basis of which economic and political choices are made. Enormous resources can be made available by disarming the huge military machines which were constructed for the conflict between East and West. These resources could become even more abundant if, in place of war, reliable procedures for the resolution

of conflicts could be set up, with the resulting spread of the principle of arms control and arms reduction, also in the countries of the Third World, through the adoption of appropriate measures against the arms trade.⁶⁰ But it will be necessary above all to abandon a mentality in which the poor - as individuals and as peoples - are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced. The poor ask for the right to share in enjoying material goods and to make good use of their capacity for work, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all. The advancement of the poor constitutes a great opportunity for the moral, cultural and even economic growth of all humanity.

29. Finally, development must not be understood solely in economic terms, but in a way that is fully human.⁶¹ It is not only a question of raising all peoples to the level currently enjoyed by the richest countries, but rather of building up a more decent life through united labour, of concretely enhancing every individual's dignity and creativity, as well as his capacity to respond to his personal vocation, and thus to God's call. The apex of development is the exercise of the right and duty to seek God, to know him and to live in accordance with that knowledge.⁶² In the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, the principle that force predominates over reason was carried to the extreme. Man was compelled to submit to a conception of reality imposed on him by coercion, and not reached by virtue of his own reason and the exercise of his own freedom. This principle must be overturned and total recognition must be given to the rights of the human conscience, which is bound only to the truth, both natural and revealed. The recognition of these rights represents the primary foundation of every authentically free political order.⁶³ It is important to reaffirm this latter principle for several reasons:

- a) because the old forms of totalitarianism and authoritarianism are not yet completely vanquished; indeed there is a risk that they will regain their strength. This demands renewed efforts of cooperation and solidarity between all countries;
- b) because in the developed countries there is sometimes an excessive promotion of purely utilitarian values, with an appeal to the appetites and inclinations towards immediate gratification, making it difficult to recognize and respect the hierarchy of the true values of human existence;
- c) because in some countries new forms of religious fundamentalism are emerging which covertly, or even openly, deny to citizens of faiths other than that of the majority the full exercise of their civil and religious rights, preventing them from taking part in the cultural process, and restricting both the Church's right to preach the Gospel and the rights of those who hear this preaching to accept it and to be converted to Christ. No authentic progress is possible without respect for the natural and fundamental right to know the truth and live according to that truth. The exercise and development of this right includes the right to discover and freely to accept Jesus Christ, who is man's true good.⁶⁴

IV. PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF MATERIAL GOODS

30. In *Rerum novarum*, Leo XIII strongly affirmed the natural character of the right to private property, using various arguments against the socialism of his time.⁶⁵ This right, which is fundamental for the autonomy and development of the person, has always been defended by the Church up to our own day. At the same time, the Church teaches that the possession of material goods is not an absolute right, and that its limits are inscribed in its very nature as a human right. While the Pope proclaimed the right to private ownership, he affirmed with equal clarity that the "use" of goods, while marked by freedom, is subordinated to their original common destination as created goods, as well as to the will of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Gospel. Pope Leo wrote: "those whom fortune favours are admonished... that they should tremble at the warnings of Jesus Christ... and that a most strict account must be given to the Supreme Judge for the use of all they possess"; and quoting Saint Thomas Aquinas, he added: "But if the question be asked, how must one's possessions be used? the Church replies without hesitation that man should not consider his material possessions

as his own, but as common to all...", because "above the laws and judgments of men stands the law, the judgment of Christ".⁶⁶

The Successors of Leo XIII have repeated this twofold affirmation: the necessity and therefore the legitimacy of private ownership, as well as the limits which are imposed on it.⁶⁷ The Second Vatican Council likewise clearly restated the traditional doctrine in words which bear repeating: "In making use of the exterior things we lawfully possess, we ought to regard them not just as our own but also as common, in the sense that they can profit not only the owners but others too"; and a little later we read: "Private property or some ownership of external goods affords each person the scope needed for personal and family autonomy, and should be regarded as an extension of human freedom... Of its nature private property also has a social function which is based on the law of the common purpose of goods".⁶⁸ I have returned to this same doctrine, first in my address to the Third Conference of the Latin American Bishops at Puebla, and later in the Encyclicals *Laborem exercens* and *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.⁶⁹

31. Re-reading this teaching on the right to property and the common destination of material wealth as it applies to the present time, the question can be raised concerning the origin of the material goods which sustain human life, satisfy people's needs and are an object of their rights.

The original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. This is the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods. The earth, by reason of its fruitfulness and its capacity to satisfy human needs, is God's first gift for the sustenance of human life. But the earth does not yield its fruits without a particular human response to God's gift, that is to say, without work. It is through work that man, using his intelligence and exercising his freedom, succeeds in dominating the earth and making it a fitting home. In this way, he makes part of the earth his own, precisely the part which he has acquired through work; this is the origin of individual property. Obviously, he also has the responsibility not to hinder others from having their own part of God's gift; indeed, he must cooperate with others so that together all can dominate the earth.

In history, these two factors - work and the land - are to be found at the beginning of every human society. However, they do not always stand in the same relationship to each other. At one time the natural fruitfulness of the earth appeared to be, and was in fact, the primary factor of wealth, while work was, as it were, the help and support for this fruitfulness. In our time, the role of human work is becoming increasingly important as the productive factor both of non-material and of material wealth. Moreover, it is becoming clearer how a person's work is naturally interrelated with the work of others. More than ever, work is work with others and work for others: it is a matter of doing something for someone else. Work becomes ever more fruitful and productive to the extent that people become more knowledgeable of the productive potentialities of the earth and more profoundly cognisant of the needs of those for whom their work is done.

32. In our time, in particular, there exists another form of ownership which is becoming no less important than land: the possession of know-how, technology and skill. The wealth of the industrialized nations is based much more on this kind of ownership than on natural resources.

Mention has just been made of the fact that people work with each other, sharing in a "community of work" which embraces ever widening circles. A person who produces something other than for his own use generally does so in order that others may use it after they have paid a just price, mutually agreed upon through free bargaining. It is precisely the ability to foresee both the needs of others and the combinations of productive factors most adapted to satisfying those needs that constitutes another important source of wealth in modern society. Besides, many goods cannot be adequately produced through the work of an isolated individual; they require the cooperation of many people in working towards a common goal. Organizing such a productive effort, planning its duration in time, making sure that it corresponds in a positive way to the demands which it must satisfy, and taking the necessary risks - all this too is a source of wealth in today's society. In this way, the role of disciplined and creative human work and, as an essential part of that work, initiative and entrepreneurial ability becomes increasingly evident and decisive.⁷⁰

This process, which throws practical light on a truth about the person which Christianity has constantly affirmed, should be viewed carefully and favourably. Indeed, besides the earth, man's principal resource is man himself. His intelligence enables him to discover the earth's productive potential and the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied. It is his disciplined work in close collaboration with others that makes possible the creation of ever more extensive working communities which can be relied upon to transform man's natural and human environments. Important virtues are involved in this process, such as diligence, industriousness, prudence in undertaking reasonable risks, reliability and fidelity in interpersonal relationships, as well as courage in carrying out decisions which are difficult and painful but necessary, both for the overall working of a business and in meeting possible set-backs.

The modern business economy has positive aspects. Its basis is human freedom exercised in the economic field, just as it is exercised in many other fields. Economic activity is indeed but one sector in a great variety of human activities, and like every other sector, it includes the right to freedom, as well as the duty of making responsible use of freedom. But it is important to note that there are specific differences between the trends of modern society and those of the past, even the recent past. Whereas at one time the decisive factor of production was the land, and later capital - understood as a total complex of the instruments of production - today the decisive factor is increasingly man himself, that is, his

knowledge, especially his scientific knowledge, his capacity for interrelated and compact organization, as well as his ability to perceive the needs of others and to satisfy them.

33. However, the risks and problems connected with this kind of process should be pointed out. The fact is that many people, perhaps the majority today, do not have the means which would enable them to take their place in an effective and humanly dignified way within a productive system in which work is truly central. They have no possibility of acquiring the basic knowledge which would enable them to express their creativity and develop their potential. They have no way of entering the network of knowledge and intercommunication which would enable them to see their qualities appreciated and utilized. Thus, if not actually exploited, they are to a great extent marginalized; economic development takes place over their heads, so to speak, when it does not actually reduce the already narrow scope of their old subsistence economies. They are unable to compete against the goods which are produced in ways which are new and which properly respond to needs, needs which they had previously been accustomed to meeting through traditional forms of organization. Allured by the dazzle of an opulence which is beyond their reach, and at the same time driven by necessity, these people crowd the cities of the Third World where they are often without cultural roots, and where they are exposed to situations of violent uncertainty, without the possibility of becoming integrated. Their dignity is not acknowledged in any real way, and sometimes there are even attempts to eliminate them from history through coercive forms of demographic control which are contrary to human dignity.

Many other people, while not completely marginalized, live in situations in which the struggle for a bare minimum is uppermost. These are situations in which the rules of the earliest period of capitalism still flourish in conditions of "ruthlessness" in no way inferior to the darkest moments of the first phase of industrialization. In other cases the land is still the central element in the economic process, but those who cultivate it are excluded from ownership and are reduced to a state of quasi-servitude.⁷¹ In these cases, it is still possible today, as in the days of *Rerum novarum*, to speak of inhuman exploitation. In spite of the great changes which have taken place in the more advanced societies, the human inadequacies of capitalism and the resulting domination of things over people are far from disappearing. In fact, for the poor, to the lack of material goods has been added a lack of knowledge and training which prevents them from escaping their state of humiliating subjection.

Unfortunately, the great majority of people in the Third World still live in such conditions. It would be a mistake, however, to understand this "world" in purely geographic terms. In some regions and in some social sectors of that world, development programmes have been set up which are centered on the use not so much of the material resources available but of the "human resources".

Even in recent years it was thought that the poorest countries would develop by isolating themselves from the world market and by depending only on their own resources. Recent experience has shown that countries which did this have suffered stagnation and recession, while the countries which experienced development were those which succeeded in taking part in the general interrelated economic activities at the international level. It seems therefore that the chief problem is that of gaining fair access to the international market, based not on the unilateral principle of the exploitation of the natural resources of these countries but on the proper use of human resources.⁷²

However, aspects typical of the Third World also appear in developed countries, where the constant transformation of the methods of production and consumption devalues certain acquired skills and professional expertise, and thus requires a continual effort of re-training and updating. Those who fail to keep up with the times can easily be marginalized, as can the elderly, the young people who are incapable of finding their place in the life of society and, in general, those who are weakest or part of the so-called Fourth World. The situation of women too is far from easy in these conditions.

34.

It would appear that, on the level of individual nations and of international relations, the free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs. But this is true only for those needs which are "solvent", insofar as they are endowed with purchasing power, and for those resources which are "marketable", insofar as they are capable of obtaining a satisfactory price. But there are many human needs which find no place on the market. It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied, and not to allow those burdened by such needs to perish. It is also necessary to help these needy people to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources. Even prior to the logic of a fair exchange of goods and the forms of justice appropriate to it, there exists something which is due to man because he is man, by reason of his lofty dignity. Inseparable from that required "something" is the possibility to survive and, at the same time, to make an active contribution to the common good of humanity.

In Third World contexts, certain objectives stated by *Rerum novarum* remain valid, and, in some cases, still constitute a goal yet to be reached, if man's work and his very being are not to be reduced to the level of a mere commodity. These objectives include a sufficient wage for the support of the family, social insurance for old age and unemployment, and adequate protection for the conditions of employment.

35.

Here we find a wide range of opportunities for commitment and effort in the name of justice on the part of trade unions and other workers' organizations. These defend workers' rights and protect their interests as persons, while fulfilling a

vital cultural role, so as to enable workers to participate more fully and honourably in the life of their nation and to assist them along the path of development.

In this sense, it is right to speak of a struggle against an economic system, if the latter is understood as a method of upholding the absolute predominance of capital, the possession of the means of production and of the land, in contrast to the free and personal nature of human work.⁷³ In the struggle against such a system, what is being proposed as an alternative is not the socialist system, which in fact turns out to be State capitalism, but rather a society of free work, of enterprise and of participation. Such a society is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the State, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied.

The Church acknowledges the legitimate role of profit as an indication that a business is functioning well. When a firm makes a profit, this means that productive factors have been properly employed and corresponding human needs have been duly satisfied. But profitability is not the only indicator of a firm's condition. It is possible for the financial accounts to be in order, and yet for the people - who make up the firm's most valuable asset - to be humiliated and their dignity offended. Besides being morally inadmissible, this will eventually have negative repercussions on the firm's economic efficiency. In fact, the purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a community of persons who in various ways are endeavouring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society. Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; other human and moral factors must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business.

We have seen that it is unacceptable to say that the defeat of so-called "Real Socialism" leaves capitalism as the only model of economic organization. It is necessary to break down the barriers and monopolies which leave so many countries on the margins of development, and to provide all individuals and nations with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development. This goal calls for programmed and responsible efforts on the part of the entire international community. Stronger nations must offer weaker ones opportunities for taking their place in international life, and the latter must learn how to use these opportunities by making the necessary efforts and sacrifices and by ensuring political and economic stability, the certainty of better prospects for the future, the improvement of workers' skills, and the training of competent business leaders who are conscious of their responsibilities.⁷⁴

At present, the positive efforts which have been made along these lines are being affected by the still largely unsolved problem of the foreign debt of the poorer countries. The principle that debts must be paid is certainly just. However, it is not right to demand or expect payment when the effect would be the imposition of political choices leading to hunger and despair for entire peoples. It cannot be expected that the debts which have been contracted should be paid at the price of unbearable sacrifices. In such cases it is necessary to find - as in fact is partly happening - ways to lighten, defer or even cancel the debt, compatible with the fundamental right of peoples to subsistence and progress.

36. It would now be helpful to direct our attention to the specific problems and threats emerging within the more advanced economies and which are related to their particular characteristics. In earlier stages of development, man always lived under the weight of necessity. His needs were few and were determined, to a degree, by the objective structures of his physical make-up. Economic activity was directed towards satisfying these needs. It is clear that today the problem is not only one of supplying people with a sufficient quantity of goods, but also of responding to a demand for quality: the quality of the goods to be produced and consumed, the quality of the services to be enjoyed, the quality of the environment and of life in general.

To call for an existence which is qualitatively more satisfying is of itself legitimate, but one cannot fail to draw attention to the new responsibilities and dangers connected with this phase of history. The manner in which new needs arise and are defined is always marked by a more or less appropriate concept of man and of his true good. A given culture reveals its overall understanding of life through the choices it makes in production and consumption. It is here that the phenomenon of consumerism arises. In singling out new needs and new means to meet them, one must be guided by a comprehensive picture of man which respects all the dimensions of his being and which subordinates his material and instinctive dimensions to his interior and spiritual ones. If, on the contrary, a direct appeal is made to his instincts - while ignoring in various ways the reality of the person as intelligent and free - then consumer attitudes and life-styles can be created which are objectively improper and often damaging to his physical and spiritual health. Of itself, an economic system does not possess criteria for correctly distinguishing new and higher forms of satisfying human needs from artificial new needs which hinder the formation of a mature personality. Thus a great deal of educational and cultural work is urgently needed, including the education of consumers in the responsible use of their power of choice, the formation of a strong sense of responsibility among producers and among people in the mass media in particular, as well as the necessary intervention by public authorities.

A striking example of artificial consumption contrary to the health and dignity of the human person, and certainly not easy to control, is the use of drugs. Widespread drug use is a sign of a serious malfunction in the social system; it also implies a materialistic and, in a certain sense, destructive "reading" of human needs. In this way the innovative capacity of a free economy is brought to a one-sided and inadequate conclusion. Drugs, as well as pornography and other forms of consumerism which exploit the frailty of the weak, tend to fill the resulting spiritual void.

It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards "having" rather than "being", and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself.⁷⁵ It is therefore necessary to create life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments. In this regard, it is not a matter of the duty of charity alone, that is, the duty to give from one's "abundance", and sometimes even out of one's needs, in order to provide what is essential for the life of a poor person. I am referring to the fact that even the decision to invest in one place rather than another, in one productive sector rather than another, is always a moral and cultural choice. Given the utter necessity of certain economic conditions and of political stability, the decision to invest, that is, to offer people an opportunity to make good use of their own labour, is also determined by an attitude of human sympathy and trust in Providence, which reveal the human quality of the person making such decisions.

37. Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him.⁷⁶

In all this, one notes first the poverty or narrowness of man's outlook, motivated as he is by a desire to possess things rather than to relate them to the truth, and lacking that disinterested, unselfish and aesthetic attitude that is born of wonder in the presence of being and of the beauty which enables one to see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them. In this regard, humanity today must be conscious of its duties and obligations towards future generations.

38. In addition to the irrational destruction of the natural environment, we must also mention the more serious destruction of the human environment, something which is by no means receiving the attention it deserves. Although people are rightly worried - though much less than they should be - about preserving the natural habitats of the various animal species threatened with extinction, because they realize that each of these species makes its particular contribution to the balance of nature in general, too little effort is made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic "human ecology". Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed. In this context, mention should be made of the serious problems of modern urbanization, of the need for urban planning which is concerned with how people are to live, and of the attention which should be given to a "social ecology" of work.

Man receives from God his essential dignity and with it the capacity to transcend every social order so as to move towards truth and goodness. But he is also conditioned by the social structure in which he lives, by the education he has received and by his environment. These elements can either help or hinder his living in accordance with the truth. The decisions which create a human environment can give rise to specific structures of sin which impede the full realization of those who are in any way oppressed by them. To destroy such structures and replace them with more authentic forms of living in community is a task which demands courage and patience.⁷⁷

39. The first and fundamental structure for "human ecology" is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. Here we mean the family founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny. But it often happens that people are discouraged from creating the proper conditions for human reproduction and are led to consider themselves and their lives as a series of sensations to be experienced rather than as a work to be accomplished. The result is a lack of freedom, which causes a person to reject a commitment to enter into a stable relationship with another person and to bring children into the world, or which leads people to consider children as one of the many "things" which an individual can have or not have, according to taste, and which compete with other possibilities.

It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life - the gift of God - can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life.

Human ingenuity seems to be directed more towards limiting, suppressing or destroying the sources of life - including recourse to abortion, which unfortunately is so widespread in the world - than towards defending and opening up the possibilities of life. The Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* denounced systematic anti-childbearing campaigns which, on the basis of a distorted view of the demographic problem and in a climate of "absolute lack of respect for the

freedom of choice of the parties involved", often subject them "to intolerable pressures... in order to force them to submit to this new form of oppression".⁷⁸ These policies are extending their field of action by the use of new techniques, to the point of poisoning the lives of millions of defenceless human beings, as if in a form of "chemical warfare".

These criticisms are directed not so much against an economic system as against an ethical and cultural system. The economy in fact is only one aspect and one dimension of the whole of human activity. If economic life is absolutized, if the production and consumption of goods become the centre of social life and society's only value, not subject to any other value, the reason is to be found not so much in the economic system itself as in the fact that the entire socio-cultural system, by ignoring the ethical and religious dimension, has been weakened, and ends by limiting itself to the production of goods and services alone.⁷⁹

All of this can be summed up by repeating once more that economic freedom is only one element of human freedom. When it becomes autonomous, when man is seen more as a producer or consumer of goods than as a subject who produces and consumes in order to live, then economic freedom loses its necessary relationship to the human person and ends up by alienating and oppressing him.⁸⁰

40.

It is the task of the State to provide for the defence and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces. Just as in the time of primitive capitalism the State had the duty of defending the basic rights of workers, so now, with the new capitalism, the State and all of society have the duty of defending those collective goods which, among others, constitute the essential framework for the legitimate pursuit of personal goals on the part of each individual.

Here we find a new limit on the market: there are collective and qualitative needs which cannot be satisfied by market mechanisms. There are important human needs which escape its logic. There are goods which by their very nature cannot and must not be bought or sold. Certainly the mechanisms of the market offer secure advantages: they help to utilize resources better; they promote the exchange of products; above all they give central place to the person's desires and preferences, which, in a contract, meet the desires and preferences of another person. Nevertheless, these mechanisms carry the risk of an "idolatry" of the market, an idolatry which ignores the existence of goods which by their nature are not and cannot be mere commodities.

41.

Marxism criticized capitalist bourgeois societies, blaming them for the commercialization and alienation of human existence. This rebuke is of course based on a mistaken and inadequate idea of alienation, derived solely from the sphere of relationships of production and ownership, that is, giving them a materialistic foundation and moreover denying the legitimacy and positive value of market relationships even in their own sphere. Marxism thus ends up by affirming that only in a collective society can alienation be eliminated. However, the historical experience of socialist countries has sadly demonstrated that collectivism does not do away with alienation but rather increases it, adding to it a lack of basic necessities and economic inefficiency.

The historical experience of the West, for its part, shows that even if the Marxist analysis and its foundation of alienation are false, nevertheless alienation - and the loss of the authentic meaning of life - is a reality in Western societies too. This happens in consumerism, when people are ensnared in a web of false and superficial gratifications rather than being helped to experience their personhood in an authentic and concrete way. Alienation is found also in work, when it is organized so as to ensure maximum returns and profits with no concern whether the worker, through his own labour, grows or diminishes as a person, either through increased sharing in a genuinely supportive community or through increased isolation in a maze of relationships marked by destructive competitiveness and estrangement, in which he is considered only a means and not an end.

The concept of alienation needs to be led back to the Christian vision of reality, by recognizing in alienation a reversal of means and ends. When man does not recognize in himself and in others the value and grandeur of the human person, he effectively deprives himself of the possibility of benefitting from his humanity and of entering into that relationship of solidarity and communion with others for which God created him.

Indeed, it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself.⁸¹ This gift is made possible by the human person's essential "capacity for transcendence". Man cannot give himself to a purely human plan for reality, to an abstract ideal or to a false utopia. As a person, he can give himself to another person or to other persons, and ultimately to God, who is the author of his being and who alone can fully accept his gift.⁸² A man is alienated if he refuses to transcend himself and to live the experience of selfgiving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented towards his final destiny, which is God. A society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer this gift of self and to establish this solidarity between people.

Exploitation, at least in the forms analyzed and described by Karl Marx, has been overcome in Western society. Alienation, however, has not been overcome as it exists in various forms of exploitation, when people use one another, and when they seek an ever more refined satisfaction of their individual and secondary needs, while ignoring the principal and authentic needs which ought to regulate the manner of satisfying the other ones too.⁸³ A person who is concerned solely or primarily with possessing and enjoying, who is no longer able to control his instincts and passions, or to subordinate them by obedience to the truth, cannot be free: obedience to the truth about God and man is the first

condition of freedom, making it possible for a person to order his needs and desires and to choose the means of satisfying them according to a correct scale of values, so that the ownership of things may become an occasion of growth for him. This growth can be hindered as a result of manipulation by the means of mass communication, which impose fashions and trends of opinion through carefully orchestrated repetition, without it being possible to subject to critical scrutiny the premises on which these fashions and trends are based.

42. Returning now to the initial question: can it perhaps be said that, after the failure of Communism, capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism should be the goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? Is this the model which ought to be proposed to the countries of the Third World which are searching for the path to true economic and civil progress?

The answer is obviously complex. If by "capitalism" is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a "business economy", "market economy" or simply "free economy". But if by "capitalism" is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative.

The Marxist solution has failed, but the realities of marginalization and exploitation remain in the world, especially the Third World, as does the reality of human alienation, especially in the more advanced countries. Against these phenomena the Church strongly raises her voice. Vast multitudes are still living in conditions of great material and moral poverty. The collapse of the Communist system in so many countries certainly removes an obstacle to facing these problems in an appropriate and realistic way, but it is not enough to bring about their solution. Indeed, there is a risk that a radical capitalistic ideology could spread which refuses even to consider these problems, in the a priori belief that any attempt to solve them is doomed to failure, and which blindly entrusts their solution to the free development of market forces.

43. The Church has no models to present; models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political and cultural aspects, as these interact with one another.⁸⁴ For such a task the Church offers her social teaching as an indispensable and ideal orientation, a teaching which, as already mentioned, recognizes the positive value of the market and of enterprise, but which at the same time points out that these need to be oriented towards the common good. This teaching also recognizes the legitimacy of workers' efforts to obtain full respect for their dignity and to gain broader areas of participation in the life of industrial enterprises so that, while cooperating with others and under the direction of others, they can in a certain sense "work for themselves"⁸⁵ through the exercise of their intelligence and freedom.

The integral development of the human person through work does not impede but rather promotes the greater productivity and efficiency of work itself, even though it may weaken consolidated power structures. A business cannot be considered only as a "society of capital goods"; it is also a "society of persons" in which people participate in different ways and with specific responsibilities, whether they supply the necessary capital for the company's activities or take part in such activities through their labour. To achieve these goals there is still need for a broad associated workers' movement, directed towards the liberation and promotion of the whole person.

In the light of today's "new things", we have re-read the relationship between individual or private property and the universal destination of material wealth. Man fulfils himself by using his intelligence and freedom. In so doing he utilizes the things of this world as objects and instruments and makes them his own. The foundation of the right to private initiative and ownership is to be found in this activity. By means of his work man commits himself, not only for his own sake but also for others and with others. Each person collaborates in the work of others and for their good. Man works in order to provide for the needs of his family, his community, his nation, and ultimately all humanity.⁸⁶ Moreover, he collaborates in the work of his fellow employees, as well as in the work of suppliers and in the customers' use of goods, in a progressively expanding chain of solidarity. Ownership of the means of production, whether in industry or agriculture, is just and legitimate if it serves useful work. It becomes illegitimate, however, when it is not utilized or when it serves to impede the work of others, in an effort to gain a profit which is not the result of the overall expansion of work and the wealth of society, but rather is the result of curbing them or of illicit exploitation, speculation or the breaking of solidarity among working people.⁸⁷ Ownership of this kind has no justification, and represents an abuse in the sight of God and man.

The obligation to earn one's bread by the sweat of one's brow also presumes the right to do so. A society in which this right is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace.⁸⁸ Just as the person fully realizes himself in the free gift of self, so too ownership morally justifies itself in the creation, at the proper time and in the proper way, of opportunities for work and human growth for all.

V. STATE AND CULTURE

44. Pope Leo XIII was aware of the need for a sound theory of the State in order to ensure the normal development of man's spiritual and temporal activities, both of which are indispensable.⁸⁹ For this reason, in one passage of *Rerum novarum* he presents the organization of society according to the three powers - legislative, executive and judicial -, something which at the time represented a novelty in Church teaching.⁹⁰ Such an ordering reflects a realistic vision of man's social nature, which calls for legislation capable of protecting the freedom of all. To that end, it is preferable that each power be balanced by other powers and by other spheres of responsibility which keep it within proper bounds. This is the principle of the "rule of law", in which the law is sovereign, and not the arbitrary will of individuals.

In modern times, this concept has been opposed by totalitarianism, which, in its Marxist-Leninist form, maintains that some people, by virtue of a deeper knowledge of the laws of the development of society, or through membership of a particular class or through contact with the deeper sources of the collective consciousness, are exempt from error and can therefore arrogate to themselves the exercise of absolute power. It must be added that totalitarianism arises out of a denial of truth in the objective sense. If there is no transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people. Their self-interest as a class, group or nation would inevitably set them in opposition to one another. If one does not acknowledge transcendent truth, then the force of power takes over, and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others. People are then respected only to the extent that they can be exploited for selfish ends. Thus, the root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is therefore by his very nature the subject of rights which no one may violate - no individual, group, class, nation or State. Not even the majority of a social body may violate these rights, by going against the minority, by isolating, oppressing, or exploiting it, or by attempting to annihilate it.⁹¹

45. The culture and praxis of totalitarianism also involve a rejection of the Church. The State or the party which claims to be able to lead history towards perfect goodness, and which sets itself above all values, cannot tolerate the affirmation of an objective criterion of good and evil beyond the will of those in power, since such a criterion, in given circumstances, could be used to judge their actions. This explains why totalitarianism attempts to destroy the Church, or at least to reduce her to submission, making her an instrument of its own ideological apparatus.⁹²

Furthermore, the totalitarian State tends to absorb within itself the nation, society, the family, religious groups and individuals themselves. In defending her own freedom, the Church is also defending the human person, who must obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 5:29), as well as defending the family, the various social organizations and nations - all of which enjoy their own spheres of autonomy and sovereignty.

46. The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.⁹³ Thus she cannot encourage the formation of narrow ruling groups which usurp the power of the State for individual interests or for ideological ends.

Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person. It requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the "subjectivity" of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility. Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and sceptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends. It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism.

Nor does the Church close her eyes to the danger of fanaticism or fundamentalism among those who, in the name of an ideology which purports to be scientific or religious, claim the right to impose on others their own concept of what is true and good. Christian truth is not of this kind. Since it is not an ideology, the Christian faith does not presume to imprison changing socio-political realities in a rigid schema, and it recognizes that human life is realized in history in conditions that are diverse and imperfect. Furthermore, in constantly reaffirming the transcendent dignity of the person, the Church's method is always that of respect for freedom.⁹⁴

But freedom attains its full development only by accepting the truth. In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation and man is exposed to the violence of passion and to manipulation, both open and hidden. The Christian upholds freedom and serves it, constantly offering to others the truth which he has known (cf. Jn 8:31-32), in accordance with the missionary nature of his vocation. While paying heed to every fragment of truth which he encounters in the life experience and in the culture of individuals and of nations, he will not fail to affirm in dialogue with others all that his faith and the correct use of reason have enabled him to understand.⁹⁵

47. Following the collapse of Communist totalitarianism and of many other totalitarian and "national security" regimes, today we are witnessing a predominance, not without signs of opposition, of the democratic ideal, together with lively attention to and concern for human rights. But for this very reason it is necessary for peoples in the process of reforming their systems to give democracy an authentic and solid foundation through the explicit recognition of those

rights.⁹⁶ Among the most important of these rights, mention must be made of the right to life, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother's womb from the moment of conception; the right to live in a united family and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child's personality; the right to develop one's intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth; the right to share in the work which makes wise use of the earth's material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one's dependents; and the right freely to establish a family, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one's sexuality. In a certain sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person.⁹⁷

Even in countries with democratic forms of government, these rights are not always fully respected. Here we are referring not only to the scandal of abortion, but also to different aspects of a crisis within democracies themselves, which seem at times to have lost the ability to make decisions aimed at the common good. Certain demands which arise within society are sometimes not examined in accordance with criteria of justice and morality, but rather on the basis of the electoral or financial power of the groups promoting them. With time, such distortions of political conduct create distrust and apathy, with a subsequent decline in the political participation and civic spirit of the general population, which feels abused and disillusioned. As a result, there is a growing inability to situate particular interests within the framework of a coherent vision of the common good. The latter is not simply the sum total of particular interests; rather it involves an assessment and integration of those interests on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person.⁹⁸

The Church respects the legitimate autonomy of the democratic order and is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution. Her contribution to the political order is precisely her vision of the dignity of the person revealed in all its fulness in the mystery of the Incarnate Word.⁹⁹

48. These general observations also apply to the role of the State in the economic sector. Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum. On the contrary, it presupposes sure guarantees of individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services. Hence the principle task of the State is to guarantee this security, so that those who work and produce can enjoy the fruits of their labours and thus feel encouraged to work efficiently and honestly. The absence of stability, together with the corruption of public officials and the spread of improper sources of growing rich and of easy profits deriving from illegal or purely speculative activities, constitutes one of the chief obstacles to development and to the economic order.

Another task of the State is that of overseeing and directing the exercise of human rights in the economic sector. However, primary responsibility in this area belongs not to the State but to individuals and to the various groups and associations which make up society. The State could not directly ensure the right to work for all its citizens unless it controlled every aspect of economic life and restricted the free initiative of individuals. This does not mean, however, that the State has no competence in this domain, as was claimed by those who argued against any rules in the economic sphere. Rather, the State has a duty to sustain business activities by creating conditions which will ensure job opportunities, by stimulating those activities where they are lacking or by supporting them in moments of crisis.

The State has the further right to intervene when particular monopolies create delays or obstacles to development. In addition to the tasks of harmonizing and guiding development, in exceptional circumstances the State can also exercise a substitute function, when social sectors or business systems are too weak or are just getting under way, and are not equal to the task at hand. Such supplementary interventions, which are justified by urgent reasons touching the common good, must be as brief as possible, so as to avoid removing permanently from society and business systems the functions which are properly theirs, and so as to avoid enlarging excessively the sphere of State intervention to the detriment of both economic and civil freedom.

In recent years the range of such intervention has vastly expanded, to the point of creating a new type of State, the so-called "Welfare State". This has happened in some countries in order to respond better to many needs and demands, by remedying forms of poverty and deprivation unworthy of the human person. However, excesses and abuses, especially in recent years, have provoked very harsh criticisms of the Welfare State, dubbed the "Social Assistance State". Malfunctions and defects in the Social Assistance State are the result of an inadequate understanding of the tasks proper to the State. Here again the principle of subsidiarity must be respected: a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.¹⁰⁰

By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending. In fact, it would appear that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbours to those in need. It should be added that certain kinds of demands often call for a response which is not simply material but which is capable of perceiving the deeper human need. One thinks of the condition of refugees, immigrants, the elderly, the sick, and all those in circumstances which call for assistance, such as drug abusers: all these people can be helped effectively only by those who offer them genuine fraternal support, in addition to the necessary care.

49. Faithful to the mission received from Christ her Founder, the Church has always been present and active among the needy, offering them material assistance in ways that neither humiliate nor reduce them to mere objects of assistance, but which help them to escape their precarious situation by promoting their dignity as persons. With heartfelt gratitude to God it must be pointed out that active charity has never ceased to be practised in the Church; indeed, today it is showing a manifold and gratifying increase. In this regard, special mention must be made of volunteer work, which the Church favours and promotes by urging everyone to cooperate in supporting and encouraging its undertakings.

In order to overcome today's widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity, beginning in the family with the mutual support of husband and wife and the care which the different generations give to one another. In this sense the family too can be called a community of work and solidarity. It can happen, however, that when a family does decide to live up fully to its vocation, it finds itself without the necessary support from the State and without sufficient resources. It is urgent therefore to promote not only family policies, but also those social policies which have the family as their principle object, policies which assist the family by providing adequate resources and efficient means of support, both for bringing up children and for looking after the elderly, so as to avoid distancing the latter from the family unit and in order to strengthen relations between generations.¹⁰¹

Apart from the family, other intermediate communities exercise primary functions and give life to specific networks of solidarity. These develop as real communities of persons and strengthen the social fabric, preventing society from becoming an anonymous and impersonal mass, as unfortunately often happens today. It is in interrelationships on many levels that a person lives, and that society becomes more "personalized". The individual today is often suffocated between two poles represented by the State and the marketplace. At times it seems as though he exists only as a producer and consumer of goods, or as an object of State administration. People lose sight of the fact that life in society has neither the market nor the State as its final purpose, since life itself has a unique value which the State and the market must serve. Man remains above all a being who seeks the truth and strives to live in that truth, deepening his understanding of it through a dialogue which involves past and future generations.¹⁰²

50. From this open search for truth, which is renewed in every generation, the culture of a nation derives its character. Indeed, the heritage of values which has been received and handed down is always challenged by the young. To challenge does not necessarily mean to destroy or reject a priori, but above all to put these values to the test in one's own life, and through this existential verification to make them more real, relevant and personal, distinguishing the valid elements in the tradition from false and erroneous ones, or from obsolete forms which can be usefully replaced by others more suited to the times.

In this context, it is appropriate to recall that evangelization too plays a role in the culture of the various nations, sustaining culture in its progress towards the truth, and assisting in the work of its purification and enrichment.¹⁰³ However, when a culture becomes inward looking, and tries to perpetuate obsolete ways of living by rejecting any exchange or debate with regard to the truth about man, then it becomes sterile and is heading for decadence.

51.

All human activity takes place within a culture and interacts with culture. For an adequate formation of a culture, the involvement of the whole man is required, whereby he exercises his creativity, intelligence, and knowledge of the world and of people. Furthermore, he displays his capacity for self-control, personal sacrifice, solidarity and readiness to promote the common good. Thus the first and most important task is accomplished within man's heart. The way in which he is involved in building his own future depends on the understanding he has of himself and of his own destiny. It is on this level that the Church's specific and decisive contribution to true culture is to be found. The Church promotes those aspects of human behaviour which favour a true culture of peace, as opposed to models in which the individual is lost in the crowd, in which the role of his initiative and freedom is neglected, and in which his greatness is posited in the arts of conflict and war. The Church renders this service to human society by preaching the truth about the creation of the world, which God has placed in human hands so that people may make it fruitful and more perfect through their work; and by preaching the truth about the Redemption, whereby the Son of God has saved mankind and at the same time has united all people, making them responsible for one another. Sacred Scripture continually speaks to us of an active commitment to our neighbour and demands of us a shared responsibility for all of humanity.

This duty is not limited to one's own family, nation or State, but extends progressively to all mankind, since no one can consider himself extraneous or indifferent to the lot of another member of the human family. No one can say that he is not responsible for the well-being of his brother or sister (cf. Gen 4:9; Lk 10:29-37; Mt 25:31-46). Attentive and pressing concern for one's neighbour in a moment of need - made easier today because of the new means of communication which have brought people closer together - is especially important with regard to in the search for ways to resolve international conflicts other than by war. It is not hard to see that the terrifying power of the means of destruction - to which even medium and small-sized countries have access - and the ever closer links between the peoples of the whole world make it very difficult or practically impossible to limit the consequences of a conflict.

52.

Pope Benedict XV and his Successors clearly understood this danger.¹⁰⁴ I myself, on the occasion of the recent tragic war in the Persian Gulf, repeated the cry: "Never again war!". No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of

resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution of the very problems which provoked the war. Just as the time has finally come when in individual States a system of private vendetta and reprisal has given way to the rule of law, so too a similar step forward is now urgently needed in the international community. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that at the root of war there are usually real and serious grievances: injustices suffered, legitimate aspirations frustrated, poverty, and the exploitation of multitudes of desperate people who see no real possibility of improving their lot by peaceful means.

For this reason, another name for peace is development. 105 Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development. Just as within individual societies it is possible and right to organize a solid economy which will direct the functioning of the market to the common good, so too there is a similar need for adequate interventions on the international level. For this to happen, a great effort must be made to enhance mutual understanding and knowledge, and to increase the sensitivity of consciences. This is the culture which is hoped for, one which fosters trust in the human potential of the poor, and consequently in their ability to improve their condition through work or to make a positive contribution to economic prosperity. But to accomplish this, the poor - be they individuals or nations - need to be provided with realistic opportunities. Creating such conditions calls for a concerted worldwide effort to promote development, an effort which also involves sacrificing the positions of income and of power enjoyed by the more developed economies.106

This may mean making important changes in established life-styles, in order to limit the waste of environmental and human resources, thus enabling every individual and all the peoples of the earth to have a sufficient share of those resources. In addition, the new material and spiritual resources must be utilized which are the result of the work and culture of peoples who today are on the margins of the international community, so as to obtain an overall human enrichment of the family of nations.

VI. MAN IS THE WAY OF THE CHURCH

53. Faced with the poverty of the working class, Pope Leo XIII wrote: "We approach this subject with confidence, and in the exercise of the rights which manifestly pertain to us... By keeping silence we would seem to neglect the duty incumbent on us".107 During the last hundred years the Church has repeatedly expressed her thinking, while closely following the continuing development of the social question. She has certainly not done this in order to recover former privileges or to impose her own vision. Her sole purpose has been care and responsibility for man, who has been entrusted to her by Christ himself: for this man, whom, as the Second Vatican Council recalls, is the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake, and for which God has his plan, that is, a share in eternal salvation. We are not dealing here with man in the "abstract", but with the real, "concrete", "historical" man. We are dealing with each individual, since each one is included in the mystery of Redemption, and through this mystery Christ has united himself with each one for ever.108 It follows that the Church cannot abandon man, and that "this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission... the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption".109

This, and this alone, is the principle which inspires the Church's social doctrine. The Church has gradually developed that doctrine in a systematic way, above all in the century that has followed the date we are commemorating, precisely because the horizon of the Church's whole wealth of doctrine is man in his concrete reality as sinful and righteous.

54. Today, the Church's social doctrine focuses especially on man as he is involved in a complex network of relationships within modern societies. The human sciences and philosophy are helpful for interpreting man's central place within society and for enabling him to understand himself better as a "social being". However, man's true identity is only fully revealed to him through faith, and it is precisely from faith that the Church's social teaching begins. While drawing upon all the contributions made by the sciences and philosophy, her social teaching is aimed at helping man on the path of salvation.

The Encyclical *Rerum novarum* can be read as a valid contribution to socio-economic analysis at the end of the nineteenth century, but its specific value derives from the fact that it is a document of the Magisterium and is fully a part of the Church's evangelizing mission, together with many other documents of this nature. Thus the Church's social teaching is itself a valid instrument of evangelization. As such, it proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself. In this light, and only in this light, does it concern itself with everything else: the human rights of the individual, and in particular of the "working class", the family and education, the duties of the State, the ordering of national and international society, economic life, culture, war and peace, and respect for life from the moment of conception until death.

55. The Church receives "the meaning of man" from Divine Revelation. "In order to know man, authentic man, man in his fullness, one must know God", said Pope Paul VI, and he went on to quote Saint Catherine of Siena, who, in prayer, expressed the same idea: "In your nature, O eternal Godhead, I shall know my own nature".110

Christian anthropology therefore is really a chapter of theology, and for this reason, the Church's social doctrine, by its concern for man and by its interest in him and in the way he conducts himself in the world, "belongs to the field... of theology and particularly of moral theology".111 The theological dimension is needed both for interpreting and solving present-day problems in human society. It is worth noting that this is true in contrast both to the "atheistic" solution,

which deprives man of one of his basic dimensions, namely the spiritual one, and to permissive and consumerist solutions, which under various pretexts seek to convince man that he is free from every law and from God himself, thus imprisoning him within a selfishness which ultimately harms both him and others.

When the Church proclaims God's salvation to man, when she offers and communicates the life of God through the sacraments, when she gives direction to human life through the commandments of love of God and neighbour, she contributes to the enrichment of human dignity. But just as the Church can never abandon her religious and transcendent mission on behalf of man, so too she is aware that today her activity meets with particular difficulties and obstacles. That is why she devotes herself with ever new energies and methods to an evangelization which promotes the whole human being. Even on the eve of the third Millennium she continues to be "a sign and safeguard of the transcendence of the human person", 112 as indeed she has always sought to be from the beginning of her existence, walking together with man through history. The Encyclical *Rerum novarum* itself is a significant sign of this.

56. On the hundredth anniversary of that Encyclical I wish to thank all those who have devoted themselves to studying, expounding and making better known Christian social teaching. To this end, the cooperation of the local Churches is indispensable, and I would hope that the present anniversary will be a source of fresh enthusiasm for studying, spreading and applying that teaching in various contexts.

In particular, I wish this teaching to be made known and applied in the countries which, following the collapse of "Real Socialism", are experiencing a serious lack of direction in the work of rebuilding. The Western countries, in turn, run the risk of seeing this collapse as a one-sided victory of their own economic system, and thereby failing to make necessary corrections in that system. Meanwhile, the countries of the Third World are experiencing more than ever the tragedy of underdevelopment, which is becoming more serious with each passing day.

After formulating principles and guidelines for the solution of the worker question, Pope Leo XIII made this incisive statement: "Everyone should put his hand to the work which falls to his share, and that at once and straightway, lest the evil which is already so great become through delay absolutely beyond remedy", and he added, "in regard to the Church, her cooperation will never be found lacking".113

57.

As far as the Church is concerned, the social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action. Inspired by this message, some of the first Christians distributed their goods to the poor, bearing witness to the fact that, despite different social origins, it was possible for people to live together in peace and harmony. Through the power of the Gospel, down the centuries monks tilled the land, men and women Religious founded hospitals and shelters for the poor, Confraternities as well as individual men and women of all states of life devoted themselves to the needy and to those on the margins of society, convinced as they were that Christ's words "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40) were not intended to remain a pious wish, but were meant to become a concrete life commitment.

Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency. This awareness is also a source of her preferential option for the poor, which is never exclusive or discriminatory towards other groups. This option is not limited to material poverty, since it is well known that there are many other forms of poverty, especially in modern society-not only economic but cultural and spiritual poverty as well. The Church's love for the poor, which is essential for her and a part of her constant tradition, impels her to give attention to a world in which poverty is threatening to assume massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress. In the countries of the West, different forms of poverty are being experienced by groups which live on the margins of society, by the elderly and the sick, by the victims of consumerism, and even more immediately by so many refugees and migrants. In the developing countries, tragic crises loom on the horizon unless internationally coordinated measures are taken before it is too late.

58.

Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. Justice will never be fully attained unless people see in the poor person, who is asking for help in order to survive, not an annoyance or a burden, but an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment. Only such an awareness can give the courage needed to face the risk and the change involved in every authentic attempt to come to the aid of another. It is not merely a matter of "giving from one's surplus", but of helping entire peoples which are presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen, it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies. Nor is it a matter of eliminating instruments of social organization which have proved useful, but rather of orienting them according to an adequate notion of the common good in relation to the whole human family. Today we are facing the so-called "globalization" of the economy, a phenomenon which is not to be dismissed, since it can create unusual opportunities for greater prosperity. There is a growing feeling, however, that this increasing internationalization of the economy ought to be accompanied by effective international agencies which will oversee and direct the economy to the common good, something that an individual State, even if it were the most powerful on earth, would not be in a position to do. In order to achieve this result, it is necessary that there be increased coordination among the more powerful countries, and that in international agencies the interests of

the whole human family be equally represented. It is also necessary that in evaluating the consequences of their decisions, these agencies always give sufficient consideration to peoples and countries which have little weight in the international market, but which are burdened by the most acute and desperate needs, and are thus more dependent on support for their development. Much remains to be done in this area.

59. Therefore, in order that the demands of justice may be met, and attempts to achieve this goal may succeed, what is needed is the gift of grace, a gift which comes from God. Grace, in cooperation with human freedom, constitutes that mysterious presence of God in history which is Providence.

The newness which is experienced in following Christ demands to be communicated to other people in their concrete difficulties, struggles, problems and challenges, so that these can then be illuminated and made more human in the light of faith. Faith not only helps people to find solutions; it makes even situations of suffering humanly bearable, so that in these situations people will not become lost or forget their dignity and vocation.

In addition, the Church's social teaching has an important interdisciplinary dimension. In order better to incarnate the one truth about man in different and constantly changing social, economic and political contexts, this teaching enters into dialogue with the various disciplines concerned with man. It assimilates what these disciplines have to contribute, and helps them to open themselves to a broader horizon, aimed at serving the individual person who is acknowledged and loved in the fullness of his or her vocation.

Parallel with the interdisciplinary aspect, mention should also be made of the practical and as it were experiential dimension of this teaching, which is to be found at the crossroads where Christian life and conscience come into contact with the real world. This teaching is seen in the efforts of individuals, families, people involved in cultural and social life, as well as politicians and statesmen to give it a concrete form and application in history.

60. In proclaiming the principles for a solution of the worker question, Pope Leo XIII wrote: "This most serious question demands the attention and the efforts of others".¹¹⁴ He was convinced that the grave problems caused by industrial society could be solved only by cooperation between all forces. This affirmation has become a permanent element of the Church's social teaching, and also explains why Pope John XXIII addressed his Encyclical on peace to "all people of good will".

Pope Leo, however, acknowledged with sorrow that the ideologies of his time, especially Liberalism and Marxism, rejected such cooperation. Since then, many things have changed, especially in recent years. The world today is ever more aware that solving serious national and international problems is not just a matter of economic production or of juridical or social organization, but also calls for specific ethical and religious values, as well as changes of mentality, behaviour and structures. The Church feels a particular responsibility to offer this contribution and, as I have written in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, there is a reasonable hope that the many people who profess no religion will also contribute to providing the social question with the necessary ethical foundation.¹¹⁵

In that same Encyclical I also addressed an appeal to the Christian Churches and to all the great world religions, inviting them to offer the unanimous witness of our common convictions regarding the dignity of man, created by God.¹¹⁶ In fact I am convinced that the various religions, now and in the future, will have a preeminent role in preserving peace and in building a society worthy of man.

Indeed, openness to dialogue and to cooperation is required of all people of good will, and in particular of individuals and groups with specific responsibilities in the areas of politics, economics and social life, at both the national and international levels.

61.

At the beginning of industrialized society, it was "a yoke little better than that of slavery itself" which led my Predecessor to speak out in defence of man. Over the past hundred years the Church has remained faithful to this duty. Indeed, she intervened in the turbulent period of class struggle after the First World War in order to defend man from economic exploitation and from the tyranny of the totalitarian systems. After the Second World War, she put the dignity of the person at the centre of her social messages, insisting that material goods were meant for all, and that the social order ought to be free of oppression and based on a spirit of cooperation and solidarity. The Church has constantly repeated that the person and society need not only material goods but spiritual and religious values as well. Furthermore, as she has become more aware of the fact that too many people live, not in the prosperity of the Western world, but in the poverty of the developing countries amid conditions which are still "a yoke little better than that of slavery itself", she has felt and continues to feel obliged to denounce this fact with absolute clarity and frankness, although she knows that her call will not always win favour with everyone.

One hundred years after the publication of *Rerum novarum*, the Church finds herself still facing "new things" and new challenges. The centenary celebration should therefore confirm the commitment of all people of good will and of believers in particular.

62.

The present Encyclical has looked at the past, but above all it is directed to the future. Like *Rerum novarum*, it comes almost at the threshold of a new century, and its intention, with God's help, is to prepare for that moment.

In every age the true and perennial "newness of things" comes from the infinite power of God, who says: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). These words refer to the fulfilment of history, when Christ "delivers the Kingdom to God the Father... that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:24, 28). But the Christian well knows that the

newness which we await in its fulness at the Lord's second coming has been present since the creation of the world, and in a special way since the time when God became man in Jesus Christ and brought about a "new creation" with him and through him (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

In concluding this Encyclical I again give thanks to Almighty God, who has granted his Church the light and strength to accompany humanity on its earthly journey towards its eternal destiny. In the third Millennium too, the Church will be faithful in making man's way her own, knowing that she does not walk alone, but with Christ her Lord. It is Christ who made man's way his own, and who guides him, even when he is unaware of it.

Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, constantly remained beside Christ in his journey towards the human family and in its midst, and she goes before the Church on the pilgrimage of faith. May her maternal intercession accompany humanity towards the next Millennium, in fidelity to him who "is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (cf. Heb 13:8), Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name I cordially impart my blessing to all.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 1 May, the Memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker, in the year 1991, the thirteenth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1891): *Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, XI, Romae 1892, 97-144.
2. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931): AAS 23 (1931), 177-228; Pius XII, Radio Message of June 1, 1941: AAS 33 (1941), 195-205; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961): AAS 53 (1961), 401-464; Paul VI, Apostolic Epistle *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971): AAS 63 (1971), 401-441.
3. Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, III, loc. cit., 228.
4. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981): AAS 73 (1981), 577-647; Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987): AAS 80 (1988), 513-586.
5. Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I, 10, 1; III, 4, 1: PG 7, 549f.; 855f.; S. Ch. 264, 154f.; 211, 44-46.
6. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 132.
7. Cf., e.g., Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (February 10, 1880): *Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, II, Romae 1882, 10-40; Encyclical Epistle *Diuturnum Illud* (June 29, 1881): *Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, II, Romae 1882, 269-287; Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum* (June 20, 1888): *Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, VIII, Romae 1889, 212-246; Encyclical Epistle *Graves de communi* (January 18, 1901): *Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, XXI, Romae 1902, 320.
8. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 97.
9. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 98.
10. Cf. *ibid.*: loc. cit., 109f.
11. Cf. *ibid.*: description of working conditions; 44: anti-Christian workers' associations: loc. cit., 110f.; 136f.
12. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 130; cf. also 114f.
13. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 130.
14. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 123.
15. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 1, 2, 6: loc. cit., 578-583; 589-592.
16. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 99-107.
17. Cf. *ibid.*: loc. cit., 102f.
18. Cf. *ibid.*: loc. cit., 101-104.
19. Cf. *ibid.*: loc. cit., 134f.; 137f.
20. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 135.
21. Cf. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 128-129.
22. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 129.
23. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 129.
24. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 130f.
25. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 131.
26. Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
27. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 121-123.
28. Cf. *ibid.*: loc. cit., 127.
29. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 126f.
30. Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Declaration on the elimination of every form of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or convictions.
31. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*; John Paul II, Letter to Heads of State (September 1, 1980): AAS 72 (1980), 1252-1260; Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace (January 1, 1988): AAS 80 (1988), 278-286.
32. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: 42: loc. cit., 99-105; 130f.; 135.
33. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 125.

34. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38-40: loc. cit., 564-569; cf. also John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, loc. cit., 407.
35. Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 114-116; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, III, loc. cit., 208; Paul VI, Homily for the Closing of the Holy Year (December 25, 1975): AAS 68 (1976), 145; Message for the 1977 World Day of Peace (January 1, 1977): AAS 68 (1976), 709.
36. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42: loc. cit., 572.
37. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 101f.; 104f.; 130f.; 136.
38. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
39. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 99.
40. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15, 28: loc. cit., 530; 548ff.
41. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 11-15: loc. cit., 602-618.
42. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, III, 113: loc. cit., 213.
43. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 121-125.
44. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 20: loc. cit., 629-632; Discourse to the International Labor Organization (I.L.O.) in Geneva (June 15, 1982): *Insegnamenti V/2* (1982), 2250-2266; Paul VI, Discourse to the same Organization (June 10, 1969): AAS 61 (1969), 491-502.
45. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 8: loc. cit., 594-598.
46. Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, 14: loc. cit., 178-181.
47. Cf. Encyclical Epistle *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (February 10, 1880): Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, II, Romae 1882, 10-40; Encyclical Epistle *Diuturnum Illud* (June 29, 1881): Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, II, Romae 1882, 269-287; Encyclical Epistle *Immortale Dei* (November 1, 1885): Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, V, Romae 1886, 118-150; Encyclical Letter *Sapientiae Christianae* (January 10, 1890): Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, X, Romae 1891, 10-41; Encyclical Epistle *Quod Apostolici Muneris* (December 28, 1878): Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, I, Romae 1881, 170-183; Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum* (June 20, 1888): Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, VIII, Romae 1889, 212-246.
48. Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum*, 10: loc. cit., 224-226.
49. Cf. Message for the 1980 World Day of Peace: AAS 71 (1979), 1572-1580.
50. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 20: loc. cit., 536f.
51. Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963), III: AAS 55 (1963), 286-289.
52. Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued in 1948; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, IV: loc. cit., 291-296; "Final Act" of the Conference on Cooperation and Security in Europe, Helsinki, 1975.
53. Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967), 61-65: AAS 59 (1967), 287-289.
54. Cf. Message for the 1980 World Day of Peace: loc. cit., 1572-1580.
55. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 36; 39.
56. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 32-44: AAS 81 (1989), 431-481.
57. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 20: loc. cit., 629-632.
58. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986): AAS 79 (1987), 554-599.
59. Cf. Discourse at the Headquarters of the E.C.W.A. on the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the "Appeal for the Sahel" (Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, January 29, 1990): AAS 82 (1990), 816-821.
60. Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, III: loc. cit., 286-288.
61. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 27-28: loc. cit., 547-550; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 43-44: loc. cit., 278f.
62. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 29-31: loc. cit., 550-556.
63. Cf. Helsinki Final Act and Vienna Accord; Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum*, 5: loc. cit., 215-217.
64. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990), 7: *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 23, 1991.
65. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 99-107; 131-133.
66. *Ibid.*, 111-113f.
67. Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, II: loc. cit., 191; Pius XII, Radio Message on June 1, 1941: loc. cit., 199; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: loc. cit., 428-429; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 22-24: loc. cit., 268f.
68. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 69; 71.
69. Cf. Discourse to Latin American Bishops at Puebla (January 28, 1979), III, 4: AAS 71 (1979), 199-201; Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 14: loc. cit., 612-616; Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42: loc. cit., 572-574.
70. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15: loc. cit., 528-531.
71. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 21: loc. cit., 632-634.
72. Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 33-42: loc. cit., 273-278.

73. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 7: loc. cit., 592-594.
74. Cf. *ibid.*, 8: loc. cit., 594-598.
75. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 35; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 19: loc. cit., 266f.
76. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 34: loc. cit., 559f.; Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace: AAS 82 (1990), 147-156.
77. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 16: AAS 77 (1985), 213-217; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, III: loc. cit., 219.
78. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 25: loc. cit., 544.
79. Cf. *ibid.*, 34: loc. cit., 559f.
80. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), 15: AAS 71 (1979), 286-289.
81. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
82. Cf. *ibid.*, 41.
83. Cf. *ibid.*, 26.
84. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 36; Paul VI, Apostolic Epistle *Octogesima Adveniens*, 2-5: loc. cit., 402-405.
85. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 15: loc. cit., 616-618.
86. Cf. *ibid.*, 10: loc. cit., 600-602.
87. *Ibid.*, 14: loc. cit., 612-616.
88. Cf. *ibid.*, 18: loc. cit., 622-625.
89. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 126-128.
90. *Ibid.*, 121 f.
91. Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum*: loc. cit., 224-226.
92. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 76.
93. Cf. *ibid.*, 29; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message on December 24, 1944: AAS 37 (1945), 10-20.
94. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*.
95. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, I 1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 23, 1991.
96. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 17: loc. cit., 270-272.
97. Cf. Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace: loc. cit., 1572-1580; Message for the 1991 World Day of Peace: *L'Osservatore Romano*, December 19, 1990; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1-2.
98. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.
99. Cf. *ibid.*, 22.
100. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, I: loc. cit., 184-186.
101. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 45: AAS 74 (1982), 136f.
102. Cf. Discourse to UNESCO (June 2, 1980): AAS 72 (1980), 735-752.
103. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 39; 52 *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 23, 1991.
104. Cf. Benedict XV, Exhortation *Ubi Primum* (September 8, 1914): AAS 6 (1914), 501f.; Pius XI, Radio Message to the Catholic Faithful and to the entire world (September 29, 1938): AAS 30 (1938), 309f.; Pius XII, Radio Message to the entire world (August 24, 1939): AAS 31 (1939), 333-335; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, III: loc. cit., 285-289; Paul VI, Discourse at the United Nations (October 4, 1965): AAS 57 (1965), 877-885.
105. Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 76-77: loc. cit., 294f.
106. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 48: loc. cit., 139f.
107. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 107.
108. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 13: loc. cit., 283.
109. *Ibid.*, 14: loc. cit., 284f.
110. Paul VI, Homily at the Final Public Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (December 7, 1965): AAS 58 (1966), 58.
111. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41: loc. cit., 571.
112. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 76; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 13: loc. cit., 283.
113. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 143.
114. *Ibid.*, 107.
115. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38: loc. cit., 564-566.
116. *Ibid.*, 47: loc. cit., 582.

Ioannes Paulus PP. II

On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate 1990.12.07

Blessing

Venerable Brothers, Beloved Sons and Daughters, Health and the Apostolic Blessing!

INTRODUCTION

1. The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God: "For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9: 16)

In the name of the whole Church, I sense an urgent duty to repeat this cry of St. Paul. From the beginning of my Pontificate I have chosen to travel to the ends of the earth in order to show this missionary concern. My direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the urgency of missionary activity, a subject to which I am devoting the present encyclical.

The Second Vatican Council sought to renew the Church's life and activity in the light of the needs of the contemporary world. The Council emphasized the Church's "missionary nature," basing it in a dynamic way on the Trinitarian mission itself. The missionary thrust therefore belongs to the very nature of the Christian life, and is also the inspiration behind ecumenism: "that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21).

2. The Council has already borne much fruit in the realm of missionary activity. There has been an increase of local churches with their own bishops, clergy and workers in the apostolate. The presence of Christian communities is more evident in the life of nations, and communion between the churches has led to a lively exchange of spiritual benefits and gifts. The commitment of the laity to the work of evangelization is changing ecclesial life, while particular churches are more willing to meet with the members of other Christian churches and other religions, and to enter into dialogue and cooperation with them. Above all, there is a new awareness that missionary activity is a matter for all Christians, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations.

Nevertheless, in this "new springtime" of Christianity there is an undeniable negative tendency, and the present document is meant to help overcome it. Missionary activity specifically directed "to the nations" (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium. Difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church's missionary thrust toward non-Christians, a fact which must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ. For in the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith.¹

Twenty-five years after the conclusion of the Council and the publication of the Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, fifteen years after the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* issued by Pope Paul VI, and in continuity with the magisterial teaching of my predecessors, I wish to invite the Church to renew her missionary commitment. The present document has as its goal an interior renewal of faith and Christian life. For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others! It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support.

But what moves me even more strongly to proclaim the urgency of missionary evangelization is the fact that it is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvelous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself. "Christ the Redeemer," I wrote in my first encyclical, "fully reveals man to himself.... The person who wishes to understand himself thoroughly...must...draw near to Christ.... [The] Redemption that took place through the cross has definitively restored to man his dignity and given back meaning to his life in the world."³

I also have other reasons and aims: to respond to the many requests for a document of this kind; to clear up doubts and ambiguities regarding missionary activity *ad gentes*, and to confirm in their commitment those exemplary brothers and sisters dedicated to missionary activity and all those who assist them; to foster missionary vocations; to encourage theologians to explore and expound systematically the various aspects of missionary activity; to give a fresh impulse to missionary activity by fostering the commitment of the particular churches - especially those of recent origin - to send forth and receive missionaries; and to assure non-Christians and particularly the authorities of countries to which missionary activity is being directed that all of this has but one purpose: to serve man by revealing to him the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ.

3. Peoples everywhere, open the doors to Christ! His Gospel in no way detracts from man's freedom, from the respect that is owed to every culture and to whatever is good in each religion. By accepting Christ, you open yourselves to the definitive Word of God, to the One in whom God has made himself fully known and has shown us the path to himself.

The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. Indeed, since the end of the Council it has almost doubled. When we consider this immense portion of humanity which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of the Church's mission is obvious.

On the other hand, our own times offer the Church new opportunities in this field: we have witnessed the collapse of oppressive ideologies and political systems; the opening of frontiers and the formation of a more united world due to an increase in communications; the affirmation among peoples of the gospel values which Jesus made incarnate in his own life (peace, justice, brotherhood, concern for the needy); and a kind of soulless economic and technical development which only stimulates the search for the truth about God, about man and about the meaning of life itself.

God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.

CHAPTER I - JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY SAVIOR

4. In my first encyclical, in which I set forth the program of my Pontificate, I said that "the Church's fundamental function in every age, and particularly in ours, is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity toward the mystery of Christ."⁴

The Church's universal mission is born of faith in Jesus Christ, as is stated in our Trinitarian profession of faith: "I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father... For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man."⁵ The redemption event brings salvation to all, "for each one is included in the mystery of the redemption and with each one Christ has united himself forever through this mystery."⁶ It is only in faith that the Church's mission can be understood and only in faith that it finds its basis.

Nevertheless, also as a result of the changes which have taken place in modern times and the spread of new theological ideas, some people wonder: Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant? Has it not been replaced by inter-religious dialogue? Is not human development an adequate goal of the Church's mission? Does not respect for conscience and for freedom exclude all efforts at conversion? Is it not possible to attain salvation in any religion? Why then should there be missionary activity?

"No one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6)

5. If we go back to the beginnings of the Church, we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one Savior of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God. In reply to the Jewish religious authorities who question the apostles about the healing of the lame man, Peter says: "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well... And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10, 12). This statement, which was made to the Sanhedrin, has a universal value, since for all people-Jews and Gentiles alike - salvation can only come from Jesus Christ.

The universality of this salvation in Christ is asserted throughout the New Testament. St. Paul acknowledges the risen Christ as the Lord. He writes: "Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth - as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords' - yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:5-6). One God and one Lord are asserted by way of contrast to the multitude of "gods" and "lords" commonly accepted. Paul reacts against the polytheism of the religious environment of his time and emphasizes what is characteristic of the Christian faith: belief in one God and in one Lord sent by God.

In the Gospel of St. John, this salvific universality of Christ embraces all the aspects of his mission of grace, truth and revelation: the Word is "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9). And again, "no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (Jn 1:18; cf. Mt 11:27). God's revelation becomes definitive and complete through his only-begotten Son: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world" (Heb 1:1-2; cf. Jn 14:6). In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way. He has revealed to mankind who he is. This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself.

Christ is the one mediator between God and mankind: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (1 Tm 2:5-7; cf. Heb 4:14-16). No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ's one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey toward God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.

6. To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith. St. John clearly states that the Word, who "was in the beginning with God, " is the very one who "became flesh" (Jn 1:2, 14). Jesus is the Incarnate Word—a single and indivisible person. One cannot separate Jesus from the Christ or speak of a "Jesus of history" who would differ from the "Christ of faith." The Church acknowledges and confesses Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16): Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth: he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all. In Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9) and "from his fullness have we all received" (Jn 1:16). The "only Son, who is the bosom of the Father" (Jn 1:18) is "the beloved Son, in whom we have redemption.... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross" (Col 1:13-14, 19-20). It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's center and goal:⁷ "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rv 22:13).

Thus, although it is legitimate and helpful to consider the various aspects of the mystery of Christ, we must never lose sight of its unity. In the process of discovering and appreciating the manifold gifts—especially the spiritual treasures—that God has bestowed on every people, we cannot separate those gifts from Jesus Christ, who is at the center of God's plan of salvation. Just as "by his incarnation the Son of God united himself in some sense with every human being, " so too "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God."⁸ God's plan is "to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10).

Faith in Christ Is Directed to Man's Freedom

7. The urgency of missionary activity derives from the radical newness of life brought by Christ and lived by his followers. This new life is a gift from God, and people are asked to accept and develop it, if they wish to realize the fullness of their vocation in conformity to Christ. The whole New Testament is a hymn to the new life of those who believe in Christ and live in his Church. Salvation in Christ, as witnessed to and proclaimed by the Church, is God's self-communication: "It is love which not only creates the good, but also grants participation in the very life of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For he who loves desires to give himself."⁹

God offers mankind this newness of life. "Can one reject Christ and everything that he has brought about in the history of mankind? Of course one can. Man is free. He can say 'no' to God. He can say 'no' to Christ. But the fundamental question remains: Is it legitimate to do this? And what would make it legitimate?"¹⁰

8. In the modern world there is a tendency to reduce man to his horizontal dimension alone. But without an openness to the Absolute, what does man become? The answer to this question is found in the experience of every individual, but it is also written in the history of humanity with the blood shed in the name of ideologies or by political regimes which have sought to build a "new humanity" without God.¹¹

Moreover, the Second Vatican Council replies to those concerned with safeguarding freedom of conscience: "The human person has a right to religious freedom.... All should have such immunity from coercion by individuals, or by groups, or by any human power, that no one should be forced to act against his conscience in religious matters, nor prevented from acting according to his conscience, whether in private or in public, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits."¹²

Proclaiming Christ and bearing witness to him, when done in a way that respects consciences, does not violate freedom. Faith demands a free adherence on the part of man, but at the same time faith must also be offered to him, because the "multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ—riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth.... This is why the Church keeps her missionary spirit alive, and even wishes to intensify it in the moment of history in which we are living."¹³ But it must also be stated, again with the Council, that "in accordance with their dignity as persons, equipped with reason and free will and endowed with personal responsibility, all are impelled by their own nature and are bound by a moral obligation to seek truth, above all religious truth. They are further bound to hold to the truth once it is known, and to regulate their whole lives by its demands."¹⁴

The Church As Sign and Instrument of Salvation

9. The first beneficiary of salvation is the Church. Christ won the Church for himself at the price of his own blood and made the Church his co-worker in the salvation of the world. Indeed, Christ dwells within the Church. She is his Bride. It is he who causes her to grow. He carries out his mission through her.

The Council makes frequent reference to the Church's role in the salvation of mankind. While acknowledging that God loves all people and grants them the possibility of being saved (cf. 1 Tm 2:4),¹⁵ the Church believes that God has established Christ as the one mediator and that she herself has been established as the universal sacrament of salvation.¹⁶ "To this catholic unity of the people of God, therefore,...all are called, and they belong to it or are ordered to it in various ways, whether they be Catholic faithful or others who believe in Christ or finally all people everywhere who by

the grace of God are called to salvation."17 It is necessary to keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for salvation. Both these truths help us to understand the one mystery of salvation, so that we can come to know God's mercy and our own responsibility. Salvation, which always remains a gift of the Holy Spirit, requires man's cooperation, both to save himself and to save others. This is God's will, and this is why he established the Church and made her a part of his plan of salvation. Referring to "this messianic people, " the Council says; "It has been set up by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth; by him too it is taken up as the instrument of salvation for all, and sent on a mission to the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth."18

Salvation in Christ Is Offered to All

10. The universality of salvation means that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church. Since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all. But it is clear that today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his Sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. It enables each person to attain salvation through his or her free cooperation.

For this reason the Council, after affirming the centrality of the Paschal Mystery, went on to declare that "this applies not only to Christians but to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work. Since Christ died for everyone, and since the ultimate calling of each of us comes from God and is therefore a universal one, we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God."19

"We cannot but speak" (Acts 4:20)

11. What then should be said of the objections already mentioned regarding the mission ad gentes? While respecting the beliefs and sensitivities of all, we must first clearly affirm our faith in Christ, the one Savior of mankind, a faith we have received as a gift from on high, not as a result of any merit of our own. We say with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom 1:16). Christian martyrs of all times - including our own - have given and continue to give their lives in order to bear witness to this faith, in the conviction that every human being needs Jesus Christ, who has conquered sin and death and reconciled mankind to God.

Confirming his words by miracles and by his resurrection from the dead, Christ proclaimed himself to be the Son of God dwelling in intimate union with the Father, and was recognized as such by his disciples. The Church offers mankind the Gospel, that prophetic message which responds to the needs and aspirations of the human heart and always remains "Good News." The Church cannot fail to proclaim that Jesus came to reveal the face of God and to merit salvation for all humanity by his cross and resurrection.

To the question, "why mission?" we reply with the Church's faith and experience that true liberation consists in opening oneself to the love of Christ. In him, and only in him, are we set free from all alienation and doubt, from slavery to the power of sin and death. Christ is truly "our peace" (Eph 2:14); "the love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14), giving meaning and joy to our life. Mission is an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us.

The temptation today is to reduce Christianity to merely human wisdom, a pseudo-science of well-being. In our heavily secularized world a "gradual secularization of salvation" has taken place, so that people strive for the good of man, but man who is truncated, reduced to his merely horizontal dimension. We know, however, that Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person and all mankind, and opens up the wondrous prospect of divine filiation. Why mission? Because to us, as to St. Paul, "this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). Newness of life in him is the "Good News" for men and women of every age: all are called to it and destined for it. Indeed, all people are searching for it, albeit at times in a confused way, and have a right to know the value of this gift and to approach it freely. The Church, and every individual Christian within her, may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God's bounty in order to be communicated to all mankind.

This is why the Church's mission derives not only from the Lord's mandate but also from the profound demands of God's life within us. Those who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God. They should be ever mindful that "they owe their distinguished status not to their own merits but to Christ's special grace; and if they fail to respond to this grace in thought, word and deed, not only will they not be saved, they will be judged more severely."20

CHAPTER II - THE KINGDOM OF GOD

12. "It is 'God, who is rich in mercy' whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father: it is his very Son who, in himself, has manifested him and made him known to us."²¹ I wrote this at the beginning of my Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, to show that Christ is the revelation and incarnation of the Father's mercy. Salvation consists in believing and accepting the mystery of the Father and of his love, made manifest and freely given in Jesus through the Spirit. In this way the kingdom of God comes to be fulfilled: the kingdom prepared for in the Old Testament, brought about by Christ and in Christ, and proclaimed to all peoples by the Church, which works and prays for its perfect and definitive realization.

The Old Testament attests that God chose and formed a people for himself, in order to reveal and carry out his loving plan. But at the same time God is the Creator and Father of all people; he cares and provides for them, extending his blessing to all (cf. Gn 12:3); he has established a covenant with all of them (cf. Gn 9:1-17). Israel experiences a personal and saving God (cf. Dt 4:37; 7:6-8; Is 43:1-7) and becomes his witness and interpreter among the nations. In the course of her history, Israel comes to realize that her election has a universal meaning (cf. for example Is 2:2-5; 25:6-8; 60:1-6; Jer 3:17; 16:19).

Christ Makes the Kingdom Present

13. Jesus of Nazareth brings God's plan to fulfillment. After receiving the Holy Spirit at his Baptism, Jesus makes clear his messianic calling: he goes about Galilee "preaching the Gospel of God and saying: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel'" (Mk 1:14-15; cf. Mt 4:17; Lk 4:43). The proclamation and establishment of God's kingdom are the purpose of his mission: "I was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4:43). But that is not all. Jesus himself is the "Good News," as he declares at the very beginning of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he applies to himself the words of Isaiah about the Anointed One sent by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. Lk 4:14-21). Since the "Good News" is Christ, there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing and being. His power, the secret of the effectiveness of his actions, lies in his total identification with the message he announces; he proclaims the "Good News" not just by what he says or does, but by what he is.

The ministry of Jesus is described in the context of his journeys within his homeland. Before Easter, the scope of his mission was focused on Israel. Nevertheless, Jesus offers a new element of extreme importance. The eschatological reality is not relegated to a remote "end of the world," but is already close and at work in our midst. The kingdom of God is at hand (cf. Mk 1:15); its coming is to be prayed for (cf. Mt 6:10); faith can glimpse it already at work in signs such as miracles (cf. Mt 11:4-5) and exorcisms (cf. Mt 12:25-28), in the choosing of the Twelve (cf. Mk 3:13-19), and in the proclamation of the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18). Jesus' encounters with Gentiles make it clear that entry into the kingdom comes through faith and conversion (cf. Mk 1:15), and not merely by reason of ethnic background.

The kingdom which Jesus inaugurates is the kingdom of God. Jesus himself reveals who this God is, the One whom he addresses by the intimate term "Abba," Father (cf. Mk 14:36). God, as revealed above all in the parables (cf. Lk 15:3-32; Mt 20:1-16), is sensitive to the needs and sufferings of every human being: he is a Father filled with love and compassion, who grants forgiveness and freely bestows the favors asked of him.

St. John tells us that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). Every person therefore is invited to "repent" and to "believe" in God's merciful love. The kingdom will grow insofar as every person learns to turn to God in the intimacy of prayer as to a Father (cf. Lk 11:2; Mt 23:9) and strives to do his will (cf. Mt 7:21).

Characteristics of the Kingdom and Its Demands

14. Jesus gradually reveals the characteristics and demands of the kingdom through his words, his actions and his own person.

The kingdom of God is meant for all mankind, and all people are called to become members of it. To emphasize this fact, Jesus drew especially near to those on the margins of society, and showed them special favor in announcing the Good News. At the beginning of his ministry he proclaimed that he was "anointed... to preach good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). To all who are victims of rejection and contempt Jesus declares: "Blessed are you poor" (Lk 6:20). What is more, he enables such individuals to experience liberation even now, by being close to them, going to eat in their homes (cf. Lk 5:30; 15:2), treating them as equals and friends (cf. Lk 7:34), and making them feel loved by God, thus revealing his tender care for the needy and for sinners (cf. Lk 15:1-32).

The liberation and salvation brought by the kingdom of God come to the human person both in his physical and spiritual dimensions. Two gestures are characteristic of Jesus' mission: healing and forgiving. Jesus' many healings clearly show his great compassion in the face of human distress, but they also signify that in the kingdom there will no longer be sickness or suffering, and that his mission, from the very beginning, is meant to free people from these evils. In Jesus' eyes, healings are also a sign of spiritual salvation, namely liberation from sin. By performing acts of healing, he invites people to faith, conversion and the desire for forgiveness (cf. Lk 5:24). Once there is faith, healing is an encouragement to go further: it leads to salvation (cf. Lk 18:42-43). The acts of liberation from demonic possession—the

supreme evil and symbol of sin and rebellion against God-are signs that indeed "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:28).

15. The kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another. Jesus sums up the whole Law, focusing it on the commandment of love (cf. Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28). Before leaving his disciples, he gives them a "new commandment": "Love one another; even as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34; cf. 15:12). Jesus' love for the world finds its highest expression in the gift of his life for mankind (cf. Jn 15:13), which manifests the love which the Father has for the world (cf. Jn 3:16). The kingdom's nature, therefore, is one of communion among all human beings-with one another and with God.

The kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness.

In the Risen Christ God's Kingdom Is Fulfilled and Proclaimed

16. By raising Jesus from the dead, God has conquered death, and in Jesus he has definitely inaugurated his kingdom. During his earthly life, Jesus was the Prophet of the kingdom; after his passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven he shares in God's power and in his dominion over the world (cf. Mt 28:18; Acts 2:36; Eph 1:18-21). The resurrection gives a universal scope to Christ's message, his actions and whole mission. The disciples recognize that the kingdom is already present in the person of Jesus and is slowly being established within man and the world through a mysterious connection with him.

Indeed, after the resurrection, the disciples preach the kingdom by proclaiming Jesus crucified and risen from the dead. In Samaria, Philip "preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). In Rome, we find Paul "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31). The first Christians also proclaim "the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5; cf. Rev 11:15; 12:10), or "the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pt 1:11). The preaching of the early Church was centered on the proclamation of Jesus Christ, with whom the kingdom was identified. Now, as then, there is a need to unite the proclamation of the kingdom of God (the content of Jesus' own "kerygma") and the proclamation of the Christ-event (the "kerygma" of the apostles). The two proclamations are complementary; each throws light on the other.

The Kingdom in Relation to Christ and the Church

17. Nowadays the kingdom is much spoken of, but not always in a way consonant with the thinking of the Church. In fact, there are ideas about salvation and mission which can be called "anthropocentric" in the reductive sense of the word, inasmuch as they are focused on man's earthly needs. In this view, the kingdom tends to become something completely human and secularized; what counts are programs and struggles for a liberation which is socio-economic, political and even cultural, but within a horizon that is closed to the transcendent. Without denying that on this level there are values to be promoted, such a notion nevertheless remains within the confines of a kingdom of man, deprived of its authentic and profound dimensions. Such a view easily translates into one more ideology of purely earthly progress. The kingdom of God, however, "is not of this world...is not from the world" (Jn 18:36).

There are also conceptions which deliberately emphasize the kingdom and which describe themselves as "kingdom-centered." They stress the image of a Church which is not concerned about herself, but which is totally concerned with bearing witness to and serving the kingdom. It is a "Church for others" just as Christ is the "man for others." The Church's task is described as though it had to proceed in two directions: on the one hand promoting such "values of the kingdom" as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood, etc., while on the other hand fostering dialogue between peoples, cultures and religions, so that through a mutual enrichment they might help the world to be renewed and to journey ever closer toward the kingdom.

Together with positive aspects, these conceptions often reveal negative aspects as well. First, they are silent about Christ: the kingdom of which they speak is "theocentrically" based, since, according to them, Christ cannot be understood by those who lack Christian faith, whereas different peoples, cultures and religions are capable of finding common ground in the one divine reality, by whatever name it is called. For the same reason they put great stress on the mystery of creation, which is reflected in the diversity of cultures and beliefs, but they keep silent about the mystery of redemption. Furthermore, the kingdom, as they understand it, ends up either leaving very little room for the Church or undervaluing the Church in reaction to a presumed "ecclesiocentrism" of the past, and because they consider the Church herself only a sign, for that matter a sign not without ambiguity.

18. This is not the kingdom of God as we know it from Revelation. The kingdom cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church.

As has already been said, Christ not only proclaimed the kingdom, but in him the kingdom itself became present and was fulfilled. This happened not only through his words and his deeds: "Above all,...the kingdom is made manifest in the very person of Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, who came 'to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many'

(Mk 10:45).²² The kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but it is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God.²³ If the kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed. The result is a distortion of the meaning of the kingdom, which runs the risk of being transformed into a purely human or ideological goal, and a distortion of the identity of Christ, who no longer appears as the Lord to whom everything must one day be subjected (cf. 1 Cor 15:27).

Likewise, one may not separate the kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered toward the kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both. Christ endowed the Church, his body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in her, enlivens her with his gifts and charisms, sanctifies, guides and constantly renews her.²⁴ The result is a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role; hence the Church's special connection with the kingdom of God and of Christ, which she has "the mission of announcing and inaugurating among all peoples."²⁵

19. It is within this overall perspective that the reality of the kingdom is understood. Certainly, the kingdom demands the promotion of human values, as well as those which can properly be called "evangelical," since they are intimately bound up with the "Good News." But this sort of promotion, which is at the heart of the Church, must not be detached from or opposed to other fundamental tasks, such as proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, and establishing and building up communities which make present and active within mankind the living image of the kingdom. One need not fear falling thereby into a form of "ecclesiocentrism." Pope Paul VI, who affirmed the existence of "a profound link between Christ, the Church and evangelization,"²⁶ also said that the Church "is not an end unto herself, but rather is fervently concerned to be completely of Christ, in Christ and for Christ, as well as completely of men, among men and for men."²⁷

The Church at the Service of the Kingdom

20. The Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the kingdom. This is seen especially in her preaching, which is a call to conversion. Preaching constitutes the Church's first and fundamental way of serving the coming of the kingdom in individuals and in human society. Eschatological salvation begins even now in newness of life in Christ: "To all who believed in him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

The Church, then, serves the kingdom by establishing communities and founding new particular churches, and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness toward others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institutions.

The Church serves the kingdom by spreading throughout the world the "gospel values" which are an expression of the kingdom and which help people to accept God's plan. It is true that the inchoate reality of the kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live "gospel values" and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8). But it must immediately be added that this temporal dimension of the kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fullness.²⁸

The many dimensions of the kingdom of God²⁹ do not weaken the foundations and purposes of missionary activity, but rather strengthen and extend them. The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all mankind, and her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message. She is a dynamic force in mankind's

journey toward the eschatological kingdom, and is the sign and promoter of gospel values.³⁰ The Church contributes to mankind's pilgrimage of conversion to God's plan through her witness and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children. In carrying on these activities, however, she never loses sight of the priority of the transcendent and spiritual realities which are premises of eschatological salvation.

Finally, the Church serves the kingdom by her intercession, since the kingdom by its very nature is God's gift and work, as we are reminded by the gospel parables and by the prayer which Jesus taught us. We must ask for the kingdom, welcome it and make it grow within us; but we must also work together so that it will be welcomed and will grow among all people, until the time when Christ "delivers the kingdom to God the Father" and "God will be everything to everyone" (cf. 1 Cor 15:24, 28).

CHAPTER III - THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE PRINCIPAL AGENT OF MISSION

21. "At the climax of Jesus' messianic mission, the Holy Spirit becomes present in the Paschal Mystery in all of his divine subjectivity: as the one who is now to continue the salvific work rooted in the sacrifice of the cross. Of course Jesus entrusts this work to human beings: to the apostles, to the Church. Nevertheless, in and through them the Holy Spirit remains the transcendent and principal agent for the accomplishment of this work in the human spirit and in the history of the world."³¹

The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission. His action is preeminent in the mission *ad gentes*, as can clearly be seen in the early Church: in the conversion of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10), in the decisions made about emerging problems (cf. Acts 15) and in the choice of regions and peoples to be evangelized (cf. Acts 16:6ff). The Spirit worked through the apostles, but at the same time he was also at work in those who heard them: "Through his action the Good News takes shape in human minds and hearts and extends through history. In all of this it is the Holy Spirit who gives life."³²

Sent Forth "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

22.

All the Evangelists, when they describe the risen Christ's meeting with his apostles, conclude with the "missionary mandate": "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,...and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:18-20; cf. Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-23).

This is a sending forth in the Spirit, as is clearly apparent in the Gospel of John: Christ sends his own into the world, just as the Father has sent him, and to this end he gives them the Spirit. Luke, for his part, closely links the witness the apostles are to give to Christ with the working of the Spirit, who will enable them to fulfill the mandate they have received.

23.

The different versions of the "missionary mandate" contain common elements as well as characteristics proper to each. Two elements, however, are found in all the versions. First, there is the universal dimension of the task entrusted to the apostles, who are sent to "all nations" (Mt 28:19); "into all the world and...to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15); to "all nations" (Lk 24:47); "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Secondly, there is the assurance given to the apostles by the Lord that they will not be alone in the task, but will receive the strength and the means necessary to carry out their mission. The reference here is to the presence and power of the spirit and the help of Jesus himself: "And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them" (Mk 16:20).

As for the different emphases found in each version, Mark presents mission as proclamation or kerygma: "Preach the Gospel" (Mk 16:15). His aim is to lead his readers to repeat Peter's profession of faith: "You are the Christ" (Mk 8:29), and to say with the Roman centurion who stood before the body of Jesus on the cross: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39) In Matthew, the missionary emphasis is placed on the foundation of the Church and on her teaching (cf. Mt 28:19-20; 16:18). According to him, the mandate shows that the proclamation of the Gospel must be completed by a specific ecclesial and sacramental catechesis. In Luke, mission is presented as witness (cf. Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8), centered especially on the resurrection (cf. Acts 1:22). The missionary is invited to believe in the transforming power of the Gospel and to proclaim what Luke presents so well, that is, conversion to God's love and mercy, the experience of a complete liberation which goes to the root of all evil, namely sin.

John is the only Evangelist to speak explicitly of a "mandate," a word equivalent to "mission." He directly links the mission which Jesus entrusts to his disciples with the mission which he himself has received from the Father: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21). Addressing the Father, Jesus says: "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (Jn 17:18). The entire missionary sense of John's Gospel is expressed in the "priestly prayer": "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). The ultimate purpose of mission is to enable people to share in the communion which exists between the Father and the Son. The disciples are to live in unity with one another, remaining in the Father and the Son, so that the world may know and believe (cf. Jn 17:21-23). This is a very important missionary text. It makes us understand that we are missionaries above all because of what we are as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries in word or deed.

The four Gospels therefore bear witness to a certain pluralism within the fundamental unity of the same mission, a pluralism which reflects different experiences and situations within the first Christian communities. It is also the result of the driving force of the Spirit himself; it encourages us to pay heed to the variety or missionary charisms and to the diversity of circumstances and peoples. Nevertheless, all the Evangelists stress that the mission of the disciples is to cooperate in the mission of Christ; "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). Mission, then, is based not on human abilities but on the power of the risen Lord.

The Spirit Directs the Church's Mission

24. The mission of the Church, like that of Jesus, is God's work or, as Luke often puts it, the work of the Spirit. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the apostles have a powerful experience which completely transforms them: the experience of Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit makes them witnesses and prophets (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:17-18). It fills them with a serene courage which impels them to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope which motivates them. The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus with "boldness."³³ When the first evangelizers go down from Jerusalem, the Spirit becomes even more of a "guide," helping them to choose both those to whom they are to go and the places to which their missionary journey is to take them. The working of the Spirit is

manifested particularly in the impetus given to the mission which, in accordance with Christ's words, spreads out from Jerusalem to all of Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest ends of the earth.

The Acts of the Apostles records six summaries of the "missionary discourses" which were addressed to the Jews during the Church's infancy (cf. Acts 2:22-39; 3:12-26; 4:9-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41). These model speeches, delivered by Peter and by Paul, proclaim Jesus and invite those listening to "be converted," that is, to accept Jesus in faith and to let themselves be transformed in him by the Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas are impelled by the Spirit to go to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:46-48), a development not without certain tensions and problems. How are these converted Gentiles to live their faith in Jesus? Are they bound by the traditions of Judaism and the law of circumcision? At the first Council, which gathers the members of the different churches together with the apostles in Jerusalem, a decision is taken which is acknowledged as coming from the Spirit: it is not necessary for a Gentile to submit to the Jewish Law in order to become a Christian (cf. Acts 15:5-11, 28). From now on the Church opens her doors and becomes the house which all may enter, and in which all can feel at home, while keeping their own culture and traditions, provided that these are not contrary to the Gospel.

25. The missionaries continued along this path, taking into account people's hopes and expectations, their anguish and sufferings, as well as their culture, in order to proclaim to them salvation in Christ. The speeches in Lystra and Athens (cf. Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31) are acknowledged as models for the evangelization of the Gentiles. In these speeches Paul enters into "dialogue" with the cultural and religious values of different peoples. To the Lycaonians, who practiced a cosmic religion, he speaks of religious experiences related to the cosmos. With the Greeks he discusses philosophy and quotes their own poets (cf. Acts 17:18, 26-28). The God whom Paul wishes to reveal is already present in their lives; indeed, this God has created them and mysteriously guides nations and history. But if they are to recognize the true God, they must abandon the false gods which they themselves have made and open themselves to the One whom God has sent to remedy their ignorance and satisfy the longings of their hearts. These are speeches which offer an example of the inculturation of the Gospel.

Under the impulse of the Spirit, the Christian faith is decisively opened to the "nations." Witness to Christ spreads to the most important centers of the eastern Mediterranean and then to Rome and the far regions of the West. It is the Spirit who is the source of the drive to press on, not only geographically but also beyond the frontiers of race and religion, for a truly universal mission.

The Holy Spirit Makes the Whole Church Missionary

26. The Spirit leads the company of believers to "form a community," to be the Church. After Peter's first proclamation on the day of Pentecost and the conversions that followed, the first community takes shape (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). One of the central purposes of mission is to bring people together in hearing the Gospel, in fraternal communion, in prayer and in the Eucharist. To live in "fraternal communion" (koinonia) means to be "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32), establishing fellowship from every point of view: human, spiritual and material. Indeed, a true Christian community is also committed to distributing earthly goods, so that no one is in want, and all can receive such goods "as they need" (cf. Acts 2:45; 4:35). The first communities, made up of "glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46), were open and missionary: they enjoyed "favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47). Even before activity, mission means witness and a way of life that shines out to others.³⁴

27. The Acts of the Apostles indicates that the mission which was directed first to Israel and then to the Gentiles develops on many levels. First and foremost, there is the group of the Twelve which as a single body, led by Peter, proclaims the Good News. Then there is the community of believers, which in its way of life and its activity bears witness to the Lord and converts the Gentiles (cf. Acts 2:46-47). Then there are the special envoys sent out to proclaim the Gospel. Thus the Christian community at Antioch sends its members forth on mission; having fasted, prayed and celebrated the Eucharist, the community recognizes that the Spirit has chosen Paul and Barnabas to be "sent forth" (cf. Acts 13:1-4). In its origins, then, mission is seen as a community commitment, a responsibility of the local church, which needs "missionaries" in order to push forward toward new frontiers. Side by side with those who had been sent forth, there were also others, who bore spontaneous witness to the newness which had transformed their lives, and who subsequently provided a link between the emerging communities and the Apostolic Church.

Reading the Acts of the Apostles helps us to realize that at the beginning of the Church the mission ad gentes, while it had missionaries dedicated "for life" by a special vocation, was in fact considered the normal outcome of Christian living, to which every believer was committed through the witness of personal conduct and through explicit proclamation whenever possible.

The Spirit Is Present and Active in Every Time and Place

28. The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time.³⁵ The Second Vatican Council recalls that the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the "seeds of the Word," to be found in human initiatives-including religious ones-and in mankind's efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself.³⁶

The Spirit offers the human race "the light and strength to respond to its highest calling"; through the Spirit, "mankind attains in faith to the contemplation and savoring of the mystery of God's design"; indeed, "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God."³⁷ The Church "is aware that humanity is being continually stirred by the Spirit of God and can therefore never be completely indifferent to the problems of religion" and that "people will always...want to know what meaning to give their life, their activity and their death."³⁸ The Spirit, therefore, is at the very source of man's existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of his being.³⁹

The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: "The Spirit of God with marvelous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth."⁴⁰ The risen Christ "is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit, not only instilling a desire for the world to come but also thereby animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end."⁴¹ Again, it is the Spirit who sows the "seeds of the Word" present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ.⁴² Thus the Spirit, who "blows where he wills" (cf. Jn 3:8), who "was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified,"⁴³ and who "has filled the world,...holds all things together [and] knows what is said" (Wis 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place.⁴⁴ I

have repeatedly called this fact to mind, and it has guided me in my meetings with a wide variety of peoples. The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: "Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man."⁴⁵ Excluding any mistaken interpretation, the interreligious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that "every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart."⁴⁶

This is the same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel⁴⁷ and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit" so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things."⁴⁸

Moreover, the universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the body of Christ, which is the Church. Indeed, it is always the Spirit who is at work, both when he gives life to the Church and impels her to proclaim Christ, and when he implants and develops his gifts in all individuals and peoples, guiding the Church to discover these gifts, to foster them and to receive them through dialogue. Every form of the Spirit's presence is to be welcomed with respect and gratitude, but the discernment of this presence is the responsibility of the Church, to which Christ gave his Spirit in order to guide her into all the truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

Missionary Activity Is Only Beginning

30. Our own time, with humanity on the move and in continual search, demands a resurgence of the Church's missionary activity. The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing ever wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit. He is the principal agent of mission!

The history of humanity has known many major turning points which have encouraged missionary outreach, and the Church, guided by the Spirit, has always responded to them with generosity and farsightedness. Results have not been lacking. Not long ago we celebrated the millennium of the evangelization of Rus' and the Slav peoples, and we are now preparing to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the evangelization of the Americas. Similarly, there have been recent commemorations of the centenaries of the first missions in various countries of Asia, Africa and Oceania. Today the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission *ad gentes* and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed. Today all Christians, the particular churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit.

CHAPTER IV - THE VAST HORIZONS OF THE MISSION AD GENTES

31. The Lord Jesus sent his apostles to every person, people and place on earth. In the apostles, the Church received a universal mission—one which knows no boundaries—which involves the communication of salvation in its integrity according to that fullness of life which Christ came to bring (cf. Jn 10:10). The Church was "sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all people and nations."⁴⁹

This mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity. First, there is the missionary activity which we call mission *ad gentes*, in reference to the opening words of the Council's decree on this subject. This is one of the Church's fundamental activities: it is essential and

never-ending. The Church, in fact, "cannot withdraw from her permanent mission of bringing the Gospel to the multitudes the millions and millions of men and women-who as yet do not know Christ the Redeemer of humanity. In a specific way this is the missionary work which Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church."⁵⁰

A Complex and Ever Changing Religious Picture

32. Today we face a religious situation which is extremely varied and changing. Peoples are on the move; social and religious realities which were once clear and well defined are today increasingly complex. We need only think of certain phenomena such as urbanization, mass migration, the flood of refugees, the de-Christianization of countries with ancient Christian traditions, the increasing influence of the Gospel and its values in overwhelmingly non-Christian countries, and the proliferation of messianic cults and religious sects. Religious and social upheaval makes it difficult to apply in practice certain ecclesial distinctions and categories to which we have become accustomed. Even before the Council it was said that some Christian cities and countries had become "mission territories"; the situation has certainly not improved in the years since then.

On the other hand, missionary work has been very fruitful throughout the world, so that there are now well-established churches, sometimes so sound and mature that they are able to provide for the needs of their own communities and even send personnel to evangelize in other churches and territories. This is in contrast to some traditionally Christian areas which are in need of re-evangelization. As a result, some are questioning whether it is still appropriate to speak of specific missionary activity or specifically "missionary" areas, or whether we should speak instead of a single missionary situation, with one single mission, the same everywhere. The difficulty of relating this complex and changing reality to the mandate of evangelization is apparent in the "language of mission." For example, there is a certain hesitation to use the terms "mission" and "missionaries," which are considered obsolete and as having negative historical connotations. People prefer to use instead the noun "mission" in the singular and the adjective "missionary" to describe all the Church's activities.

This uneasiness denotes a real change, one which has certain positive aspects. The so-called return or "repatriation" of the missions into the Church's mission, the insertion of missiology into ecclesiology, and the integration of both areas into the Trinitarian plan of salvation, have given a fresh impetus to missionary activity itself, which is not considered a marginal task for the Church but is situated at the center of her life, as a fundamental commitment of the whole People of God. Nevertheless, care must be taken to avoid the risk of putting very different situations on the same level and of reducing, or even eliminating, the Church's mission and missionaries *ad gentes*. To say that the whole Church is missionary does not preclude the existence of a specific mission *ad gentes*, just as saying that all Catholics must be missionaries not only does not exclude, but actually requires that there be persons who have a specific vocation to be "life-long missionaries *ad gentes*."

Mission *Ad Gentes* Retains Its Value

33. The fact that there is a diversity of activities in the Church's one mission is not intrinsic to that mission, but arises from the variety of circumstances in which that mission is carried out. ⁵¹ Looking at today's world from the viewpoint of evangelization, we can distinguish three situations.

First, there is the situation which the Church's missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term.⁵²

Secondly, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. In these communities the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care.

Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization."

34. Missionary activity proper, namely the mission *ad gentes*, is directed to "peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ," "who are far from Christ," in whom the Church "has not yet taken root"⁵³ and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel.⁵⁴ It is distinct from other ecclesial activities inasmuch as it is addressed to groups and settings which are non-Christian because the preaching of the Gospel and the presence of the Church are either absent or insufficient. It can thus be characterized as the work of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building up the local Church and promoting the values of the kingdom. The specific nature of this mission *ad gentes* consists in its being addressed to "non-Christians." It is therefore necessary to ensure that this specifically "missionary work that Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church"⁵⁵ does not become an indistinguishable part of the overall mission of the whole People of God and as a result become neglected or forgotten.

On the other hand, the boundaries between pastoral care of the faithful, new evangelization and specific missionary activity are not clearly definable, and it is unthinkable to create barriers between them or to put them into watertight compartments. Nevertheless, there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel and to establish new churches among peoples or communities where they do not yet exist, for this is the first task of the Church, which has been sent forth to all peoples and to the very ends of the earth. Without the mission ad gentes, the Church's very missionary dimension would be deprived of its essential meaning and of the very activity that exemplifies it.

Also to be noted is the real and growing interdependence which exists between these various saving activities of the Church. Each of them influences, stimulates and assists the others. The missionary thrust fosters exchanges between the churches and directs them toward the larger world, with positive influences in every direction. The churches in traditionally Christian countries, for example, involved as they are in the challenging task of new evangelization, are coming to understand more clearly that they cannot be missionaries to non-Christians in other countries and continents unless they are seriously concerned about the non-Christians at home. Hence missionary activity ad intra is a credible sign and a stimulus for missionary activity ad extra, and vice versa.

To All Peoples, In Spite of Difficulties

35.

The mission ad gentes faces an enormous task, which is in no way disappearing. Indeed, both from the numerical standpoint of demographic increase and from the socio-cultural standpoint of the appearance of new relationships, contacts and changing situations the mission seems destined to have ever wider horizons. The task of proclaiming Jesus Christ to all peoples appears to be immense and out of all proportion to the Church's human resources.

The difficulties seem insurmountable and could easily lead to discouragement, if it were a question of a merely human enterprise. In certain countries missionaries are refused entry. In others, not only is evangelization forbidden but conversion as well, and even Christian worship. Elsewhere the obstacles are of a cultural nature: passing on the Gospel message seems irrelevant or incomprehensible, and conversion is seen as a rejection of one's own people and culture.

36.

Nor are difficulties lacking within the People of God; indeed these difficulties are the most painful of all. As the first of these difficulties Pope Paul VI pointed to "the lack of fervor [which] is all the more serious because it comes from within. It is manifested in fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope."⁵⁶ Other great obstacles to the Church's missionary work include past and present divisions among Christians, ⁵⁷ dechristianization within Christian countries, the decrease of vocations to the apostolate, and the counterwitness of believers and Christian communities failing to follow the model of Christ in their lives. But one of the most serious reasons for the lack of interest in the missionary task is a widespread indifferentism, which, sad to say, is found also among Christians. It is based on incorrect theological perspectives and is characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that "one religion is as good as another." We can add, using the words of Pope Paul VI, that there are also certain "excuses which would impede evangelization. The most insidious of these excuses are certainly the ones which people claim to find support for in such and such a teaching of the Council."⁵⁸

In this regard, I earnestly ask theologians and professional Christian journalists to intensify the service they render to the Church's mission in order to discover the deep meaning of their work, along the sure path of "thinking with the Church" (*sentire cum Ecclesia*).

Internal and external difficulties must not make us pessimistic or inactive. What counts, here as in every area of Christian life, is the confidence that comes from faith, from the certainty that it is not we who are the principal agents of the Church's mission, but Jesus Christ and his Spirit. We are only co-workers, and when we have done all that we can, we must say: "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Lk 17:10).

Parameters of the Church's Mission Ad Gentes

37. By virtue of Christ's universal mandate, the mission ad gentes knows no boundaries. Still, it is possible to determine certain parameters within which that mission is exercised, in order to gain a real grasp of the situation.

(a) Territorial limits.

Missionary activity has normally been defined in terms of specific territories. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged the territorial dimension of the mission ad gentes, ⁵⁹ a dimension which even today remains important for determining responsibilities, competencies and the geographical limits of missionary activity. Certainly, a universal mission implies a universal perspective. Indeed, the Church refuses to allow her missionary presence to be hindered by geographical boundaries or political barriers. But it is also true that missionary activity ad gentes, being different from the pastoral care of the faithful and the new evangelization of the non-practicing, is exercised within well-defined territories and groups of people.

The growth in the number of new churches in recent times should not deceive us. Within the territories entrusted to these churches - particularly in Asia, but also in Africa, Latin America and Oceania - there remain vast regions still to be evangelized. In many nations entire peoples and cultural areas of great importance have not yet been reached by the

proclamation of the Gospel and the presence of the local church.⁶⁰ Even in traditionally Christian countries there are regions that are under the special structures of the mission ad gentes, with groups and areas not yet evangelized. Thus, in these countries too there is a need not only for a new evangelization, but also, in some cases, for an initial evangelization.⁶¹

Situations are not, however, the same everywhere. While acknowledging that statements about the missionary responsibility of the Church are not credible unless they are backed up by a serious commitment to a new evangelization in the traditionally Christian countries, it does not seem justified to regard as identical the situation of a people which has never known Jesus Christ and that of a people which has known him, accepted him and then rejected him, while continuing to live in a culture which in large part has absorbed gospel principles and values. These are two basically different situations with regard to the faith.

Thus the criterion of geography, although somewhat imprecise and always provisional, is still a valid indicator of the frontiers toward which missionary activity must be directed. There are countries and geographical and cultural areas which lack indigenous Christian communities. In other places, these communities are so small as not to be a clear sign of a Christian presence; or they lack the dynamism to evangelize their societies, or belong to a minority population not integrated into the dominant culture of the nation. Particularly in Asia, toward which the Church's mission ad gentes ought to be chiefly directed, Christians are a small minority, even though sometimes there are significant numbers of converts and outstanding examples of Christian presence.

(b) New worlds and new social phenomena.

The rapid and profound transformations which characterize today's world, especially in the southern hemisphere, are having a powerful effect on the overall missionary picture. Where before there were stable human and social situations, today everything is in flux. One thinks, for example, of urbanization and the massive growth of cities, especially where demographic pressure is greatest. In not a few countries, over half the population already lives in a few "megalopolises," where human problems are often aggravated by the feeling of anonymity experienced by masses of people.

In the modern age, missionary activity has been carried out especially in isolated regions which are far from centers of civilization and which are hard to penetrate because of difficulties of communication, language or climate. Today the image of mission ad gentes is perhaps changing: efforts should be concentrated on the big cities, where new customs and styles of living arise together with new forms of culture and communication, which then influence the wider population. It is true that the "option for the neediest" means that we should not overlook the most abandoned and isolated human groups, but it is also true that individual or small groups cannot be evangelized if we neglect the centers where a new humanity, so to speak, is emerging, and where new models of development are taking shape. The future of the younger nations is being shaped in the cities.

Speaking of the future, we cannot forget the young, who in many countries comprise more than half the population. How do we bring the message of Christ to non-Christian young people who represent the future of entire continents? Clearly, the ordinary means of pastoral work are not sufficient: what are needed are associations, institutions, special centers and groups, and cultural and social initiatives for young people. This is a field where modern ecclesial movements have ample room for involvement.

Among the great changes taking place in the contemporary world, migration has produced a new phenomenon: non-Christians are becoming very numerous in traditionally Christian countries, creating fresh opportunities for contacts and cultural exchanges, and calling the Church to hospitality, dialogue, assistance and, in a word, fraternity. Among migrants, refugees occupy a very special place and deserve the greatest attention. Today there are many millions of refugees in the world and their number is constantly increasing. They have fled from conditions of political oppression and inhuman misery, from famine and drought of catastrophic proportions. The Church must make them part of her overall apostolic concern.

Finally, we may mention the situations of poverty - often on an intolerable scale - which have been created in not a few countries, and which are often the cause of mass migration. The community of believers in Christ is challenged by these inhuman situations: the proclamation of Christ and the kingdom of God must become the means for restoring the human dignity of these people.

(c) Cultural sectors: the modern equivalents of the Areopagus.

After preaching in a number of places, St. Paul arrived in Athens, where he went to the Areopagus and proclaimed the Gospel in language appropriate to and understandable in those surroundings (cf. Acts 17:22-31). At that time the Areopagus represented the cultural center of the learned people of Athens, and today it can be taken as a symbol of the new sectors in which the Gospel must be proclaimed.

The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a "global village." The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media. To some degree perhaps this Areopagus has been neglected. Generally, preference has been given to other means of preaching the Gospel and of Christian education, while the mass media are left to the initiative of individuals or small groups and enter into pastoral planning only in a secondary way. Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization

of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the "new culture" originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology. Pope Paul VI said that "the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time,"⁶² and the field of communications fully confirms this judgment.

There are many other forms of the "Areopagus" in the modern world toward which the Church's missionary activity ought to be directed; for example, commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities; the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world. These too are areas which need to be illuminated with the light of the Gospel.

We must also mention the immense "Areopagus" of culture, scientific research, and international relations which promote dialogue and open up new possibilities. We would do well to be attentive to these modern areas of activity and to be involved in them. People sense that they are, as it were, traveling together across life's sea, and that they are called to ever greater unity and solidarity. Solutions to pressing problems must be studied, discussed and worked out with the involvement of all. That is why international organizations and meetings are proving increasingly important in many sectors of human life, from culture to politics, from the economy to research. Christians who live and work in this international sphere must always remember their duty to bear witness to the Gospel.

38. Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization. This phenomenon—the so-called "religious revival"—is not without ambiguity, but it also represents an opportunity. The Church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer humankind, a heritage in Christ, who called himself "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6): it is the Christian path to meeting God, to prayer, to asceticism, and to the search for life's meaning. Here too there is an "Areopagus" to be evangelized.

Fidelity to Christ and the Promotion of Human Freedom

39. All forms of missionary activity are marked by an awareness that one is furthering human freedom by proclaiming Jesus Christ. The Church must be faithful to Christ, whose body she is, and whose mission she continues. She must necessarily "go the same road that Christ went—namely a road of poverty, obedience, service and self-sacrifice even unto death, from which he emerged a victor through his resurrection."⁶³ The Church is thus obliged to do everything possible to carry out her mission in the world and to reach all peoples. And she has the right to do this, a right given her by God for the accomplishment of his plan. Religious freedom, which is still at times limited or restricted, remains the premise and guarantee of all the freedoms that ensure the common good of individuals and peoples. It is to be hoped that authentic religious freedom will be granted to all people everywhere. The Church strives for this in all countries, especially in those with a Catholic majority, where she has greater influence. But it is not a question of the religion of the majority or the minority, but of an inalienable right of each and every human person.

On her part, the Church addresses people with full respect for their freedom.⁶⁴ Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. The Church proposes; she imposes nothing. She respects individuals and cultures, and she honors the sanctuary of conscience. To those who for various reasons oppose missionary activity, the Church repeats: Open the doors to Christ!

Here I wish to address all the particular churches, both young and old. The world is steadily growing more united, and the gospel spirit must lead us to overcome cultural and nationalistic barriers, avoiding all isolationism. Pope Benedict XV already cautioned the missionaries of his time lest they "forget their proper dignity and think more of their earthly homeland than of their heavenly one."⁶⁵ This same advice is valid today for the particular churches: Open the doors to missionaries, for "each individual church that would voluntarily cut itself off from the universal Church would lose its relationship to God's plan and would be impoverished in its ecclesial mission."⁶⁶

Directing Attention Toward the South and the East

40. Today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church. As the end of the second millennium of the redemption draws near, it is clear that the peoples who have not yet received an initial proclamation of Christ constitute the majority of mankind. The results of missionary activity in modern times are certainly positive. The Church has been established on every continent; indeed today the majority of believers and particular churches is to be found no longer in Europe but on the continents which missionaries have opened up to the faith.

The fact remains however that the "ends of the earth" to which the Gospel must be brought are growing ever more distant. Tertullian's saying, that the Gospel has been proclaimed to all the earth and to all peoples, ⁶⁷ is still very far from being a reality. The mission *ad gentes* is still in its infancy. New peoples appear on the world scene, and they too

have a right to receive the proclamation of salvation. Population growth in non-Christian countries of the South and the East is constantly increasing the number of people who remain unaware of Christ's redemption.

We need therefore to direct our attention toward those geographical areas and cultural settings which still remain uninfluenced by the Gospel. All who believe in Christ should feel, as an integral part of their faith, an apostolic concern to pass on to others its light and joy. This concern must become, as it were, a hunger and thirst to make the Lord known, given the vastness of the non-Christian world.

CHAPTER V - THE PATHS OF MISSION

41. "Missionary activity is nothing other and nothing less than the manifestation or epiphany of God's plan and its fulfillment in the world and in history; in this history God, by means of missions, clearly accomplishes the history of salvation."⁶⁸ What paths does the Church follow in order to achieve this goal? Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways. Among these ways, some have particular importance in the present situation of the Church and the world.

The First Form of Evangelization Is Witness

42. People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, ⁶⁹ in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ, whose mission we continue, is the "witness" par excellence (Rv 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Church along her way and associates her with the witness he gives to Christ (cf. Jn 15:26-27).

The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living. The missionary who, despite all his or her human limitations and defects, lives a simple life, taking Christ as the model, is a sign of God and of transcendent realities.

But everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness;⁷⁰ in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary.

The evangelical witness which the world finds most appealing is that of concern for people, and of charity toward the poor, the weak and those who suffer. The complete generosity underlying this attitude and these actions stands in marked contrast to human selfishness. It raises precise questions which lead to God and to the Gospel. A commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion is also a witness to the Gospel when it is a sign of concern for persons and is directed toward integral human development.⁷¹

43. Christians and Christian communities are very much a part of the life of their respective nations and can be a sign of the Gospel in their fidelity to their native land, people and national culture, while always preserving the freedom brought by Christ. Christianity is open to universal brotherhood, for all men and women are sons and daughters of the same Father and brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Church is called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of political or economic power; by not seeking her own glory and material wealth; by using her resources to serve the poorest of the poor and by imitating Christ's own simplicity of life. The Church and her missionaries must also bear the witness of humility, above all with regard to themselves—a humility which allows them to make a personal and communal examination of conscience in order to correct in their behavior whatever is contrary to the Gospel and disfigures the face of Christ.

The Initial Proclamation of Christ the Savior

44. Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the "Good News" about their being loved and saved by God. "Evangelization will always contain—as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism—a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy."⁷² All forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation, which reveals and gives access to the mystery hidden for ages and made known in Christ (cf. Eph 3:3-9; Col 1:25-29), the mystery which lies at the heart of the Church's mission and life, as the hinge on which all evangelization turns.

In the complex reality of mission, initial proclamation has a central and irreplaceable role, since it introduces man "into the mystery of the love of God, who invites him to enter into a personal relationship with himself in Christ"⁷³ and opens the way to conversion. Faith is born of preaching, and every ecclesial community draws its origin and life from the personal response of each believer to that preaching.⁷⁴ Just as the whole economy of salvation has its center in Christ, so too all missionary activity is directed to the proclamation of his mystery.

The subject of proclamation is Christ who was crucified, died and is risen: through him is accomplished our full and authentic liberation from evil, sin and death; through him God bestows "new life" that is divine and eternal. This is the "Good News" which changes man and his history, and which all peoples have a right to hear. This proclamation is to be made within the context of the lives of the individuals and peoples who receive it. It is to be made with an attitude of

love and esteem toward those who hear it, in language which is practical and adapted to the situation. In this proclamation the Spirit is at work and establishes a communion between the missionary and his hearers, a communion which is possible inasmuch as both enter into communion with God the Father through Christ.⁷⁵

45. Proclamation, because it is made in union with the entire ecclesial community, is never a merely personal act. The missionary is present and carries out his work by virtue of a mandate he has received; even if he finds himself alone, he remains joined by invisible but profound bonds to the evangelizing activity of the whole Church.⁷⁶ Sooner or later, his hearers come to recognize in him the community which sent him and which supports him.

Proclamation is inspired by faith, which gives rise to enthusiasm and fervor in the missionary. As already mentioned, the Acts of the Apostles uses the word *parrhesia* to describe this attitude, a word which means to speak frankly and with courage. This term is found also in St. Paul: "We had courage in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God in the face of great opposition" (1 Th 2:2); "Pray...also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph 6:18-20).

In proclaiming Christ to non-Christians, the missionary is convinced that, through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death. The missionary's enthusiasm in proclaiming Christ comes from the conviction that he is responding to that expectation, and so he does not become discouraged or cease his witness even when he is called to manifest his faith in an environment that is hostile or indifferent. He knows that the Spirit of the Father is speaking through him (cf. Mt 10:17-20; Lk 12:11-12) and he can say with the apostles: "We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:32). He knows that he is not proclaiming a human truth, but the "word of God," which has an intrinsic and mysterious power of its own (cf. Rom 1:16).

The supreme test is the giving of one's life, to the point of accepting death in order to bear witness to one's faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout Christian history, martyrs, that is, "witnesses," have always been numerous and indispensable to the spread of the Gospel. In our own age, there are many: bishops, priests, men and women religious, lay people—often unknown heroes who give their lives to bear witness to the faith. They are par excellence the heralds and witnesses of the faith.

Conversion and Baptism

46. The proclamation of the Word of God has Christian conversion as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith. Conversion is a gift of God, a work of the Blessed Trinity. It is the Spirit who opens people's hearts so that they can believe in Christ and "confess him" (cf. 1 Cor 12:3); of those who draw near to him through faith Jesus says: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn 6:44).

From the outset, conversion is expressed in faith which is total and radical, and which neither limits nor hinders God's gift. At the same time, it gives rise to a dynamic and lifelong process which demands a continual turning away from "life according to the flesh" to "life according to the Spirit" (cf. Rom 8:3-13). Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple.

The Church calls all people to this conversion, following the example of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ by "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4), as well as the example of Christ himself, who "after John was arrested,...came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God and saying: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel'" (Mk 1:14-15).

Nowadays the call to conversion which missionaries address to non-Christians is put into question or passed over in silence. It is seen as an act of "proselytizing"; it is claimed that it is enough to help people to become more human or more faithful to their own religion, that it is enough to build communities capable of working for justice, freedom, peace and solidarity. What is overlooked is that every person has the right to hear the "Good News" of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ, so that each one can live out in its fullness his or her proper calling. This lofty reality is expressed in the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God," and in the unconscious but ardent desire of the woman: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst" (Jn 4:10, 15).

47. The apostles, prompted by the Spirit, invited all to change their lives, to be converted and to be baptized. Immediately after the event of Pentecost, Peter spoke convincingly to the crowd: "When they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:37-38). That very day some three thousand persons were baptized. And again, after the healing of the lame man, Peter spoke to the crowd and repeated: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out!" (Acts 3:19)

Conversion to Christ is joined to Baptism not only because of the Church's practice, but also by the will of Christ himself, who sent the apostles to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them (cf. Mt 28:19). Conversion is also joined to Baptism because of the intrinsic need to receive the fullness of new life in Christ. As Jesus says to Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). In Baptism, in fact, we are born anew to the life of God's children, united to Jesus Christ and anointed in the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not simply a seal of conversion, and a kind of external sign indicating conversion and attesting

to it. Rather, it is the sacrament which signifies and effects rebirth from the Spirit, establishes real and unbreakable bonds with the Blessed Trinity, and makes us members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

All this needs to be said, since not a few people, precisely in those areas involved in the mission ad gentes, tend to separate conversion to Christ from Baptism, regarding Baptism as unnecessary. It is true that in some places sociological considerations associated with Baptism obscure its genuine meaning as an act of faith. This is due to a variety of historical and cultural factors which must be removed where they still exist, so that the sacrament of spiritual rebirth can be seen for what it truly is. Local ecclesial communities must devote themselves to this task. It is also true that many profess an interior commitment to Christ and his message yet do not wish to be committed sacramentally, since, owing to prejudice or because of the failings of Christians, they find it difficult to grasp the true nature of the Church as a mystery of faith and love.⁷⁷ I wish to encourage such people to be fully open to Christ, and to remind them that, if they feel drawn to Christ, it was he himself who desired that the Church should be the "place" where they would in fact find him. At the same time, I invite the Christian faithful, both individually and as communities, to bear authentic witness to Christ through the new life they have received.

Certainly, every convert is a gift to the Church and represents a serious responsibility for her, not only because converts have to be prepared for Baptism through the catechumenate and then be guided by religious instruction, but also because - especially in the case of adults-such converts bring with them a kind of new energy, an enthusiasm for the faith, and a desire to see the Gospel lived out in the Church. They would be greatly disappointed if, having entered the ecclesial community, they were to find a life lacking fervor and without signs of renewal! We cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted anew every day.

Forming Local Churches

48. Conversion and Baptism give entry into a Church already in existence or require the establishment of new communities which confess Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is part of God's plan, for it pleases him "to call human beings to share in his own life not merely as individuals, without any unifying bond between them, but rather to make them into a people in which his children, who had been widely scattered, might be gathered together in unity."⁷⁸

The mission ad gentes has this objective: to found Christian communities and develop churches to their full maturity. This is a central and determining goal of missionary activity, so much so that the mission is not completed until it succeeds in building a new particular church which functions normally in its local setting. The Decree Ad Gentes deals with this subject at length,⁷⁹ and since the Council, a line of theological reflection has developed which emphasizes that the whole mystery of the Church is contained in each particular church, provided it does not isolate itself but remains in communion with the universal Church and becomes missionary in its own turn. Here we are speaking of a great and lengthy process, in which it is hard to identify the precise stage at which missionary activity properly so-called comes to an end and is replaced by pastoral activity. Even so, certain points must remain clear.

49. It is necessary first and foremost to strive to establish Christian communities everywhere, communities which are "a sign of the presence of God in the world"⁸⁰ and which grow until they become churches. Notwithstanding the high number of dioceses, there are still very large areas where there are no local churches or where their number is insufficient in relation to the vastness of the territory and the density of the population. There is still much to be done in implanting and developing the Church. This phase of ecclesial history, called the *plantatio Ecclesiae*, has not reached its end; indeed, for much of the human race it has yet to begin.

Responsibility for this task belongs to the universal Church and to the particular churches, to the whole people of God and to all its missionary forces. Every church, even one made up of recent converts, is missionary by its very nature, and is both evangelized and evangelizing. Faith must always be presented as a gift of God to be lived out in community (families, parishes, associations), and to be extended to others through witness in word and deed. The evangelizing activity of the Christian community, first in its own locality, and then elsewhere as part of the Church's universal mission, is the clearest sign of a mature faith. A radical conversion in thinking is required in order to become missionary, and this holds true both for individuals and entire communities. The Lord is always calling us to come out of ourselves and to share with others the goods we possess, starting with the most precious gift of all - our faith. The effectiveness of the Church's organizations, movements, parishes and apostolic works must be measured in the light of this missionary imperative. Only by becoming missionary will the Christian community be able to overcome its internal divisions and tensions, and rediscover its unity and its strength of faith.

Missionary personnel coming from other churches and countries must work in communion with their local counterparts for the development of the Christian community. In particular, it falls to missionary personnel - in accordance with the directives of the bishops and in cooperation with those responsible at the local level - to foster the spread of the faith and the expansion of the Church in non-Christian environments and among non-Christian groups, and to encourage a missionary sense within the particular churches, so that pastoral concern will always be combined with concern for the mission ad gentes. In this way, every church will make its own the solicitude of Christ the Good Shepherd, who fully devotes himself to his flock, but at the same time is mindful of the "other sheep, that are not of this fold." (Jn 10:16)

50. This solicitude will serve as a motivation and stimulus for a renewed commitment to ecumenism. The relationship between ecumenical activity and missionary activity makes it necessary to consider two closely associated factors. On

the one hand, we must recognize that "the division among Christians damages the holy work of preaching the Gospel to every creature and is a barrier for many in their approach to the faith."⁸¹ The fact that the Good News of reconciliation is preached by Christians who are divided among themselves weakens their witness. It is thus urgent to work for the unity of Christians, so that missionary activity can be more effective. At the same time we must not forget that efforts toward unity are themselves a sign of the work of reconciliation which God is bringing about in our midst.

On the other hand, it is true that some kind of communion, though imperfect, exists among all those who have received Baptism in Christ. On this basis the Council established the principle that "while all appearance of indifferentism and confusion is ruled out, as well as any appearance of unhealthy rivalry, Catholics should collaborate in a spirit of fellowship with their separated brothers and sisters in accordance with the norms of the Decree on Ecumenism: by a common profession of faith in God and in Jesus Christ before the nations - to the extent that this is possible - and by their cooperation in social and technical as well as in cultural and religious matters."⁸²

Ecumenical activity and harmonious witness to Jesus Christ by Christians who belong to different churches and ecclesial communities has already borne abundant fruit. But it is ever more urgent that they work and bear witness together at this time when Christian and para-Christian sects are sowing confusion by their activity. The expansion of these sects represents a threat for the Catholic Church and for all the ecclesial communities with which she is engaged in dialogue. Wherever possible, and in the light of local circumstances, the response of Christians can itself be an ecumenical one.

"Ecclesial Basic Communities" As a Force for Evangelization

51. A rapidly growing phenomenon in the young churches - one sometimes fostered by the bishops and their Conferences as a pastoral priority - is that of "ecclesial basic communities" (also known by other names) which are proving to be good centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach. These are groups of Christians who, at the level of the family or in a similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, Scripture reading, catechesis, and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment. These communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a "civilization of love."

These communities decentralize and organize the parish community, to which they always remain united. They take root in less privileged and rural areas, and become a leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and neglected, and of commitment to the transformation of society. Within them, the individual Christian experiences community and therefore senses that he or she is playing an active role and is encouraged to share in the common task. Thus, these communities become a means of evangelization and of the initial proclamation of the Gospel, and a source of new ministries. At the same time, by being imbued with Christ's love, they also show how divisions, tribalism and racism can be overcome.

Every community, if it is to be Christian, must be founded on Christ and live in him, as it listens to the word of God, focuses its prayer on the Eucharist, lives in a communion marked by oneness of heart and soul, and shares according to the needs of its members (cf. Acts 2:42-47). As Pope Paul VI recalled, every community must live in union with the particular and the universal Church, in heartfelt communion with the Church's pastors and the Magisterium, with a commitment to missionary outreach and without yielding to isolationism or ideological exploitation.⁸³ And the Synod of Bishops stated: "Because the Church is communion, the new 'basic communities,' if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church."⁸⁴

Incarnating the Gospel in Peoples' Culture

52. As she carries out missionary activity among the nations, the Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the Church's pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent.

The process of the Church's insertion into peoples' cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation "means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."⁸⁵ The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church's reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.

Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community.⁸⁶ She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within.⁸⁷ Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.

Thanks to this action within the local churches, the universal Church herself is enriched with forms of expression and values in the various sectors of Christian life, such as evangelization, worship, theology and charitable works. She comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ, all the while being motivated to continual renewal. During

my pastoral visits to the young churches I have repeatedly dealt with these themes, which are present in the Council and the subsequent Magisterium.⁸⁸

Inculturation is a slow journey which accompanies the whole of missionary life. It involves those working in the Church's mission *ad gentes*, the Christian communities as they develop, and the bishops, who have the task of providing discernment and encouragement for its implementation.⁸⁹

53. Missionaries, who come from other churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations. Hence they must learn the language of the place in which they work, become familiar with the most important expressions of the local culture, and discover its values through direct experience. Only if they have this kind of awareness will they be able to bring to people the knowledge of the hidden mystery (cf. Rom 16:25-27; Eph 3:5) in a credible and fruitful way. It is not of course a matter of missionaries renouncing their own cultural identity, but of understanding, appreciating, fostering and evangelizing the culture of the environment in which they are working, and therefore of equipping themselves to communicate effectively with it, adopting a manner of living which is a sign of gospel witness and of solidarity with the people.

Developing ecclesial communities, inspired by the Gospel, will gradually be able to express their Christian experience in original ways and forms that are consonant with their own cultural traditions, provided that those traditions are in harmony with the objective requirements of the faith itself. To this end, especially in the more delicate areas of inculturation, particular churches of the same region should work in communion with each other⁹⁰ and with the whole Church, convinced that only through attention both to the universal Church and to the particular churches will they be capable of translating the treasure of faith into a legitimate variety of expressions.⁹¹ Groups which have been evangelized will thus provide the elements for a "translation" of the gospel message, ⁹² keeping in mind the positive elements acquired down the centuries from Christianity's contact with different cultures and not forgetting the dangers of alterations which have sometimes occurred.⁹³

54. In this regard, certain guidelines remain basic. Properly applied, inculturation must be guided by two principles: "compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal Church."⁹⁴ Bishops, as guardians of the "deposit of faith, " will take care to ensure fidelity and, in particular, to provide discernment, ⁹⁵ for which a deeply balanced approach is required. In fact there is a risk of passing uncritically from a form of alienation from culture to an overestimation of culture. Since culture is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be "healed, ennobled and perfected."⁹⁶

This kind of process needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community's Christian experience. As Pope Paul VI said in Kampala: "It will require an incubation of the Christian 'mystery' in the genius of your people in order that its native voice, more clearly and frankly, may then be raised harmoniously in the chorus of other voices in the universal Church."⁹⁷ In effect, inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei* which must never be lost sight of. Inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research. The safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith.

Dialogue with Our Brothers and Sisters of Other Religions

55. Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions. This mission, in fact, is addressed to those who do not know Christ and his Gospel, and who belong for the most part to other religions. In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love. He does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain "gaps, insufficiencies and errors."⁹⁸ All of this has been given ample emphasis by the Council and the subsequent Magisterium, without detracting in any way from the fact that salvation comes from Christ and that dialogue does not dispense from evangelization. ⁹⁹

In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.

I recently wrote to the bishops of Asia: "Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is 'the way, and the truth and the life.'...The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people."¹⁰⁰ Indeed Christ himself "while expressly insisting on the need for faith and baptism, at the same time confirmed the need for the Church, into which people enter through Baptism as through a door." ¹⁰¹ Dialogue should be conducted and

implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.¹⁰²

56. Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills.¹⁰³ Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the "seeds of the Word,"¹⁰⁴ a "ray of that truth which enlightens all men";¹⁰⁵ these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind. Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the Spirit. Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.

This gives rise to the spirit which must enliven dialogue in the context of mission. Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretense or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. There must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings. Dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful.

57. A vast field lies open to dialogue, which can assume many forms and expressions: from exchanges between experts in religious traditions or official representatives of those traditions to cooperation for integral development and the safeguarding of religious values; and from a sharing of their respective spiritual experiences to the so-called "dialogue of life," through which believers of different religions bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society.

Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way. The contribution of the laity is indispensable in this area, for they "can favor the relations which ought to be established with the followers of various religions through their example in the situations in which they live and in their activities."¹⁰⁶ Some of them also will be able to make a contribution through research and study.¹⁰⁷

I am well aware that many missionaries and Christian communities find in the difficult and often misunderstood path of dialogue their only way of bearing sincere witness to Christ and offering generous service to others. I wish to encourage them to persevere with faith and love, even in places where their efforts are not well received. Dialogue is a path toward the kingdom and will certainly bear fruit, even if the times and seasons are known only to the Father (cf. Acts 1:7).

Promoting Development by Forming Consciences

58. The mission *ad gentes* is still being carried out today, for the most part in the southern regions of the world, where action on behalf of integral development and liberation from all forms of oppression is most urgently needed. The Church has always been able to generate among the peoples she evangelizes a drive toward progress. Today, more than in the past, missionaries are being recognized as promoters of development by governments and international experts who are impressed at the remarkable results achieved with scanty means.

In the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, I stated that "the Church does not have technical solutions to offer for the problem of underdevelopment as such," but "offers her first contribution to the solution of the urgent problem of development when she proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation."¹⁰⁸ The Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla stated

that "the best service we can offer to our brother is evangelization, which helps him to live and act as a son of God, sets him free from injustices and assists his overall development."¹⁰⁹ It is not the Church's mission to work directly on the economic, technical or political levels, or to contribute materially to development. Rather, her mission consists essentially in offering people an opportunity not to "have more" but to "be more," by awakening their consciences through the Gospel. "Authentic human development must be rooted in an ever deeper evangelization."¹¹⁰

The Church and her missionaries also promote development through schools, hospitals, printing presses, universities and experimental farms. But a people's development does not derive primarily from money, material assistance or technological means, but from the formation of consciences and the gradual maturing of ways of thinking and patterns of behavior. Man is the principal agent of development, not money or technology. The Church forms consciences by revealing to peoples the God whom they seek and do not yet know, the grandeur of man created in God's image and loved by him, the equality of all men and women as God's sons and daughters, the mastery of man over nature created by God and placed at man's service, and the obligation to work for the development of the whole person and of all mankind.

59. Through the gospel message, the Church offers a force for liberation which promotes development precisely because it leads to conversion of heart and of ways of thinking, fosters the recognition of each person's dignity,

encourages solidarity, commitment and service of one's neighbor, and gives everyone a place in God's plan, which is the building of his kingdom of peace and justice, beginning already in this life. This is the biblical perspective of the "new heavens and a new earth" (cf. Is 65:17; 2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1), which has been the stimulus and goal for mankind's advancement in history. Man's development derives from God, and from the model of Jesus - God and man - and must lead back to God.¹¹¹ That is why there is a close connection between the proclamation of the Gospel and human promotion.

The contribution of the Church and of evangelization to the development of peoples concerns not only the struggle against material poverty and underdevelopment in the South of the world, but also concerns the North, which is prone to a moral and spiritual poverty caused by "overdevelopment."¹¹² A certain way of thinking, uninfluenced by a religious outlook and widespread in some parts of today's world, is based on the idea that increasing wealth and the promotion of economic and technical growth is enough for people to develop on the human level. But a soulless development cannot suffice for human beings, and an excess of affluence is as harmful as excessive poverty. This is a "development model" which the North has constructed and is now spreading to the South, where a sense of religion as well as human values are in danger of being overwhelmed by a wave of consumerism.

"Fight hunger by changing your lifestyle" is a motto which has appeared in Church circles and which shows the people of the rich nations how to become brothers and sisters of the poor. We need to turn to a more austere way of life which will favor a new model of development that gives attention to ethical and religious values. To the poor, missionary activity brings light and an impulse toward true development, while a new evangelization ought to create among the wealthy a realization that the time has arrived for them to become true brothers and sisters of the poor through the conversion of all to an "integral development" open to the Absolute.¹¹³

Charity: Source and Criterion of Mission

60. As I said during my pastoral visit to Brazil: "The Church all over the world wishes to be the Church of the poor...she wishes to draw out all the truth contained in the Beatitudes of Christ, and especially in the first one: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit...'...She wishes to teach this truth and she wishes to put it into practice, just as Jesus came to do and to teach."¹¹⁴

The young churches, which for the most part are to be found among peoples suffering from widespread poverty, often give voice to this concern as an integral part of their mission. The Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla, after recalling the example of Jesus, wrote that "the poor deserve preferential attention, whatever their moral or personal situation. They have been made in the image and likeness of God to be his children, but this image has been obscured and even violated. For this reason, God has become their defender and loves them. It follows that the poor are those to whom the mission is first addressed, and their evangelization is par excellence the sign and proof of the mission of Jesus."¹¹⁵

In fidelity to the spirit of the Beatitudes, the Church is called to be on the side of those who are poor and oppressed in any way. I therefore exhort the disciples of Christ and all Christian communities - from families to dioceses, from parishes to religious institutes - to carry out a sincere review of their lives regarding their solidarity with the poor. At the same time, I express gratitude to the missionaries who, by their loving presence and humble service to people, are working for the integral development of individuals and of society through schools, health-care centers, leprosaria, homes for the handicapped and the elderly, projects for the promotion of women and other similar apostolates. I thank the priests, religious brothers and sisters, and members of the laity for their dedication, and I also encourage the volunteers from non-governmental organizations who in ever increasing numbers are devoting themselves to works of charity and human promotion.

It is in fact these "works of charity" that reveal the soul of all missionary activity: love, which has been and remains the driving force of mission, and is also "the sole criterion for judging what is to be done or not done, changed or not changed. It is the principle which must direct every action, and end to which that action must be directed. When we act with a view to charity, or are inspired by charity, nothing is unseemly and everything is good."¹¹⁶

CHAPTER VI - LEADERS AND WORKERS IN THE MISSIONARY APOSTOLATE

61. Without witnesses there can be no witness, just as without missionaries there can be no missionary activity. Jesus chooses and sends people forth to be his witnesses and apostles, so that they may share in his mission and continue in his saving work: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Twelve are the first to work in the Church's universal mission. They constitute a "collegial subject" of that mission, having been chosen by Jesus to be with him and to be sent forth "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:6). This collegiality does not prevent certain figures from assuming prominence within the group, such as James, John and above all Peter, who is so prominent as to justify the expression: "Peter and the other Apostles" (Acts 2:14, 37). It was thanks to Peter that the horizons of the Church's universal mission were expanded, and the way was prepared for the outstanding missionary work of Paul, who by God's will was called and sent forth to the nations (cf. Gal 1:15-16).

In the early Church's missionary expansion, we find alongside the apostles, other lesser figures who should not be overlooked. These include individuals, groups and communities. A typical example is the local church at Antioch which, after being evangelized, becomes an evangelizing community which sends missionaries to others (cf. Acts 13:2-3). The early Church experiences her mission as a community task, while acknowledging in her midst certain "special envoys" or "missionaries devoted to the Gentiles," such as Paul and Barnabas.

62. What was done at the beginning of Christianity to further its universal mission remains valid and urgent today. The Church is missionary by her very nature, for Christ's mandate is not something contingent or external, but reaches the very heart of the Church. It follows that the universal Church and each individual church is sent forth to the nations. Precisely" so that this missionary zeal may flourish among the people of their own country, " it is highly appropriate that young churches should "share as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the Church. They should themselves send missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world, even though they are suffering from a shortage of clergy."117 Many are already doing so, and I strongly encourage them to continue.

In this essential bond between the universal Church and the particular churches the authentic and full missionary nature of the Church finds practical expression: "In a world where the lessening of distance makes the world increasingly smaller, the Church's communities ought to be connected with each other, exchange vital energies and resources, and commit themselves as a group to the one and common mission of proclaiming and living the Gospel.... So-called younger churches have need of the strength of the older churches and the older ones need the witness and the impulse of the younger, so that each church can draw on the riches of the other churches." 118

Those Primarily Responsible for Missionary Activity

63. Just as the risen Lord gave the universal missionary mandate to the College of the Apostles with Peter as its head, so this same responsibility now rests primarily with the College of Bishops, headed by the successor of Peter.119 Conscious of this responsibility, I feel the duty to give expression to it in my meetings with the bishops, both with regard to new evangelization and the universal mission. I have traveled all over the world in order "to proclaim the Gospel, to 'strengthen the brothers' in the faith, to console the Church, to meet people. They are journeys of faith...they are likewise opportunities for traveling catechesis, for evangelical proclamation in spreading the Gospel and the apostolic Magisterium to the full extent of the world."120

My brother bishops are directly responsible, together with me, for the evangelization of the world, both as members of the College of Bishops and as pastors of the particular churches. In this regard the Council states: "The charge of announcing the Gospel throughout the world belongs to the body of shepherds, to all of whom in common Christ gave the command."121 It also stated that the bishops "have been consecrated not only for a particular diocese but for the salvation of the entire world."122 This collegial responsibility has certain practical consequences. Thus, "the Synod of Bishops...should, among the concerns of general importance, pay special attention to missionary activity, the greatest and holiest duty of the Church."123

The same responsibility is reflected to varying degrees in Episcopal Conferences and their organisms at a continental level, which must make their own contribution to the missionary task.124

Each bishop too, as the pastor of a particular church, has a wide-ranging missionary duty. It falls to him "as the ruler and center of unity in the diocesan apostolate, to promote missionary activity, to direct and coordinate it.... Let him also see to it that apostolic activity is not limited only to those who are already converted, but that a fair share both of personnel and funds be devoted to the evangelization of non-Christians."125

64. Each particular church must be generous and open to the needs of the other churches. Cooperation between the churches, in an authentic reciprocity that prepares them both to give and to receive, is a source of enrichment for all of them and touches the various spheres of ecclesial life. In this respect, the declaration of the bishops at Puebla is exemplary: "The hour has finally come for Latin America...to be projected beyond her frontiers, ad gentes. Certainly we have need of missionaries ourselves, nevertheless we must give from our own poverty."126

In the same spirit, I exhort bishops and Episcopal Conferences to act generously in implementing the provisions of the norms which the Congregation for the Clergy issued regarding cooperation between particular churches and especially regarding the better distribution of clergy in the world. 127

The Church's mission is wider than the "communion among the churches"; it ought to be directed not only to aiding re-evangelization but also and primarily to missionary activity as such. I appeal to all the churches, young and old alike, to share in this concern of mine by seeking to overcome the various obstacles and increase missionary vocations.

Missionaries and Religious Institutes Ad Gentes

65. Now, as in the past, among those involved in the missionary apostolate a place of fundamental importance is held by the persons and institutions to whom the Decree Ad Gentes devotes the special chapter entitled "Missionaries."128 This requires careful reflection, especially on the part of missionaries themselves, who may be led, as a result of changes occurring within the missionary field, no longer to understand the meaning of their vocation and no longer to know exactly what the Church expects of them today.

The following words of the Council are a point of reference: "Although the task of spreading the faith, to the best of one's ability, falls to each disciple of Christ, the Lord always calls from the number of his disciples those whom he wishes, so that they may be with him and that he may send them to preach to the nations. Accordingly, through the Holy Spirit, who distributes his gifts as he wishes for the good of all, Christ stirs up a missionary vocation in the hearts of individuals, and at the same time raises up in the Church those institutes which undertake the duty of evangelization, which is the responsibility of the whole Church, as their special task."¹²⁹

What is involved, therefore, is a "special vocation, " patterned on that of the apostles. It is manifested in a total commitment to evangelization, a commitment which involves the missionary's whole person and life, and demands a self giving without limits of energy or time. Those who have received this vocation, "sent by legitimate authority, go out, in faith and obedience, to those who are far from Christ, set aside for the work to which they have been called as ministers of the Gospel."¹³⁰ Missionaries must always meditate on the response demanded by the gift they have received, and continually keep their doctrinal and apostolic formation up to date.

66. Missionary institutes, drawing from their experience and creativity while remaining faithful to their founding charism, must employ all means necessary to ensure the adequate preparation of candidates and the renewal of their members' spiritual, moral and physical energies.¹³¹ They should sense that they are a vital part of the ecclesial community and should carry out their work in communion with it. Indeed, "every institute exists for the Church and must enrich her with its distinctive characteristics, according to a particular spirit and a specific mission"; the guardians of this fidelity to the founding charism are the bishops themselves.¹³²

In general, missionary institutes came into being in churches located in traditionally Christian countries, and historically they have been the means employed by the Congregation of Propaganda Fide for the spread of the faith and the founding of new churches. Today, these institutes are receiving more and more candidates from the young churches which they founded, while new missionary institutes have arisen in countries which previously only received missionaries, but are now also sending them. This is a praiseworthy trend which demonstrates the continuing validity and relevance of the specific missionary vocation of these institutes. They remain "absolutely necessary, "¹³³ not only for missionary activity *ad gentes*, in keeping with their tradition, but also for stirring up missionary fervor both in the churches of traditionally Christian countries and in the younger churches.

The special vocation of missionaries "for life" retains all its validity: it is the model of the Church's missionary commitment, which always stands in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold endeavors. Therefore the men and women missionaries who have devoted their whole lives to bearing witness to the risen Lord among the nations must not allow themselves to be daunted by doubts, misunderstanding, rejection or persecution. They should revive the grace of their specific charism and courageously press on, preferring - in a spirit of faith, obedience and communion with their pastors - to seek the lowliest and most demanding places.

Diocesan Priests for the Universal Mission

67. As co-workers of the bishops, priests are called by virtue of the sacrament of Orders to share in concern for the Church's mission: "The spiritual gift that priests have received in ordination prepares them, not for any narrow and limited mission, but for the most universal and all embracing mission of salvation 'to the end of the earth.' For every priestly ministry shares in the universal scope of the mission that Christ entrusted to his apostles."¹³⁴ For this reason, the formation of candidates to the priesthood must aim at giving them "the true Catholic spirit whereby they will learn to transcend the bounds of their own diocese, country or rite, and come to the aid of the whole Church, in readiness to preach the Gospel anywhere."¹³⁵ All priests must have the mind and the heart of missionaries - open to the needs of the Church and the world, with concern for those farthest away, and especially for the non-Christian groups in their own area. They should have at heart, in their prayers and particularly at the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the concern of the whole Church for all of humanity.

Especially in those areas where Christians are a minority, priests must be filled with special missionary zeal and commitment. The Lord entrusts to them not only the pastoral care of the Christian community, but also and above all the evangelization of those of their fellow-citizens who do not belong to Christ's flock. Priests will "not fail to make themselves readily available to the Holy Spirit and the bishop, to be sent to preach the Gospel beyond the borders of their country. This will demand of them not only maturity in their vocation, but also an uncommon readiness to detach themselves from their own homeland, culture and family, and a special ability to adapt to other cultures, with understanding and respect for them."¹³⁶

68. In his Encyclical *Fidei Donum*, Pope Pius XII, with prophetic insight, encouraged bishops to offer some of their priests for temporary service in the churches of Africa, and gave his approval to projects already existing for that purpose. Twenty-five years later, I pointed out the striking newness of that encyclical, which "surmounted the territorial dimension of priestly service in order to direct it toward the entire Church."¹³⁷ Today it is clear how effective and fruitful this experience has been. Indeed, *Fidei Donum* priests are a unique sign of the bond of communion existing among the churches. They make a valuable contribution to the growth of needy ecclesial communities, while drawing from them freshness and liveliness of faith. Of course, the missionary service of the diocesan priest must conform to

certain criteria and conditioning. The priests to be sent should be selected from among the most suitable candidates, and should be duly prepared for the particular work that awaits them.¹³⁸ With an open and fraternal attitude, they should become part of the new setting of the Church which welcomes them, and form one presbyterate with the local priests, under the authority of the bishop.¹³⁹ I hope that a spirit of service will increase among the priests of the long-established churches, and that it will be fostered among priests of the churches of more recent origin.

The Missionary Fruitfulness of Consecrated Life

69. From the inexhaustible and manifold richness of the Spirit come the vocations of the Institutes of Consecrated Life, whose members, "because of the dedication to the service of the Church deriving from their very consecration, have an obligation to play a special part in missionary activity, in a manner appropriate to their Institute."¹⁴⁰ History witnesses to the outstanding service rendered by religious families in the spread of the faith and the formation of new churches: from the ancient monastic institutions, to the medieval Orders, up to the more recent congregations.

(a)

Echoing the Council, I invite institutes of contemplative life to establish communities in the young churches, so as to "bear glorious witness among non-Christians to the majesty and love of God, as well as to unity in Christ."¹⁴¹ This presence is beneficial throughout the non-Christian world, especially in those areas where religious traditions hold the contemplative life in great esteem for its asceticism and its search for the Absolute.

(b)

To institutes of active life, I would recommend the immense opportunities for works of charity, for the proclamation of the Gospel, for Christian education, cultural endeavors and solidarity with the poor and those suffering from discrimination, abandonment and oppression. Whether they pursue a strictly missionary goal or not, such institutes should ask themselves how willing and able they are to broaden their action in order to extend God's kingdom. In recent times many institutes have responded to this request, which I hope will be given even greater consideration and implementation for a more authentic service. The Church needs to make known the great gospel values of which she is the bearer. No one witnesses more effectively to these values than those who profess the consecrated life in chastity, poverty and obedience, in a total gift of self to God and in complete readiness to serve humanity and society after the example of Christ.¹⁴²

70. I extend a special word of appreciation to the missionary religious sisters, in whom virginity for the sake of the kingdom is transformed into a motherhood in the spirit that is rich and fruitful. It is precisely the mission ad gentes that offers them vast scope for "the gift of self with love in a total and undivided manner."¹⁴³ The example and activity of women who through virginity are consecrated to love of God and neighbor, especially the very poor, are an indispensable evangelical sign among those peoples and cultures where women still have far to go on the way toward human promotion and liberation. It is my hope that many young Christian women will be attracted to giving themselves generously to Christ, and will draw strength and joy from their consecration in order to bear witness to him among the peoples who do not know him.

All the Laity Are Missionaries by baptism

71. Recent popes have stressed the importance of the role of the laity in missionary activity.¹⁴⁴ In the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, I spoke explicitly of the Church's "permanent mission of bringing the Gospel to the multitudes - the millions and millions of men and women - who as yet do not know Christ the Redeemer of humanity,"¹⁴⁵ and of the responsibility of the lay faithful in this regard. The mission ad gentes is incumbent upon the entire People of God. Whereas the foundation of a new church requires the Eucharist and hence the priestly ministry, missionary activity, which is carried out in a wide variety of ways, is the task of all the Christian faithful.

It is clear that from the very origins of Christianity, the laity - as individuals, families, and entire communities - shared in spreading the faith. Pope Pius XII recalled this fact in his first encyclical on the missions,¹⁴⁶ in which he pointed out some instances of lay missions. In modern times, this active participation of lay men and women missionaries has not been lacking. How can we forget the important role played by women: their work in the family, in schools, in political, social and cultural life, and especially their teaching of Christian doctrine? Indeed, it is necessary to recognize - and it is a title of honor - that some churches owe their origins to the activity of lay men and women missionaries.

The Second Vatican Council confirmed this tradition in its description of the missionary character of the entire People of God and of the apostolate of the laity in particular,¹⁴⁷ emphasizing the specific contribution to missionary activity which they are called to make.¹⁴⁸ The need for all the faithful to share in this responsibility is not merely a matter of making the apostolate more effective, it is a right and duty based on their baptismal dignity, whereby "the faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King."¹⁴⁹ Therefore, "they are bound by the general obligation and they have the right, whether as individuals or in associations, to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world. This obligation is all the more insistent in circumstances in which only through them are people able to hear the Gospel and to know Christ." ¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, because of their secular character, they especially are called "to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering these in accordance with the will of God."¹⁵¹

72. The sphere in which lay people are present and active as missionaries is very extensive. "Their own field...is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics..."¹⁵² on the local, national and international levels. Within the Church, there are various types of services, functions, ministries and ways of promoting the Christian life. I call to mind, as a new development occurring in many churches in recent times, the rapid growth of "ecclesial movements" filled with missionary dynamism. When these movements humbly seek to become part of the life of local churches and are welcomed by bishops and priests within diocesan and parish structures, they represent a true gift of God both for new evangelization and for missionary activity properly so-called. I therefore recommend that they be spread, and that they be used to give fresh energy, especially among young people, to the Christian life and to evangelization, within a pluralistic view of the ways in which Christians can associate and express themselves.

Within missionary activity, the different forms of the lay apostolate should be held in esteem, with respect for their nature and aims. Lay missionary associations, international Christian volunteer organizations, ecclesial movements, groups and solidarities of different kinds - all these should be involved in the mission *ad gentes* as cooperators with the local churches. In this way the growth of a mature and responsible laity will be fostered, a laity whom the younger churches are recognizing as "an essential and undeniable element in the *plantatio Ecclesiae*."¹⁵³

The Work of Catechists and the Variety of Ministries

73. Among the laity who become evangelizers, catechists have a place of honor. The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church speaks of them as "that army of catechists, both men and women, worthy of praise, to whom missionary work among the nations owes so much. Imbued with the apostolic spirit, they make a singular and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church by their strenuous efforts."¹⁵⁴ It is with good reason that the older and established churches, committed to a new evangelization, have increased the numbers of their catechists and intensified catechetical activity. But "the term 'catechists' belongs above all to the catechists in mission lands.... Churches that are flourishing today would not have been built up without them."¹⁵⁵

Even with the extension of the services rendered by lay people both within and outside the Church, there is always need for the ministry of catechists, a ministry with its own characteristics. Catechists are specialists, direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers who, as I have often stated and experienced during my missionary journeys, represent the basic strength of Christian communities, especially in the young churches. The new Code of Canon Law acknowledges the tasks, qualities and qualifications of catechists.¹⁵⁶

However, it must not be forgotten that the work of catechists is becoming more and more difficult and demanding as a result of ecclesial and cultural changes. What the Council suggested is still valid today: a more careful doctrinal and pedagogical training, continuing spiritual and apostolic renewal, and the need to provide "a decent standard of living and social security."¹⁵⁷ It is also important to make efforts to establish and support schools for catechists, which are to be approved by the Episcopal Conferences and confer diplomas officially recognized by the latter.¹⁵⁸

74. Besides catechists, mention must also be made of other ways of serving the Church and her mission; namely, other Church personnel: leaders of prayer, song and liturgy; leaders of basic ecclesial communities and Bible study groups; those in charge of charitable works; administrators of Church resources; leaders in the various forms of the apostolate; religion teachers in schools. All the members of the laity ought to devote a part of their time to the Church, living their faith authentically.

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Other Structures for Missionary Activity

75. Leaders and agents of missionary pastoral activity should sense their unity within the communion which characterizes the Mystical Body. Christ prayed for this at the Last Supper when he said: "Even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21). The fruitfulness of missionary activity is to be found in this communion.

But since the Church is also a communion which is visible and organic, her mission requires an external and ordered union between the various responsibilities and functions involved, in such a way that all the members "may in harmony spend their energies for the building up of the Church."¹⁵⁹

To the congregation responsible for missionary activity it falls "to direct and coordinate throughout the world the work of evangelizing peoples and of missionary cooperation, with due regard for the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches."¹⁶⁰ Hence, its task is to "recruit missionaries and distribute them in accordance with the more urgent needs of various regions...draw up an ordered plan of action, issue norms and directives, as well as principles which are appropriate for the work of evangelization, and assist in the initial stages of their work."¹⁶¹ I can only confirm these wise directives. In order to re-launch the mission *ad gentes*, a center of outreach, direction and coordination is needed, namely, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. I invite the Episcopal Conferences and their various bodies, the major superiors of orders, congregations and institutes, as well as lay organizations

involved in missionary activity, to cooperate faithfully with this Dicastery, which has the authority necessary to plan and direct missionary activity and cooperation worldwide.

The same congregation, which has behind it a long and illustrious history, is called to play a role of primary importance with regard to reflection and programs of action which the Church needs in order to be more decisively oriented toward the mission in its various forms. To this end, the congregation should maintain close relations with the other Dicasteries of the Holy See, with the local churches and the various missionary forces. In an ecclesiology of communion in which the entire Church is missionary, but in which specific vocations and institutions for missionary work *ad gentes* remains indispensable, the guiding and coordinating role of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples remains very important in order to ensure a united effort in confronting great questions of common concern, with due regard for the competence proper to each authority and structure.

76. Episcopal Conferences and their various groupings have great importance in directing and coordinating missionary activity on the national and regional levels. The Council asks them to "confer together in dealing with more important questions and urgent problems, without, however, overlooking local differences,"¹⁶² and to consider the complex issue of inculturation. In fact, large-scale and regular activity is already taking place in this area, with visible results. It is an activity which must be intensified and better coordinated with that of other bodies of the same Conferences, so that missionary concern will not be left to the care of only one sector or body, but will be shared by all.

The bodies and institutions involved in missionary activity should join forces and initiatives as opportunity suggests. Conferences of Major Superiors should have this same concern in their own sphere, maintaining contact with Episcopal Conferences in accordance with established directives and norms,¹⁶³ and also having recourse to mixed commissions.¹⁶⁴ Also desirable are meetings and other forms of cooperation between the various missionary institutions, both in formation and study,¹⁶⁵ as well as in the actual apostolate.

CHAPTER VII - COOPERATION IN MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

77. Since they are members of the Church by virtue of their Baptism, all Christians share responsibility for missionary activity. "Missionary cooperation" is the expression used to describe the sharing by communities and individual Christians in this right and duty.

Missionary cooperation is rooted and lived, above all, in personal union with Christ. Only if we are united to him as the branches to the vine (cf. Jn 15:5) can we produce good fruit. Through holiness of life every Christian can become a fruitful part of the Church's mission. The Second Vatican Council invited all "to a profound interior renewal, so that having a lively awareness of their personal responsibility for the spreading of the Gospel, they may play their part in missionary work among the nations."¹⁶⁶

Sharing in the universal mission therefore is not limited to certain specific activities, but is the sign of maturity in faith and of a Christian life that bears fruit. In this way, individual believers extend the reach of their charity and show concern for those both far and near. They pray for the missions and missionary vocations. They help missionaries and follow their work with interest. And when missionaries return, they welcome them with the same joy with which the first Christian communities heard from the apostles the marvelous things which God had wrought through their preaching (cf. Acts 14:27).

Prayer and Sacrifice for Missionaries

78. Among the forms of sharing, first place goes to spiritual cooperation through prayer, sacrifice and the witness of Christian life. Prayer should accompany the journey of missionaries so that the proclamation of the word will be effective through God's grace. In his Letters, St. Paul often asks the faithful to pray for him so that he might proclaim the Gospel with confidence and conviction. Prayer needs to be accompanied by sacrifice. The redemptive value of suffering, accepted and offered to God with love, derives from the sacrifice of Christ himself, who calls the members of his Mystical Body to share in his sufferings, to complete them in their own flesh (cf. Col 1:24). The sacrifice of missionaries should be shared and accompanied by the sacrifices of all the faithful. I therefore urge those engaged in the pastoral care of the sick to teach them about the efficacy of suffering, and to encourage them to offer their sufferings to God for missionaries. By making such an offering, the sick themselves become missionaries, as emphasized by a number of movements which have sprung up among them and for them. The solemnity of Pentecost - the beginning of the Church's mission - is celebrated in some communities as a "Day of Suffering for the Missions."

"Here I am, Lord! I am ready! Send me!" (cf. Is 6:8)

79.

Cooperation is expressed above all by promoting missionary vocations. While acknowledging the validity of various ways of being involved in missionary activity, it is necessary at the same time to reaffirm that a full and lifelong commitment to the work of the missions holds pride of place, especially in missionary institutes and congregations. Promoting such vocations is at the heart of missionary cooperation. Preaching the Gospel requires preachers; the harvest needs laborers. The mission is carried out above all by men and women who are consecrated for life to the work of the Gospel and are prepared to go forth into the whole world to bring salvation.

I wish to call to mind and to recommend this concern for missionary vocations. Conscious of the overall responsibility of Christians to contribute to missionary activity and to the development of poorer peoples, we must ask ourselves how it is that in some countries, while monetary contributions are on the increase, missionary vocations, which are the real measure of self-giving to one's brothers and sisters, are in danger of disappearing. Vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life are a sure sign of the vitality of a church.

80.

As I think of this serious problem, I appeal with great confidence and affection to families and to young people. Families, especially parents, should be conscious that they ought to "offer a special contribution to the missionary cause of the Church by fostering missionary vocations among their sons and daughters."¹⁶⁷

An intense prayer life, a genuine sense of service to one's neighbor and a generous participation in Church activities provide families with conditions that favor vocations among young people. When parents are ready to allow one of their children to leave for the missions, when they have sought this grace from the Lord, he will repay them, in joy, on the day that their son or daughter hears his call.

I ask young people themselves to listen to Christ's words as he says to them what he once said to Simon Peter and to Andrew at the lakeside: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). May they have the courage to reply as Isaiah did: "Here am I, Lord! I am ready! Send me!" (cf. Is 6:8) They will have a wonderful life ahead of them, and they will know the genuine joy of proclaiming the "Good News" to brothers and sisters whom they will lead on the way of salvation.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)

81. The material and financial needs of the missions are many: not only to set up the Church with minimal structures (chapels, schools for catechists and seminarians, housing), but also to support works of charity, education and human promotion—a vast field of action especially in poor countries. The missionary Church gives what she receives, and distributes to the poor the material goods that her materially richer sons and daughters generously put at her disposal. Here I wish to thank all those who make sacrifices and contribute to the work of the missions. Their sacrifices and sharing are indispensable for building up the Church and for showing love.

In the matter of material help, it is important to consider the spirit in which donations are made. For this we should reassess our own way of living: the missions ask not only for a contribution but for a sharing in the work of preaching and charity toward the poor. All that we have received from God - life itself as well as material goods - does not belong to us but is given to us for our use. Generosity in giving must always be enlightened and inspired by faith: then we will truly be more blessed in giving than in receiving.

World Mission Day, which seeks to heighten awareness of the missions, as well as to collect funds for them, is an important date in the life of the Church, because it teaches how to give: as an offering made to God, in the Eucharistic celebration and for all the missions of the world.

New Forms of Missionary Cooperation

82. Today, cooperation includes new forms—not only economic assistance, but also direct participation. New situations connected with the phenomenon of mobility demand from Christians an authentic missionary spirit.

International tourism has now become a mass phenomenon. This is a positive development if tourists maintain an attitude of respect and a desire for mutual cultural enrichment, avoiding ostentation and waste, and seeking contact with other people. But Christians are expected above all to be aware of their obligation to bear witness always to their faith and love of Christ. Firsthand knowledge of the missionary life and of new Christian communities also can be an enriching experience and can strengthen one's faith. Visiting the missions is commendable, especially on the part of young people who go there to serve and to gain an intense experience of the Christian life.

Reasons of work nowadays bring many Christians from young communities to areas where Christianity is unknown and at times prohibited or persecuted. The same is true of members of the faithful from traditionally Christian countries who work for a time in non-Christian countries. These circumstances are certainly an opportunity to live the faith and to bear witness to it. In the early centuries, Christianity spread because Christians, traveling to or settling in regions where Christ had not yet been proclaimed, bore courageous witness to their faith and founded the first communities there.

More numerous are the citizens of mission countries and followers of non-Christian religions who settle in other nations for reasons of study or work, or are forced to do so because of the political or economic situations in their native lands. The presence of these brothers and sisters in traditionally Christian countries is a challenge for the ecclesial communities, and a stimulus to hospitality, dialogue, service, sharing, witness and direct proclamation. In Christian countries, communities and cultural groups are also forming which call for the mission *ad gentes*, and the local churches, with the help of personnel from the immigrants' own countries and of returning missionaries, should respond generously to these situations.

Missionary cooperation can also involve leaders in politics, economics, culture and journalism, as well as experts of the various international bodies. In the modern world it is becoming increasingly difficult to determine geographical or cultural boundaries. There is an increasing interdependence between peoples, and this constitutes a stimulus for Christian witness and evangelization.

Missionary Promotion and Formation Among the People of God

83. Missionary formation is the task of the local Church, assisted by missionaries and their institutes, and by personnel from the young churches. This work must be seen not as peripheral but as central to the Christian life. Even for the "new evangelization" of Christian countries the theme of the missions can prove very helpful: the witness of missionaries retains its appeal even for the non-practicing and non-believers, and it communicates Christian values. Particular churches should therefore make the promotion of the missions a key element in the normal pastoral activity of parishes, associations and groups, especially youth groups.

With this end in view, it is necessary to spread information through missionary publications and audiovisual aids. These play an important role in making known the life of the universal Church and in voicing the experiences of missionaries and of the local churches in which they work. In those younger churches which are still not able to have a press and other means of their own, it is important that missionary institutes devote personnel and resources to these undertakings.

Such formation is entrusted to priests and their associates, to educators and teachers, and to theologians, particularly those who teach in seminaries and centers for the laity. Theological training cannot and should not ignore the Church's universal mission, ecumenism, the study of the great religions and missiology. I recommend that such studies be undertaken especially in seminaries and in houses of formation for men and women religious, ensuring that some priests or other students specialize in the different fields of missiology.

Activities aimed at promoting interest in the missions must always be geared to these specific goals; namely, informing and forming the People of God to share in the Church's universal mission, promoting vocations ad gentes and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelization. It is not right to give an incomplete picture of missionary activity, as if it consisted principally in helping the poor, contributing to the liberation of the oppressed, promoting development or defending human rights. The missionary Church is certainly involved on these fronts but her primary task lies elsewhere: the poor are hungry for God, not just for bread and freedom. Missionary activity must first of all bear witness to and proclaim salvation in Christ, and establish local churches which then become means of liberation in every sense.

The Primary Responsibility of the Pontifical Mission Societies

84. The leading role in this work of promotion belongs to the Pontifical Mission Societies, as I have often pointed out in my Messages for World Mission Day. The four Societies - Propagation of the Faith, St. Peter the Apostle, Holy Childhood and the Missionary Union - have the common purpose of fostering a universal missionary spirit among the People of God. The Missionary Union has as its immediate and specific purpose the promotion of missionary consciousness and formation among priests and men and women religious, who in turn will provide this consciousness and formation within the Christian communities. In addition, the Missionary Union seeks to promote the other Societies, of which it is the "soul,"¹⁶⁸ "This must be our motto: All the churches united for the conversion of the whole world."¹⁶⁹

Because they are under the auspices of the Pope and of the College of Bishops, these Societies, also within the boundaries of the particular churches, rightly have "the first place... since they are the means by which Catholics from their very infancy are imbued with a genuinely universal and missionary spirit; they are also the means which ensure an effective collection of resources for the good of all the missions, in accordance with the needs of each one."¹⁷⁰ Another purpose of the Missionary Societies is the fostering of lifelong vocations ad gentes, in both the older and younger churches. I earnestly recommend that their promotional work be increasingly directed to this goal.

In their activities, these Societies depend at the worldwide level on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples; at the local level they depend on the Episcopal Conferences and the bishops of individual churches, in collaboration with existing promotional centers. They bring to the Catholic world that spirit of universality and of service to the Church's mission, without which authentic cooperation does not exist.

Not Only Giving to the Missions But Receiving From Them As Well

85. Cooperating in missionary activity means not just giving but also receiving. All the particular churches, both young and old, are called to give and to receive in the context of the universal mission, and none should be closed to the needs of others. The Council states: "By virtue of...catholicity, the individual parts bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole Church, in such a way that the whole and individual parts grow greater through the mutual communication

of all and their united efforts toward fullness in unity.... Between the different parts of the Church there are bonds of intimate communion with regard to spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal assistance."171

I exhort all the churches, and the bishops, priests, religious and members of the laity, to be open to the Church's universality, and to avoid every form of provincialism or exclusiveness, or feelings of self-sufficiency. Local churches, although rooted in their own people and their own culture, must always maintain an effective sense of the universality of the faith, giving and receiving spiritual gifts, experiences of pastoral work in evangelization and initial proclamation, as well as personnel for the apostolate and material resources.

The temptation to become isolated can be a strong one. The older churches, involved in new evangelization, may think that their mission is now at home, and thus they may risk slackening their drive toward the non-Christian world, begrudgingly conceding vocations to missionary institutes, religious congregations or other particular churches. But it is by giving generously of what we have that we will receive. Already the young churches, many of which are blessed with an abundance of vocations, are in a position to send priests and men and women religious to the older churches.

On the other hand, the young churches are concerned about their own identity, about inculturation, and about their freedom to grow independently of external influences, with the possible result that they close their doors to missionaries. To these churches I say: Do not isolate yourselves; willingly accept missionaries and support from other churches, and do likewise throughout the world. Precisely because of the problems that concern you, you need to be in continuous contact with your brothers and sisters in the faith. With every legitimate means, seek to ensure recognition of the freedom to which you have a right, remembering that Christ's disciples must "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

God Is Preparing a New Springtime for the Gospel

86. If we look at today's world, we are struck by many negative factors that can lead to pessimism. But this feeling is unjustified: we have faith in God our Father and Lord, in his goodness and mercy. As the third millennium of the redemption draws near, God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity, and we can already see its first signs. In fact, both in the non-Christian world and in the traditionally Christian world, people are gradually drawing closer to gospel ideals and values, a development which the Church seeks to encourage. Today in fact there is a new consensus among peoples about these values: the rejection of violence and war; respect for the human person and for human rights; the desire for freedom, justice and brotherhood; the surmounting of different forms of racism and nationalism; the affirmation of the dignity and role of women.

Christian hope sustains us in committing ourselves fully to the new evangelization and to the worldwide mission, and leads us to pray as Jesus taught us: "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10).

The number of those awaiting Christ is still immense: the human and cultural groups not yet reached by the Gospel, or for whom the Church is scarcely present, are so widespread as to require the uniting of all the Church's resources. As she prepares to celebrate the jubilee of the year 2000, the whole Church is even more committed to a new missionary advent. We must increase our apostolic zeal to pass on to others the light and joy of the faith, and to this high ideal the whole People of God must be educated.

We cannot be content when we consider the millions of our brothers sisters, who like us have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but who live in ignorance of the love of God. For each believer, as for the entire Church, the missionary task must remain foremost, for it concerns the eternal destiny of humanity and corresponds to God's mysterious and merciful plan.

CHAPTER VIII - MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY

87. Missionary activity demands a specific spirituality, which applies in particular to all those whom God has called to be missionaries.

Being Led by the Spirit

This spirituality is expressed first of all by a life of complete docility to the Spirit. It commits us to being molded from within by the Spirit, so that we may become ever more like Christ. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit. This docility then commits us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are essential elements of missionary spirituality.

An example of this is found with the apostles during the Master's public life. Despite their love for him and their generous response to his call, they proved to be incapable of understanding his words and reluctant to follow him along the path of suffering and humiliation. The Spirit transformed them into courageous witnesses to Christ and enlightened heralds of his word. It was the Spirit himself who guided them along the difficult and new paths of mission.

Today, as in the past, that mission is difficult and complex, and demands the courage and light of the Spirit. We often experience the dramatic situation of the first Christian community which witnessed unbelieving and hostile forces "gathered together against the Lord and his Anointed" (Acts 4:26). Now, as then, we must pray that God will grant us

boldness in preaching the Gospel; we must ponder the mysterious ways of the Spirit and allow ourselves to be led by him into all the truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

Living the Mystery of Christ, "the One who was sent"

88. An essential characteristic of missionary spirituality is intimate communion with Christ. We cannot understand or carry out the mission unless we refer it to Christ as the one who was sent to evangelize. St. Paul describes Christ's attitude: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:5-8).

The mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption is thus described as a total self-emptying which leads Christ to experience fully the human condition and to accept totally the Father's plan. This is an emptying of self which is permeated by love and expresses love. The mission follows this same path and leads to the foot of the cross.

The missionary is required to "renounce himself and everything that up to this point he considered as his own, and to make himself everything to everyone."¹⁷² This he does by a poverty which sets him free for the Gospel, overcoming attachment to the people and things about him, so that he may become a brother to those to whom he is sent and thus bring them Christ the Savior. This is the goal of missionary spirituality: "To the weak I became weak...; I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel..." (1 Cor 9:22-23).

It is precisely because he is "sent" that the missionary experiences the consoling presence of Christ, who is with him at every moment of life - "Do not be afraid...for I am with you" (Acts 18:9-10) - and who awaits him in the heart of every person.

Loving the Church and Humanity As Jesus Did

89. Missionary spirituality is also marked by apostolic charity, the charity of Christ who came "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52), of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, who searches them out and offers his life for them (cf. Jn 10). Those who have the missionary spirit feel Christ's burning love for souls, and love the Church as Christ did.

The missionary is urged on by "zeal for souls," a zeal inspired by Christ's own charity, which takes the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability and interest in people's problems. Jesus' love is very deep: he who "knew what was in man" (Jn 2:25) loved everyone by offering them redemption and suffered when it was rejected. The missionary is a person of charity. In order to proclaim to all his brothers and sisters that they are loved by God and are capable of loving, he must show love toward all, giving his life for his neighbor. The missionary is the "universal brother," bearing in himself the Church's spirit, her openness to and interest in all peoples and individuals, especially the least and poorest of his brethren. As such, he overcomes barriers and divisions of race, cast or ideology. He is a sign of God's love in the world - a love without exclusion or partiality.

Finally, like Christ he must love the Church: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). This love, even to the point of giving one's life, is a focal point for him. Only profound love for the Church can sustain the missionary's zeal. His daily pressure, as St. Paul says, is "anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28). For every missionary "fidelity to Christ cannot be separated from fidelity to the Church."¹⁷³

The True Missionary Is the Saint

90. The call to mission derives, of its nature, from the call to holiness. A missionary is really such only if he commits himself to the way of holiness: "Holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church."¹⁷⁴

The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission. This was the earnest desire of the Council, which hoped to be able "to enlighten all people with the brightness of Christ, which gleams over the face of the Church, by preaching the Gospel to every creature."¹⁷⁵ The Church's missionary spirituality is a journey toward holiness.

The renewed impulse to the mission ad gentes demands holy missionaries. It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and coordinate ecclesial resources, or delve more deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith. What is needed is the encouragement of a new "ardor for holiness" among missionaries and throughout the Christian community, especially among those who work most closely with missionaries.¹⁷⁶

Dear brothers and sisters: let us remember the missionary enthusiasm of the first Christian communities. Despite the limited means of travel and communication in those times, the proclamation of the Gospel quickly reached the ends of the earth. And this was the religion of a man who had died on a cross, "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23) Underlying this missionary dynamism was the holiness of the first Christians and the first communities.

91. I therefore address myself to the recently baptized members of the young communities and young churches. Today, you are the hope of this two-thousand-year-old Church of ours: being young in faith, you must be like the first Christians and radiate enthusiasm and courage, in generous devotion to God and neighbor. In a word, you must set yourselves on the path of holiness. Only thus can you be a sign of God in the world and re-live in your own countries the missionary epic of the early Church. You will also be a leaven of missionary spirit for the older churches.

For their part, missionaries should reflect on the duty of holiness required of them by the gift of their vocation, renew themselves in spirit day by day, and strive to update their doctrinal and pastoral formation. The missionary must be a "contemplative in action." He finds answers to problems in the light of God's word and in personal and community prayer. My contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way. He is a witness to the experience of God, and must be able to say with the apostles: "that which we have looked upon...concerning the word of life,...we proclaim also to you" (1 Jn 1:1-3).

The missionary is a person of the Beatitudes. Before sending out the Twelve to evangelize, Jesus, in his "missionary discourse" (cf. Mt 10), teaches them the paths of mission: poverty, meekness, acceptance of suffering and persecution, the desire for justice and peace, charity - in other words, the Beatitudes, lived out in the apostolic life (cf. Mt 5:1-12). By living the Beatitudes, the missionary experiences and shows concretely that the kingdom of God has already come, and that he has accepted it. The characteristic of every authentic missionary life is the inner joy that comes from faith. In a world tormented and oppressed by so many problems, a world tempted to pessimism, the one who proclaims the "Good News" must be a person who has found true hope in Christ.

Conclusion

92. Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time.

Like the apostles after Christ's Ascension, the Church must gather in the Upper Room "together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14), in order to pray for the Spirit and to gain strength and courage to carry out the missionary mandate. We too, like the apostles, need to be transformed and guided by the Spirit.

On the eve of the third millennium the whole Church is invited to live more intensely the mystery of Christ by gratefully cooperating in the work of salvation. The Church does this together with Mary and following the example of Mary, the Church's Mother and model: Mary is the model of that maternal love which should inspire all who cooperate in the Church's apostolic mission for the rebirth of humanity. Therefore, "strengthened by the presence of Christ, the Church journeys through time toward the consummation of the ages and goes to meet the Lord who comes. But on this journey...she proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary."¹⁷⁷

To "Mary's mediation, wholly oriented toward Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power,"¹⁷⁸ I entrust the Church and, in particular, those who commit themselves to carrying out the missionary mandate in today's world. As Christ sent forth his apostles in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, so too, renewing that same mandate, I extend to all of you my apostolic blessing, in the name of the same Most Holy Trinity. Amen.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on December 7, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes*, in the year 1990, the thirteenth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1. Cf. Paul VI, Message for World Mission Day, 1972, *Insegnamenti X*, (1972), 522: "How many internal tensions, which weaken and divide certain local churches and institutions, would disappear before the firm conviction that the salvation of local communities is procured through cooperation in work for the spread of the Gospel to the farthest bounds of the earth!"

2. Cf. Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (November 30, 1919): AAS 11 (1919), 440-455; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Ecclesiae* (February 28, 1926): AAS 18 (1926), 65-83; Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Evangelii Praecones* (June 2, 1951): AAS 43 (1951), 497-528; Encyclical Letter *Fidei Donum* (April 21, 1957): AAS 49 (1957), 225-248; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Princeps Pastorum* (November 28, 1959): AAS 51 (1959), 833-864.

3. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), 10: AAS 71 (1979), 274f.

4. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., 275.

5. Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: DS 150.

6. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 13: loc. cit., 283.

7. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 2.

8. *Ibid.*, 22.
9. Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* (November 30, 1980), 7: AAS 72 (1980), 1202.
10. Homily for the celebration of the Eucharist in Krakow, June 10, 1979: AAS 71 (1979), 873.
11. Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961) IV AAS 53 (1961), 453.
12. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.
13. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), 53: AAS 68 (1976), 42.
14. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.
15. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 14-17; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 3.
16. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 48; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 43; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7, 21.
17. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.
18. *Ibid.*, 9.
19. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
20. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 14.
21. Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 1: loc. cit., 1177.
22. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 5.
23. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
24. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 4.
25. *Ibid.*, 5.
26. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 16: loc. cit., 15.
27. Address at the opening of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, September 14, 1964: AAS 56 (1964), 810.
28. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 34: loc. cit., 28.
29. Cf. International Theological Commission, Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council (October 7, 1985), 10: "The Eschatological Character of the Church: Kingdom and Church."
30. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.
31. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (May 18, 1986), 42: AAS 78 (1986), 857.
32. *Ibid.*, 64: loc. cit., 892.
33. The Greek word "parrhesia" also means enthusiasm or energy; cf. Acts 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27-28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8, 26; 28:31.
34. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41-42: loc. cit., 31-33.
35. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53: loc. cit., 874f.
36. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 3, 11, 15; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 10-11, 22, 26, 38, 41, 92-93.
37. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 10, 15, 22.
38. *Ibid.*, 41.
39. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 54: loc. cit., 875f.
40. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.
41. *Ibid.*, 38; cf. 93.
42. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 3, 15.
43. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 4.
44. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53: loc. cit., 874.
45. Address to Representatives of Non-Christian Religions, Madras, February 5, 1986: AAS 78 (1986), 767; cf. Message to the Peoples of Asia, Manila, February 21, 1981, 2-4: AAS 73 (1981), 392f; Address to Representatives of Other Religions, Tokyo, February 24, 1981, 3-4: *Insegnamenti IV/I* (1981), 507f.
46. Address to Cardinals and the Roman Curia, December 22, 1986, 11: AAS 79 (1987), 1089.
47. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16.
48. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 45; cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 54: loc. cit., 876.
49. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 10.
50. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 35: AAS 81 (1989), 457.
51. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 6.
52. Cf. *ibid.*

53. Cf. *ibid.*, 6, 23, 27.
54. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18-20: *loc. cit.*, 17-19.
55. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 35: *loc. cit.*, 457.
56. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80: *loc. cit.*, 73.
57. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 6.
58. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80: *loc. cit.*, 73.
59. Cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 6.
60. Cf. *ibid.*, 20.
61. Cf. Address to the members of the Symposium of the Council of the European Episcopal Conferences, October 11, 1985: AAS 78 (1986), 178-189.
62. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20: *loc. cit.*, 19.
63. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 5; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
64. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3-4; Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 79-80: *loc. cit.*, 71-75; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 12: *loc. cit.*, 278-281.
65. Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*: *loc. cit.*, 446.
66. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 62: *loc. cit.*, 52.
67. Cf. *De praescriptione haereticorum*, XX: CCL, I, 201f.
68. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 9; cf. Chapter II, 10-18.
69. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41: *loc. cit.*, 31 f.
70. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 28, 35, 38; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 43; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 11-12.
71. Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967), 21, 42: AAS 59 (1967), 267f, 278.
72. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 27: *loc. cit.*, 23.
73. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 13.
74. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15: *loc. cit.*, 13-15; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 13-14.
75. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 42, 64: *loc. cit.*, 857-859, 892-894.
76. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 60: *loc. cit.*, 50f.
77. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 6-9.
78. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 2; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 9.
79. Cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, Chapter III, 19-22.
80. *Ibid.*, 15.
81. *Ibid.*, 6.
82. *Ibid.*, 15; cf. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.
83. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58: *loc. cit.*, 46-49.
84. Extraordinary Assembly of 1985, Final Report, II, C, 6.
85. *Ibid.*, II, D, 4.
86. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), 53: AAS 71 (1979), 1320; Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli* (June 2, 1985), 21: AAS 77 (1985), 802f.
87. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20: *loc. cit.*, 18f.
88. Address to the Bishops of Zaire, Kinshasa, May 3, 1980, 4-6: AAS 72 (1980), 432-435; Address to the Bishops of Kenya, Nairobi, May 7, 1980, 6: AAS 72 (1980), 497; Address to the Bishops of India, Delhi, February 1, 1986, 5: AAS 78 (1986), 748f; Homily at Cartagena, July 6, 1986, 7-8: AAS 79 (1987), 105f; cf. also Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli*, 21-22; *loc. cit.*, 802-804.
89. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 22.
90. Cf. *ibid.*
91. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 64: *loc. cit.*, 55.
92. *Ibid.*, 63: *loc. cit.*, 53: Particular Churches "have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language.... And the word 'language' should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological or cultural."
93. Cf. Address at the General Audience of April 13, 1988: *Insegnamenti XI/I* (1988), 877-881.
94. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, (November 22, 1981), 10: AAS 74 (1982), 91, which speaks of inculturation "in the context of marriage and the family."
95. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 63-65: *loc. cit.*, 53-56.

96. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17.
97. Address to those participating in the Symposium of African Bishops at Kampala, July 31, 1969, 2: AAS 61 (1969), 577.
98. Paul VI, Address at the opening of the Second Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, September 29, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), 858; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 2; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 9; Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii untiandi*, 53: loc. cit. 41f.
99. Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964): AAS 56 (1964), 609-659; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 11, 41; Secretariat for Non-Christians, Document *L'atteggiamento della Chiesa di fronte ai seguaci di altre religioni: Riflessioni e orientamenti su dialogo e missione* (September 4, 1984): AAS 76 (1984), 816-828.
100. Letter to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Asian Bishops' Conferences (June 23, 1990), 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 18, 1990.
101. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 14; cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7.
102. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7.
103. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 12: loc. cit., 279.
104. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 11, 15.
105. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 2.
106. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 35: loc. cit., 458.
107. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 41.
108. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), 41: AAS 80 (1988), 570f.
109. Documents of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla (1979), 3760 (1145).
110. Address to Clergy and Religious, Jakarta, October 10, 1989, 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 11, 1989.
111. Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 14-21, 40-42: loc. cit., 264-268, 277f; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 27-41: loc. cit., 547-572.
112. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 28: loc. cit., 548-550.
113. Cf. *ibid.*, Chapter IV, 27-34: loc. cit., 547-560; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 19-21, 41-42: loc. cit., 266-268, 277f.
114. Address to the residents of "Favela Vidigal" in Rio de Janeiro, July 2, 1980, 4: AAS 72 (1980), 854.
115. Documents of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla, (1979), 3757 (1142).
116. Isaac of Stella, Sermon 31, PL 194, 1793.
117. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 20.
118. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 35: loc. cit., 458.
119. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 38.
120. Address to Cardinals and those associated in the work of the Roman Curia, Vatican City and the Vicariate of Rome, June 28, 1980, 10: *Insegnamenti*, III/1 (1980), 1887.
121. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.
122. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 38.
123. *Ibid.*, 29.
124. Cf. *ibid.*, 38.
125. *Ibid.*, 30.
126. Documents of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla (1979): 2941 (368).
127. Cf. Norms for the Cooperation of the Local Churches Among Themselves and especially for a Better Distribution of the Clergy in the World *Postquam Apostoli* (March 25, 1980): AAS 72 (1980), 343-364.
128. Cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, Chapter IV, 23-27.
129. *Ibid.*, 23.
130. *Ibid.*
131. *Ibid.*, 23, 27.
132. Cf. Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and Sacred Congregation for Bishops, Directives for Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church *Mutuae Relationes* (May 14, 1978), 14b: AAS 70 (1978), 482; cf. n. 28: loc. cit., 490.
133. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 27.
134. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 10; cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 39.

135. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatum Totius*, 20: cf. "Guide de la vie pastorale pour les pretres diocesains des Eglises qui dependent de la Congregation pour l'Evangelisation des Peuples," Rome, 1989.
136. Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, April 14, 1989, 4: AAS 81 (1989), 1140.
137. Message for World Mission Day, 1982: *Insegnamenti V/2* (1982), 1879.
138. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 38; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Norms *Postquam Apostoli*, 24-25: loc. cit., 361.
139. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Norms *Postquam Apostoli*, 29: loc. cit., 362f; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 20.
140. CIC, c. 783.
141. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 40.
142. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 69: loc. cit., 58f.
143. Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), 20: AAS 80 (1988), 1703.
144. Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Evangelii Praecones*: loc. cit., 510ff; Encyclical Letter *Fidei Donum*: loc. cit., 228ff; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Princeps Pastorum*: loc. cit., 855ff; Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70-73: loc. cit., 59-63.
145. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 35: loc. cit., 457.
146. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Evangelii Praecones*: loc. cit., 510-514.
147. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17, 33ff.
148. Cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 35-36, 41.
149. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 14: loc. cit., 410.
150. CIC, c. 225, 1; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6, 13.
151. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 31; cf. CIC, c. 225, 2.
152. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70: loc. cit., 60.
153. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 35: loc. cit., 458.
154. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 17.
155. Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 66: loc. cit., 1331.
156. Cf. c. 785, 1.
157. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 17.
158. Cf. Plenary Assembly of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, 1969, on catechists, and the related "Instruction" of April 1970: *Bibliographia Missionaria* 34 (1970), 197-212 and S. C. de Propaganda Fide *Memoria Rerum*, III/2 (1976), 821-831.
159. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 28.
160. Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (June 28, 1988), 85: AAS 80 (1988), 881; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 29.
161. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 29: Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, 86: loc. cit., 882.
162. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 31.
163. Cf. *ibid.*, 33.
164. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* (August 6, 1966), II, 43: AAS 58 (1966), 782.
165. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 34; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, III, 22: loc. cit., 787.
166. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 35; cf. CIC, cc. 211, 781.
167. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 54: loc. cit., 147.
168. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Epistle *Graves et Increscentes* (September 5, 1966): AAS 58 (1966), 750-756.
169. P. Manna, *Le nostre "Chiese" e la propagazione del vangelo*, Trentola Ducenta, 1952 2, p. 35.
170. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 38.
171. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.
172. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 24.
173. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14.
174. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 17: loc. cit., 419.
175. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
176. Cf. Address at CELAM Meeting, Port-au-Prince, March 9, 1983: AAS 75 (1983), 771-779; Homily for the Opening of the "Novena of Years" promoted by CELAM, Santo Domingo, October 12, 1984: *Insegnamenti VII/2* (1984), 885-897.
177. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), 2: AAS 79 (1987), 362f.

178. Ibid., 22: loc. cit., 390.

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Ioannes Paulus PP. II
 To the Bishops, Priests
 Religious Families, sons and daughters of the Church
 and all people of good will
 for the twentieth anniversary of
 "Populorum Progressio"

1987.12.30

Blessing

Venerable Brothers and dear Sons and Daughters, Health and the Apostolic Blessing!

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The social concern of the Church, directed towards an authentic development of man and society which would respect and promote all the dimensions of the human person, has always expressed itself in the most varied ways. In recent years, one of the special means of intervention has been the Magisterium of the Roman Pontiffs which, beginning with the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII as a point of reference, 1 has frequently dealt with the question and has sometimes made the dates of publication of the various social documents coincide with the anniversaries of that first document.²

The Popes have not failed to throw fresh light by means of those messages upon new aspects of the social doctrine of the Church. As a result, this doctrine, beginning with the outstanding contribution of Leo XIII and enriched by the successive contributions of the Magisterium, has now become an updated doctrinal

"corpus." It builds up gradually, as the Church, in the fullness of the word revealed by Christ Jesus³ and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 14:16, 26; 16:13-15), reads events as they unfold in the course of history. She thus seeks to lead people to respond, with the support also of rational reflection and of the human sciences, to their vocation as responsible builders of earthly society.

2. Part of this large body of social teaching is the distinguished Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*,⁴ which my esteemed predecessor Paul VI published on March 26, 1967.

The enduring relevance of this Encyclical is easily recognized if we note the series of commemorations which took place during 1987 in various forms and in many parts of the ecclesiastical and civil world. For this same purpose, the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* sent a circular letter to the Synods of the Oriental Catholic Churches and to the Episcopal Conferences, asking for ideas and suggestions on the best way to celebrate the Encyclical's anniversary, to enrich its teachings and, if need be, to update them. At the time of the twentieth anniversary, the same Commission organized a solemn commemoration in which I myself took part and gave the concluding address.⁵ And now, also taking into account the replies to the above-mentioned circular letter, I consider it appropriate, at the close of the year 1987, to devote an Encyclical to the theme of *Populorum Progressio*.

3. In this way I wish principally to achieve two objectives of no little importance: on the one hand, to pay homage to this historic document of Paul VI and to its teaching; on the other hand, following in the footsteps of my esteemed predecessors in the See of Peter, to reaffirm the continuity of the social doctrine as well as its constant renewal. In effect, continuity and renewal are a proof of the perennial value of the teaching of the Church.

This twofold dimension is typical of her teaching in the social sphere. On the one hand it is constant, for it remains identical in its fundamental inspiration, in its "principles of reflection," in its "criteria of judgment," in its basic "directives for action,"⁶ and above all in its vital link with the Gospel of the Lord. On the other hand, it is ever new, because it is subject to the necessary and opportune adaptations suggested by the changes in historical conditions and by the unceasing flow of the events which are the setting of the life of people and society.

4. I am convinced that the teachings of the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, addressed to the people and the society of the '60s, retain all their force as an appeal to conscience today in the last part of the '80s, in an effort to trace the major lines of the present world always within the context of the aim and inspiration of the "development of peoples," which are still very far from being exhausted. I therefore propose to extend the impact of that message by bringing it to bear, with its possible applications, upon the present historical moment, which is no less dramatic than that of twenty years ago.

As we well know, time maintains a constant and unchanging rhythm. Today however we have the impression that it is passing ever more quickly, especially by reason of the multiplication and complexity of the phenomena in the midst of which we live. Consequently, the configuration of the world in the course of the last twenty years, while preserving certain fundamental constants, has undergone notable changes and presents some totally new aspects.

The present period of time, on the eve of the third Christian millennium, is characterized by a widespread expectancy, rather like a new "Advent,"⁷ which to some extent touches everyone. It offers an opportunity to study the teachings of the Encyclical in greater detail and to see their possible future developments.

The aim of the present reflection is to emphasize, through a theological investigation of the present world, the need for a fuller and more nuanced concept of development, according to the suggestions contained in the Encyclical. Its aim is also to indicate some ways of putting it into effect.

II. ORIGINALITY OF THE ENCYCLICAL POPULORUM PROGRESSIO

5.

As soon as it appeared, the document of Pope Paul VI captured the attention of public opinion by reason of its originality. In a concrete manner and with great clarity, it was possible to identify the above mentioned characteristics of continuity and renewal within the Church's social doctrine. The intention of rediscovering numerous aspects of this teaching, through a careful rereading of the Encyclical, will therefore; constitute the main thread of the present reflections.

But first I wish to say a few words about the date of publication; the year 1967. The very fact that Pope Paul VI chose to publish a social Encyclical in that year invites us to consider the document in relationship to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which had ended on December 8, 1965.

6.

We should see something more in this than simple chronological proximity. The Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* presents itself, in a certain way, as a document which applies the teachings of the Council. It not only makes continual reference to the texts of the Council,⁸ but it also flows from the same concern of the Church which inspired the whole effort of the Council-and in a particular way the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* - to coordinate and develop a number of themes of her social teaching.

We can therefore affirm that the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* is a kind of response to the Council's appeal with which the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* begins: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts."⁹ These words express the fundamental motive inspiring the great document of the Council, which begins by noting the situation of poverty and of underdevelopment in which millions of human beings live.

This poverty and underdevelopment are, under another name, the "griefs and the anxieties" of today, of "especially those who are poor." Before this vast panorama of pain and suffering, the Council wished to suggest horizons of joy and hope. The Encyclical of Paul VI has the same purpose, in full fidelity to the inspiration of the Council.

7. There is also the theme of the Encyclical which, in keeping with the great tradition of the Church's social teaching, takes up again in a direct manner the new exposition and rich synthesis which the Council produced, notably in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.

With regard to the content and themes once again set forth by the Encyclical, the following should be emphasized: the awareness of the duty of the Church, as "an expert in humanity, " "to scrutinize the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel"¹⁰; the awareness, equally profound, of her mission of "service, " a mission distinct from the function of the State, even when she is concerned with people's concrete situation"¹¹; the reference to the notorious inequalities in the situations of those same people¹²; the confirmation of the Council's teaching, a faithful echo of the centuries - old tradition of the Church regarding the "universal purpose of goods"¹³; the appreciation of the culture and the technological civilization which contribute to human liberation, ¹⁴ without failing to recognize their limits'¹⁵; finally, on the specific theme of development, which is precisely the theme of the Encyclical, the insistence on the "most serious duty" incumbent on the more developed nations "to help the developing countries."¹⁶ The same idea of development proposed by the Encyclical flows directly from the approach which the Pastoral Constitution takes to this problem.¹⁷

These and other explicit references to the Pastoral Constitution lead one to conclude that the Encyclical presents itself as an application of the Council's teaching in social matters to the specific problem of the development and the underdevelopment of peoples.

8. This brief analysis helps us to appreciate better the originality of the Encyclical, which can be stated in three points. The first is constituted by the very fact of a document, issued by the highest authority of the Catholic Church and addressed both to the Church herself and "to all people of good will,"¹⁸ on a matter which at first sight is solely economic and social: the development of peoples. The term "development" is taken from the vocabulary of the social and economic sciences. From this point of view, the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* follows directly in the line of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which deals with the "condition of the workers."¹⁹ Considered superficially, both themes could seem extraneous to the legitimate concern of the Church seen as a religious institution - and "development" even more so than the "condition of the workers."

In continuity with the Encyclical of Leo XIII, it must be recognized that the document of Paul VI possesses the merit of having emphasized the ethical and cultural character of the problems connected with development, and likewise the legitimacy and necessity of the Church's intervention in this field.

In addition, the social doctrine of the Church has once more demonstrated its character as an application of the word of God to people's lives and the life of society, as well as to the earthly realities connected with them, offering "principles for reflection, " "criteria of judgment" and "directives for action."²⁰ Here, in the document of Paul VI, one finds these three elements with a prevalently practical orientation, that is, directed towards moral conduct.

In consequence, when the Church concerns herself with the "development of peoples, " she cannot be accused of going outside her own specific field of competence and, still less, outside the mandate received from the Lord.

9. The second point of originality of *Populorum Progressio* is shown by the breadth of outlook open to what is commonly called the "social question."

In fact, the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* of Pope John XXIII had already entered into this wider outlook, ²¹

and the Council had echoed the same in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. ²² However, the social teaching of the Church had not yet reached the point of affirming with such clarity that the social question has acquired a worldwide dimension, ²³ nor had this affirmation and the accompanying analysis yet been made into a "directive for action, " as Paul VI did in his Encyclical.

Such an explicit taking up of a position offers a great wealth of content, which it is appropriate to point out.

In the first place a possible misunderstanding has to be eliminated. Recognition that the "social question" has assumed a worldwide dimension does not at all mean that it has lost its incisiveness or its national and local importance. On the contrary, it means that the problems in industrial enterprises or in the workers' and union movements of a particular country or region are not to be considered as isolated cases with no connection. On the contrary they depend more and more on the influence of factors beyond regional boundaries and national frontiers.

Unfortunately, from the economic point of view, the developing countries are much more numerous than the developed ones; the multitudes of human beings who lack the goods and services offered by development are much more numerous than those who possess them.

We are therefore faced with a serious problem of unequal distribution of the means of subsistence originally meant for everybody, and thus also an unequal distribution of the benefits deriving from them. And this happens not through the fault of the needy people, and even less through a sort of inevitability dependent on natural conditions or circumstances as a whole.

The Encyclical of Paul VI, in declaring that the social question has acquired worldwide dimensions, first of all points out a moral fact, one which has its foundation in an objective analysis of reality. In the words of the Encyclical itself, "each one must be conscious" of this fact, ²⁴ precisely because it directly concerns the conscience, which is the source of moral decisions.

In this framework, the originality of the Encyclical consists not so much in the affirmation, historical in character, of the universality of the social question, but rather in the moral evaluation of this reality. Therefore political leaders, and citizens of rich countries considered as individuals, especially if they are Christians, have the moral obligation, according to the degree of each one's responsibility, to take into consideration, in personal decisions and decisions of government, this relationship of universality, this interdependence which exists between their conduct and the poverty and underdevelopment of so many millions of people. Pope Paul's Encyclical translates more succinctly the moral obligation as the "duty of solidarity"²⁵; and this affirmation, even though many situations have changed in the world, has the same force and validity today as when it was written.

On the other hand, without departing from the lines of this moral vision, the originality of the Encyclical also consists in the basic insight that the very concept of development, if considered in the perspective of universal interdependence, changes notably. True development cannot consist in the simple accumulation of wealth and in the greater availability of goods and services, if this is gained at the expense of the development of the masses, and without due consideration for the social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the human being.²⁶

10. As a third point, the Encyclical provides a very original contribution to the social doctrine of the Church in its totality and to the very concept of development. This originality is recognizable in a phrase of the document's concluding paragraph, which can be considered as its summary, as well as its historic label: "Development is the new name for peace."²⁷

In fact, if the social question has acquired a worldwide dimension, this is because the demand for justice can only be satisfied on that level. To ignore this demand could encourage the temptation among the victims of injustice to respond with violence, as happens at the origin of many wars. Peoples excluded from the fair distribution of the goods originally destined for all could ask themselves: why not respond with violence to those who first treat us with violence? And if the situation is examined in the light of the division of the world into ideological blocs a division already existing in 1967 - and in the light of the subsequent economic and political repercussions and dependencies, the danger is seen to be much greater.

The first consideration of the striking content of the Encyclical's historic phrase may be supplemented by a second consideration to which the document itself alludes²⁸: how can one justify the fact that huge sums of money, which could and should be used for increasing the development of peoples, are instead utilized for the enrichment of

individuals or groups, or assigned to the increase of stockpiles of weapons, both in developed countries and in the developing ones, thereby upsetting the real priorities? This is even more serious given the difficulties which often hinder the direct transfer of capital set aside for helping needy countries. If "development is the new name for peace," war and military preparations are the major enemy of the integral development of peoples.

In the light of this expression of Pope Paul VI, we are thus invited to re-examine the concept of development. This of course is not limited to merely satisfying material necessities through an increase of goods, while ignoring the sufferings of the many and making the selfishness of individuals and nations the principal motivation. As the Letter of St. James pointedly reminds us: "What causes wars, and what causes fighting among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have" (Jas 4:1-2).

On the contrary, in a different world, ruled by concern for the common good of all humanity, or by concern for the "spiritual and human development of all" instead of by the quest for individual profit, peace would be possible as the result of a "more perfect justice among people."²⁹

Also this new element of the Encyclical has a permanent and contemporary value, in view of the modern attitude which is so sensitive to the close link between respect for justice and the establishment of real peace.

III. SURVEY OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

11.

In its own time the fundamental teaching of the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* received great acclaim for its novel character. The social context in which we live today cannot be said to be completely identical to that of twenty years ago. For this reason, I now wish to conduct a brief review of some of the characteristics of today's world, in order to develop the teaching of Paul VI's Encyclical, once again from the point of view of the "development of peoples."

12.

The first fact to note is that the hopes for development, at that time so lively, today appear very far from being realized.

In this regard, the Encyclical had no illusions. Its language, grave and at times dramatic, limited itself to stressing the seriousness of the situation and to bringing before the conscience of all the urgent obligation of contributing to its solution. In those years there was a certain widespread optimism about the possibility of overcoming, without excessive efforts, the economic backwardness of the poorer peoples, of providing them with infrastructures and assisting them in the process of industrialization.

In that historical context, over and above the efforts of each country, the United Nations Organization promoted consecutively two decades of development.³⁰ In fact, some measures, bilateral and multilateral, were taken with the aim of helping many nations, some of which had already been independent for some time, and others - the majority - being States just born from the process of decolonization. For her part, the Church felt the duty to deepen her understanding of the problems posed by the new situation, in the hope of supporting these efforts with her religious and human inspiration in order to give them a "soul" and an effective impulse.

13.

It cannot be said that these various religious, human, economic and technical initiatives have been in vain, for they have succeeded in achieving certain results. But in general, taking into account the various factors, one cannot deny that the present situation of the world, from the point of view of development, offers a rather negative impression.

For this reason, I wish to call attention to a number of general indicators, without excluding other specific ones. Without going into an analysis of figures and statistics, it is sufficient to face squarely the reality of an innumerable multitude of people - children, adults and the elderly - in other words, real and unique human persons, who are suffering under the intolerable burden of poverty. There are many millions who are deprived of hope due to the fact that, in many parts of the world, their situation has noticeably worsened. Before these tragedies of total indigence and need, in which so many of our brothers and sisters are living, it is the Lord Jesus himself who comes to question us (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

14.

The first negative observation to make is the persistence and often the widening of the gap between the areas of the so-called developed North and the developing South. This geographical terminology is only indicative, since one cannot ignore the fact that the frontiers of wealth and poverty intersect within the societies themselves, whether developed or developing. In fact, just as social inequalities down to the level of poverty exist in rich countries, so, in parallel fashion, in the less developed countries one often sees manifestations of selfishness and a flaunting of wealth which is as disconcerting, as it is scandalous. The abundance of goods and services available in some parts of the world, particularly in the developed North, is matched in the South by an unacceptable delay, and it is precisely in this geopolitical area that the major part of the human race lives.

Looking at all the various sectors - the production and distribution of foodstuffs, hygiene, health and housing, availability of drinking water, working conditions (especially for women), life expectancy and other economic and

social indicators - the general picture is a disappointing one, both considered in itself and in relation to the corresponding data of the more developed countries. The word "gap" returns spontaneously to mind.

Perhaps this is not the appropriate word for indicating the true reality, since it could give the impression of a stationary phenomenon. This is not the case. The pace of progress in the developed and developing countries in recent years has differed, and this serves to widen the distances. Thus the developing countries, especially the poorest of them, find themselves in a situation of very serious delay.

We must also add the differences of culture and value systems between the various population groups, differences which do not always match the degree of economic development, but which help to create distances. These are elements and aspects which render the social question much more complex, precisely because this question has assumed a universal dimension.

As we observe the various parts of the world separated by this widening gap, and note that each of these parts seems to follow its own path with its own achievements, we can understand the current usage which speaks of different worlds within our one world: the First World, the Second World, the Third World and at times the Fourth World.³¹ Such expressions, which obviously do not claim to classify exhaustively all countries, are significant: they are a sign of a widespread sense that the unity of the world, that is, the unity of the human race, is seriously compromised. Such phraseology, beyond its more or less objective value, undoubtedly conceals a moral content, before which the Church, which is a "sacrament or sign and instrument...of the unity of the whole human race"³² cannot remain indifferent.

15. However, the picture just given would be incomplete if one failed to add to the "economic and social indices" of underdevelopment other indices which are equally negative and indeed even more disturbing, beginning with the cultural level. These are illiteracy, the difficulty or impossibility of obtaining higher education, the inability to share in the building of one's own nation, the various forms of exploitation and of economic, social, political and even religious oppression of the individual and his or her rights, discrimination of every type, especially the exceptionally odious form based on difference of race. If some of these scourges are noted with regret in areas of the more developed North, they are undoubtedly more frequent, more lasting and more difficult to root out in the developing and less advanced countries.

It should be noted that in today's world, among other rights, the right of economic initiative is often suppressed. Yet it is a right which is important not only for the individual but also for the common good. Experience shows us that the denial of this right, or its limitation in the name of an alleged "equality" of everyone in society, diminishes, or in practice absolutely destroys the spirit of initiative, that is to say the creative subjectivity of the citizen. As a consequence, there arises, not so much a true equality as a "leveling down." In the place of creative initiative there appears passivity, dependence and submission to the bureaucratic apparatus which, as the only "ordering" and "decision-making" body - if not also the "owner"- of the entire totality of goods and the means of production, puts everyone in a position of almost absolute dependence, which is similar to the traditional dependence of the worker-proletarian in capitalism. This provokes a sense of frustration or desperation and predisposes people to opt out of national life, impelling many to emigrate and also favoring a form of "psychological" emigration.

Such a situation has its consequences also from the point of view of the "rights of the individual nations." In fact, it often happens that a nation is deprived of its subjectivity, that is to say the "sovereignty" which is its right, in its economic, political-social and in a certain way cultural significance, since in a national community all these dimensions of life are bound together.

It must also be restated that no social group, for example a political party, has the right to usurp the role of sole leader, since this brings about the destruction of the true subjectivity of society and of the individual citizens, as happens in every form of totalitarianism. In this situation the individual and the people become "objects," in spite of all declarations to the contrary and verbal assurances.

We should add here that in today's world there are many other forms of poverty. For are there not certain privations or deprivations which deserve this name? The denial or the limitation of human rights - as for example the right to religious freedom, the right to share in the building of society, the freedom to organize and to form unions, or to take initiatives in economic matters - do these not impoverish the human person as much as, if not more than, the deprivation of material goods? And is development which does not take into account the full affirmation of these rights really development on the human level?

In brief, modern underdevelopment is not only economic but also cultural, political and simply human, as was indicated twenty years ago by the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. Hence at this point we have to ask ourselves if the sad reality of today might not be, at least in part, the result of a too narrow idea of development, that is, a mainly economic one.

16. It should be noted that in spite of the praiseworthy efforts made in the last two decades by the more developed or developing nations and the international organizations to find a way out of the situation, or at least to remedy some of its symptoms, the conditions have become notably worse.

Responsibility for this deterioration is due to various causes. Notable among them are undoubtedly grave instances of omissions on the part of the developing nations themselves, and especially on the part of those holding economic and political power. Nor can we pretend not to see the responsibility of the developed nations, which have not always, at least in due measure, felt the duty to help countries separated from the affluent world to which they themselves belong.

Moreover, one must denounce the existence of economic, financial and social mechanisms which, although they are manipulated by people, often function almost automatically, thus accentuating the situation of wealth for some and poverty for the rest. These mechanisms, which are maneuvered directly or indirectly by the more developed countries, by their very functioning favor the interests of the people manipulating them at in the end they suffocate or condition the economies of the less developed countries. Later on these mechanisms will have to be subjected to a careful analysis under the ethical-moral aspect.

Populorum Progressio already foresaw the possibility that under such systems the wealth of the rich would increase and the poverty of the poor would remain.³³ A proof of this forecast has been the appearance of the so-called Fourth World.

17. However much society worldwide shows signs of fragmentation, expressed in the conventional names First, Second, Third and even Fourth World, their interdependence remains close. When this interdependence is separated from its ethical requirements, it has disastrous consequences for the weakest. Indeed, as a result of a sort of internal dynamic and under the impulse of mechanisms which can only be called perverse, this interdependence triggers negative effects even in the rich countries. It is precisely within these countries that one encounters, though on a lesser scale, the more specific manifestations of under development. Thus it should be obvious that development either becomes shared in common by every part of the world or it undergoes a process of regression even in zones marked by constant progress. This tells us a great deal about the nature of authentic development: either all the nations of the world participate, or it will not be true development.

Among the specific signs of underdevelopment which increasingly affect the developed countries also, there are two in particular that reveal a tragic situation. The first is the housing crisis. During this International Year of the Home less proclaimed by the United Nations. attention is focused on the millions of human beings lacking adequate housing or with no housing at all, in order to awaken everyone's conscience and to find a solution to this serious problem with its negative consequences for the individual, the family and society.³⁴

The lack of housing is being experienced universally and is due in large measure to the growing phenomenon of urbanization.³⁵ Even the most highly developed peoples present the sad spectacle of individuals and families literally struggling to survive, without a roof over their heads or with a roof so inadequate as to constitute no roof at all.

The lack of housing, an extremely serious problem in itself, should be seen as a sign and summing-up of a whole series of shortcomings: economic, social, cultural or simply human in nature. Given the extent of the problem, we should need little convincing of how far we are from an authentic development of peoples.

18. Another indicator common to the vast majority of nations is the phenomenon of unemployment and underemployment.

Everyone recognizes the reality and growing seriousness of this problem in the industrialized countries.³⁶ While it is alarming in the developing countries, with their high rate of population growth and their large numbers of young people, in the countries of high economic development the sources of work seem to be shrinking, and thus the opportunities for employment are decreasing rather than increasing.

This phenomenon too, with its series of negative consequences for individuals and for society, ranging from humiliation to the loss of that self respect which every man and woman should have, prompts us to question seriously the type of development which has been followed over the past twenty years. Here the words of the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* are extremely appropriate: "It must be stressed that the constitutive element in this progress and also the most adequate way to verify it in a spirit of justice and peace, which the Church proclaims and for which she does not cease to pray...is the continual reappraisal of man's work, both in the aspect of its objective finality and in the aspect of the dignity of the subject of all work, that is to say, man." On the other hand, "we cannot fail to be struck by a disconcerting fact of immense proportions: the fact that...there are huge numbers of people who are unemployed...a fact that without any doubt demonstrates that both within the individual political communities and in their relationships on the continental and world level there is something wrong with the organization of work and employment, precisely at the most critical and socially most important points."³⁷

This second phenomenon, like the previous one, because it is universal in character and tends to proliferate, is a very telling negative sign of the state and the quality of the development of peoples which we see today.

19. A third phenomenon, likewise characteristic of the most recent period, even though it is not met with everywhere, is without doubt equally indicative of the interdependence between developed and less developed countries. It is the question of the international debt, concerning which the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* has issued a document.³⁸ At this point one cannot ignore the close connection between a problem of this kind - the growing seriousness of which was already foreseen in *Populorum Progressio*³⁹ - and the question of the development of peoples.

The reason which prompted the developing peoples to accept the offer of abundantly available capital was the hope of being able to invest it in development projects. Thus the availability of capital and the fact of accepting it as a loan can be considered a contribution to development, something desirable and legitimate in itself, even though perhaps imprudent and occasionally hasty.

Circumstances have changed, both within the debtor nations and in the international financial market; the instrument chosen to make a contribution to development has turned into a counterproductive mechanism. This is because the debtor nations, in order to service their debt, find themselves obliged to export the capital needed for improving or at

least maintaining their standard of living. It is also because, for the same reason, they are unable to obtain new and equally essential financing.

Through this mechanism, the means intended for the development of peoples has turned into a brake upon development instead, and indeed in some cases has even aggravated underdevelopment.

As the recent document of the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* states, 40 these observations should make us reflect on the ethical character of the interdependence of peoples. And along similar lines, they should make us reflect on the requirements and conditions, equally inspired by ethical principles, for cooperation in development.

20. If at this point we examine the reasons for this serious delay in the process of development, a delay which has occurred contrary to the indications of the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, which had raised such great hopes, our attention is especially drawn to the political causes of today's situation.

Faced with a combination of factors which are undoubtedly complex, we cannot hope to achieve a comprehensive analysis here. However, we cannot ignore a striking fact about the political picture since the Second World War, a fact which has considerable impact on the forward movement of the development of peoples.

I am referring to the existence of two opposing blocs, commonly known as the East and the West. The reason for this description is not purely political but is also, as the expression goes, geopolitical. Each of the two blocs tends to assimilate or gather around it other countries or groups of countries, to different degrees of adherence or participation.

The opposition is first of all political, inasmuch as each bloc identifies itself with a system of organizing society and exercising power which presents itself as an alternative to the other. The political opposition, in turn, takes its origin from a deeper Opposition which is ideological in nature.

In the West there exists a system which is historically inspired by the principles of the liberal capitalism which developed with industrialization during the last century. In the East there exists a system inspired by the Marxist collectivism which sprang from an interpretation of the condition of the proletarian classes made in the light of a particular reading of history. Each of the two ideologies, on the basis of two very different visions of man and of his freedom and social role, has proposed and still promotes, on the economic level, antithetical forms of the organization of labor and of the structures of ownership, especially with regard to the so-called means of production.

It was inevitable that by developing antagonistic systems and centers of power, each with its own forms of propaganda and indoctrination, the ideological opposition should evolve into a growing military opposition and give rise to two blocs of armed forces, each suspicious and fearful of the other's domination.

International relations, in turn, could not fail to feel the effects of this "logic of blocs" and of the respective "spheres of influence." The tension between the two blocs which began at the end of the Second World War has dominated the whole of the subsequent forty years. Sometimes it has taken the form of "cold war," sometimes of "wars by proxy," through the manipulation of local conflicts, and sometimes it has kept people's minds in suspense and anguish by the threat of an open and total war.

Although at the present time this danger seems to have receded, yet without completely disappearing, and even though an initial agreement has been reached on the destruction of one type of nuclear weapon, the existence and opposition of the blocs continue to be a real and worrying fact which still colors the world picture.

21. This happens with particularly negative effects in the international relations which concern the developing countries. For as we know the tension between East and West is not in itself an opposition between two different levels of development but rather between two concepts of the development of individuals and peoples both concepts being imperfect and in need of radical correction. This opposition is transferred to the developing countries themselves, and thus helps to widen the gap already existing on the economic level between North and South and which results from the distance between the two worlds: the more developed one and the less developed one.

This is one of the reasons why the Church's social doctrine adopts a critical attitude towards both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism. For from the point of view of development the question naturally arises: in what way and to what extent are these two systems capable of changes and updatings such as to favor or promote a true and integral development of individuals and peoples in modern society? In fact, these changes and updatings are urgent and essential for the cause of a development common to all.

Countries which have recently achieved independence, and which are trying to establish a cultural and political identity of their own, and need effective and impartial aid from all the richer and more developed countries, find themselves involved in, and sometimes overwhelmed by, ideological conflicts, which inevitably create internal divisions, to the extent in some cases of provoking full civil war. This is also because investments and aid for development are often diverted from their proper purpose and used to sustain conflicts, apart from and in opposition to the interests of the countries which ought to benefit from them. Many of these countries are becoming more and more aware of the danger of falling victim to a form of neocolonialism and are trying to escape from it. It is this awareness which in spite of difficulties, uncertainties and at times contradictions gave rise to the International Movement of Non-Aligned Nations, which, in its positive aspect, would like to affirm in an effective way the right of every people to its own identity, independence and security, as well as the right to share, on a basis of equality and solidarity, in the goods intended for all.

22. In the light of these considerations, we easily arrive at a clearer picture of the last twenty years and a better understanding of the conflicts in the northern hemisphere, namely between East and West, as an important cause of the retardation or stagnation of the South.

The developing countries, instead of becoming autonomous nations concerned with their own progress towards a just sharing in the goods and services meant for all, become parts of a machine, cogs on a gigantic wheel. This is often true also in the field of social communications, which, being run by centers mostly in the northern hemisphere, do not always give due consideration to the priorities and problems of such countries or respect their cultural make-up. They frequently impose a distorted vision of life and of man and thus fail to respond to the demands of true development.

Each of the two blocs harbors in its own way a tendency towards imperialism, as it is usually called, or towards forms of new- colonialism: an easy temptation to which they frequently succumb, as history, including recent history, teaches. It is this abnormal situation, the result of a war and of an unacceptably exaggerated concern for security, which deadens the impulse towards united cooperation by all for the common good of the human race, to the detriment especially of peaceful peoples who are impeded from their rightful access to the goods meant for all.

Seen in this way, the present division of the world is a direct obstacle to the real transformation of the conditions of underdevelopment in the developing and less advanced countries. However, peoples do not always resign themselves to their fate. Furthermore, the very needs of an economy stifled by military expenditure and by bureaucracy and intrinsic inefficiency now seem to favor processes which might mitigate the existing opposition and make it easier to begin a fruitful dialogue and genuine collaboration for peace.

23. The statement in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* that the resources and investments devoted to arms production ought to be used to alleviate the misery of impoverished peoples⁴¹ makes more urgent the appeal to overcome the opposition between the two blocs.

Today, the reality is that these resources are used to enable each of the two blocs to overtake the other and thus guarantee its own security. Nations which historically, economically and politically have the possibility of playing a leadership role are prevented by this fundamentally flawed distortion from adequately fulfilling their duty of solidarity for the benefit of peoples which aspire to full development.

It is timely to mention - and it is no exaggeration - that a leadership role among nations can only be justified by the possibility and willingness to contribute widely and generously to the common good.

If a nation were to succumb more or less deliberately to the temptation to close in upon itself and failed to meet the responsibilities following from its superior position in the community of nations, it would fall seriously short of its clear ethical duty. This is readily apparent in the circumstances of history, where believers discern the dispositions of Divine Providence, ready to make use of the nations for the realization of its plans, so as to render "vain the designs of the peoples" (cf. Ps 33[32]: 10).

When the West gives the impression of abandoning itself to forms of growing and selfish isolation, and the East in its turn seems to ignore for questionable reasons its duty to cooperate in the task of alleviating human misery, then we are up against not only a betrayal of humanity's legitimate expectations - a betrayal that is a harbinger of unforeseeable consequences - but also a real desertion of a moral obligation.

24. If arms production is a serious disorder in the present world with regard to true human needs and the employment of the means capable of satisfying those needs, the arms trade is equally to blame. Indeed, with reference to the latter it must be added that the moral judgment is even more severe. As we all know, this is a trade without frontiers capable of crossing even the barriers of the blocs. It knows how to overcome the division between East and West, and above all the one between North and South, to the point - and this is more serious - of pushing its way into the different sections which make up the southern hemisphere. We are thus confronted with a strange phenomenon: while economic aid and development plans meet with the obstacle of insuperable ideological barriers, and with tariff and trade barriers, arms of whatever origin circulate with almost total freedom all over the world. And as the recent document of the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* on the international debt points out, ⁴² everyone knows that in certain cases the capital lent by the developed world has been used in the underdeveloped world to buy weapons.

If to all this we add the tremendous and universally acknowledged danger represented by atomic weapons stockpiled on an incredible scale, the logical conclusion seems to be this: in today's world, including the world of economics, the prevailing picture is one destined to lead us more quickly towards death rather than one of concern for true development which would lead all towards a "more human" life, as envisaged by the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.⁴³

The consequences of this state of affairs are to be seen in the festering of a wound which typifies and reveals the imbalances and conflicts of the modern world: the millions of refugees whom war, natural calamities, persecution and discrimination of every kind have deprived of home, employment, family and homeland. The tragedy of these multitudes is reflected in the hopeless faces of men, women and children who can no longer find a home in a divided and inhospitable world.

Nor may we close our eyes to another painful wound in today's world: the phenomenon of terrorism, understood as the intention to kill people and destroy property indiscriminately, and to create a climate of terror and insecurity, often including the taking of hostages. Even when some ideology or the desire to create a better society is adduced as the motivation for this inhuman behavior, acts of terrorism are never justifiable. Even less so when, as happens today, such

decisions and such actions, which at times lead to real massacres, and to the abduction of innocent people who have nothing to do with the conflicts, claim to have a propaganda purpose for furthering a cause. It is still worse when they are an end in themselves, so that murder is committed merely for the sake of killing. In the face of such horror and suffering, the words I spoke some years ago are still true, and I wish to repeat them again: "What Christianity forbids is to seek solutions...by the ways of hatred, by the murdering of defenseless people, by the methods of terrorism."⁴⁴

25. At this point something must be said about the demographic problem and the way it is spoken of today, following what Paul VI said in his Encyclicals⁴⁵ and what I myself stated at length in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*.⁴⁶

One cannot deny the existence, especially in the southern hemisphere, of a demographic problem which creates difficulties for development.

One must immediately add that in the northern hemisphere the nature of this problem is reversed: here, the cause for concern is the drop in the birthrate, with repercussions on the aging of the population, unable even to renew itself biologically. In itself, this is a phenomenon capable of hindering development. Just as it is incorrect to say that such difficulties stem solely from demographic growth, neither is it proved that all demographic growth is incompatible with orderly development.

On the other hand, it is very alarming to see governments in many countries launching systematic campaigns against birth, contrary not only to the cultural and religious identity of the countries themselves but also contrary to the nature of true development. It often happens that these campaigns are the result of pressure and financing coming from abroad, and in some cases they are made a condition for the granting of financial and economic aid and assistance. In any event, there is an absolute lack of respect for the freedom of choice of the parties involved, men and women often subjected to intolerable pressures, including economic ones, in order to force them to submit to this new form of oppression. It is the poorest populations which suffer such mistreatment, and this sometimes leads to a tendency towards a form of racism, or the promotion of certain equally racist forms of eugenics.

This fact too, which deserves the most forceful condemnation, is a sign of an erroneous and perverse idea of true human development.

26. This mainly negative overview of the actual situation of development in the contemporary world would be incomplete without a mention of the coexistence of positive aspects.

The first positive note is the full awareness among large numbers of men and women of their own dignity and of that of every human being. This awareness is expressed, for example, in the more lively concern that human rights should be respected, and in the more vigorous rejection of their violation. One sign of this is the number of recently established private associations, some worldwide in membership, almost all of them devoted to monitoring with great care and commendable objectivity what is happening internationally in this sensitive field.

At this level one must acknowledge the influence exercised by the Declaration of Human Rights, promulgated some forty years ago by the United Nations Organization. Its very existence and gradual acceptance by the international community are signs of a growing awareness. The same is to be said, still in the field of human rights, of other juridical instruments issued by the United Nations Organization or other international organizations.⁴⁷

The awareness under discussion applies not only to individuals but also to nations and peoples, which, as entities having a specific cultural identity, are particularly sensitive to the preservation, free exercise and promotion of their precious heritage.

At the same time, in a world divided and beset by every type of conflict, the conviction is growing of a radical interdependence and consequently of the need for a solidarity which will take up interdependence and transfer it to the moral plane. Today perhaps more than in the past, people are realizing that they are linked together by a common destiny, which is to be constructed together, if catastrophe for all is to be avoided. From the depth of anguish, fear and escapist phenomena like drugs, typical of the contemporary world, the idea is slowly emerging that the good to which we are all called and the happiness to which we aspire cannot be obtained without an effort and commitment on the part of all, nobody excluded, and the consequent renouncing of personal selfishness.

Also to be mentioned here, as a sign of respect for life - despite all the temptations to destroy it by abortion and euthanasia - is a concomitant concern for peace, together with an awareness that peace is indivisible. It is either for all or for none. It demands an ever greater degree of rigorous respect for justice and consequently a fair distribution of the results of true development.⁴⁸

Among today's positive signs we must also mention a greater realization of the limits of available resources, and of the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development, rather than sacrificing them to certain demagogic ideas about the latter. Today this is called ecological concern.

It is also right to acknowledge the generous commitment of statesmen, politicians, economists, trade unionists, people of science and international officials - many of them inspired by religious faith - who at no small personal sacrifice try to resolve the world's ills and who give of themselves in every way so as to ensure that an ever increasing number of people may enjoy the benefits of peace and a quality of life worthy of the name.

The great international organizations, and a number of the regional organizations, contribute to this in no small measure. Their united efforts make possible more effective action.

It is also through these contributions that some Third World countries, despite the burden of many negative factors, have succeeded in reaching a certain self-sufficiency in food, or a degree of industrialization which makes it possible to survive with dignity and to guarantee sources of employment for the active population.

Thus, all is not negative in the contemporary world, nor could it be, for the Heavenly Father's providence lovingly watches over even our daily cares (cf. Mt 6:25-32; 10:23-31; Lk 12:6-7, 22-30). Indeed, the positive values which we have mentioned testify to a new moral concern, particularly with respect to the great human problems such as development and peace.

This fact prompts me to turn my thoughts to the true nature of the development of peoples, along the lines of the Encyclical which we are commemorating, and as a mark of respect for its teaching.

IV. AUTHENTIC HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

27. The examination which the Encyclical invites us to make of the contemporary world leads us to note in the first place that development is not a straightforward process, as it were automatic and in itself limitless, as though, given certain conditions, the human race were able to progress rapidly towards an undefined perfection of some kind.⁴⁹

Such an idea - linked to a notion of "progress" with philosophical connotations deriving from the Enlightenment, rather than to the notion of "development"⁵⁰ which is used in a specifically economic and social sense - now seems to be seriously called into doubt, particularly since the tragic experience of the two world wars, the planned and partly achieved destruction of whole peoples, and the looming atomic peril. A naive mechanistic optimism has been replaced by a well founded anxiety for the fate of humanity.

28. At the same time, however, the "economic" concept itself, linked to the word development, has entered into crisis. In fact there is a better understanding today that the mere accumulation of goods and services, even for the benefit of the majority, is not enough for the realization of human happiness. Nor, in consequence, does the availability of the many real benefits provided in recent times by science and technology, including the computer sciences, bring freedom from every form of slavery. On the contrary, the experience of recent years shows that unless all the considerable body of resources and potential at man's disposal is guided by a moral understanding and by an orientation towards the true good of the human race, it easily turns against man to oppress him.

A disconcerting conclusion about the most recent period should serve to enlighten us: side-by-side with the miseries of underdevelopment, themselves unacceptable, we find ourselves up against a form of superdevelopment, equally inadmissible. because like the former it is contrary to what is good and to true happiness. This super-development, which consists in an excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups, easily makes people slaves of "possession" and of immediate gratification, with no other horizon than the multiplication or continual replacement of the things already owned with others still better. This is the so-called civilization of "consumption" or "consumerism," which involves so much "throwing-away" and "waste." An object already owned but now superseded by something better is discarded, with no thought of its possible lasting value in itself, nor of some other human being who is poorer.

All of us experience firsthand the sad effects of this blind submission to pure consumerism: in the first place a crass materialism, and at the same time a radical dissatisfaction, because one quickly learns - unless one is shielded from the flood of publicity and the ceaseless and tempting offers of products - that the more one possesses the more one wants, while deeper aspirations remain unsatisfied and perhaps even stifled.

The Encyclical of Pope Paul VI pointed out the difference, so often emphasized today, between "having" and "being,"⁵¹ which had been expressed earlier in precise words by the Second Vatican Council.⁵² To "have" objects and goods does not in itself perfect the human subject, unless it contributes to the maturing and enrichment of that subject's "being," that is to say unless it contributes to the realization of the human vocation as such.

Of course, the difference between "being" and "having," the danger inherent in a mere multiplication or replacement of things possessed compared to the value of "being," need not turn into a contradiction. One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many. It is the injustice of the poor distribution of the goods and services originally intended for all.

This then is the picture: there are some people - the few who possess much - who do not really succeed in "being" because, through a reversal of the hierarchy of values, they are hindered by the cult of "having"; and there are others - the many who have little or nothing - who do not succeed in realizing their basic human vocation because they are deprived of essential goods.

The evil does not consist in "having" as such, but in possessing without regard for the quality and the ordered hierarchy of the goods one has. Quality and hierarchy arise from the subordination of goods and their availability to man's "being" and his true vocation.

This shows that although development has a necessary economic dimension, since it must supply the greatest possible number of the world's inhabitants with an availability of goods essential for them "to be," it is not limited to that dimension. If it is limited to this, then it turns against those whom it is meant to benefit.

The characteristics of full development, one which is "more human" and able to sustain itself at the level of the true vocation of men and women without denying economic requirements, were described by Paul VI.⁵³

29. Development which is not only economic must be measured and oriented according to the reality and vocation of man seen in his totality, namely, according to his interior dimension. There is no doubt that he needs created goods and the products of industry, which is constantly being enriched by scientific and technological progress. And the ever greater availability of material goods not only meets needs but also opens new horizons. The danger of the misuse of material goods and the appearance of artificial needs should in no way hinder the regard we have for the new goods and resources placed at our disposal and the use we make of them. On the contrary, we must see them as a gift from God and as a response to the human vocation, which is fully realized in Christ.

However, in trying to achieve true development we must never lose sight of that dimension which is in the specific nature of man, who has been created by God in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). It is a bodily and a spiritual nature, symbolized in the second creation account by the two elements: the earth, from which God forms man's body, and the breath of life which he breathes into man's nostrils (cf. Gen 2:7).

Thus man comes to have a certain affinity with other creatures: he is called to use them, and to be involved with them. As the Genesis account says (cf. Gen 2:15), he is placed in the garden with the duty of cultivating and watching over it, being superior to the other creatures placed by God under his dominion (cf. Gen 1:25-26). But at the same time man must remain subject to the will of God, who imposes limits upon his use and dominion over things (cf. Gen 2:16-17), just as he promises his mortality (cf. Gen 2:9; Wis 2:23). Thus man, being the image of God, has a true affinity with him too. On the basis of this teaching, development cannot consist only in the use, dominion over and indiscriminate possession of created things and the products of human industry, but rather in subordinating the possession, dominion and use to man's divine likeness and to his vocation to immortality. This is the transcendent reality of the human being, a reality which is seen to be shared from the beginning by a couple, a man and a woman (cf. Gen 1:27), and is therefore fundamentally social.

30. According to Sacred Scripture therefore, the notion of development is not only "lay" or "profane," but it is also seen to be, while having a socio-economic dimension of its own, the modern expression of an essential dimension of man's vocation.

The fact is that man was not created, so to speak, immobile and static. The first portrayal of him, as given in the Bible, certainly presents him as a creature and image, defined in his deepest reality by the origin and affinity that constitute him. But all this plants within the human being - man and woman - the seed and the requirement of a special task to be accomplished by each individually and by them as a couple. The task is "to have dominion" over the other created beings, "to cultivate the garden." This is to be accomplished within the framework of obedience to the divine law and therefore with respect for the image received, the image which is the clear foundation of the power of dominion recognized as belonging to man as the means to his perfection (cf. Gen 1:26-30; 2:15-16; Wis 9:2-3).

When man disobeys God and refuses to submit to his rule, nature rebels against him and no longer recognizes him as its "master," for he has tarnished the divine image in himself. The claim to ownership and use of created things remains still valid, but after sin its exercise becomes difficult and full of suffering (cf. Gen 3:17-19).

In fact, the following chapter of Genesis shows us that the descendants of Cain build "a city," engage in sheep farming, practice the arts (music) and technical skills (metallurgy); while at the same time people began to "call upon the name of the Lord" (cf. Gen 4:17-26).

The story of the human race described by Sacred Scripture is, even after the fall into sin, a story of constant achievements, which, although always called into question and threatened by sin, are nonetheless repeated, increased and extended in response to the divine vocation given from the beginning to man and to woman (cf. Gen 1:26-28) and inscribed in the image which they received.

It is logical to conclude, at least on the part of those who believe in the word of God, that today's "development" is to be seen as a moment in the story which began at creation, a story which is constantly endangered by reason of infidelity to the Creator's will, and especially by the temptation to idolatry. But this "development" fundamentally corresponds to the first premises. Anyone wishing to renounce the difficult yet noble task of improving the lot of man in his totality, and of all people, with the excuse that the struggle is difficult and that constant effort is required, or simply because of the experience of defeat and the need to begin again, that person would be betraying the will of God the Creator. In this regard, in the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* I referred to man's vocation to work, in order to emphasize the idea that it is always man who is the protagonist of development.⁵⁴

Indeed, the Lord Jesus himself, in the parable of the talents, emphasizes the severe treatment given to the man who dared to hide the gift received: "You wicked slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I have not winnowed?...So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents" (Mt 25:26-28). It falls to us, who receive the gifts of God in order to make them fruitful, to "sow" and "reap." If we do not, even what we have will be taken away from us.

A deeper study of these harsh words will make us commit ourselves more resolutely to the duty, which is urgent for everyone today, to work together for the full development of others: "development of the whole human being and of all people."⁵⁵

31. Faith in Christ the Redeemer, while it illuminates from within the nature of development, also guides us in the task of collaboration. In the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians, we read that Christ is "the first-born of all creation, " and that "all things were created through him" and for him (1:15-16). In fact, "all things hold together in him, " since "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things" (v. 20).

A part of this divine plan, which begins from eternity in Christ, the perfect "image" of the Father, and which culminates in him, "the firstborn from the dead" (v. 18), is our own history, marked by our personal and collective effort to raise up the human condition and to overcome the obstacles which are continually arising along our way. It thus prepares us to share in the fullness which "dwells in the Lord" and which he communicates "to his body, which is the Church" (v. 18; cf. Eph 1:22-23). At the same time sin, which is always attempting to trap us and which jeopardizes our human achievements, is conquered and redeemed by the "reconciliation" accomplished by Christ (cf. Col 1:20).

Here the perspectives widen. The dream of "unlimited progress" reappears, radically transformed by the new outlook created by Christian faith, assuring us that progress is possible only because God the Father has decided from the beginning to make man a sharer of his glory in Jesus Christ risen from the dead, in whom "we have redemption through his blood...the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph 1:7). In him God wished to conquer sin and make it serve our greater good, 56 which infinitely surpasses what progress could achieve.

We can say therefore - as we struggle amidst the obscurities and deficiencies of underdevelopment and superdevelopment - that one day this corruptible body will put on incorruptibility, this mortal body immortality (cf. 1 Cor 15:54), when the Lord "delivers the Kingdom to God the Father" (v. 24) and all the works and actions that are worthy of man will be redeemed.

Furthermore, the concept of faith makes quite clear the reasons which impel the Church to concern herself with the problems of development, to consider them a duty of her pastoral ministry, and to urge all to think about the nature and characteristics of authentic human development. Through her commitment she desires, on the one hand, to place herself at the service of the divine plan which is meant to order all things to the fullness which dwells in Christ (cf. Col 1:19) and which he communicated to his body; and on the other hand she desires to respond to her fundamental vocation of being a "sacrament, " that is to say "a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."⁵⁷

Some Fathers of the Church were inspired by this idea to develop in original ways a concept of the meaning of history and of human work, directed towards a goal which surpasses this meaning and which is always defined by its relationship to the work of Christ. In other words, one can find in the teaching of the Fathers an optimistic vision of history and work, that is to say of the perennial value of authentic human achievements, inasmuch as they are redeemed by Christ and destined for the promised Kingdom.⁵⁸

Thus, part of the teaching and most ancient practice of the Church is her conviction that she is obliged by her vocation - she herself, her ministers and each of her members - to relieve the misery of the suffering, both far and near, not only out of her "abundance" but also out of her "necessities." Faced by cases of need, one cannot ignore them in favor of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishings for divine worship; on the contrary it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order to provide food, drink, clothing and shelter for those who lack these things.⁵⁹ As has been already noted, here we are shown a "hierarchy of values" - in the framework of the right to property - between "having" and "being, " especially when the "having" of a few can be to the detriment of the "being" of many others.

In his Encyclical Pope Paul VI stands in the line of this teaching, taking his inspiration from the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. 60 For my own part, I wish to insist once more on the seriousness and urgency of that teaching, and I ask the Lord to give all Christians the strength to put it faithfully into practice.

32. The obligation to commit oneself to the development of peoples is not just an individual duty, and still less an individualistic one, as if it were possible to achieve this development through the isolated efforts of each individual. It is an imperative which obliges each and every man and woman, as well as societies and nations. In particular, it obliges the Catholic Church and the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, with which we are completely willing to collaborate in this field. In this sense, just as we Catholics invite our Christian brethren to share in our initiatives, so too we declare that we are ready to collaborate in theirs, and we welcome the invitations presented to us. In this pursuit of integral human development we can also do much with the members of other religions, as in fact is being done in various places.

Collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all, and must be shared by the four parts of the world: East and West, North and South; or, as we say today, by the different "worlds." If, on the contrary, people try to achieve it in only one part, or in only one world, they do so at the expense of the others; and, precisely because the others are ignored, their own development becomes exaggerated and misdirected. Peoples or nations too have a right to their own full development, which while including - as already said -the economic and social aspects, should also include individual cultural identity and openness to the transcendent. Not even the need for development can be used as an excuse for imposing on others one's own way of life or own religious belief.

33. Nor would a type of development which did not respect and promote human rights - personal and social, economic and political, including the rights of nations and of peoples - be really worthy of man.

Today, perhaps more than in the past, the intrinsic contradiction of a development limited only to its economic element is seen more clearly. Such development easily subjects the human person and his deepest needs to the demands of economic planning and selfish profit.

The intrinsic connection between authentic development and respect for human rights once again reveals the moral character of development: the true elevation of man, in conformity with the natural and historical vocation of each individual, is not attained only by exploiting the abundance of goods and services, or by having available perfect infrastructures.

When individuals and communities do not see a rigorous respect for the moral, cultural and spiritual requirements, based on the dignity of the person and on the proper identity of each community, beginning with the family and religious societies, then all the rest - availability of goods, abundance of technical resources applied to daily life, a certain level of material well-being - will prove unsatisfying and in the end contemptible. The Lord clearly says this in the Gospel, when he calls the attention of all to the true hierarchy of values: "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Mt 16:26)

True development, in keeping with the specific needs of the human being-man or woman, child, adult or old person-implies, especially for those who actively share in this process and are responsible for it, a lively awareness of the value of the rights of all and of each person. It likewise implies a lively awareness of the need to respect the right of every individual to the full use of the benefits offered by science and technology.

On the internal level of every nation, respect for all rights takes on great importance, especially: the right to life at every stage of its existence; the rights of the family, as the basic social community, or "cell of society"; justice in employment relationships; the rights inherent in the life of the political community as such; the rights based on the transcendent vocation of the human being, beginning with the right of freedom to profess and practice one's own religious belief.

On the international level, that is, the level of relations between States or, in present-day usage, between the different "worlds, " there must be complete respect for the identity of each people, with its own historical and cultural characteristics. It is likewise essential, as the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* already asked, to recognize each people's equal right "to be seated at the table of the common banquet, "61 instead of lying outside the door like Lazarus, while "the dogs come and lick his sores" (cf. Lk 16:21). Both peoples and individual must enjoy the fundamental equality⁶² which is the basis, for example, of the Charter of the United Nations Organization: the equality which is the basis of the right of all to share in the process of full development.

In order to be genuine, development must be achieved within the framework of solidarity and freedom, without ever sacrificing either of them under whatever pretext. The moral character of development and its necessary promotion are emphasized when the most rigorous respect is given to all the demands deriving from the order of truth and good proper to the human person. Furthermore the Christian who is taught to see that man is the image of God, called to share in the truth and the good which is God himself, does not understand a commitment to development and its application which excludes regard and respect for the unique dignity of this "image." In other words, true development must be based on the love of God and neighbor, and must help to promote the relationships between individuals and society. This is the "civilization of love" of which Paul VI often spoke.

34. Nor can the moral character of development exclude respect for the beings which constitute the natural world, which the ancient Greeks - alluding precisely to the order which distinguishes it - called the "cosmos." Such realities also demand respect, by virtue of a threefold consideration which it is useful to reflect upon carefully.

The first consideration is the appropriateness of acquiring a growing awareness of the fact that one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate - animals, plants, the natural elements - simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs. On the contrary, one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos."

The second consideration is based on the realization - which is perhaps more urgent - that natural resources are limited; some are not, as it is said, renewable. Using them as if they were inexhaustible, with absolute dominion, seriously endangers their availability not only for the present generation but above all for generations to come.

The third consideration refers directly to the consequences of a certain type of development on the quality of life in the industrialized zones. We all know that the direct or indirect result of industrialization is, ever more frequently, the pollution of the environment, with serious consequences for the health of the population.

Once again it is evident that development, the planning which governs it, and the way in which resources are used must include respect for moral demands. One of the latter undoubtedly imposes limits on the use of the natural world. The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to "use and misuse, " or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to "eat of the fruit of the tree" (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity.

A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the elements of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialization - three considerations which alert our consciences to the moral dimension of development.⁶³

V. A THEOLOGICAL READING OF MODERN PROBLEMS

35. Precisely because of the essentially moral character of development, it is clear that the obstacles to development likewise have a moral character. If in the years since the publication of Pope Paul's Encyclical there has been no development - or very little, irregular, or even contradictory development - the reasons are not only economic. As has already been said, political motives also enter in. For the decisions which either accelerate or slow down the development of peoples are really political in character. In order to overcome the misguided mechanisms mentioned earlier and to replace them with new ones which will be more just and in conformity with the common good of humanity, an effective political will is needed. Unfortunately, after analyzing the situation we have to conclude that this political will has been insufficient.

In a document of a pastoral nature such as this, an analysis limited exclusively to the economic and political causes of underdevelopment (and, *mutatis mutandis*, of so-called superdevelopment) would be incomplete. It is therefore necessary to single out the moral causes which, with respect to the behavior of individuals considered as responsible persons, interfere in such a way as to slow down the course of development and hinder its full achievement.

Similarly, when the scientific and technical resources are available which, with the necessary concrete political decisions, ought to help lead peoples to true development, the main obstacles to development will be overcome only by means of essentially moral decisions. For believers, and especially for Christians, these decisions will take their inspiration from the principles of faith, with the help of divine grace.

36. It is important to note therefore that a world which is divided into blocs, sustained by rigid ideologies, and in which instead of interdependence and solidarity different forms of imperialism hold sway, can only be a world subject to structures of sin. The sum total of the negative factors working against a true awareness of the universal common good, and the need to further it, gives the impression of creating, in persons and institutions, an obstacle which is difficult to overcome.⁶⁴

If the present situation can be attributed to difficulties of various kinds, it is not out of place to speak of "structures of sin," which, as I stated in my Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove.⁶⁵ And thus they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behavior.

"Sin" and "structures of sin" are categories which are seldom applied to the situation of the contemporary world. However, one cannot easily gain a profound understanding of the reality that confronts us unless we give a name to the root of the evils which afflict us.

One can certainly speak of "selfishness" and of "shortsightedness," of "mistaken political calculations" and "imprudent economic decisions." And in each of these evaluations one hears an echo of an ethical and moral nature. Man's condition is such that a more profound analysis of individuals' actions and omissions cannot be achieved without implying, in one way or another, judgments or references of an ethical nature.

This evaluation is in itself positive, especially if it is completely consistent and if it is based on faith in God and on his law, which commands what is good and forbids evil.

In this consists the difference between sociopolitical analysis and formal reference to "sin" and the "structures of sin." According to this latter viewpoint, there enter in the will of the Triune God, his plan for humanity, his justice and his mercy. The God who is rich in mercy, the Redeemer of man, the Lord and giver of life, requires from people clear cut attitudes which express themselves also in actions or omissions toward one's neighbor. We have here a reference to the "second tablet" of the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex 20:12-17; Dt 5:16-21). Not to observe these is to offend God and hurt one's neighbor, and to introduce into the world influences and obstacles which go far beyond the actions and brief life span of an individual. This also involves interference in the process of the development of peoples, the delay or slowness of which must be judged also in this light.

37. This general analysis, which is religious in nature, can be supplemented by a number of particular considerations to demonstrate that among the actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God, the good of neighbor and the "structures" created by them, two are very typical: on the one hand, the all-consuming desire for profit, and on the other, the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others. In order to characterize better each of these attitudes, one can add the expression: "at any price." In other words, we are faced with the absolutizing of human attitudes with all its possible consequences.

Since these attitudes can exist independently of each other, they can be separated; however in today's world both are indissolubly united, with one or the other predominating.

Obviously, not only individuals fall victim to this double attitude of sin; nations and blocs can do so too. And this favors even more the introduction of the "structures of sin" of which I have spoken. If certain forms of modern "imperialism" were considered in the light of these moral criteria, we would see that hidden behind certain decisions, apparently inspired only by economics or politics, are real forms of idolatry: of money, ideology, class, technology.

I have wished to introduce this type of analysis above all in order to point out the true nature of the evil which faces us with respect to the development of peoples: it is a question of a moral evil, the fruit of many sins which lead to

"structures of sin." To diagnose the evil in this way is to identify precisely, on the level of human conduct, the path to be followed in order to overcome it.

38. This path is long and complex, and what is more it is constantly threatened because of the intrinsic frailty of human resolutions and achievements, and because of the mutability of very unpredictable and external circumstances. Nevertheless, one must have the courage to set out on this path, and, where some steps have been taken or a part of the journey made, the courage to go on to the end.

In the context of these reflections, the decision to set out or to continue the journey involves, above all, a moral value which men and women of faith recognize as a demand of God's will, the only true foundation of an absolutely binding ethic.

One would hope that also men and women without an explicit faith would be convinced that the obstacles to integral development are not only economic but rest on more profound attitudes which human beings can make into absolute values. Thus one would hope that all those who, to some degree or other, are responsible for ensuring a "more human life" for their fellow human beings, whether or not they are inspired by a religious faith, will become fully aware of the urgent need to change the spiritual attitudes which define each individual's relationship with self, with neighbor, with even the remotest human communities, and with nature itself; and all of this in view of higher values such as the common good or, to quote the felicitous expression of the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, the full development "of the whole individual and of all people."⁶⁶

For Christians, as for all who recognize the precise theological meaning of the word "sin," a change of behavior or mentality or mode of existence is called "conversion," to use the language of the Rihle (cf. Mk 13:3, 5, Is 30:15). This conversion specifically entails a relationship to God, to the sin committed, to its consequences and hence to one's neighbor, either an individual or a community. It is God, in "whose hands are the hearts of the powerful"⁶⁷ and the hearts of all, who according to his own promise and by the power of his Spirit can transform "hearts of stone" into "hearts of flesh" (cf. Ezek 36:26).

On the path toward the desired conversion, toward the overcoming of the moral obstacles to development, it is already possible to point to the positive and moral value of the growing awareness of interdependence among individuals and nations. The fact that men and women in various parts of the world feel personally affected by the injustices and violations of human rights committed in distant countries, countries which perhaps they will never visit, is a further sign of a reality transformed into awareness, thus acquiring a moral connotation.

It is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world, in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category. When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a "virtue," is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. This determination is based on the solid conviction that what is hindering full development is that desire for profit and that thirst for power already mentioned. These attitudes and "structures of sin" are only conquered - presupposing the help of divine grace - by a diametrically opposed attitude: a commitment to the good of one's neighbor with the readiness, in the gospel sense, to "lose oneself" for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to "serve him" instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage (cf. Mt 10:40-42; 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27).

39. The exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognize one another as persons. Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all. The intermediate groups, in their turn, should not selfishly insist on their particular interests, but respect the interests of others.

Positive signs in the contemporary world are the growing awareness of the solidarity of the poor among themselves, their efforts to support one another, and their public demonstrations on the social scene which, without recourse to violence, present their own needs and rights in the face of the inefficiency or corruption of the public authorities. By virtue of her own evangelical duty the Church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good.

The same criterion is applied by analogy in international relationships. Interdependence must be transformed into solidarity, based upon the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all. That which human industry produces through the processing of raw materials, with the contribution of work, must serve equally for the good of all.

Surmounting every type of imperialism and determination to preserve their own hegemony, the stronger and richer nations must have a sense of moral responsibility for the other nations, so that a real international system may be established which will rest on the foundation of the equality of all peoples and on the necessary respect for their legitimate differences. The economically weaker countries, or those still at subsistence level, must be enabled, with the assistance of other peoples and of the international community, to make a contribution of their own to the common good with their treasures of humanity and culture, which otherwise would be lost for ever.

Solidarity helps us to see the "other"-whether a person, people or nation-not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our "neighbor," a "helper" (cf. Gen 2:18-20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God. Hence the importance of reawakening the religious awareness of individuals and peoples. Thus the exploitation, oppression and annihilation of others are excluded. These facts, in the present division of the world into opposing blocs, combine to produce the danger of war and an excessive preoccupation with personal security, often to the detriment of the autonomy, freedom of decision, and even the territorial integrity of the weaker nations situated within the so-called "areas of influence" or "safety belts."

The "structures of sin" and the sins which they produce are likewise radically opposed to peace and development, for development, in the familiar expression Pope Paul's Encyclical, is "the new name for peace."⁶⁸

In this way, the solidarity which we propose is the path to peace and at the same time to development. For world peace is inconceivable unless the world's leaders come to recognize that interdependence in itself demands the abandonment of the politics of blocs, the sacrifice of all forms of economic, military or political imperialism, and the transformation of mutual distrust into collaboration. This is precisely the act proper to solidarity among individuals and nations.

The motto of the pontificate of my esteemed predecessor Pius XII was *Opus iustitiae pax*, peace as the fruit of justice. Today one could say, with the same exactness and the same power of biblical inspiration (cf. Is 32:17; Jas 3:18): *Opus solidaritatis pax*, peace as the fruit of solidarity.

The goal of peace, so desired by everyone, will certainly be achieved through the putting into effect of social and international justice, but also through the practice of the virtues which favor togetherness, and which teach us to live in unity, so as to build in unity, by giving and receiving, a new society and a better world.

40. Solidarity is undoubtedly a Christian virtue. In what has been said so far it has been possible to identify many points of contact between solidarity and charity, which is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples (cf. Jn 13:35). In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation. One's neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit. One's neighbor must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her; and for that person's sake one must be ready for sacrifice, even the ultimate one: to lay down one's life for the brethren (cf. 1 Jn 3:16).

At that point, awareness of the common fatherhood of God, of the brotherhood of all in Christ - "children in the Son" - and of the presence and life-giving action of the Holy Spirit will bring to our vision of the world a new criterion for interpreting it. Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a new model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity. This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three Persons, is what we Christians mean by the word "communion." This specifically Christian communion, jealously preserved, extended and enriched with the Lord's help, is the soul of the Church's vocation to be a "sacrament," in the sense already indicated.

Solidarity therefore must play its part in the realization of this divine plan, both on the level of individuals and on the level of national and international society. The "evil mechanisms" and "structures of sin" of which we have spoken can be overcome only through the exercise of the human and Christian solidarity to which the Church calls us and which she tirelessly promotes. Only in this way can such positive energies be fully released for the benefit of development and peace. Many of the Church's canonized saints offer a wonderful witness of such solidarity and can serve as examples in the present difficult circumstances. Among them I wish to recall St. Peter Claver and his service to the slaves at Cartagena de Indias, and St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe who offered his life in place of a prisoner unknown to him in the concentration camp at Auschwitz.

VI. SOME PARTICULAR GUIDELINES

41. The Church does not have technical revolutions to offer for the problem of underdevelopment as such, as Pope Paul VI already affirmed in his Encyclical.⁶⁹ For the Church does not propose economic and political systems or programs, nor does she show preference for one or the other, provided that human dignity is properly respected and promoted, and provided she herself is allowed the room she needs to exercise her ministry in the world.

But the Church is an "expert in humanity,"⁷⁰ and this leads her necessarily to extend her religious mission to the various fields in which men and women expend their efforts in search of the always relative happiness which is possible in this world, in line with their dignity as persons.

Following the example of my predecessors, I must repeat that whatever affects the dignity of individuals and peoples, such as authentic development, cannot be reduced to a "technical" problem. If reduced in this way, development would be emptied of its true content, and this would be an act of betrayal of the individuals and peoples whom development is meant to serve.

This is why the Church has something to say today, just as twenty years ago, and also in the future, about the nature, conditions, requirements and aims of authentic development, and also about the obstacles which stand in its way. In

doing so the Church fulfills her mission to evangelize, for she offers her first contribution to the solution of the urgent problem of development when she proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation.⁷¹

As her instrument for reaching this goal, the Church uses her social doctrine. In today's difficult situation, a more exact awareness and a wider diffusion of the "set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgment and directives for action" proposed by the Church's teaching⁷² would be of great help in promoting both the correct definition of the problems being faced and the best solution to them.

It will thus be seen at once that the questions facing us are above all moral questions; and that neither the analysis of the problem of development as such nor the means to overcome the present difficulties can ignore this essential dimension.

The Church's social doctrine is not a "third way" between liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism, nor even a possible alternative to other solutions less radically opposed to one another: rather, it constitutes a category of its own. Nor is it an ideology, but rather the accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in the light of faith and of the Church's tradition. Its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to guide Christian behavior. It therefore belongs to the field, not of ideology, but of theology and particularly of moral theology.

The teaching and spreading of her social doctrine are part of the Church's evangelizing mission. And since it is a doctrine aimed at guiding people's behavior, it consequently gives rise to a "commitment to justice," according to each individual's role, vocation and circumstances.

The condemnation of evils and injustices is also part of that ministry of evangelization in the social field which is an aspect of the Church's prophetic role. But it should be made clear that proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation.

42. Today more than in the past, the Church's social doctrine must be open to an international outlook, in line with the Second Vatican Council,⁷³ the most recent Encyclicals,⁷⁴ and particularly in line with the Encyclical which we are commemorating.⁷⁵ It will not be superfluous therefore to reexamine and further clarify in this light the characteristic themes and guidelines dealt with by the Magisterium in recent years.

Here I would like to indicate one of them: the option or love of preference for the poor. This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods.

Today, furthermore, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed,⁷⁶ this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. It is impossible not to take account of the existence of these realities. To ignore them would mean becoming like the "rich man" who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate (cf. Lk 16:19-31).⁷⁷

Our daily life as well as our decisions in the political and economic fields must be marked by these realities. Likewise the leaders of nations and the heads of international bodies, while they are obliged always to keep in mind the true human dimension as a priority in their development plans, should not forget to give precedence to the phenomenon of growing poverty. Unfortunately, instead of becoming fewer the poor are becoming more numerous, not only in less developed countries but-and this seems no less scandalous-in the more developed ones too.

It is necessary to state once more the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine: the goods of this world are originally meant for all.⁷⁸ The right to private property is valid and necessary, but it does not nullify the value of this principle. Private property, in fact, is under a "social mortgage,"⁷⁹ which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods. Likewise, in this concern for the poor, one must not overlook that special form of poverty which consists in being deprived of fundamental human rights, in particular the right to religious freedom and also the right to freedom of economic initiative.

43. The motivating concern for the poor - who are, in the very meaningful term, "the Lord's poor"⁸⁰ - must be translated at all levels into concrete actions, until it decisively attains a series of necessary reforms. Each local situation will show what reforms are most urgent and how they can be achieved. But those demanded by the situation of international imbalance, as already described, must not be forgotten.

In this respect I wish to mention specifically: the reform of the international trade system, which is mortgaged to protectionism and increasing bilateralism; the reform of the world monetary and financial system, today recognized as inadequate; the question of technological exchanges and their proper use; the need for a review of the structure of the existing international organizations, in the framework of an international juridical order. The international trade system today frequently discriminates against the products of the young industries of the developing countries and discourages the producers of raw materials. There exists, too, a kind of international division of labor, whereby the low-cost

products of certain countries which lack effective labor laws or which are too weak to apply them are sold in other parts of the world at considerable profit for the companies engaged in this form of production, which knows no frontiers.

The world monetary and financial system is marked by an excessive fluctuation of exchange rates and interest rates, to the detriment of the balance of payments and the debt situation of the poorer countries.

Forms of technology and their transfer constitute today one of the major problems of international exchange and of the grave damage deriving therefrom. There are quite frequent cases of developing countries being denied needed forms of technology or sent useless ones.

In the opinion of many, the international organizations seem to be at a stage of their existence when their operating methods, operating costs and effectiveness need careful review and possible correction. Obviously, such a delicate process cannot be put into effect without the collaboration of all. This presupposes the overcoming of political rivalries and the renouncing of all desire to manipulate these organizations, which exist solely for the common good.

The existing institutions and organizations have worked well for the benefit of peoples. Nevertheless, humanity today is in a new and more difficult phase of its genuine development. It needs a greater degree of international ordering, at the service of the societies, economies and cultures of the whole world.

44. Development demands above all a spirit of initiative on the part of the countries which need it.⁸¹ Each of them must act in accordance with its own responsibilities, not expecting everything from the more favored countries, and acting in collaboration with others in the same situation. Each must discover and use to the best advantage its own area of freedom. Each must make itself capable of initiatives responding to its own needs as a society. Each must likewise realize its true needs, as well as the rights and duties which oblige it to respond to them. The development of peoples begins and is most appropriately accomplished in the dedication of each people to its own development, in collaboration with others.

It is important then that as far as possible the developing nations themselves should favor the self-affirmation of each citizen, through access to a wider culture and a free flow of information. Whatever promotes literacy and the basic education which completes and deepens it is a direct contribution to true development, as the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* proposed.⁸² These goals are still far from being reached in so many parts of the world.

In order to take this path, the nations themselves will have to identify their own priorities and clearly recognize their own needs, according to the particular conditions of their people, their geographical setting and their cultural traditions. Some nations will have to increase food production, in order to have always available what is needed for subsistence and daily life. In the modern world - where starvation claims so many victims, especially among the very young - there are examples of not particularly developed nations which have nevertheless achieved the goal of food self-sufficiency and have even become food exporters.

Other nations need to reform certain unjust structures, and in particular their political institutions, in order to replace corrupt, dictatorial and authoritarian forms of government by democratic and participatory ones. This is a process which we hope will spread and grow stronger. For the "health" of a political community - as expressed in the free and responsible participation of all citizens in public affairs, in the rule of law and in respect for the promotion of human rights - is the necessary condition and sure guarantee of the development of "the whole individual and of all people."

45. None of what has been said can be achieved without the collaboration of all - especially the international community - in the framework of a solidarity which includes everyone, beginning with the most neglected. But the developing nations themselves have the duty to practice solidarity among themselves and with the neediest countries of the world.

It is desirable, for example, that nations of the same geographical area should establish forms of cooperation which will make them less dependent on more powerful producers; they should open their frontiers to the products of the area; they should examine how their products might complement one another; they should combine in order to set up those services which each one separately is incapable of providing; they should extend cooperation to the monetary and financial sector.

Interdependence is already a reality in many of these countries. To acknowledge it, in such a way as to make it more operative, represents an alternative to excessive dependence on richer and more powerful nations, as part of the hoped-for development, without opposing anyone, but discovering and making best use of the country's own potential. The developing countries belonging to one geographical area, especially those included in the term "South," can and ought to set up new regional organizations inspired by criteria of equality, freedom and participation in the comity of nations - as is already happening with promising results.

An essential condition for global solidarity is autonomy and free self-determination, also within associations such as those indicated. But at the same time solidarity demands a readiness to accept the sacrifices necessary for the good of the whole world community.

VII. CONCLUSION

46. Peoples and individuals aspire to be free: their search for full development signals their desire to overcome the many obstacles preventing them from enjoying a "more human life."

Recently, in the period following the publication of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, a new way of confronting the problems of poverty and underdevelopment has spread in some areas of the world, especially in Latin America. This approach makes liberation the fundamental category and the first principle of action. The positive values, as well as the deviations and risks of deviation, which are damaging to the faith and are connected with this form of theological reflection and method, have been appropriately pointed out by the Church's Magisterium.⁸³

It is fitting to add that the aspiration to freedom from all forms of slavery affecting the individual and society is something noble and legitimate. This in fact is the purpose of development, or rather liberation and development, taking into account the intimate connection between the two.

Development which is merely economic is incapable of setting man free, on the contrary, it will end by enslaving him further. Development that does not include the cultural, transcendent and religious dimensions of man and society, to the extent that it does not recognize the existence of such dimensions and does not endeavor to direct its goals and priorities toward the same, is even less conducive to authentic liberation. Human beings are totally free only when they are completely themselves, in the fullness of their rights and duties. The same can be said about society as a whole.

The principal obstacle to be overcome on the way to authentic liberation is sin and the structures produced by sin as it multiplies and spreads.⁸⁴

The freedom with which Christ has set us free (cf. Gal 5:1) encourages us to become the servants of all. Thus the process of development and liberation takes concrete shape in the exercise of solidarity, that is to say in the love and service of neighbor, especially of the poorest: "For where truth and love are missing, the process of liberation results in the death of a freedom which will have lost all support."⁸⁵

47. In the context of the sad experiences of recent years and of the mainly negative picture of the present moment, the Church must strongly affirm the possibility of overcoming the obstacles which, by excess or by defect, stand in the way of development. And she must affirm her confidence in a true liberation. Ultimately, this confidence and this possibility are based on the Church's awareness of the divine promise guaranteeing that our present history does not remain closed in upon itself but is open to the Kingdom of God.

The Church has confidence also in man, though she knows the evil of which he is capable. For she well knows that - in spite of the heritage of sin, and the sin which each one is capable of committing - there exist in the human person sufficient qualities and energies, a fundamental "goodness" (cf. Gen 1:31), because he is the image of the Creator, placed under the redemptive influence of Christ, who "united himself in some fashion with every man,"⁸⁶ and because the efficacious action of the Holy Spirit "fills the earth" (Wis 1:7).

There is no justification then for despair or pessimism or inertia. Though it be with sorrow, it must be said that just as one may sin through selfishness and the desire for excessive profit and power, one may also be found wanting with regard to the urgent needs of multitudes of human beings submerged in conditions of underdevelopment, through fear, indecision and, basically, through cowardice. We are all called, indeed obliged, to face the tremendous challenge of the last decade of the second Millennium, also because the present dangers threaten everyone: a world economic crisis, a war without frontiers, without winners or losers. In the face of such a threat, the distinction between rich individuals and countries and poor individuals and countries will have little value, except that a greater responsibility rests on those who have more and can do more.

This is not however the sole motive or even the most important one. At stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt. As many people are already more or less clearly aware, the present situation does not seem to correspond to this dignity. Every individual is called upon to play his or her part in this peaceful campaign, a campaign to be conducted by peaceful means, in order to secure development in peace, in order to safeguard nature itself and the world about us. The Church too feels profoundly involved in this enterprise, and she hopes for its ultimate success.

Consequently, following the example of Pope Paul VI with his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*,⁸⁷ I wish to appeal with simplicity and humility to everyone, to all men and women without exception. I wish to ask them to be convinced of the seriousness of the present moment and of each one's individual responsibility, and to implement - by the way they live as individuals and as families, by the use of their resources, by their civic activity, by contributing to economic and political decisions and by personal commitment to national and international undertakings - the measures inspired by solidarity and love of preference for the poor. This is what is demanded by the present moment and above all by the very dignity of the human person, the indestructible image of God the Creator, which is identical in each one of us.

In this commitment, the sons and daughters of the Church must serve as examples and guides, for they are called upon, in conformity with the program announced by Jesus himself in the synagogue at Nazareth, to "preach good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19). It is appropriate to emphasize the preeminent role that belongs to the laity, both men and women, as was reaffirmed in the recent Assembly of the Synod. It is their task to animate temporal realities with Christian commitment, by which they show that they are witnesses and agents of peace and justice. I wish to address especially those who, through the sacrament of Baptism and the profession of the same Creed, share a real, though imperfect, communion with us. I am certain that the concern expressed in this Encyclical as

well as the motives inspiring it will be familiar to them, for these motives are inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can find here a new invitation to bear witness together to our common convictions concerning the dignity of man, created by God, redeemed by Christ, made holy by the Spirit and called upon in this world to live a life in conformity with this dignity. I likewise address this appeal to the Jewish people, who share with us the inheritance of Abraham, "our father in faith" (cf. Rm 4:11f.)⁸⁸ and the tradition of the Old Testament, as well as to the Muslims who, like us, believe in a just and merciful God. And I extend it to all the followers of the world's great religions.

The meeting held last October 27 in Assisi the city of St. Francis, in order to pray for and commit ourselves to peace - each one in fidelity to his own religious profession - showed how much peace and, as its necessary condition, the development of the whole person and of all peoples, are also a matter of religion, and how the full achievement of both the one and the other depends on our fidelity to our vocation as men and women of faith. For it depends, above all, on God.

48. The Church well knows that no temporal achievement is to be identified with the Kingdom of God, but that all such achievements simply reflect and in a sense anticipate the glory of the Kingdom, the Kingdom which we await at the end of history, when the Lord will come again. But that expectation can never be an excuse for lack of concern for people in their concrete personal situations and in their social, national and international life, since the former is conditioned by the latter, especially today.

However imperfect and temporary are all the things that can and ought to be done through the combined efforts of everyone and through divine grace, at a given moment of history, in order to make people's lives "more human," nothing will be lost or will have been in vain. This is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, in an enlightening passage of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise - human dignity, fraternal communion, and freedom - according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illumined and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom...here on earth that kingdom is already present in mystery."⁸⁹

The Kingdom of God becomes present above all in the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the Lord's Sacrifice. In that celebration the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands - the bread and wine - are transformed mysteriously, but really and substantially, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of the minister, into the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary, through whom the Kingdom of the Father has been made present in our midst.

The goods of this world and the work of our hands - the bread and wine - serve for the coming of the definitive Kingdom, since the Lord, through his Spirit, takes them up into himself in order to offer himself to the Father and to offer us with himself in the renewal of his one Sacrifice, which anticipates God's Kingdom and proclaims its final coming.

Thus the Lord unites us with himself through the Eucharist - Sacrament and Sacrifice - and he unites us with himself and with one another by a bond stronger than any natural union; and thus united, he sends us into the whole world to bear witness, through faith and works, to God's love, preparing the coming of his Kingdom and anticipating it, though in the obscurity of the present time.

All of us who take part in the Eucharist are called to discover, through this sacrament, the profound meaning of our actions in the world in favor of development and peace; and to receive from it the strength to commit ourselves ever more generously, following the example of Christ, who in this sacrament lays down his life for his friends (cf. Jn 15:13). Our personal commitment, like Christ's and in union with his, will not be in vain but certainly fruitful.

49. I have called the current Marian Year in order that the Catholic faithful may look more and more to Mary, who goes before us on the pilgrimage of faith⁹⁰ and with maternal care intercedes for us before her Son, our Redeemer. I wish to entrust to her and to her intercession this difficult moment of the modern world, and the efforts that are being made and will be made, often with great suffering, in order to contribute to the true development of peoples proposed and proclaimed by my predecessor Paul VI.

In keeping with Christian piety through the ages, we present to the Blessed Virgin difficult individual situations, so that she may place them before her Son, asking that he alleviate and change them. But we also present to her social situations and the international crisis itself, in their worrying aspects of poverty, unemployment, shortage of food, the arms race, contempt for human rights, and situations or dangers of conflict, partial or total. In a filial spirit we wish to place all this before her "eyes of mercy," repeating once more with faith and hope the ancient antiphon: "Holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin."

Mary most holy, our Mother and Queen, is the one who turns to her Son and says: "They have no more wine" (Jn 2:3). She is also the one who praises God the Father, because "he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Lk 1:52-53). Her maternal concern extends to the personal and social aspects of people's life on earth.⁹¹

Before the Most Blessed Trinity, I entrust to Mary all that I have written in this Encyclical, and I invite all to reflect and actively commit themselves to promoting the true development of peoples, as the prayer of the Mass for this intention states so well: "Father, you have given all peoples one common origin, and your will is to gather them as one family in yourself. Fill the hearts of all with the fire of your love, and the desire to ensure justice for all their brothers and sisters. By sharing the good things you give us, may we secure justice and equality for every human being, an end to all

division and a human society built on love and peace."⁹² This, in conclusion, is what I ask in the name of all my brothers and sisters, to whom I send a special blessing as a sign of greeting and good wishes.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on December 30 of the year 1987, the tenth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1. Leo XIII, Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1891): *Leonis XIII P. M. Acta*, XI, Romae 1892, pp. 97-144.
2. Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931): AAS 23 (1931), pp. 177-228; John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961); AAS 53 (1961), pp. 401-464; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971): AAS 63 (1971), pp. 401-441; John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981): AAS 73 (1981), pp. 577-647. Also Pius XII delivered a radio message (June 1, 1941) for the fiftieth anniversary of the Encyclical of Leo XIII: AAS 33 (1941), pp. 195-205.
3. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, n. 4.
4. Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967): AAS 59 (1967), pp. 257-299.
5. Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 25, 1987.
6. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986), 72: AAS 79 (1987), p. 586; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), n. 4: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 403f.
7. Cf. Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), n. 3: AAS 79 (1987), pp. 363f.; Homily at the Mass of January 1, 1987: *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 2, 1987.
8. The Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* cites the documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council nineteen times, and sixteen of the references are to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*.
9. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1.
10. *Ibid.*, n. 4; cf. *Populorum Progressio*, n. 13: loc. cit., pp. 263, 264.
11. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 3; *Populorum Progressio*, n. 13: loc. cit., p. 264.
12. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 63; *Populorum Progressio*, n. 9: loc. cit., p. 269.
13. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 69; *Populorum Progressio*, n. 22: loc. cit., p. 269.
14. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 57; *Populorum Progressio*, n. 41: loc. cit., p. 277.
15. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 19; *Populorum Progressio*, n. 41: loc. cit., pp. 277f.
16. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 86; *Populorum Progressio*, n. 48: loc. cit., p. 281.
17. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 69; *Populorum Progressio*, nn. 14-21: loc. cit., pp. 264-268.
18. Cf. the Inscriptio of the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*: loc. cit., p. 257.
19. The Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII has as its principal subject "the condition of the workers" *Leonis XIII P. M. Acta*, XI, Romae 1892, p. 97.
20. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986), n. 72: AAS 79 (1987), p. 586; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971); n. 4: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 403f.
21. Cf. Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961): AAS 53 (1961), p. 440.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html
(35 of 42)2006-10-03 17:22:53
22. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 63.
23. Cf. Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 3: loc. cit., p. 258; cf. also *ibid.*, n. 9: loc. cit., p. 261.
24. Cf. *ibid.*, n. 3: loc. cit., p. 258.
25. *Ibid.*, n. 48: loc. cit., p. 281.
26. Cf. *ibid.*, n. 14: loc. cit., p. 264: "Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man."
27. *Ibid.*, n. 87: loc. cit., p. 299.
28. Cf. *ibid.*, n. 53: loc. cit., p. 283.
29. Cf. *ibid.*, n. 76: loc. cit., p. 295.
30. The decades referred to are the years 1960-1970 and 1970-1980, the present decade is the third (1980-1990).
31. The expression "Fourth World" is used not just occasionally for the so-called less advanced countries, but also and especially for the bands of great or extreme poverty in countries of medium and high income.
32. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1.
33. Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 33: loc. cit., p. 273.
34. It should be noted that the Holy See associated itself with the celebration of this International Year with a special Document issued by the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* entitled: "What Have You Done to Your Homeless Brother?" *The Church and the Housing Problem* (December 27, 1987).
35. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), nn. 8-9: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 406-408.

36. A recent United Nations publication entitled *World Economic Survey 1987* provides the most recent data (cf. pp. 8-9). The percentage of unemployed in the developed countries with a market economy jumped from 3% of the work force in 1970 to 8% in 1986. It now amounts to 29 million people.
37. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981), n. 18: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 624-625.
38. *At the Service of the Human Community: An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question* (December 27, 1986).
39. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 54: loc. cit., pp. 283f.: "Developing countries will thus no longer risk being overwhelmed by debts whose repayment swallows up the greater part of their gains. Rates of interest and time for repayment of the loan could be so arranged as not to be too great a burden on either party, taking into account free gifts, interest-free or low-interest loans, and the time needed for liquidating the debts."
40. Cf. "Presentation" of the document *At the Service of the Human Community: An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question* (December 27, 1986).
41. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 53; loc. cit., p. 283.
42. *At the Service of the Human Community: An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question* (December 27, 1986), III, 2, 1.
43. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, nn. 20-21: loc. cit., pp. 267f.
44. Address at Drogheda, Ireland (September 29, 1979), n. 5: AAS 71 (1979), II, p. 1079.
45. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 37: loc. cit., pp. 275f.
46. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), especially in n. 30: AAS 74 (1982), pp. 115-117.
47. Cf. *Human Rights: Collection of International Instruments*, United Nations, New York, 1983; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), n. 17: AAS 71 (1979), p. 296.
48. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 78; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 76: loc. cit., pp. 294f.: "To wage war on misery and to struggle against injustice is to promote, along with improved conditions, the human and spiritual progress of all men, and therefore the common good of humanity...peace is something that is built up day after day, in the pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among men."
49. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), n. 6: AAS 74 (1982), p. 88: "...history is not simply a fixed progression toward what is better, but rather an event of freedom, and even a struggle between freedoms...."
50. For this reason the word "development" was used in the Encyclical rather than the word "progress," but with an attempt to give the word "development" its fullest meaning.
51. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 19: loc. cit., pp. 266f.: "Increased possession is not the ultimate goal of nations or of individuals. All growth is ambivalent.... The exclusive pursuit of possessions thus becomes an obstacle to individual fulfillment and to man's true greatness...both for nations and for individual men, avarice is the most evident form of moral underdevelopment"; cf. also Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), n. 9: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 407f.
52. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 35: Paul VI, Address to the Diplomatic Corps (January 7, 1965): AAS 57 (1965), p. 232.
53. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, nn. 20-21: loc. cit., pp. 267f.
54. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981), n. 4: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 584f., Paul VI Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 15: loc. cit., p. 265.
55. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 42: loc. cit., p. 278.
56. Cf. *Praeconium Paschale, Missale Romanum*, ed. typ. altera, 1975, p. 272: "O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est! O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!"
57. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1.
58. Cf. for example, St. Basil the Great, *Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, *Interrogatio XXXVII*, nn. 1-2: PG 31, 1009-1012; Theodoret of Cyr, *De Providentia*, *Oratio VII*: PG 83, 665-686; St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, n. 17: CCL 48 683-685.
59. Cf. for example, St. John Chrysostom, In *Evangelium S. Matthaei*, Hom. 50, 3-4: PG 58, 508-510; St. Ambrose *De Officiis Ministrorum*, lib. II, XXVIII, 136-140: PL 16 139-141; St. Possidius, *Vita S. Augustini Episcopi*, XXIV: PL 32, 53f.
60. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 23: loc. cit., p. 268: "If someone who has the riches of this world sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 Jn 3:17) It is well known how strong were the words used by the Fathers of the Church to describe the proper attitude of persons who possess anything toward persons in need." In the previous number, the Pope had cited n. 69 of the Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.
61. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 47: "...a world where freedom is not an empty word and where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man."

62. Cf. *ibid.*, n. 47: "It is a question, rather, of building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men..."; cf. also Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 29. Such fundamental equality is one of the basic reasons why the Church has always been opposed to every form of racism.
63. Cf. Homily at Val Visdende (July 12, 1987), n. 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 13-14, 1987; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter Octogesima Adveniens (May 14, 1971), n. 21: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 416f.
64. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 25.
65. Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), n. 16: "Whenever the Church speaks of situations of sin, or when she condemns as social sins certain situations or the collective behavior of certain social groups, big or small, or even of whole nations and blocs of nations, she knows and she proclaims that such cases of social sin are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins. It is a case of the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference; of those who take refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world, and also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required, producing specious reasons of a higher order. The real responsibility, then, lies with individuals. A situation - or likewise an institution, a structure, society itself - is not in itself the subject of moral acts. Hence a situation cannot in itself be good or bad": AAS 77 (1985), p. 217.
66. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 42: *loc. cit.*, p. 278.
67. Cf. *Liturgia Horarum*, Feria III hebdomadae IIIae Temporis per annum, *Preces ad Vesperas*.
68. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 87: *loc. cit.*, p. 299.
69. Cf. *ibid.*, n. 13; *loc. cit.*, pp. 263f., 296f.
70. Cf. *ibid.*, n. 13: *loc. cit.*, p. 263.
71. Cf. Address at the Opening of the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Bishops (January 28, 1979): AAS 71 (1979), pp. 189-196.
72. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986), n. 72: AAS 79 (1987), p. 586; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter Octogesima Adveniens (May 14, 1971), n. 4: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 403f.
73. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, Part II, Ch. V, Section 2: "Building Up the International Community," nn. 83-90.
74. Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961): AAS 53 (1961), p. 440; Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963), Part IV: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 291-296; Paul VI Apostolic Letter Octogesima Adveniens (May 14, 1971), nn 2-4: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 402-404.
75. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, nn. 3, 9: *loc. cit.*, pp. 258, 261.
76. *Ibid.*, n. 3: *loc. cit.*, p. 258.
77. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 47: *loc. cit.*, p. 280; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986), n. 68: AAS 79 (1987), pp. 583f.
78. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 69; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 22: *loc. cit.*, p. 268; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986), n. 90: AAS 79 (1987), p. 594; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol. IIa IIae*, q. 66, art. 2.
79. Cf. Address at the Opening of the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Bishops (January 28, 1979): AAS 71 (1979), pp. 189-196; Ad Limina Address to a group of Polish Bishops, (December 17, 1987), n. 6: *L'Osservatore Romano*, December 18, 1987.
80. Because the Lord wished to identify himself with them (Mt 25:31-46) and takes special care of them (cf. Ps 12[11]:6; Lk 1:52f.).
81. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 55: *loc. cit.*, p. 284: "These are the men and women that need to be helped, that need to be convinced to take into their own hands their development, gradually acquiring the means"; cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 86.
82. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 35: *loc. cit.*, p. 274: "Basic education is the first objective of a plan of development."
83. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation" *Libertatis Nuntius* (August 6, 1984), Introduction: AAS 76 (1984), pp. 876f.
84. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), n. 16: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 213-217; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986, nn. 38, 42: AAS 79 (1987), pp. 569, 571.
85. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986), n. 24: AAS 79 (1987), p. 564.

86. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), n. 8: AAS 71 (1979), p. 272.
87. Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 5: loc. cit., p. 259: "We believe that all men of good will, together with our Catholic sons and daughters and our Christian brethren, can and should agree on this program"; cf. also nn. 81-83, 87: loc. cit., pp. 296-298, 299.
88. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, n. 4.
89. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 39.
90. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 58; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987) nn. 5-6: AAS 79 (1987), pp. 365-367.
91. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (February 2, 1974), n. 37: AAS 66 (1974), pp. 148f.; John Paul II, Homily at the Shrine of Our Lady of Zapopan, Mexico (January 30, 1979), n. 4: AAS 71 (1979), p. 230.
92. Collect of the Mass "For the Development of Peoples": *Missale Romanum*, ed. typ. altera, 1975, p. 820.

Ioannes Paulus PP. II
 On the Blessed Virgin Mary
 in the life of the Pilgrim Church

1987.03.25

Blessing

Venerable Brothers and dear Sons and Daughters, Health and the Apostolic Blessing.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation, for "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:4-6)

With these words of the Apostle Paul, which the Second Vatican Council takes up at the beginning of its treatment of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I too wish to begin my reflection on the role of Mary in the mystery of Christ and on her active and exemplary presence in the life of the Church. For they are words which celebrate together the love of the Father, the mission of the Son, the gift of the Spirit, the role of the woman from whom the Redeemer was born, and our own divine filiation, in the mystery of the "fullness of time."²

This "fullness" indicates the moment fixed from all eternity when the Father sent his Son "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). It denotes the blessed moment when the Word that "was with God...became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:1, 14), and made himself our brother. It marks the moment when the Holy Spirit, who had already infused the fullness of grace into Mary of Nazareth, formed in her virginal womb the human nature of Christ. This "fullness" marks the moment when, with the entrance of the eternal into time, time itself is redeemed, and being filled with the mystery of Christ becomes definitively "salvation time." Finally, this "fullness" designates the hidden beginning of the Church's journey. In the liturgy the Church salutes Mary of Nazareth as the Church's own beginning,³ for in the event of the Immaculate Conception the Church sees projected, and anticipated in her most noble member, the saving grace of Easter. And above all, in the Incarnation she encounters Christ and Mary indissolubly joined: he who is the Church's Lord and Head and she who, uttering the first fiat of the New Covenant, prefigures the Church's condition as spouse and mother.

2. Strengthened by the presence of Christ (cf. Mt. 28:20), the Church journeys through time towards the consummation of the ages and goes to meet the Lord who comes. But on this journey- and I wish to make this point straightaway-she proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary, who "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross."⁴

I take these very rich and evocative words from the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which in its concluding part offers a clear summary of the Church's doctrine on the Mother of Christ, whom she venerates as her beloved Mother and as her model in faith hope and charity.

Shortly after the Council, my great predecessor Paul VI decided to speak further of the Blessed Virgin. In the Encyclical Epistle *Christi Matri* and subsequently in the Apostolic Exhortations *Signum Magnum* and *Marialis Cultus*⁵ he expounded the foundations and criteria of the special veneration which the Mother of Christ receives in the Church, as well as the various forms of Marian devotion- liturgical, popular and private-which respond to the spirit of faith.

3. The circumstance which now moves me to take up this subject once more is the prospect of the year 2000, now drawing near, in which the Bimillennial Jubilee of the birth of Jesus Christ at the same time directs our gaze towards his Mother. In recent years, various opinions have been voiced suggesting that it would be fitting to precede that anniversary by a similar Jubilee in celebration of the birth of Mary.

In fact, even though it is not possible to establish an exact chronological point for identifying the date of Mary's birth, the Church has constantly been aware that Mary appeared on the horizon of salvation history before Christ.⁶ It is a fact that when "the fullness of time" was definitively drawing near-the saving advent of Emmanuel- he who was from eternity destined to be his Mother already existed on earth. The fact that she "preceded" the coming of Christ is reflected every year in the liturgy of Advent. Therefore, if to that ancient historical expectation of the Savior we compare these years which are bringing us closer to the end of the second Millennium after Christ and to the beginning of the third, it becomes fully comprehensible that in this present period we wish to turn in a special way to her, the one who in the "night" of the Advent expectation began to shine like a true "Morning Star" (*Stella Matutina*). For just as this star, together with the "dawn," precedes the rising of the sun, so Mary from the time of her Immaculate Conception preceded the coming of the Savior, the rising of the "Sun of Justice" in the history of the human race.⁷

Her presence in the midst of Israel—a presence so discreet as to pass almost unnoticed by the eyes of her contemporaries—shone very clearly before the Eternal One, who had associated this hidden "daughter of Sion" (cf. Zeph. 3:14; Zeph. 2:10) with the plan of salvation embracing the whole history of humanity. With good reason, then, at the end of this Millennium, we Christians who know that the providential plan of the Most Holy Trinity is the central reality of Revelation and of faith feel the need to emphasize the unique presence of the Mother of Christ in history, especially during these last years leading up to the year 2000.

4. The Second Vatican Council prepares us for this by presenting in its teaching the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and of the Church. If it is true, as the Council itself proclaims, 8 that "only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light," then this principle must be applied in a very particular way to that exceptional "daughter of the human race," that extraordinary "woman" who became the Mother of Christ. Only in the mystery of Christ is her mystery fully made clear. Thus has the Church sought to interpret it from the very beginning: the mystery of the Incarnation has enabled her to penetrate and to make ever clearer the mystery of the Mother of the Incarnate Word. The Council of Ephesus (431) was of decisive importance in clarifying this, for during that Council, to the great joy of Christians, the truth of the divine motherhood of Mary was solemnly confirmed as a truth of the Church's faith. Mary is the Mother of God (= Θεοτόκος), since by the power of the Holy Spirit she conceived in her virginal womb and brought into the world Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is of one being with the Father.⁹ "The Son of God...born of the Virgin Mary...has truly been made one of us,"¹⁰ has been made man. Thus, through the mystery of Christ, on the horizon of the Church's faith there shines in its fullness the mystery of his Mother. In turn, the dogma of the divine motherhood of Mary was for the Council of Ephesus and is for the Church like a seal upon the dogma of the Incarnation, in which the Word truly assumes human nature into the unity of his person, without cancelling out that nature.

5. The Second Vatican Council, by presenting Mary in the mystery of Christ, also finds the path to a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Church. Mary, as the Mother of Christ, is in a particular way united with the Church, "which the Lord established as his own body."¹¹ It is significant that the conciliar text places this truth about the Church as the Body of Christ (according to the teaching of the Pauline Letters) in close proximity to the truth that the Son of God "through the power of the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary." The reality of the Incarnation finds a sort of extension in the mystery of the Church—the Body of Christ. And one cannot think of the reality of the Incarnation without referring to Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word.

In these reflections, however, I wish to consider primarily that "pilgrimage of faith" in which "the Blessed Virgin advanced," faithfully preserving her union with Christ.¹² In this way the "twofold bond" which unites the Mother of God with Christ and with the Church takes on historical significance. Nor is it just a question of the Virgin Mother's life-story, of her personal journey of faith and "the better part" which is hers in the mystery of salvation; it is also a question of the history of the whole People of God, of all those who take part in the same "pilgrimage of faith."

The Council expresses this when it states in another passage that Mary "has gone before," becoming "a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ."¹³ This "going before" as a figure or model is in reference to the intimate mystery of the Church, as she actuates and accomplishes her own saving mission by uniting in herself—as Mary did—the qualities of mother and virgin. She is a virgin who "keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse" and "becomes herself a mother," for "she brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God."¹⁴

6. All this is accomplished in a great historical process, comparable "to a journey." The pilgrimage of faith indicates the interior history, that is, the story of souls. But it is also the story of all human beings, subject here on earth to transitoriness, and part of the historical dimension. In the following reflections we wish to concentrate first of all on the present, which in itself is not yet history, but which nevertheless is constantly forming it, also in the sense of the history of salvation. Here there opens up a broad prospect, within which the Blessed Virgin Mary continues to "go before" the People of God. Her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church, for individuals and for communities, for peoples and nations and, in a sense, for all humanity. It is indeed difficult to encompass and measure its range.

The Council emphasizes that the Mother of God is already the eschatological fulfillment of the Church: "In the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph. 5:27)"; and at the same time the Council says that "the followers of Christ still strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin, and so they raise their eyes to Mary, who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as a model of the virtues."¹⁵ The pilgrimage of faith no longer belongs to the Mother of the Son of God: glorified at the side of her Son in heaven, Mary has already crossed the threshold between faith and that vision which is "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). At the same time, however, in this eschatological fulfillment, Mary does not cease to be the "Star of the Sea" (Maris Stella) ¹⁶ for all those who are still on the journey of faith. If they lift their eyes to her from their earthly existence, they do so because "the Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (Rom. 8:29),"¹⁷ and also because "in the birth and development" of these brothers and sisters "she cooperates with a maternal love."¹⁸

PART I - MARY IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

1. Full of Grace

7. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3). These words of the Letter to the Ephesians reveal the eternal design of God the Father, his plan of man's salvation in Christ. It is a universal plan, which concerns all men and women created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26). Just as all are included in the creative work of God "in the beginning," so all are eternally included in the divine plan of salvation, which is to be completely revealed, in the "fullness of time," with the final coming of Christ. In fact, the God who is the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"-these are the next words of the same Letter-"chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:4-7).

The divine plan of salvation-which was fully revealed to us with the coming of Christ-is eternal. And according to the teaching contained in the Letter just quoted and in other Pauline Letters (cf. Col. 1:12-14; Rom. 3:24; Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:18-29), it is also eternally linked to Christ. It includes everyone, but it reserves a special place for the "woman" who is the Mother of him to whom the Father has entrusted the work of salvation.¹⁹ As the Second Vatican Council says, "she is already prophetically foreshadowed in that promise made to our first parents after their fall into sin"-according to the Book of Genesis (cf. 3:15). "Likewise she is the Virgin who is to conceive and bear a son, whose name will be called Emmanuel"-according to the words of Isaiah (cf. 7:14).²⁰ In this way the Old Testament prepares that "fullness of time" when God "sent forth his Son, born of woman...so that we might receive adoption as sons." The coming into the world of the Son of God is an event recorded in the first chapters of the Gospels according to Luke and Matthew.

8. Mary is definitively introduced into the mystery of Christ through this event: the Annunciation by the angel. This takes place at Nazareth, within the concrete circumstances of the history of Israel, the people which first received God's promises. The divine messenger says to the Virgin: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk. 1:28). Mary "was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be" (Lk. 1:29): what could those extraordinary words mean, and in particular the expression "full of grace" (kecharitoméne).²¹

If we wish to meditate together with Mary on these words, and especially on the expression "full of grace," we can find a significant echo in the very passage from the Letter to the Ephesians quoted above. And if after the announcement of the heavenly messenger the Virgin of Nazareth is also called "blessed among women" (cf. Lk. 1:42), it is because of that blessing with which "God the Father" has filled us "in the heavenly places, in Christ." It is a spiritual blessing which is meant for all people and which bears in itself fullness and universality ("every blessing"). It flows from that love which, in the Holy Spirit, unites the consubstantial Son to the Father. At the same time, it is a blessing poured out through Jesus Christ upon human history until the end: upon all people. This blessing, however, refers to Mary in a special and exceptional degree: for she was greeted by Elizabeth as "blessed among women."

The double greeting is due to the fact that in the soul of this "daughter of Sion" there is manifested, in a sense, all the "glory of grace," that grace which "the Father...has given us in his beloved Son." For the messenger greets Mary as "full of grace"; he calls her thus as if it were her real name. He does not call her by her proper earthly name: Miryam (= Mary), but by this new name: "full of grace." What does this name mean? Why does the archangel address the Virgin of Nazareth in this way?

In the language of the Bible "grace" means a special gift, which according to the New Testament has its source precisely in the Trinitarian life of God himself, God who is love (cf. 1 Jn. 4:8). The fruit of this love is "the election" of which the Letter to the Ephesians speaks. On the part of God, this election is the eternal desire to save man through a sharing in his own life (cf. 2 Pt. 1:4) in Christ: it is salvation through a sharing in supernatural life. The effect of this eternal gift, of this grace of man's election by God, is like a seed of holiness, or a spring which rises in the soul as a gift from God himself, who through grace gives life and holiness to those who are chosen. In this way there is fulfilled, that is to say there comes about, that "blessing" of man "with every spiritual blessing," that "being his adopted sons and daughters...in Christ," in him who is eternally the "beloved Son" of the Father.

When we read that the messenger addresses Mary as "full of grace," the Gospel context, which mingles revelations and ancient promises, enables us to understand that among all the "spiritual blessings in Christ" this is a special "blessing." In the mystery of Christ she is present even "before the creation of the world," as the one whom the Father "has chosen" as Mother of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way Mary is united to Christ, and similarly she is eternally loved in this "beloved Son," this Son who is of one being with the Father, in whom is concentrated all the "glory of grace." At the same time, she is and remains perfectly open to this "gift from above" (cf. Jas. 1:17). As the Council teaches, Mary "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from him."²²

9. If the greeting and the name "full of grace" say all this, in the context of the angel's announcement they refer first of all to the election of Mary as Mother of the Son of God. But at the same time the "fullness of grace" indicates all the supernatural munificence from which Mary benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ. If this

election is fundamental for the accomplishment of God's salvific designs for humanity, and if the eternal choice in Christ and the vocation to the dignity of adopted children is the destiny of everyone, then the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Hence also the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ.

The divine messenger says to her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High" (Lk. 1:30-32). And when the Virgin, disturbed by that extraordinary greeting, asks: "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" she receives from the angel the confirmation and explanation of the preceding words. Gabriel says to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35).

The Annunciation, therefore, is the revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation at the very beginning of its fulfillment on earth. God's salvific giving of himself and his life, in some way to all creation but directly to man, reaches one of its high points in the mystery of the Incarnation. This is indeed a high point among all the gifts of grace conferred in the history of man and of the universe: Mary is "full of grace," because it is precisely in her that the Incarnation of the Word, the hypostatic union of the Son of God with human nature, is accomplished and fulfilled. As the Council says, Mary is "the Mother of the Son of God. As a result she is also the favorite daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace, she far surpasses all other creatures, both in heaven and on earth."²³ 10. The Letter to the Ephesians, speaking of the "glory of grace" that "God, the Father...has bestowed on us in his beloved Son," adds: "In him we have redemption through his blood" (Eph. 1:7). According to the belief formulated in solemn documents of the Church, this "glory of grace" is manifested in the Mother of God through the fact that she has been "redeemed in a more sublime manner."²⁴ By virtue of the richness of the grace of the beloved Son, by reason of the redemptive merits of him who willed to become her Son, Mary was preserved from the inheritance of original sin.²⁵ In this way, from the first moment of her conception- which is to say of her existence-she belonged to Christ, sharing in the salvific and sanctifying grace and in that love which has its beginning in the "Beloved," the Son of the Eternal Father, who through the Incarnation became her own Son. Consequently, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, Mary receives life from him to whom she herself, in the order of earthly generation, gave life as a mother. The liturgy does not hesitate to call her "mother of her Creator"²⁶ and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of St. Bernard: "daughter of your Son."²⁷ And since Mary receives this "new life" with a fullness corresponding to the Son's love for the Mother, and thus corresponding to the dignity of the divine motherhood, the angel at the Annunciation calls her "full of grace."

11. In the salvific design of the Most Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Incarnation constitutes the superabundant fulfillment of the promise made by God to man after original sin, after that first sin whose effects oppress the whole earthly history of man (cf. Gen. 3:15). And so, there comes into the world a Son, "the seed of the woman" who will crush the evil of sin in its very origins: "he will crush the head of the serpent." As we see from the words of the Protogospel, the victory of the woman's Son will not take place without a hard struggle, a struggle that is to extend through the whole of human history. The "enmity," foretold at the beginning, is confirmed in the Apocalypse (the book of the final events of the Church and the world), in which there recurs the sign of the "woman," this time "clothed with the sun" (Rev. 12:1).

Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word, is placed at the very center of that enmity, that struggle which accompanies the history of humanity on earth and the history of salvation itself. In this central place, she who belongs to the "weak and poor of the Lord" bears in herself, like no other member of the human race, that "glory of grace" which the Father "has bestowed on us in his beloved Son," and this grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty of her whole being. Mary thus remains before God, and also before the whole of humanity, as the unchangeable and inviolable sign of God's election, spoken of in Paul's letter: "in Christ...he chose us...before the foundation of the world...he destined us...to be his sons" (Eph. 1:4, 5). This election is more powerful than any experience of evil and sin, than all that "enmity" which marks the history of man. In this history Mary remains a sign of sure hope.

2. Blessed is she who believed

12. Immediately after the narration of the Annunciation, the Evangelist Luke guides us in the footsteps of the Virgin of Nazareth towards "a city of Judah" (Lk. 1:39). According to scholars this city would be the modern Ain Karim, situated in the mountains, not far from Jerusalem. Mary arrived there "in haste," to visit Elizabeth her kinswoman. The reason for her visit is also to be found in the fact that at the Annunciation Gabriel had made special mention of Elizabeth, who in her old age had conceived a son by her husband Zechariah, through the power of God: "your kins woman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a Son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk. 1:36-37). The divine messenger had spoken of what had been accomplished in Elizabeth in order to answer Mary's question. "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk. 1:34) It is to come to pass precisely through the "power of the Most High," just as it happened in the case of Elizabeth, and even more so.

Moved by charity, therefore, Mary goes to the house of her kinswoman. When Mary enters, Elizabeth replies to her greeting and feels the child leap in her womb, and being "filled with the Holy Spirit" she greets Mary with a loud cry: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (cf. Lk. 1:40-42) Elizabeth's exclamation or

acclamation was subsequently to become part of the Hail Mary, as a continuation of the angel's greeting, thus becoming one of the Church's most frequently used prayers. But still more significant are the words of Elizabeth in the question which follows: "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:43) Elizabeth bears witness to Mary: she recognizes and proclaims that before her stands the Mother of the Lord, the Mother of the Messiah. The son whom Elizabeth is carrying in her womb also shares in this witness: "The babe in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk. 1:44). This child is the future John the Baptist, who at the Jordan will point out Jesus as the Messiah.

While every word of Elizabeth's greeting is filled with meaning, her final words would seem to have fundamental importance: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk. 1:45).²⁸ These words can be linked with the little "full of grace" of the angel's greeting. Both of these texts reveal an essential Mariological content, namely the truth about Mary, who has become really present in the mystery of Christ precisely because she "has believed." The fullness of grace announced by the angel means the gift of God himself. Mary's faith, proclaimed by Elizabeth at the Visitation, indicates how the Virgin of Nazareth responded to this gift.

13. As the Council teaches, "'The obedience of faith' (Rom. 16:26; cf. Rom. 1:5; 2 Cor. 10:5-6) must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God."²⁹ This description of faith found perfect realization in Mary. The "decisive" moment was the Annunciation, and the very words of Elizabeth: "And blessed is she who believed" refer primarily to that very moment.³⁰

Indeed, at the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the "full submission of intellect and will," manifesting "the obedience of faith" to him who spoke to her through his messenger.³¹ She responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine "I," and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with "the grace of God that precedes and assists" and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who "constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts."³²

The word of the living God, announced to Mary by the angel, referred to her: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (Lk. 1:31). By accepting this announcement, Mary was to become the "Mother of the Lord," and the divine mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished in her: "The Father of mercies willed that the consent of the predestined Mother should precede the Incarnation."³³ And Mary gives this consent, after she has heard everything the messenger has to say. She says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). This fiat of Mary-"let it be to me"-was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery. There is a complete harmony with the words of the Son, who, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, says to the Father as he comes into the world: "Sacrifices and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.... Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:5-7). The mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished when Mary uttered her fiat: "Let it be to me according to your word," which made possible, as far as it depended upon her in the divine plan, the granting of her Son's desire.

Mary uttered this fiat in faith. In faith she entrusted herself to God without reserve and "devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son."³⁴ And as the Fathers of the Church teach-she conceived this Son in her mind before she conceived him in her womb: precisely in faith!³⁵

Rightly therefore does Elizabeth praise Mary: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." These words have already been fulfilled: Mary of Nazareth presents herself at the threshold of Elizabeth and Zechariah's house as the Mother of the Son of God. This is Elizabeth's joyful discovery: "The mother of my Lord comes to me"!

14.

Mary's faith can also be compared to that of Abraham, whom St. Paul calls "our father in faith" (cf. Rom. 4:12). In the salvific economy of God's revelation, Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant; Mary's faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant. Just as Abraham "in hope believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations" (cf. Rom. 4:18), so Mary, at the Annunciation, having professed her virginity ("How shall this be, since I have no husband?") believed that through the power of the Most High, by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God's Son in accordance with the angel's revelation: "The child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35).

However, Elizabeth's words "And blessed is she who believed" do not apply only to that particular moment of the Annunciation. Certainly the Annunciation is the culminating moment of Mary's faith in her awaiting of Christ, but it is also the point of departure from which her whole "journey towards God" begins, her whole pilgrimage of faith. And on this road, in an eminent and truly heroic manner- indeed with an ever greater heroism of faith-the "obedience" which she professes to the word of divine revelation will be fulfilled. Mary's "obedience of faith" during the whole of her pilgrimage will show surprising similarities to the faith of Abraham. Just like the Patriarch of the People of God, so too Mary, during the pilgrimage of her filial and maternal fiat, "in hope believed against hope." Especially during certain stages of this journey the blessing granted to her "who believed" will be revealed with particular vividness. To believe means "to abandon oneself" to the truth of the word of the living God, knowing and humbly recognizing "how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Rom. 11:33). Mary, who by the eternal will of the Most High stands, one may say, at the very center of those "inscrutable ways" and "unsearchable judgments" of God,

conforms herself to them in the dim light of faith, accepting fully and with a ready heart everything that is decreed in the divine plan.

15.

When at the Annunciation Mary hears of the Son whose Mother she is to become and to whom "she will give the name Jesus" (= Savior), she also learns that "the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, " and that "he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk. 1:32- 33). The hope of the whole of Israel was directed towards this. The promised Messiah is to be "great, " and the heavenly messenger also announces that "he will be great"-great both by bearing the name of Son of the Most High and by the fact that he is to assume the inheritance of David. He is therefore to be a king, he is to reign "over the house of Jacob." Mary had grown up in the midst of these expectations of her people: could she guess, at the moment of the Annunciation, the vital significance of the angel's words? And how is one to understand that "kingdom" which "will have no end"?

Although through faith she may have perceived in that instant that she was the mother of the "Messiah King, " nevertheless she replied: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). From the first moment Mary professed above all the "obedience of faith, " abandoning herself to the meaning which was given to the words of the Annunciation by him from whom they proceeded: God himself.

16.

Later, a little further along this way of the "obedience of faith, " Mary hears other words: those uttered by Simeon in the Temple of Jerusalem. It was now forty days after the birth of Jesus when, in accordance with the precepts of the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph "brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord" (Lk. 2:22). The birth had taken place in conditions of extreme poverty. We know from Luke that when, on the occasion of the census ordered by the Roman authorities, Mary went with Joseph to Bethlehem, having found "no place in the inn, " she gave birth to her Son in a stable and "laid him in a manger" (cf. Lk. 2:7).

A just and God-fearing man, called Simeon, appears at this beginning of Mary's "journey" of faith. His words, suggested by the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk. 2:25-27), confirm the truth of the Annunciation. For we read that he took up in his arms the child to whom-in accordance with the angel's command-the name Jesus was given (cf. Lk. 2:21). Simeon's words match the meaning of this name, which is Savior: "God is salvation." Turning to the Lord, he says: "For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Lk. 2:30-32). At the same time, however, Simeon addresses Mary with the following words: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed"; and he adds with direct reference to her: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (cf. Lk. 2:34-35). Simeon's words cast new light on the announcement which Mary had heard from the angel: Jesus is the Savior, he is "a light for revelation" to mankind. Is not this what was manifested in a way on Christmas night, when the shepherds come to the stable (cf. Lk. 2:8-20)? Is not this what was to be manifested even more clearly in the coming of the Magi from the East (cf. Mt. 2:1-12)? But at the same time, at the very beginning of his life, the Son of Mary, and his Mother with him, will experience in themselves the truth of those other words of Simeon: "a sign that is spoken against" (Lk. 2:34). Simeon's words seem like a second Annunciation to Mary, for they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish his mission, namely, in misunderstanding and sorrow. While this announcement on the one hand confirms her faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises of salvation, on the other hand it also reveals to her that she will have to live her obedience of faith in suffering, at the side of the suffering Savior, and that her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful. Thus, after the visit of the Magi who came from the East, after their homage ("they fell down and worshipped him") and after they had offered gifts (cf. Mt. 2:11), Mary together with the child has to flee into Egypt in the protective care of Joseph, for "Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (cf. Mt. 2:13). And until the death of Herod they will have to remain in Egypt (cf. Mt. 2:15).

17.

When the Holy Family returns to Nazareth after Herod's death, there begins the long period of the hidden life. She "who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk. 1:45) lives the reality of these words day by day. And daily at her side is the Son to whom "she gave the name Jesus"; therefore in contact with him she certainly uses this name, a fact which would have surprised no one, since the name had long been in use in Israel. Nevertheless, Mary knows that he who bears the name Jesus has been called by the angel "the Son of the Most High" (cf. Lk. 1:32). Mary knows she has conceived and given birth to him "without having a husband, " by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the power of the Most High who overshadowed her (cf. Lk. 1:35), just as at the time of Moses and the Patriarchs the cloud covered the presence of God (cf. Ex. 24:16; 40:34-35; I Kings 8:10-12). Therefore Mary knows that the Son to whom she gave birth in a virginal manner is precisely that "Holy One, " the Son of God, of whom the angel spoke to her.

During the years of Jesus' hidden life in the house at Nazareth, Mary's life too is "hid with Christ in God" (cf. Col. 3:3) through faith. For faith is contact with the mystery of God. Every day Mary is in constant contact with the ineffable mystery of God made man, a mystery that surpasses everything revealed in the Old Covenant. From the moment of the Annunciation, the mind of the Virgin-Mother has been initiated into the radical "newness" of God's self-revelation and has been made aware of the mystery. She is the first of those "little ones" of whom Jesus will say one day: "Father,

...you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (Mt. 11:25). For "no one knows the Son except the Father" (Mt. 11:27). If this is the case, how can Mary "know the Son"? Of course she does not know him as the Father does; and yet she is the first of those to whom the Father "has chosen to reveal him" (cf. Mt. 11:26-27; 1 Cor. 2:11). If though, from the moment of the Annunciation, the Son-whom only the Father knows completely, as the one who begets him in the eternal "today" (cf. Ps. 2:7) was revealed to Mary, she, his Mother, is in contact with the truth about her Son only in faith and through faith! She is therefore blessed, because "she has believed, " and continues to believe day after day amidst all the trials and the adversities of Jesus' infancy and then during the years of the hidden life at Nazareth, where he "was obedient to them" (Lk. 2:51). He was obedient both to Mary and also to Joseph, since Joseph took the place of his father in people's eyes; for this reason, the Son of Mary was regarded by the people as "the carpenter's son" (Mt. 13:55).

The Mother of that Son, therefore, mindful of what has been told her at the Annunciation and in subsequent events, bears within herself the radical "newness" of faith: the beginning of the New Covenant. This is the beginning of the Gospel, the joyful Good News. However, it is not difficult to see in that beginning a particular heaviness of heart, linked with a sort of night of faith"-to use the words of St. John of the Cross-a kind of "veil" through which one has to draw near to the Invisible One and to live in intimacy with the mystery.³⁶ And this is the way that Mary, for many years, lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son, and went forward in her "pilgrimage of faith, " while Jesus "increased in wisdom...and in favor with God and man" (Lk. 2:52). God's predilection for him was manifested ever more clearly to people's eyes. The first human creature thus permitted to discover Christ was Mary, who lived with Joseph in the same house at Nazareth.

However, when he had been found in the Temple, and his Mother asked him, "Son, why have you treated us so?" the twelve-year-old Jesus answered: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And the Evangelist adds: "And they (Joseph and Mary) did not understand the saying which he spoke to them" (Lk. 2:48-50). Jesus was aware that "no one knows the Son except the Father" (cf. Mt. 11:27); thus even his Mother, to whom had been revealed most completely the mystery of his divine sonship, lived in intimacy with this mystery only through faith! Living side by side with her Son under the same roof, and faithfully persevering "in her union with her Son, " she "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, " as the Council emphasizes.³⁷ And so it was during Christ's public life too (cf. Mk. 3:21-35) that day by day there was fulfilled in her the blessing uttered by Elizabeth at the Visitation: "Blessed is she who believed."

18. This blessing reaches its full meaning when Mary stands beneath the Cross of her Son (cf. Jn. 19:25).

The Council says that this happened "not without a divine plan": by "suffering deeply with her only-begotten Son and joining herself with her maternal spirit to his sacrifice, lovingly consenting to the immolation of the victim to whom she had given birth, " in this way Mary "faithfully preserved her union with her Son even to the Cross."³⁸ It is a union through faith- the same faith with which she had received the angel's revelation at the Annunciation. At that moment she had also heard the words: "He will be great... and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk. 1:32-33).

And now, standing at the foot of the Cross, Mary is the witness, humanly speaking, of the complete negation of these words. On that wood of the Cross her Son hangs in agony as one condemned. "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows...he was despised, and we esteemed him not": as one destroyed (cf. Is. 53:3- 5). How great, how heroic then is the obedience of faith shown by Mary in the face of God's "unsearchable judgments"! How completely she "abandons herself to God" without reserve, offering the full assent of the intellect and the will"³⁹ to him whose "ways are inscrutable" (cf. Rom. 11:33)! And how powerful too is the action of grace in her soul, how all-pervading is the influence of the Holy Spirit and of his light and power!

Through this faith Mary is perfectly united with Christ in his self- emptying. For "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men": precisely on Golgotha "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (cf. Phil. 2:5-8). At the foot of the Cross Mary shares through faith in the shocking mystery of this self- emptying. This is perhaps the deepest "kenosis" of faith in human history. Through faith the Mother shares in the death of her Son, in his redeeming death; but in contrast with the faith of the disciples who fled, hers was far more enlightened. On Golgotha, Jesus through the Cross definitively confirmed that he was the "sign of contradiction" foretold by Simeon. At the same time, there were also fulfilled on Golgotha the words which Simeon had addressed to Mary: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also."⁴⁰

19. Yes, truly "blessed is she who believed"! These words, spoken by Elizabeth after the Annunciation, here at the foot of the Cross seem to re-echo with supreme eloquence, and the power contained within them becomes something penetrating. From the Cross, that is to say from the very heart of the mystery of Redemption, there radiates and spreads out the prospect of that blessing of faith. It goes right back to "the beginning," and as a sharing in the sacrifice of Christ- the new Adam-it becomes in a certain sense the counterpoise to the disobedience and disbelief embodied in the sin of our first parents. Thus teach the Fathers of the Church and especially St. Irenaeus, quoted by the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*: "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith."⁴¹ In the light of this comparison with Eve, the Fathers of the Church- as the Council also says- call Mary the "mother of the living" and often speak of "death through Eve, life through Mary."⁴²

In the expression "Blessed is she who believed," we can therefore rightly find a kind of "key" which unlocks for us the innermost reality of Mary, whom the angel hailed as "full of grace." If as "full of grace" she has been eternally present in the mystery of Christ, through faith she became a sharer in that mystery in every extension of her earthly journey. She "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith" and at the same time, in a discreet yet direct and effective way, she made present to humanity the mystery of Christ. And she still continues to do so. Through the mystery of Christ, she too is present within mankind. Thus through the mystery of the Son the mystery of the Mother is also made clear.

3. Behold your mother

20. The Gospel of Luke records the moment when "a woman in the crowd raised her voice" and said to Jesus: "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" (Lk. 11:27) These words were an expression of praise of Mary as Jesus' mother according to the flesh. Probably the Mother of Jesus was not personally known to this woman; in fact, when Jesus began his messianic activity Mary did not accompany him but continued to remain at Nazareth. One could say that the words of that unknown woman in a way brought Mary out of her hiddenness.

Through these words, there flashed out in the midst of the crowd, at least for an instant, the gospel of Jesus' infancy. This is the gospel in which Mary is present as the mother who conceives Jesus in her womb, gives him birth and nurses him: the nursing mother referred to by the woman in the crowd. Thanks to this motherhood, Jesus, the Son of the Most High (cf. Lk. 1:32), is a true son of man. He is "flesh," like every other man: he is "the Word (who) became flesh" (cf. Jn. 1:14). He is of the flesh and blood of Mary!⁴³

But to the blessing uttered by that woman upon her who was his mother according to the flesh, Jesus replies in a significant way: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk. 11:28). He wishes to divert attention from motherhood understood only as a fleshly bond, in order to direct it towards those mysterious bonds of the spirit which develop from hearing and keeping God's word.

This same shift into the sphere of spiritual values is seen even more clearly in another response of Jesus reported by all the Synoptics. When Jesus is told that "his mother and brothers are standing outside and wish to see him," he replies: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (cf. Lk. 8:20-21). This he said "looking around on those who sat about him," as we read in Mark (3:34) or, according to Matthew (12:49), "stretching out his hand towards his disciples."

These statements seem to fit in with the reply which the twelve-year-old Jesus gave to Mary and Joseph when he was found after three days in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Now, when Jesus left Nazareth and began his public life throughout Palestine, he was completely and exclusively "concerned with his Father's business" (cf. Lk. 2:49). He announced the Kingdom: the "Kingdom of God" and "his Father's business," which add a new dimension and meaning to everything human, and therefore to every human bond, insofar as these things relate to the goals and tasks assigned to every human being. Within this new dimension, also a bond such as that of "brotherhood" means something different from "brotherhood according to the flesh" deriving from a common origin from the same set of parents. "Motherhood," too, in the dimension of the Kingdom of God and in the radius of the fatherhood of God himself, takes on another meaning. In the words reported by Luke, Jesus teaches precisely this new meaning of motherhood.

Is Jesus thereby distancing himself from his mother according to the flesh? Does he perhaps wish to leave her in the hidden obscurity which she herself has chosen? If this seems to be the case from the tone of those words, one must nevertheless note that the new and different motherhood which Jesus speaks of to his disciples refers precisely to Mary in a very special way. Is not Mary the first of "those who hear the word of God and do it"? And therefore does not the blessing uttered by Jesus in response to the woman in the crowd refer primarily to her? Without any doubt, Mary is worthy of blessing by the very fact that she became the mother of Jesus according to the flesh ("Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked"), but also and especially because already at the Annunciation she accepted the word of God, because she believed it, because she was obedient to God, and because she "kept" the word and "pondered it in her heart" (cf. Lk. 1:38, 45; 2:19, 51) and by means of her whole life accomplished it. Thus we can say that the blessing proclaimed by Jesus is not in opposition, despite appearances, to the blessing uttered by the unknown woman, but rather coincides with that blessing in the person of this Virgin Mother, who called herself only "the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk. 1:38). If it is true that "all generations will call her blessed" (cf. Lk. 1:48), then it can be said that the unnamed woman was the first to confirm unwittingly that prophetic phrase of Mary's Magnificat and to begin the Magnificat of the ages.

If through faith Mary became the bearer of the Son given to her by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit, while preserving her virginity intact, in that same faith she discovered and accepted the other dimension of motherhood revealed by Jesus during his messianic mission. One can say that this dimension of motherhood belonged to Mary from the beginning, that is to say from the moment of the conception and birth of her Son. From that time she was "the one who believed." But as the messianic mission of her Son grew clearer to her eyes and spirit, she herself as a mother became ever more open to that new dimension of motherhood which was to constitute her "part" beside her Son. Had she not said from the very beginning: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38)? Through faith Mary continued to hear and to ponder that word, in which there became ever clearer, in a

way "which surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19), the self-revelation of the living God. Thus in a sense Mary as Mother became the first "disciple" of her Son, the first to whom he seemed to say: "Follow me, " even before he addressed this call to the Apostles or to anyone else (cf. Jn. 1:43).

21. From this point of view, particularly eloquent is the passage in the Gospel of John which presents Mary at the wedding feast of Cana. She appears there as the Mother of Jesus at the beginning of his public life: "There was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples" (Jn. 2:1-2). From the text it appears that Jesus and his disciples were invited together with Mary, as if by reason of her presence at the celebration: the Son seems to have been invited because of his mother. We are familiar with the sequence of events which resulted from that invitation, that "beginning of the signs" wrought by Jesus-the water changed into wine-which prompts the Evangelist to say that Jesus "manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (Jn. 2:11).

Mary is present at Cana in Galilee as the Mother of Jesus, and in a significant way she contributes to that "beginning of the signs" which reveal the messianic power of her Son. We read: "When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come'" (Jn. 2:3-4). In John's Gospel that "hour" means the time appointed by the Father when the Son accomplishes his task and is to be glorified (cf. Jn. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). Even though Jesus' reply to his mother sounds like a refusal (especially if we consider the blunt statement "My hour has not yet come" rather than the question), Mary nevertheless turns to the servants and says to them: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2:5). Then Jesus orders the servants to fill the stone jars with water, and the water becomes wine, better than the wine which has previously been served to the wedding guests.

What deep understanding existed between Jesus and his mother? How can we probe the mystery of their intimate spiritual union? But the fact speaks for itself. It is certain that that event already quite clearly outlines the new dimension, the new meaning of Mary's motherhood. Her motherhood has a significance which is not exclusively contained in the words of Jesus and in the various episodes reported by the Synoptics (Lk. 11:27-28 and Lk. 8:19-21; Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35). In these texts Jesus means above all to contrast the motherhood resulting from the fact of birth with what this "motherhood" (and also "brotherhood") is to be in the dimension of the Kingdom of God, in the salvific radius of God's fatherhood.

In John's text on the other hand, the description of the Cana event outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say Mary's solicitude for human beings, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs. At Cana in Galilee there is shown only one concrete aspect of human need, apparently a small one of little importance ("They have no wine"). But it has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ's messianic mission and salvific power. Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself "in the middle, " that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she "has the right" to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary "intercedes" for mankind. And that is not all. As a mother she also wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested, that salvific power of his which is meant to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from the evil which in various forms and degrees weighs heavily upon his life. Precisely as the Prophet Isaiah had foretold about the Messiah in the famous passage which Jesus quoted before his fellow townfolk in Nazareth: "To preach good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind..." (cf. Lk. 4:18).

Another essential element of Mary's maternal task is found in her words to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." The Mother of Christ presents herself as the spokeswoman of her Son's will, pointing out those things which must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested. At Cana, thanks to the intercession of Mary and the obedience of the servants, Jesus begins "his hour." At Cana Mary appears as believing in Jesus. Her faith evokes his first "sign" and helps to kindle the faith of the disciples.

22. We can therefore say that in this passage of John's Gospel we find as it were a first manifestation of the truth concerning Mary's maternal care. This truth has also found expression in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. It is important to note how the Council illustrates Mary's maternal role as it relates to the mediation of Christ. Thus we read: "Mary's maternal function towards mankind in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its efficacy, " because "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). This maternal role of Mary flows, according to God's good pleasure, "from the superabundance of the merits of Christ; it is founded on his mediation, absolutely depends on it, and draws all its efficacy from it."⁴⁴ It is precisely in this sense that the episode at Cana in Galilee offers us a sort of first announcement of Mary's mediation, wholly oriented towards Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power.

From the text of John it is evident that it is a mediation which is maternal. As the Council proclaims: Mary became "a mother to us in the order of grace." This motherhood in the order of grace flows from her divine motherhood. Because she was, by the design of divine Providence, the mother who nourished the divine Redeemer, Mary became "an associate of unique nobility, and the Lord's humble handmaid, " who "cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and

burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls."⁴⁵ And "this maternity of Mary in the order of grace...will last without interruption until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect."⁴⁶

23. If John's description of the event at Cana presents Mary's caring motherhood at the beginning of Christ's messianic activity, another passage from the same Gospel confirms this motherhood in the salvific economy of grace at its crowning moment, namely when Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, his Paschal Mystery, is accomplished. John's description is concise: "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother: 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (Jn. 19:25-27).

Undoubtedly, we find here an expression of the Son's particular solicitude for his Mother, whom he is leaving in such great sorrow. And yet the "testament of Christ's Cross" says more. Jesus highlights a new relationship between Mother and Son, the whole truth and reality of which he solemnly confirms. One can say that if Mary's motherhood of the human race had already been outlined, now it is clearly stated and established. It emerges from the definitive accomplishment of the Redeemer's Paschal Mystery. The Mother of Christ, who stands at the very center of this mystery—a mystery which embraces each individual and all humanity—is given as mother to every single individual and all mankind. The man at the foot of the Cross is John, "the disciple whom he loved."⁴⁷ But it is not he alone. Following tradition, the Council does not hesitate to call Mary "the Mother of Christ and mother of mankind": since she "belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all human beings.... Indeed she is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ... since she cooperated out of love so that there might be born in the Church the faithful.'"⁴⁸

And so this "new motherhood of Mary," generated by faith, is the fruit of the "new" love which came to definitive maturity in her at the foot of the Cross, through her sharing in the redemptive love of her Son.

24. Thus we find ourselves at the very center of the fulfillment of the promise contained in the Proto-gospel: the "seed of the woman...will crush the head of the serpent" (cf. Gen. 3:15). By his redemptive death Jesus Christ conquers the evil of sin and death at its very roots. It is significant that, as he speaks to his mother from the Cross, he calls her "woman" and says to her: "Woman, behold your son!" Moreover, he had addressed her by the same term at Cana too (cf. Jn. 2:4). How can one doubt that especially now, on Golgotha, this expression goes to the very heart of the mystery of Mary, and indicates the unique place which she occupies in the whole economy of salvation? As the Council teaches, in Mary "the exalted Daughter of Sion, and after a long expectation of the promise, the times were at length fulfilled and the new dispensation established. All this occurred when the Son of God took a human nature from her, that he might in the mysteries of his flesh free man from sin."⁴⁹

The words uttered by Jesus from the Cross signify that the motherhood of her who bore Christ finds a "new" continuation in the Church and through the Church, symbolized and represented by John. In this way, she who as the one "full of grace" was brought into the mystery of Christ in order to be his Mother and thus the Holy Mother of God, through the Church remains in that mystery as "the woman" spoken of by the Book of Genesis (3:15) at the beginning and by the Apocalypse (12:1) at the end of the history of salvation. In accordance with the eternal plan of Providence, Mary's divine motherhood is to be poured out upon the Church, as indicated by statements of Tradition, according to which Mary's "motherhood" of the Church is the reflection and extension of her motherhood of the Son of God.⁵⁰

According to the Council the very moment of the Church's birth and full manifestation to the world enables us to glimpse this continuity of Mary's motherhood: "Since it pleased God not to manifest solemnly the mystery of the salvation of the human race until he poured forth the Spirit promised by Christ, we see the Apostles before the day of Pentecost 'continuing with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren' (Acts 1:14). We see Mary prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation."⁵¹

And so, in the redemptive economy of grace, brought about through the action of the Holy Spirit, there is a unique correspondence between the moment of the Incarnation of the Word and the moment of the birth of the Church. The person who links these two moments is Mary: Mary at Nazareth and Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem. In both cases her discreet yet essential presence indicates the path of "birth from the Holy Spirit." Thus she who is present in the mystery of Christ as Mother becomes—by the will of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit—present in the mystery of the Church. In the Church too she continues to be a maternal presence, as is shown by the words spoken from the Cross: "Woman, behold your son!"; "Behold, your mother."

PART II - THE MOTHER OF GOD AT THE CENTER OF THE PILGRIM CHURCH

1. The Church, the People of God present in all the nations of the earth

25. "The Church 'like a pilgrim in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God,'⁵² announcing the Cross and Death of the Lord until he comes (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26)."⁵³ "Israel according to the flesh, which wandered as an exile in the desert, was already called the Church of God (cf. 2 Esd. 13:1; Num. 20:4; Dt. 23:1ff.). Likewise the new Israel...is also called the Church of Christ (cf. Mt 16:18). For he has bought it for himself with his blood (Acts 20:28), has filled it with his Spirit, and provided it with

those means which befit it as a visible and social unity. God has gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and has established them as Church, that for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity."⁵⁴

The Second Vatican Council speaks of the pilgrim Church, establishing an analogy with the Israel of the Old Covenant journeying through the desert. The journey also has an external character, visible in the time and space in which it historically takes place. For the Church "is destined to extend to all regions of the earth and so to enter into the history of mankind, " but at the same time "she transcends all limits of time and of space."⁵⁵ And yet the essential character of her pilgrimage is interior: it is a question of a pilgrimage through faith, by "the power of the Risen Lord, "⁵⁶ a pilgrimage in the Holy Spirit, given to the Church as the invisible Comforter (parakletos) (cf. Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7): "Moving forward through trial and tribulation, the Church is strengthened by the power of God's grace promised to her by the Lord, so that... moved by the Holy Spirit, she may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting."⁵⁷

It is precisely in this ecclesial journey or pilgrimage through space and time, and even more through the history of souls, that Mary is present, as the one who is "blessed because she believed, " as the one who advanced on the pilgrimage of faith, sharing unlike any other creature in the mystery of Christ. The Council further says that "Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation and in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith."⁵⁸ Among all believers she is like a "mirror" in which are reflected in the most profound and limpid way "the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11).

26. Built by Christ upon the Apostles, the Church became fully aware of these mighty works of God on the day of Pentecost, when those gathered together in the Upper Room "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). From that moment there also begins that journey of faith, the Church's pilgrimage through the history of individuals and peoples. We know that at the beginning of this journey Mary is present. We see her in the midst of the Apostles in the Upper Room, "prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit."⁵⁹

In a sense her journey of faith is longer. The Holy Spirit had already come down upon her, and she became his faithful spouse at the Annunciation, welcoming the Word of the true God, offering "the full submission of intellect and will...and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him, " indeed abandoning herself totally to

God through "the obedience of faith, "⁶⁰ whereby she replied to the angel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." The journey of faith made by Mary, whom we see praying in the Upper Room, is thus longer than that of the others gathered there: Mary "goes before them, "

"leads the way" for them.⁶¹ The moment of Pentecost in Jerusalem had been prepared for by the moment of the Annunciation in Nazareth, as well as by the Cross. In the Upper Room Mary's journey meets the Church's journey of faith. In what way?

Among those who devoted themselves to prayer in the Upper Room, preparing to go "into the whole world" after receiving the Spirit, some had been called by Jesus gradually from the beginning of his mission in Israel. Eleven of them had been made Apostles, and to them Jesus had passed on the mission which he himself had received from the Father. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn. 20:21), he had said to the Apostles after the Resurrection. And forty days later, before returning to the Father, he had added: "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...you shall be my witnesses...to the end of the earth" (cf. Acts 1:8). This mission of the Apostles began the moment they left the Upper Room in Jerusalem. The Church is born and then grows through the testimony that Peter and the Apostles bear to the Crucified and Risen Christ (cf. Acts 2:31-34; 3:15-18; 4:10-12; 5:30-32).

Mary did not directly receive this apostolic mission. She was not among those whom Jesus sent "to the whole world to teach all nations" (cf. Mt. 28:19) when he conferred this mission on them. But she was in the Upper Room, where the Apostles were preparing to take up this mission with the coming of the Spirit of Truth: she was present with them. In their midst Mary was "devoted to prayer" as the "mother of Jesus" (cf. Acts 1:13-14), of the Crucified and Risen Christ. And that first group of those who in faith looked "upon Jesus as the author of salvation, "⁶² knew that Jesus was the Son of Mary, and that she was his Mother, and that as such she was from the moment of his conception and birth a unique witness to the mystery of Jesus, that mystery which before their eyes had been disclosed and confirmed in the Cross and Resurrection. Thus, from the very first moment, the Church "looked at" Mary through Jesus, just as she "looked at" Jesus through Mary. For the Church of that time and of every time Mary is a singular witness to the years of Jesus' infancy and hidden life at Nazareth, when she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19; cf. Lk. 2:51).

But above all, in the Church of that time and of every time Mary was and is the one who is "blessed because she believed"; she was the first to believe. From the moment of the Annunciation and conception, from the moment of his birth in the stable at Bethlehem, Mary followed Jesus step by step in her maternal pilgrimage of faith. She followed him during the years of his hidden life at Nazareth; she followed him also during the time after he left home, when he began "to do and to teach" (cf. Acts 1:1) in the midst of Israel. Above all she followed him in the tragic experience of Golgotha. Now, while Mary was with the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem at the dawn of the Church, her faith, born from the words of the Annunciation, found confirmation. The angel had said to her then: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great...and he will reign over the house of

Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." The recent events on Calvary had shrouded that promise in darkness, yet not even beneath the Cross did Mary's faith fail. She had still remained the one who, like Abraham, "in hope believed against hope" (Rom. 4:18). But it is only after the Resurrection that hope had shown its true face and the promise had begun to be transformed into reality. For Jesus, before returning to the Father, had said to the Apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (cf. Mt. 28:19-20). Thus had spoken the one who by his Resurrection had revealed himself as the conqueror of death, as the one who possessed the kingdom of which, as the angel said, "there will be no end."

27. Now, at the first dawn of the Church, at the beginning of the long journey through faith which began at Pentecost in Jerusalem, Mary was with all those who were the seed of the "new Israel." She was present among them as an exceptional witness to the mystery of Christ. And the Church was assiduous in prayer together with her, and at the same time "contemplated her in the light of the Word made man." It was always to be so. For when the Church "enters more intimately into the supreme mystery of the Incarnation, "

she thinks of the Mother of Christ with profound reverence and devotion.⁶³ Mary belongs indissolubly to the mystery of Christ, and she belongs also to the mystery of the Church from the beginning, from the day of the Church's birth. At the basis of what the Church has been from the beginning, and of what she must continually become from generation to generation, in the midst of all the nations of the earth, we find the one "who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk. 1:45). It is precisely Mary's faith which marks the beginning of the new and eternal Covenant of God with man in Jesus Christ; this heroic faith of hers "precedes" the apostolic witness of the Church, and ever remains in the Church's heart hidden like a special heritage of God's revelation. All those who from generation to generation accept the apostolic witness of the Church share in that mysterious inheritance, and in a sense share in Mary's faith.

Elizabeth's words "Blessed is she who believed" continue to accompany the Virgin also at Pentecost; they accompany her from age to age, wherever knowledge of Christ's salvific mystery spreads, through the Church's apostolic witness and service. Thus is fulfilled the prophecy of the Magnificat: "All generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Lk. 1:48-49). For knowledge of the mystery of Christ leads us to bless his Mother, in the form of special veneration for the Theotokos. But this veneration always includes a blessing of her faith, for the Virgin of Nazareth became blessed above all through this faith, in accordance with Elizabeth's words. Those who from generation to generation among the different peoples and nations of the earth accept with faith the mystery of Christ, the Incarnate Word and Redeemer of the world, not only turn with veneration to Mary and confidently have recourse to her as his Mother, but also seek in her faith support for their own. And it is precisely this lively sharing in Mary's faith that determines her special place in the Church's pilgrimage as the new People of God throughout the earth.

28. As the Council says, "Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation.... Hence when she is being preached and venerated, she summons the faithful to her Son and his sacrifice, and to love for the Father."⁶⁴ For this reason, Mary's faith, according to the Church's apostolic witness, in some way continues to become the faith of the pilgrim People of God: the faith of individuals and communities, of places and gatherings, and of the various groups existing in the Church. It is a faith that is passed on simultaneously through both the mind and the heart. It is gained or regained continually through prayer. Therefore, "the Church in her apostolic work also rightly looks to her who brought forth Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin, so that through the Church Christ may be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful also."⁶⁵

Today, as on this pilgrimage of faith we draw near to the end of the second Christian Millennium, the Church, through the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, calls our attention to her vision of herself, as the "one People of God...among all the nations of the earth." And she reminds us of that truth according to which all the faithful, though "scattered throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit."⁶⁶ We can therefore say that in this union the mystery of Pentecost is continually being accomplished. At the same time, the Lord's apostles and disciples, in all the nations of the earth, "devote themselves to prayer together with Mary, the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14). As they constitute from generation to generation the "sign of the Kingdom" which is not of this world, ⁶⁷ they are also aware that in the midst of this world they must gather around that King to whom the nations have been given in heritage (cf. Ps. 2:8), to whom the Father has given "the throne of David his father, " so that he "will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

During this time of vigil, Mary, through the same faith which made her blessed, especially from the moment of the Annunciation, is present in the Church's mission, present in the Church's work of introducing into the world the Kingdom of her Son.⁶⁸

This presence of Mary finds many different expressions in our day, just as it did throughout the Church's history. It also has a wide field of action. Through the faith and piety of individual believers; through the traditions of Christian families or "domestic churches, " of parish and missionary communities, religious institutes and dioceses; through the radiance and attraction of the great shrines where not only individuals or local groups, but sometimes whole nations and societies, even whole continents, seek to meet the Mother of the Lord, the one who is blessed because she believed is the first among believers and therefore became the Mother of Emmanuel. This is the message of the Land of Palestine, the spiritual homeland of all Christians because it was the homeland of the Savior of the world and of his

Mother. This is the message of the many churches in Rome and throughout the world which have been raised up in the course of the centuries by the faith of Christians. This is the message of centers like Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima and the others situated in the various countries. Among them how could I fail to mention the one in my own native land, Jasna Gora? One could perhaps speak of a specific "geography" of faith and Marian devotion, which includes all these special places of pilgrimage where the People of God seek to meet the Mother of God in order to find, within the radius of the maternal presence of her "who believed, " a strengthening of their own faith. For in Mary's faith, first at the Annunciation and then fully at the foot of the Cross, an interior space was reopened within humanity which the eternal Father can fill "with every spiritual blessing." It is the space "of the new and eternal Covenant,"⁶⁹ and it continues to exist in the Church, which in Christ is "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind."⁷⁰

In the faith which Mary professed at the Annunciation as the "handmaid of the Lord" and in which she constantly "precedes" the pilgrim People of God throughout the earth, the Church "strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity...back to Christ its Head in the unity of his Spirit."⁷¹

2. The Church's journey and the unity of all Christians²⁹. "In all of Christ's disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd."⁷² The journey of the Church, especially in our own time, is marked by the sign of ecumenism: Christians are seeking ways to restore that unity which Christ implored from the Father for his disciples on the day before his Passion: "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:21). The unity of Christ's disciples, therefore, is a great sign given in order to kindle faith in the world while their division constitutes a scandal.⁷³

The ecumenical movement, on the basis of a clearer and more widespread awareness of the urgent need to achieve the unity of all Christians, has found on the part of the Catholic Church its culminating expression in the work of the Second Vatican Council: Christians must deepen in themselves and each of their communities that "obedience of faith" of which Mary is the first and brightest example. And since she "shines forth on earth,...as a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God, " "it gives great joy and comfort to this most holy Synod that among the divided brethren, too, there are those who live due honor to the Mother of our Lord and Savior. This is especially so among the Easterners."⁷⁴

30. Christians know that their unity will be truly rediscovered only if it is based on the unity of their faith. They must resolve considerable discrepancies of doctrine concerning the mystery and ministry of the Church, and sometimes also concerning the role of Mary in the work of salvation.⁷⁵ The dialogues begun by the Catholic Church with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West⁷⁶ are steadily converging upon these two inseparable aspects of the same mystery of salvation. If the mystery of the Word made flesh enables us to glimpse the mystery of the divine motherhood and is, in turn, contemplation of the Mother of God brings us to a more profound understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation, then the same must be said for the mystery of the Church and Mary's role in the work of salvation. By a more profound study of both Mary and the Church, clarifying each by the light of the other, Christians who are eager to do what Jesus tells them-as their Mother recommends (cf. Jn. 2:5)- will be able to go forward together on this "pilgrimage of faith." Mary, who is still the model of this pilgrimage, is to lead them to the unity which is willed by their one Lord and so much desired by those who are attentively listening to what "the Spirit is saying to the Churches" today (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17).

Meanwhile, it is a hopeful sign that these Churches and Ecclesial Communities are finding agreement with the Catholic Church on fundamental points of Christian belief, including matters relating to the Virgin Mary. For they recognize her as the Mother of the Lord and hold that this forms part of our faith in Christ, true God and true man. They look to her who at the foot of the Cross accepts as her son the beloved disciple, the one who in his turn accepts her as his mother.

Therefore, why should we not all together look to her as our common Mother, who prays for the unity of God's family and who "precedes" us all at the head of the long line of witnesses of faith in the one Lord, the Son of God, who was conceived in her virginal womb by the power of the Holy Spirit?

31. On the other hand, I wish to emphasize how profoundly the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and the ancient Churches of the East feel united by love and praise of the Theotokos. Not only "basic dogmas of the Christian faith concerning the Trinity and God's Word made flesh of the Virgin Mary were defined in Ecumenical Councils held in the East,"⁷⁷ but also in their liturgical worship "the Orientals pay high tribute, in very beautiful hymns, to Mary ever Virgin...God's Most Holy Mother."⁷⁸

The brethren of these Churches have experienced a complex history, but it is one that has always been marked by an intense desire for Christian commitment and apostolic activity, despite frequent persecution, even to the point of bloodshed. It is a history of fidelity to the Lord, an authentic "pilgrimage of faith" in space and time, during which Eastern Christians have always looked with boundless trust to the Mother of the Lord, celebrated her with praise and invoked her with unceasing prayer. In the difficult moments of their troubled Christian existence, "they have taken refuge under her protection,"⁷⁹ conscious of having in her a powerful aid. The Churches which profess the doctrine of Ephesus proclaim the Virgin as "true Mother of God, " since "our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Father before time began according to his divinity, in the last days, for our sake and for our salvation, was himself begotten of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God according to his humanity."⁸⁰ The Greek Fathers and the Byzantine tradition contemplating the

Virgin in the light of the Word made flesh, have sought to penetrate the depth of that bond which unites Mary, as the Mother of God, to Christ and the Church: the Virgin is a permanent presence in the whole reality of the salvific mystery.

The Coptic and Ethiopian traditions were introduced to this contemplation of the mystery of Mary by St. Cyril of Alexandria, and in their turn they have celebrated it with a profuse poetic blossoming.⁸¹ The poetic genius of St. Ephrem the Syrian, called "the lyre of the Holy Spirit," tirelessly sang of Mary, leaving a still living mark on the whole tradition of the Syriac Church.⁸² In his panegyric of the Θεοτόκος, St. Gregory of Narek, one of the outstanding glories of Armenia, with powerful poetic inspiration ponders the different aspects of the mystery of the Incarnation, and each of them is for him an occasion to sing and extol the extraordinary dignity and magnificent beauty of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word made flesh.⁸³

It does not surprise us therefore that Mary occupies a privileged place in the worship of the ancient Oriental Churches with an incomparable abundance of feasts and hymns.

32.

In the Byzantine liturgy, in all the hours of the Divine Office, praise of the Mother is linked with praise of her Son and with the praise which, through the Son, is offered up to the Father in the Holy Spirit. In the Anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer of St. John Chrysostom, immediately after the epiclesis the assembled community sings in honor of the Mother of God: "It is truly just to proclaim you blessed, O Mother of God, who are most blessed, all pure and Mother of our God. We magnify you who are more honorable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim. You who, without losing your virginity, gave birth to the Word of God. You who are truly the Mother of God."

These praises, which in every celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy are offered to Mary, have moulded the faith, piety and prayer of the faithful. In the course of the centuries they have permeated their whole spiritual outlook, fostering in them a profound devotion to the "All Holy Mother of God."

33.

This year there occurs the twelfth centenary of the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787). Putting an end to the well-known controversy about the cult of sacred images, this Council defined that, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers and the universal tradition of the Church, there could be exposed for the veneration of the faithful, together with the Cross, also images of the Mother of God, of the angels and of the saints, in churches and houses and at the roadside.⁸⁴ This custom has been maintained in the whole of the East and also in the West. Images of the Virgin have a place of honor in churches and houses. In them Mary is represented in a number of ways: as the throne of God carrying the Lord and giving him to humanity (Theotokos); as the way that leads to Christ and manifests him (Hodegetria); as a praying figure in an attitude of intercession and as a sign of the divine presence on the journey of the faithful until the day of the Lord (Deesis); as the protectress who stretches out her mantle over the peoples (Pokrov), or as the merciful Virgin of tenderness (Eleousa). She is usually represented with her Son, the child Jesus, in her arms: it is the relationship with the Son which glorifies the Mother. Sometimes she embraces him with tenderness (Glykophilousa); at other times she is a hieratic figure, apparently rapt in contemplation of him who is the Lord of history (cf. Rev. 5:9-14).⁸⁵

It is also appropriate to mention the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir, which continually accompanied the pilgrimage of faith of the peoples of ancient Rus'. The first Millennium of the conversion of those noble lands to Christianity is approaching: lands of humble folk, of thinkers and of saints. The Icons are still venerated in the Ukraine, in Byelorussia and in Russia under various titles. They are images which witness to the faith and spirit of prayer of that people, who sense the presence and protection of the Mother of God.

In these Icons the Virgin shines as the image of divine beauty, the abode of Eternal Wisdom, the figure of the one who prays, the prototype of contemplation, the image of glory: she who even in her earthly life possessed the spiritual knowledge inaccessible to human reasoning and who attained through faith the most sublime knowledge. I also recall the Icon of the Virgin of the Cenacle, praying with the Apostles as they awaited the Holy Spirit: could she not become the sign of hope for all those who, in fraternal dialogue, wish to deepen their obedience of faith?

34. Such a wealth of praise, built up by the different forms of the Church's great tradition, could help us to hasten the day when the Church can begin once more to breathe fully with her "two lungs," the East and the West. As I have often said, this is more than ever necessary today. It would be an effective aid in furthering the progress of the dialogue already taking place between the Catholic Church and the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West.⁸⁶ It would also be the way for the pilgrim Church to sing and to live more perfectly her "Magnificat."

3. The "Magnificat" of the pilgrim Church

35. At the present stage of her journey, therefore, the Church seeks to rediscover the unity of all who profess their faith in Christ, in order to show obedience to her Lord, who prayed for this unity before his Passion. "Like a pilgrim in a foreign land, the Church presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the Cross and Death of the Lord until he comes."⁸⁷ "Moving forward through trial and tribulation, the Church is strengthened by the power of God's grace promised to her by the Lord, so that in the weakness of the flesh she may not

waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of her Lord; that moved by the Holy Spirit she may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting."⁸⁸

The Virgin Mother is constantly present on this journey of faith of the People of God towards the light.

This is shown in a special way by the canticle of the "Magnificat," which, having welled up from the depths of Mary's faith at the Visitation, ceaselessly re-echoes in the heart of the Church down the centuries. This is proved by its daily recitation in the liturgy of Vespers and at many other moments of both personal and communal devotion.

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on his servant in her lowliness.
For behold, henceforth all generations
will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name:
and his mercy is from age to age
on those who fear him.
He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud-hearted,
he has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever." (Lk.1:46-55)

36. When Elizabeth greeted her young kinswoman coming from Nazareth, Mary replied with the Magnificat. In her greeting, Elizabeth first called Mary "blessed" because of "the fruit of her womb," and then she called her "blessed" because of her faith (cf. Lk. 1:42, 45). These two blessings referred directly to the Annunciation. Now, at the Visitation, when Elizabeth's greeting bears witness to that culminating moment, Mary's faith acquires a new consciousness and a new expression. That which remained hidden in the depths of the "obedience of faith" at the Annunciation can now be said to spring forth like a clear and life-giving flame of the spirit. The words used by Mary on the threshold of Elizabeth's house are an inspired profession of her faith, in which her response to the revealed word is expressed with the religious and poetical exultation of her whole being towards God. In these sublime words, which are simultaneously very simple and wholly inspired by the sacred texts of the people of Israel, ⁸⁹ Mary's personal experience, the ecstasy of her heart, shines forth. In them shines a ray of the mystery of God, the glory of his ineffable holiness, the eternal love which, as an irrevocable gift, enters into human history.

Mary is the first to share in this new revelation of God and, within the same, in this new "self-giving" of God. Therefore she proclaims: "For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." Her words reflect a joy of spirit which is difficult to express: "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Indeed, "the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is made clear to us in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation."⁹⁰ In her exultation Mary confesses that she finds herself in the very heart of this fullness of Christ. She is conscious that the promise made to the fathers, first of all "to Abraham and to his posterity for ever," is being fulfilled in herself. She is thus aware that concentrated within herself as the mother of Christ is the whole salvific economy, in which "from age to age" is manifested he who as the God of the Covenant, "remembers his mercy."

37. The Church, which from the beginning has modelled her earthly journey on that of the Mother of God, constantly repeats after her the words of the Magnificat. From the depths of the Virgin's faith at the Annunciation and the Visitation, the Church derives the truth about the God of the Covenant: the God who is Almighty and does "great things" for man: "holy is his name." In the Magnificat the Church sees uprooted that sin which is found at the outset of the earthly history of man and woman, the sin of disbelief and of "little faith" in God. In contrast with the "suspicion" which the "father of lies" sowed in the heart of Eve the first woman, Mary, whom tradition is wont to call the "new Eve"⁹¹ and the true "Mother of the living,"⁹² boldly proclaims the undimmed truth about God: the holy and almighty God, who from the beginning is the source of all gifts, he who "has done great things" in her, as well as in the whole universe. In the act of creation God gives existence to all that is. In creating man, God gives him the dignity of the image and likeness of himself in a special way as compared with all earthly creatures. Moreover, in his desire to give God gives himself in the Son, notwithstanding man's sin: "He so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn. 3:16). Mary is the first witness of this marvelous truth, which will be fully accomplished through "the works and words" (cf. Acts 1:1) of her Son and definitively through his Cross and Resurrection. The Church, which even "amid trials and tribulations" does not cease repeating with Mary the words of the Magnificat, is sustained by the power of God's truth,

proclaimed on that occasion with such extraordinary simplicity. At the same time, by means of this truth about God, the Church desires to shed light upon the difficult and sometimes tangled paths of man's earthly existence. The Church's journey, therefore, near the end of the second Christian Millennium, involves a renewed commitment to her mission. Following him who said of himself: "(God) has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (cf. Lk. 4:18), the Church has sought from generation to generation and still seeks today to accomplish that same mission.

The Church's love of preference for the poor is wonderfully inscribed in Mary's Magnificat. The God of the Covenant, celebrated in the exultation of her spirit by the Virgin of Nazareth, is also he who "has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly, ...filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty, ...scattered the proud-hearted...and his mercy is from age to age on those who fear him." Mary is deeply imbued with the spirit of the "poor of Yahweh," who in the prayer of the Psalms awaited from God their salvation, placing all their trust in him (cf. Pss. 25; 31; 35; 55). Mary truly proclaims the coming of the "Messiah of the poor" (cf. Is. 11:4; 61:1). Drawing from Mary's heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the Magnificat, the Church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that the truth about God who saves, the truth about God who is the source of every gift, cannot be separated from the manifestation of his love of preference for the poor and humble, that love which, celebrated in the Magnificat, is later expressed in the words and works of Jesus. The Church is thus aware-and at the present time this awareness is particularly vivid-not only that these two elements of the message contained in the Magnificat cannot be separated, but also that there is a duty to safeguard carefully the importance of "the poor" and of "the option in favor of the poor" in the word of the living God. These are matters and questions intimately connected with the Christian meaning of freedom and liberation. "Mary is totally dependent upon God and completely directed towards him, and at the side of her Son, she is the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe. It is to her as Mother and Model that the Church must look in order to understand in its completeness the meaning of her own mission."⁹³

PART III -MATERNAL MEDIATION

1. Mary, the Handmaid of the Lord

38. The Church knows and teaches with Saint Paul that there is only one mediator: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). "The maternal role of Mary towards people in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power":⁹⁴ it is mediation in Christ.

The Church knows and teaches that "all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on mankind originate... from the divine pleasure. They flow forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rest on his mediation, depend entirely on it, and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather, they foster this union."⁹⁵ This saving influence is sustained by the Holy Spirit, who, just as he overshadowed the Virgin Mary when he began in her the divine motherhood, in a similar way constantly sustains her solicitude for the brothers and sisters of her Son.

In effect, Mary's mediation is intimately linked with her motherhood. It possesses a specifically maternal character, which distinguishes it from the mediation of the other creatures who in various and always subordinate ways share in the one mediation of Christ, although her own mediation is also a shared mediation.⁹⁶ In fact, while it is true that "no creature could ever be classed with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer," at the same time "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise among creatures to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this unique source." And thus "the one goodness of God is in reality communicated diversely to his creatures."⁹⁷

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council presents the truth of Mary's mediation as "a sharing in the one unique source that is the mediation of Christ himself." Thus we read: "The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary. She experiences it continuously and commends it to the hearts of the faithful, so that, encouraged by this maternal help, they may more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer."⁹⁸ This role is at the same time special and extraordinary. It flows from her divine motherhood and can be understood and lived in faith only on the basis of the full truth of this motherhood. Since by virtue of divine election Mary is the earthly Mother of the Father's consubstantial Son and his "generous companion" in the work of redemption "she is a mother to us in the order of grace."⁹⁹ This role constitutes a real dimension of her presence in the saving mystery of Christ and the Church.

39. From this point of view we must consider once more the fundamental event in the economy of salvation, namely the Incarnation of the Word at the moment of the Annunciation. It is significant that Mary, recognizing in the words of the divine messenger the will of the Most High and submitting to his power, says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). The first moment of submission to the one mediation "between God and men"-the mediation of Jesus Christ-is the Virgin of Nazareth's acceptance of motherhood. Mary consents to God's choice, in order to become through the power of the Holy Spirit the Mother of the Son of God. It can be said that a consent to motherhood is above all a result of her total selfgiving to God in virginity. Mary accepted her election as Mother of the Son of God, guided by spousal love, the love which totally "consecrates" a human being to God. By virtue of this love, Mary wished to be always and in all things "given to God," living in virginity. The words "Behold, I

am the handmaid of the Lord" express the fact that from the outset she accepted and understood her own motherhood as a total gift of self, a gift of her person to the service of the saving plans of the Most High. And to the very end she lived her entire maternal sharing in the life of Jesus Christ, her Son, in a way that matched her vocation to virginity.

Mary's motherhood, completely pervaded by her spousal attitude as the "handmaid of the Lord, " constitutes the first and fundamental dimension of that mediation which the Church confesses and proclaims in her regard¹⁰⁰ and continually "commends to the hearts of the faithful, " since the Church has great trust in her. For it must be recognized that before anyone else it was God himself, the Eternal Father, who entrusted himself to the Virgin of Nazareth, giving her his own Son in the mystery of the Incarnation. Her election to the supreme office and dignity of Mother of the Son of God refers, on the ontological level, to the very reality of the union of the two natures in the person of the Word (hypostatic union). This basic fact of being the Mother of the Son of God is from the very beginning a complete openness to the person of Christ, to his whole work, to his whole mission. The words "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" testify to Mary's openness of spirit: she perfectly unites in herself the love proper to virginity and the love characteristic of motherhood, which are joined and, as it were, fused together.

For this reason Mary became not only the "nursing mother" of the Son of Man but also the "associate of unique nobility"¹⁰¹ of the Messiah and Redeemer. As I have already said, she advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and in this pilgrimage to the foot of the Cross there was simultaneously accomplished her maternal cooperation with the Savior's whole mission through her actions and sufferings. Along the path of this collaboration with the work of her Son, the Redeemer, Mary's motherhood itself underwent a singular transformation, becoming ever more imbued with "burning charity" towards all those to whom Christ's mission was directed. Through this "burning charity, " which sought to achieve, in union with Christ, the restoration of "supernatural life to souls, " ¹⁰² Mary entered, in a way all her own, into the one mediation "between God and men" which is the mediation of the man Christ Jesus. If she was the first to experience within herself the supernatural consequences of this one mediation-in the Annunciation she had been greeted as "full of grace"-then we must say that through this fullness of grace and supernatural life she was especially predisposed to cooperation with Christ, the one Mediator of human salvation. And such cooperation is precisely this mediation subordinated to the mediation of Christ.

In Mary's case we have a special and exceptional mediation, based upon her "fullness of grace, " which was expressed in the complete willingness of the "handmaid of the Lord." In response to this interior willingness of his Mother, Jesus Christ prepared her ever more completely to become for all people their "mother in the order of grace." This is indicated, at least indirectly, by certain details noted by the Synoptics (cf. Lk. 11:28; 8:20-21; Mk. 3:32-35; Mt. 12:47-50) and still more so by the Gospel of John (cf. 2:1-12; 19:25-27), which I have already mentioned. Particularly eloquent in this regard are the words spoken by Jesus on the Cross to Mary and John.

40. After the events of the Resurrection and Ascension Mary entered the Upper Room together with the Apostles to await Pentecost, and was present there as the Mother of the glorified Lord. She was not only the one who "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith" and loyally persevered in her union with her Son "unto the Cross, " but she was also the "handmaid of the Lord, " left by her Son as Mother in the midst of the infant Church: "Behold your mother." Thus there began to develop a special bond between this Mother and the Church. For the infant Church was the fruit of the Cross and Resurrection of her Son. Mary, who from the beginning had given herself without reserve to the person and work of her Son, could not but pour out upon the Church, from the very beginning, her maternal self-giving. After her Son's departure, her motherhood remains in the Church as maternal mediation: interceding for all her children, the Mother cooperates in the saving work of her Son, the Redeemer of the world. In fact the Council teaches that the "motherhood of Mary in the order of grace...will last without interruption until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect."¹⁰³ With the redeeming death of her Son, the maternal mediation of the handmaid of the Lord took on a universal dimension, for the work of redemption embraces the whole of humanity. Thus there is manifested in a singular way the efficacy of the one and universal mediation of Christ "between God and men" Mary's cooperation shares, in its subordinate character, in the universality of the mediation of the Redeemer, the one Mediator. This is clearly indicated by the Council in the words quoted above.

"For, " the text goes on, "taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this saving role, but by her manifold acts of intercession continues to win for us gifts of eternal salvation."¹⁰⁴ With this character of "intercession, "

first manifested at Cana in Galilee, Mary's mediation continues in the history of the Church and the world. We read that Mary "by her maternal charity, cares for the brethren of her Son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led to their happy homeland."¹⁰⁵ In this way Mary's motherhood continues unceasingly in the Church as the mediation which intercedes, and the Church expresses her faith in this truth by invoking Mary "under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix and Mediatrix."¹⁰⁶

41. Through her mediation, subordinate to that of the Redeemer, Mary contributes in a special way to the union of the pilgrim Church on earth with the eschatological and heavenly reality of the Communion of Saints, since she has already been "assumed into heaven."¹⁰⁷ The truth of the Assumption, defined by Pius XII, is reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which thus expresses the Church's faith: "Preserved free from all guilt of original sin, the Immaculate Virgin was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory upon the completion of her earthly sojourn. She was exalted by the Lord as Queen of the Universe, in order that she might be the more thoroughly conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords

(cf. Rev. 19:16) and the conqueror of sin and death."¹⁰⁸ In this teaching Pius XII was in continuity with Tradition, which has found many different expressions in the history of the Church, both in the East and in the West.

By the mystery of the Assumption into heaven there were definitively accomplished in Mary all the effects of the one mediation of Christ the Redeemer of the world and Risen Lord: "In Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor. 15:22-23). In the mystery of the Assumption is expressed the faith of the Church, according to which Mary is "united by a close and indissoluble bond" to Christ, for, if as Virgin and Mother she was singularly united with him in his first coming, so through her continued collaboration with him she will also be united with him in expectation of the second; "redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits

of her Son,"¹⁰⁹ she also has that specifically maternal role of mediatrix of mercy at his final coming, when all those who belong to Christ "shall be made alive," when "the last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26).¹¹⁰

Connected with this exaltation of the noble "Daughter of Sion"¹¹¹ through her Assumption into heaven is the mystery of her eternal glory. For the Mother of Christ is glorified as "Queen of the Universe."¹¹² She who at the Annunciation called herself the "handmaid of the Lord" remained throughout her earthly life faithful to what this name expresses. In this she confirmed that she was a true "disciple" of Christ, who strongly emphasized that his mission was one of service: the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28). In this way Mary became the first of those who, "serving Christ also in others, with humility and patience lead their brothers and sisters to that King whom to serve is to reign,"¹¹³ and she fully obtained that "state of royal freedom" proper to Christ's disciples: to serve means to reign!

"Christ obeyed even at the cost of death, and was therefore raised up by the Father (cf. Phil. 2:8-9). Thus he entered into the glory of his kingdom. To him all things are made subject until he subjects himself and all created things to the Father, that God may be all in all (cf. 1 Cor. 15:27-28)."¹¹⁴ Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, has a share in this Kingdom of the Son.¹¹⁵ The glory of serving does not cease to be her royal exaltation: assumed into heaven, she does not cease her saving service, which expresses her maternal

mediation "until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect."¹¹⁶ Thus, she who here on earth "loyally preserved in her union with her Son unto the Cross," continues to remain united with him, while now "all things are subjected to him, until he subjects to the Father himself and all things." Thus in her Assumption into heaven, Mary is as it were clothed by the whole reality of the Communion of Saints, and her very union with the Son in glory is wholly oriented towards the definitive fullness of the Kingdom, when "God will be all in all."

In this phase too Mary's maternal mediation does not cease to be subordinate to him who is the one Mediator, until the final realization of "the fullness of time," that is to say until "all things are united in Christ" (cf. Eph. 1:10).

2. Mary in the life of the Church and of every Christian

42. Linking itself with Tradition, the Second Vatican Council brought new light to bear on the role of the Mother of Christ in the life of the Church. "Through the gift...of divine motherhood, Mary is united with her Son, the Redeemer, and with his singular graces and offices. By these, the Blessed Virgin is also intimately united with the Church: the Mother of God is a figure of the Church in the matter of faith, charity

and perfect union with Christ."¹¹⁷ We have already noted how, from the beginning, Mary remains with the Apostles in expectation of Pentecost and how, as "the blessed one who believed," she is present in the midst of the pilgrim Church from generation to generation through faith and as the model of the hope which does not disappoint (cf. Rom. 5:5).

Mary believed in the fulfillment of what had been said to her by the Lord. As Virgin, she believed that she would conceive and bear a son: the "Holy One," who bears the name of "Son of God," the name "Jesus" (= God who saves). As handmaid of the Lord, she remained in perfect fidelity to the person and mission of this Son. As Mother, "believing and obeying...she brought forth on earth the Father's Son. This she did, knowing not man but overshadowed by the Holy Spirit."¹¹⁸

For these reasons Mary is honored in the Church "with special reverence. Indeed, from most ancient times the Blessed Virgin Mary has been venerated under the title of 'God-bearer.' In all perils and needs, the faithful have fled prayerfully to her protection."¹¹⁹ This cult is altogether special: it bears in itself and expresses the profound link which exists between the Mother of Christ and the Church.¹²⁰ As Virgin and Mother, Mary remains for the Church a "permanent model." It can therefore be said that especially under this aspect, namely as a model, or rather as a "figure," Mary, present in the mystery of Christ, remains constantly present also in the mystery of the Church. For the Church too is "called mother and virgin," and these names have a profound biblical and theological justification.¹²¹

43. The Church "becomes herself a mother by accepting God's word with fidelity."¹²² Like Mary, who first believed by accepting the word of God revealed to her at the Annunciation and by remaining faithful to that word in all her trials even unto the Cross, so too the Church becomes a mother when, accepting with fidelity the word of God, "by her preaching and by baptism she brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God."¹²³ This "maternal" characteristic of the Church was expressed in a particularly vivid way by the Apostle to the Gentiles when he wrote: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal. 4:19) These words of Saint Paul contain an interesting sign of the early Church's awareness of her own

motherhood, linked to her apostolic service to mankind. This awareness enabled and still enables the Church to see the mystery of her life and mission modelled upon the example of the Mother of the Son, who is "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

It can be said that from Mary the Church also learns her own motherhood: she recognizes the maternal dimension of her vocation, which is essentially bound to her sacramental nature, in "contemplating Mary's mysterious sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will."¹²⁴ If the Church is the sign and instrument of intimate union with God, she is so by reason of her motherhood, because, receiving life from the Spirit, she "generates" sons and daughters of the human race to a new life in Christ. For, just as Mary is at the service of the mystery of the Incarnation, so the Church is always at the service of the mystery of adoption to sonship through grace.

Likewise, following the example of Mary, the Church remains the virgin faithful to her spouse: The Church herself is a virgin who keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse.¹²⁵ For the Church is the spouse of Christ, as is clear from the Pauline Letters (cf. Eph. 5:21-33; 2 Cor. 11:2), and from the title found in John: "bride of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9). If the Church as spouse "keeps the fidelity she has pledged to Christ," this fidelity, even though in the Apostle's teaching it has become an image of marriage (cf. Eph. 5:23-33), also has value as a model of total self-giving to God in celibacy "for the kingdom of heaven," in virginity consecrated to God (cf. Mt. 19:11-12; 2 Cor. 11:2). Precisely such virginity, after the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, is the source of a special spiritual fruitfulness: it is the source of motherhood in the Holy Spirit.

But the Church also preserves the faith received from Christ. Following the example of Mary, who kept and pondered in her heart everything relating to her divine Son (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51), the Church is committed to preserving the word of God and investigating its riches with discernment and prudence, in order to bear faithful witness to it before all mankind in every age.¹²⁶

44. Given Mary's relationship to the Church as an exemplar, the Church is close to her and seeks to become like her: "Imitating the Mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she preserves with virginal purity an integral faith, a firm hope, and a sincere charity."¹²⁷ Mary is thus present in the mystery of the Church as a model. But the Church's mystery also consists in generating people to a new and immortal life: this is her motherhood in the Holy Spirit. And here Mary is not only the model and figure of the Church; she is much more. For, "with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development" of the sons and daughters of Mother Church. The Church's motherhood is accomplished not only according to the model and figure of the Mother of God but also with her "cooperation." The Church draws abundantly from this cooperation, that is to say from the maternal mediation which is characteristic of Mary, insofar as already on earth she cooperated in the rebirth and development of the Church's sons and daughters, as the Mother of that Son whom the Father "placed as the first-born among many brethren."¹²⁸

She cooperated, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, with a maternal love.¹²⁹ Here we perceive the real value of the words spoken by Jesus to his Mother at the hour of the Cross: "Woman, behold your son" and to the disciple: "Behold your mother" (Jn. 19:26-27). They are words which determine Mary's place in the life of Christ's disciples and they express—as I have already said—the new motherhood of the Mother of the Redeemer: a spiritual motherhood, born from the heart of the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer of the world. It is a motherhood in the order of grace, for it implores the gift of the Spirit, who raises up the new children of God, redeems through the sacrifice of Christ that Spirit whom Mary too, together with the Church, received on the day of Pentecost.

Her motherhood is particularly noted and experienced by the Christian people at the Sacred Banquet—the liturgical celebration of the mystery of the Redemption—at which Christ, his true body born of the Virgin Mary, becomes present. The piety of the Christian people has always very rightly sensed a profound link between devotion to the Blessed Virgin and worship of the Eucharist: this is a fact that can be seen in the liturgy of both the West and the East, in the traditions of the Religious Families, in the modern movements of spirituality, including those for youth, and in the pastoral practice of the Marian Shrines. Mary guides the faithful to the Eucharist.

45. Of the essence of motherhood is the fact that it concerns the person. Motherhood always establishes a unique and unrepeatable relationship between two people: between mother and child and between child and mother. Even when the same woman is the mother of many children, her personal relationship with each one of them is of the very essence of motherhood. For each child is generated in a unique and unrepeatable way, and this is true both for the mother and for the child. Each child is surrounded in the same way by that maternal love on which are based the child's development and coming to maturity as a human being.

It can be said that motherhood "in the order of grace" preserves the analogy with what "in the order of nature" characterizes the union between mother and child. In the light of this fact it becomes easier to understand why in Christ's testament on Golgotha his Mother's new motherhood is expressed in the singular, in reference to one man: "Behold your son."

It can also be said that these same words fully show the reason for the Marian dimension of the life of Christ's disciples. This is true not only of John, who at that hour stood at the foot of the Cross together with his Master's Mother, but it is also true of every disciple of Christ, of every Christian. The Redeemer entrusts his mother to the disciple, and at the same time he gives her to him as his mother. Mary's motherhood, which becomes man's inheritance, is a gift: a gift which Christ himself makes personally to every individual. The Redeemer entrusts Mary to John because he entrusts John to Mary. At the foot of the Cross there begins that special entrusting of humanity to the Mother of Christ, which in

the history of the Church has been practiced and expressed in different ways. The same Apostle and Evangelist, after reporting the words addressed by Jesus on the Cross to his Mother and to himself, adds: "And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (Jn. 19:27). This statement certainly means that the role of son was attributed to the disciple and that he assumed responsibility for the Mother of his beloved Master. And since Mary was given as a mother to him personally, the statement indicates, even though indirectly, everything expressed by the intimate relationship of a child with its mother. And all of this can be included in the word "entrusting." Such entrusting is the response to a person's love, and in particular to the love of a mother.

The Marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ is expressed in a special way precisely through this filial entrusting to the Mother of Christ, which began with the testament of the Redeemer on Golgotha. Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, like the Apostle John, "welcomes" the Mother of Christ "into his own home"¹³⁰ and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life, that is to say into his human and Christian "I": he "took her to his own home." Thus the Christian seeks to be taken into that "maternal charity" with which the Redeemer's Mother "cares for the brethren of her Son,"¹³¹ "in whose birth and development she cooperates"¹³² in the measure of the gift proper to each one through the power of Christ's Spirit. Thus also is exercised that motherhood in the Spirit which became Mary's role at the foot of the Cross and in the Upper Room.

46. This filial relationship, this self-entrusting of a child to its mother, not only has its beginning in Christ but can also be said to be definitively directed towards him. Mary can be said to continue to say to each individual the words which she spoke at Cana in Galilee: "Do whatever he tells you." For he, Christ, is the one Mediator between God and mankind; he is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6); it is he whom the Father has given to the world, so that man "should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). The Virgin of Nazareth became the first "witness" of this saving love of the Father, and she also wishes to remain its humble handmaid always and everywhere. For every Christian, for every human being, Mary is the one who first "believed," and precisely with her faith as Spouse and Mother she wishes to act upon all those who entrust themselves to her as her children. And it is well known that the more her children persevere and progress in this attitude, the nearer Mary leads them to the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). And to the same degree they recognize more and more clearly the dignity of man in all its fullness and the definitive meaning of his vocation, for "Christ...fully reveals man to man himself."¹³³

This Marian dimension of Christian life takes on special importance in relation to women and their status. In fact, femininity has a unique relationship with the Mother of the Redeemer, a subject which can be studied in greater depth elsewhere. Here I simply wish to note that the figure of Mary of Nazareth sheds light on womanhood as such by the very fact that God, in the sublime event of the Incarnation of his Son, entrusted himself to the ministry, the free and active ministry of a woman. It can thus be said that women, by looking to Mary, find in her the secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement. In the light of Mary, the Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: the self-offering totality of love; the strength that is capable of bearing the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement.

47. At the Council Paul VI solemnly proclaimed that Mary is the Mother of the Church, "that is, Mother of the entire Christian people, both faithful and pastors."¹³⁴ Later, in 1968, in the Profession of faith known as the "Credo of the People of God," he restated this truth in an even more forceful way in these words: "We believe that the Most Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, the Mother of the Church, carries on in heaven her maternal role with regard to the members of Christ, cooperating in the birth and development of divine life in the souls of the redeemed."¹³⁵

The Council's teaching emphasized that the truth concerning the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Christ, is an effective aid in exploring more deeply the truth concerning the Church. When speaking of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which had just been approved by the Council, Paul VI said: "Knowledge of the true Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary will always be a key to the exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church."¹³⁶ Mary is present in the Church as the Mother of Christ, and at the same time as that Mother whom Christ, in the mystery of the Redemption, gave to humanity in the person of the Apostle John. Thus, in her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and every one in the Church, and embraces each and every one through the Church. In this sense Mary, Mother of the Church, is also the Church's model. Indeed, as Paul VI hopes and asks, the Church must draw "from the Virgin Mother of God the most authentic form of perfect imitation of Christ."¹³⁷

Thanks to this special bond linking the Mother of Christ with the Church, there is further clarified the mystery of that "woman" who, from the first chapters of the Book of Genesis until the Book of Revelation, accompanies the revelation of God's salvific plan for humanity. For Mary, present in the Church as the Mother of the Redeemer, takes part, as a mother, in that monumental struggle; against the powers of darkness¹³⁸ which continues throughout human history. And by her ecclesial identification as the "woman clothed with the sun" (Rev. 12:1),¹³⁹ it can be said that "in the Most Holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle." Hence, as Christians raise their eyes with faith to Mary in the course of their earthly pilgrimage, they "strive to increase in holiness."¹⁴⁰ Mary,

the exalted Daughter of Sion, helps all her children, wherever they may be and whatever their condition, to find in Christ the path to the Father's house.

Thus, throughout her life, the Church maintains with the Mother of God a link which embraces, in the saving mystery, the past, the present and the future, and venerates her as the spiritual mother of humanity and the advocate of grace.

3. The meaning of the Marian Year

48. It is precisely the special bond between humanity and this Mother which has led me to proclaim a Marian Year in the Church, in this period before the end of the Second Millennium since Christ's birth, a similar initiative was taken in the past. when Pius XII proclaimed 1954 as a Marian Year, in order to highlight the exceptional holiness of the Mother of Christ as expressed in the mysteries of her Immaculate Conception (defined exactly a century before) and of her Assumption into heaven.¹⁴¹

Now, following the line of the Second Vatican Council, I wish to emphasize the special presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and his Church. For this is a fundamental dimension emerging from the Mariology of the Council, the end of which is now more than twenty years behind us. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in 1985 exhorted everyone to follow faithfully the teaching and guidelines of the Council. We can say that these two events—the Council and the synod—embody what the Holy Spirit himself wishes "to say to the Church" in the present phase of history.

In this context, the Marian Year is meant to promote a new and more careful reading of what the Council said about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, the topic to which the contents of this Encyclical are devoted. Here we speak not only of the doctrine of faith but also of the life of faith, and thus of authentic "Marian spirituality," seen in the light of Tradition, and especially the spirituality to which the Council exhorts us.¹⁴² Furthermore, Marian spirituality, like its corresponding devotion, finds a very rich source in the historical experience of individuals and of the various Christian communities present among the different peoples and nations of the world. In this regard, I would like to recall, among the many witnesses and teachers of this spirituality, the figure of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort,¹⁴³ who proposes consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary, as an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments. I am pleased to note that in our own time too new manifestations of this spirituality and devotion are not lacking.

There thus exist solid points of reference to look to and follow in the context of this Marian Year.

49.

This Marian Year will begin on the Solemnity of Pentecost, on June 7 next. For it is a question not only of recalling that Mary "preceded" the entry of Christ the Lord into the history of the human family, but also of emphasizing, in the light of Mary, that from the moment when the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished, human history entered "the fullness of time," and that the Church is the sign of this fullness. As the People of God, the Church makes her pilgrim way towards eternity through faith, in the midst of all the peoples and nations, beginning from the day of Pentecost. Christ's Mother—who was present at the beginning of "the time of the Church," when in expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit she devoted herself to prayer in the midst of the Apostles and her Son's disciples—constantly "precedes" the Church in her journey through human history. She is also the one who, precisely as the "handmaid of the Lord," cooperates unceasingly with the work of salvation accomplished by Christ, her Son.

Thus by means of this Marian Year the Church is called not only to remember everything in her past that testifies to the special maternal cooperation of the Mother of God in the work of salvation in Christ the Lord, but also, on her own part, to prepare for the future the paths of this cooperation. For the end of the second Christian Millennium opens up as a new prospect.

50.

As has already been mentioned, also among our divided brethren many honor and celebrate the Mother of the Lord, especially among the Orientals. It is a Marian light cast upon ecumenism. In particular, I wish to mention once more that during the Marian Year there will occur the Millennium of the Baptism of Saint Vladimir, Grand Duke of Kiev [988]. This marked the beginning of Christianity in the territories of what was then called Rus', and subsequently in other territories of Eastern Europe. In this way, through the work of evangelization, Christianity spread beyond Europe, as far as the northern territories of the Asian continent. We would therefore like, especially during this Year, to join in prayer with all those who are celebrating the Millennium of this Baptism, both Orthodox and Catholics, repeating and confirming with the Council those sentiments of joy and comfort that "the Easterners...with ardent emotion and devout mind concur in reverencing the Mother of God, ever Virgin."¹⁴⁴ Even though we are still experiencing the painful effects of the separation which took place some decades later [1054], we can say that in the presence of the Mother of Christ we feel that we are true brothers and sisters within that messianic People, which is called to be the one family of God on earth. As I announced at the beginning of the New Year "We desire to reconfirm this universal inheritance of all the Sons and daughters of this earth."¹⁴⁵

In announcing the Year of Mary, I also indicated that it will end next year on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven, in order to emphasize the "great sign in heaven" spoken of by the Apocalypse. In this way we also wish to respond to the exhortation of the Council, which looks to Mary as "a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God." And the Council expresses this exhortation in the following words: "Let the entire body of the faithful pour forth persevering prayer to the Mother of God and Mother of mankind. Let them implore that she who

aided the beginning of the Church by her prayers may now, exalted as she is in heaven above all the saints and angels, intercede with her Son in the fellowship of all the saints. May she do so until all the peoples of the human family, whether they are honored with the name of Christian or whether they still do not know their Savior, are happily gathered together in peace and harmony into the one People of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity."146

CONCLUSION

51. At the end of the daily Liturgy of the Hours, among the invocations addressed to Mary by the Church is the following:

"Loving Mother of the Redeemer, gate of heaven, star of the sea, assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again. To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator!"

"To the wonderment of nature"! These words of the antiphon express that wonderment of faith which accompanies the mystery of Mary's divine motherhood. In a sense, it does so in the heart of the whole of creation, and, directly, in the heart of the whole People of God, in the heart of the Church. How wonderfully far God has gone, the Creator and Lord of all things, in the "revelation of himself" to man!¹⁴⁷ How clearly he has bridged all the spaces of that infinite "distance" which separates the Creator from the creature! If in himself he remains ineffable and unsearchable, still more ineffable and unsearchable is he in the reality of the Incarnation of the Word, who became man through the Virgin of Nazareth.

If he has eternally willed to call man to share in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pt. 1:4), it can be said that he has matched the "divinization" of man to humanity's historical conditions, so that even after sin he is ready to restore at a great price the eternal plan of his love through the "humanization" of his Son, who is of the same being as himself. The whole of creation, and more directly man himself, cannot fail to be amazed at this gift in which he has become a sharer, in the Holy Spirit: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn. 3:16).

At the center of this mystery, in the midst of this wonderment of faith, stands Mary. As the loving Mother of the Redeemer, she was the first to experience it: "To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator"!

52. The words of this liturgical antiphon also express the truth of the "great transformation" which the mystery of the Incarnation establishes for man. It is a transformation which belongs to his entire history, from that beginning which is revealed to us in the first chapters of Genesis until the final end, in the perspective of the end of the world, of which Jesus has revealed to us "neither the day nor the hour" (Mt. 25:13). It is an unending and continuous transformation between falling and rising again, between the man of sin and the man of grace and justice. The Advent liturgy in particular is at the very heart of this transformation and captures its unceasing "here and now" when it exclaims: "Assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again"!

These words apply to every individual, every community, to nations and peoples, and to the generations and epochs of human history, to our own epoch, to these years of the Millennium which is drawing to a close: "Assist, yes assist, your people who have fallen"!

This is the invocation addressed to Mary, the "loving Mother of the Redeemer," the invocation addressed to Christ, who through Mary entered human history. Year after year the antiphon rises to Mary, evoking that moment which saw the accomplishment of this essential historical transformation, which irreversibly continues: the transformation from "falling" to "rising."

Mankind has made wonderful discoveries and achieved extraordinary results in the fields of science and technology. It has made great advances along the path of progress and civilization, and in recent times one could say that it has succeeded in speeding up the pace of history. But the fundamental transformation, the one which can be called "original," constantly accompanies man's journey, and through all the events of history accompanies each and every individual. It is the transformation from "falling" to "rising," from death to life. It is also a constant challenge to people's consciences, a challenge to man's whole historical awareness: the challenge to follow the path of "not falling" in ways that are ever old and ever new, and of "rising again" if a fall has occurred.

As she goes forward with the whole of humanity towards the frontier between the two Millennia, the Church, for her part, with the whole community of believers and in union with all men and women of good will, takes up the great challenge contained in these words of the Marian antiphon: "the people who have fallen yet strive to rise again," and she addresses both the Redeemer and his Mother with the plea: "Assist us." For, as this prayer attests, the Church sees the Blessed Mother of God in the saving mystery of Christ and in her own mystery. She sees Mary deeply rooted in humanity's history, in man's eternal vocation according to the providential plan which God has made for him from eternity. She sees Mary maternally present and sharing in the many complicated problems which today beset the lives of individuals, families and nations; she sees her helping the Christian people in the constant struggle between good and evil, to ensure that it "does not fall," or, if it has fallen, that it "rises again."

I hope with all my heart that the reflections contained in the present Encyclical will also serve to renew this vision in the hearts of all believers.

As Bishop of Rome, I send to all those to whom these thoughts are addressed the kiss of peace, my greeting and my blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, in the year 1987, the ninth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 52 and the whole of Chapter VIII, entitled "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church."
2. The expression "fullness of time" (*pleroma tou chronou*) is parallel with similar expressions of Judaism, both Biblical (cf. Gen. 29:21; 1 Sam. 7:12; Tob. 14:5) and extra-Biblical, and especially of the New Testament (cf. Mk. 1:15; Lk. 21:24; Jn. 7:8; Eph. 1:10). From the point of view of form, it means not only the conclusion of a chronological process but also and especially the coming to maturity or completion of a particularly important period, one directed towards the fulfillment of an expectation, a coming to completion which thus takes on an eschatological dimension. According to Gal. 4:4 and its context, it is the coming of the Son of God that reveals that time has, so to speak, reached its limit. That is to say, the period marked by the promise made to Abraham and by the Law mediated by Moses has now reached its climax, in the sense that Christ fulfills the divine promise and supersedes the old law.
3. Cf. Roman Missal, Preface of 8 December, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Saint Ambrose, *De Institutione Virginis*, XV, 93-94: PL 16, 342; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68.
4. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 58.
5. Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Epistle *Christi Matri* (15 September 1966): AAS 58 (1966) 745-749, Apostolic Exhortation *Signum Magnum* (13 May 1967): AAS 59 (1967) 465-475; Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974): AAS 66 (1974) 113-168.
6. The Old Testament foretold in many different ways the mystery of Mary: cf. Saint John Damascene, Hom. in *Dormitionem* 1, 8-9: S. Ch. 80, 103-107.
7. Cf. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI/2 (1983) 225f.; Pope Pius IX, Apostolic Letter *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854): Pii IX P. M. Acta, pars I, 597-599.
8. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
9. Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, 41-44; 59-61: DS 250-264; cf. Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, o. c. 84-87: DS 300-303.
10. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
11. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 52.
12. Cf. *ibid.*, 58.
13. *Ibid.*, 63, cf. Saint Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam*, II, 7: CSEL 32/4, 45; *De Institutione Virginis*, XIV, 88-89: PL 16, 341.
14. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 64.
15. *Ibid.*, 65.
16. "Take away this star of the sun which illuminates the world: where does the day go? Take away Mary, this star of the sea, of the great and boundless sea: what is left but a vast obscurity and the shadow of death and deepest darkness?": Saint Bernard, In *Navitate B. Mariae Sermo-De aquaeductu*, 6: S. Bernardi Opera, V, 1968, 279; cf. In *laudibus Virginis Matris Homilia* II, 17: ed. cit., IV, 1966, 34f.
17. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 63.
18. *Ibid.*, 63.
19. Concerning the predestination of Mary, cf. Saint John Damascene, Hom. in *Nativitatem*, 7, 10: S. Ch. 80, 65; 73; Hom. in *Dormitionem* 1, 3: S. Ch. 80, 85: "For it is she, who, chosen from the ancient generations, by virtue of the predestination and benevolence of the God and Father who generated you (the Word of God) outside time without coming out of himself or suffering change, it is she who gave you birth, nourished of her flesh, in the last time...."
20. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 55.
21. In Patristic tradition there is a wide and varied interpretation of this expression: cf. Origen, In *Lucam homiliae*, VI, 7: S. Ch. 87, 148; Severianus of Gabala, In *mundi creationem*, Oratio VI, 10: PG 56, 497f.; Saint John Chrysostom (Pseudo), In *Annunhationem Deiparae et contra Arium impium*, PG 62, 765f.; Basil of Seleucia, Oratio 39, In *Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 5: PG 85, 441-46; Antipater of Bosra, Hom. II, In *Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 3-11: PG 85, 1777-1783; Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem, Oratio 11, In *Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 17-19: PG 87/3, 3235-3240; Saint John Damascene Hom. in *Dormitionem*, 1, 70: S. Ch. 80, 96-101; Saint Jerome, *Epistola* 65, 9: PL 22, 628, Saint Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam*, II, 9: CSEL 32/4, 45f.; Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 291, 4-6: PL 38, 131 8f.; *Enchiridion*, 36,

- 11: PL 40, 250; Saint Peter Chrysologus, Sermo 142: PL 52, 579f.; Sermo 143: PL 52, 583; Saint Fulgentius of Ruspe, Epistola 17, VI 12: PL 65 458; Saint Bernard, In laudibus Virginis Matris, Homilia III, 2-3: S. Bernardi Opera, IV, 1966, 36-38.
22. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 55.
23. Ibid., 53.
24. Cf. Pope Pius XI, Apostolic Letter Ineffabilis Deus (8 December 1854): Pii IX P.M. Acta, pars I, 616; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 53.
25. Cf. Saint Germanus of Constantinople, In Annuntiationem SS. Deiparae Hom.: PG 98, 327f.; Saint Andrew of Crete, Canon in B. Mariae Natalem, 4. PG 97, 1321f., In Nativitatem B. Mariae, I: PG 97, 81 1f. Hom. in Dormitionem S. Mariae I: PG 97, 1067f.
26. Liturgy of the Hours of 15 August, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Hymn at First and Second Vespers; Saint Peter Damian, Carmina et preces, XLVII: PL 145, 934.
27. Divina Commedia, Paradiso, XXXIII, 1; cf. Liturgy of the Hours, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, Hymn II in the Office of Readings.
28. Cf. Saint Augustine, De Sancta Virginitate, III, 3: PL 40, 398; Sermo 25, 7: PL 46,
29. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 5
30. This is a classic theme, already expounded by Saint Irenaeus: "And, as by the action of the disobedient virgin, man was afflicted and, being cast down, died, so also by the action of the Virgin who obeyed the word of God, man being regenerated received, through life, life.... For it was meet and Just...that Eve should be "recapitulated" in Mary, so that the Virgin, becoming the advocate of the virgin, should dissolve and destroy the virginal disobedience by means of virginal obedience": Expositio doctrinae apostolicae, 33: S.Ch. 62, 83-86; cf. also Adversus Haereses, V, 19, 1: 5. Ch. 153, 248-250.
31. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 5.
32. Ibid., 5, cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 56.
33. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 56.
34. Ibid., 56.
35. Cf. ibid., 53; Saint Augustine, De Sancta Virginitate, III, 3: PL 40, 398; Sermo 215, 4; PL 38, 1074; Sermo 196, I: PL 38, 1019; De peccatorum meritis et remissione, I, 29, 57: PL 44, 142; Sermo 25, 7: PL 46, 937-938; Saint Leo the Great, Tractatus 21, de natale Domini, I: CCL 138, 86.
36. Ascent of Mount Carmel, 1. II, Ch. 3, 4-6.
37. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 58.
38. Ibid., 58.
39. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 5.
40. Concerning Mary's participation or "compassion" in the death of Christ, cf. Saint Bernard, In Dominica infra octavam Assumptionis Sermo, 14: S. Bernardi Opera, V, 1968, 273.
41. Saint Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses III, 22, 4: S. Ch. 211, 438-444; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 56, Note 6.
42. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 56, and the Fathers quoted there in Notes 8 and 9.
43. "Christ is truth, Christ is flesh: Christ truth in the mind of Mary, Christ flesh in the womb of Mary": Saint Augustine, Sermo 25 (Sermones inediti), 7: PL 46, 938.
44. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 60.
45. Ibid., 61.
46. Ibid., 62.
47. There is a well-known passage of Origen on the presence of Mary and John on Calvary: "The Gospels are the first fruits of all Scripture and the Gospel of John is the first of the Gospels: no one can grasp its meaning without having leaned his head on Jesus' breast and having received from Jesus Mary as Mother": Comm. in Ioan., I, 6: PG 14, 31; cf. Saint Ambrose, Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam, X, 129-131: CSEL 32/4, 504f.
48. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 54 and 53; the latter text quotes Saint Augustine, De Sancta Virginitate, VI, 6: PL 40, 399.
49. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 55.
50. Cf. Saint Leo the Great, Tractatus 26, de natale Domini, 2: CCL 138, 126.
51. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 59.
52. Saint Augustine, De civitate Dei, XVIII, 51: CCL 48, 650.
53. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 8.
54. Ibid., 9.
55. Ibid., 9.
56. Ibid., 8.
57. Ibid., 9.
58. Ibid., 65.
59. Ibid., 59.

60. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 5.
61. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 63.
62. Cf. *ibid.*, 9.
63. Cf. *ibid.*, 65.
64. *Ibid.*, 65.
65. *Ibid.*, 65.
66. Cf. *ibid.*, 13.
67. Cf. *ibid.*, 13.
68. Cf. *ibid.*, 13.
69. Cf. Roman Missal, formula of the Consecration of the Chalice in the Eucharistic Prayers.
70. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
71. *Ibid.*, 13.
72. *Ibid.*, 15.
73. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.
74. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68, 69. On Mary Most Holy, promoter of Christian unity, and on the cult of Mary in the East, cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Adiutricem Populi* (5 September 1885): *Acta Leonis XV*, 300-312.
75. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 20.
76. Cf. *ibid.*, 19.
77. *Ibid.*, 14.
78. *Ibid.*, 15.
79. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 66.
80. Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, *Definitio fidei: Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, 86 (DS 301).
81. Cf. the *Weddase Maryam* (Praises of Mary), which follows the Ethiopian Psalter and contains hymns and prayers to Mary for each day of the week. Cf. also the *Matshafa Kidana Mehrat* (Book of the Pact of Mercy); the importance given to Mary in the Ethiopian hymnology and liturgy deserves to be emphasized.
82. Cf. Saint Ephrem, Hymn. de Nativitate: *Scriptores Syri*, 82, CSCO, 186.
83. Cf. Saint Gregory of Narek, *Le livre de prieres: S. Ch.* 78, 160-163; 428-432.
84. Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, 135-138 (DS 600-609).
85. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 59.
86. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 19.
87. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
88. *Ibid.*, 9.
89. As is well-known, the words of the Magnificat contain or echo numerous passages of the Old Testament.
90. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 2.
91. Cf. for example Saint Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo*, 100: Otto II, 358; Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III, 22, 4: S. Ch. 211, 439-445; Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 17, 4-6: CCL 2, 904f.
92. Cf. Saint Epiphanius, *Panarion*, III, 2; *Haer.* 78, 18: PG 42, 727-730.
93. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* (22 March 1986), 97.
94. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 60.
95. *Ibid.*, 60.
96. Cf. the formula of mediatrix "ad Mediatorem" of Saint Bernard, In *Dominica infra oct. Assumptionis Sermo*, 2: S. Bernardi Opera, V, 1968, 263. Mary as a pure mirror sends back to her Son all the glory and honor which she receives: *Id.*, In *Nativitate B. Mariae Sermo-De Aquaeductu*, 12: ed. cit., 283.
97. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 62.
98. *Ibid.*, 62.
99. *Ibid.*, 61.
100. *Ibid.*, 62.
101. *Ibid.*, 61.
102. *Ibid.*, 61.
103. *Ibid.*, 62.
104. *Ibid.*, 62.
105. *Ibid.*, 62; in her prayer too the Church recognizes and celebrates Mary's "maternal role": it is a role "of intercession and forgiveness, petition and grace, reconciliation and peace" (cf. Preface of the Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Mediatrix of Grace, in *Collectio Missarum de Beata Maria Virgine*, ed. typ. 1987, I, 120).
106. *Ibid.*, 62.
107. *Ibid.*, 62; cf. Saint John Damascene, *Hom. in Dormitionem*, I, 11; II, 2, 14; III, 2: S. Ch. 80, 111f.; 127-131; 157-161; 181-185; Saint Bernard, In *Assumptione Beatae Mariae Sermo*, 1-2: S. Bernardi Opera, V, 1968, 228-238.

108. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 59; cf. Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* (1 November 1950): AAS 42 (1950) 769-771; Saint Bernard presents Mary immersed in the splendor of the Son's glory: In *Dominica infra oct. Assumptionis Sermo*, 3; *S. Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 263f.
109. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 53.
110. On this particular aspect of Mary's mediation as implorer of clemency from the "Son as Judge," cf. Saint Bernard, In *Dominica infra oct. Assumptionis Sermo*, 1-2: *S. Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 262f; Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Octobri Mense* (22 September 1891): *Acta Leonis*, XI, 299-315.
111. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 55.
112. *Ibid.*, 59.
113. *Ibid.*, 36.
114. *Ibid.*, 36.
115. With regard to Mary as Queen, cf. Saint John Damascene, Hom. in *Nativitatem*, 6; 12; Hom. in *Dormitionem*, 1, 2, 12, 14; II, 11; III, 4: *S. Ch.* 80, 59f.; 77f.; 83f.; 113f.; 117; 151f.; 189-193.
116. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 62.
117. *Ibid.*, 63.
118. *Ibid.*, 63.
119. *Ibid.*, 66.
120. Cf. Saint Ambrose, *De Institutione Virginis*, XIV, 88-89: PL 16, 341, Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 215, 4: PL 38, 1074; *De Sancta Virginitate*, II, 2; V, 5; VI, 6: PL 40, 397-398f.; 399; *Sermo* 191, II, 3: PL 38, 1010f.
121. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 63.
122. *Ibid.*, 64.
123. *Ibid.*, 64.
124. *Ibid.*, 64.
125. *Ibid.*, 64.
126. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 8; Saint Bonaventure, *Comment. in Evang. Lucae, Ad Claras Aquas*, VII, 53, No. 40, 68, No. 109.
127. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 64.
128. *Ibid.*, 63.
129. Cf. *ibid.*, 63.
130. Clearly, in the Greek text the expression "eis ta idia" goes beyond the mere acceptance of Mary by the disciple in the sense of material lodging and hospitality in his house; it indicates rather a communion of life established between the two as a result of the words of the dying Christ: cf. Saint Augustine, In *Ioan. Evang. tract.* 119, 3: CCL 36, 659: "He took her to himself, not into his own property, for he possessed nothing of his own, but among his own duties, which he attended to with dedication."
131. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 62.
132. *Ibid.*, 63.
133. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
134. Cf. Pope Paul VI, Discourse of 21 November 1964: AAS 56 (1964) 1015.
135. Pope Paul VI, Solemn Profession of Faith (30 June 1968), 15: AAS 60 (1968) 438f.
136. Pope Paul VI, Discourse of 21 November 1964: AAS 56 (1964) 1015.
137. *Ibid.*, 1016.
138. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 37.
139. Cf. Saint Bernard, In *Dominica infra oct. Assumptionis Sermo*: *S. Bernardi Opera* V, 1968, 262-274.
140. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 65.
141. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Fulgens Corona* (8 September 1953): AAS 45 (1953) 577-592. Pius X with his Encyclical Letter *Ad Diem Illum* (2 February 1904), on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, had proclaimed an Extraordinary jubilee of a few months; Pii X P. M. *Acta*, I, 147-166.
142. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 66-67.
143. Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, *Traite de la varie devotion a la sainte Vierge*. This saint can rightly be linked with the figure of Saint Alfonso Maria de' Liguori, the second centenary of whose death occurs this year; cf. among his works *Le glorie di Maria*.
144. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 69.
145. Homily on 1 January 1987.
146. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 69.
147. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 2: "Through this revelation...the invisible God...out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends...and lives among them..., so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself."

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On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World
1986.05.18

INTRODUCTION

Venerable Brothers, Beloved Sons and Daughters,

Health and the Apostolic Blessing!

1. The Church professes her faith in the Holy Spirit as "the Lord, the giver of life." She professes this in the Creed which is called Nicene- Constantinopolitan from the name of the two Councils-of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and Constantinople (A.D. 381)-at which it was formulated or promulgated. It also contains the statement that the Holy Spirit "has spoken through the Prophets."

These are words which the Church receives from the very source of her faith, Jesus Christ. In fact, according to the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is given to us with the new life, as Jesus foretells and promises on the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles: "If any one thirst let him come to me and drink. He who believeth in me as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"¹ And the Evangelist explains: "This he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive."² It is the same simile of water which Jesus uses in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, when he speaks of "a spring of water welling up to eternal life,"³ and in his conversation with Nicodemus when he speaks of the need for a new birth "of water and the Holy Spirit" in order to "enter the kingdom of God."⁴

The Church, therefore, instructed by the words of Christ, and drawing on the experience of Pentecost and her own apostolic history, has proclaimed since the earliest centuries her faith in the Holy Spirit, as the giver of life, the one in whom the inscrutable Triune God communicates himself to human beings, constituting in them the source of eternal life.

2. This faith, uninterruptedly professed by the Church, needs to be constantly reawakened and deepened in the consciousness of the People of God. In the course of the last hundred years this has been done several times: by Leo XIII, who published the Encyclical Epistle *Divinum Illud Munus* (1897) entirely devoted to the Holy Spirit; by Pius XII, who in the Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis* (1943) spoke of the Holy Spirit as the vital principle of the Church, in which he works in union with the Head of the Mystical Body, Christ⁵; at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which brought out the need for a new study of the doctrine on the Holy Spirit, as Paul VI emphasized: "The Christology and particularly the ecclesiology of the Council must be succeeded by a new study of and devotion to the Holy Spirit, precisely as the indispensable complement to the teaching of the Council."⁶

In our own age, then, we are called anew by the ever ancient and ever new faith of the Church, to draw near to the Holy Spirit as the giver of life. In this we are helped and stimulated also by the heritage we share with the Oriental Churches, which have jealously guarded the extraordinary riches of the teachings of the Fathers on the Holy Spirit. For this reason too we can say that one of the most important ecclesial events of recent years has been the Sixteenth Centenary of the First Council of Constantinople, celebrated simultaneously in Constantinople and Rome on the Solemnity of Pentecost in 1981. The Holy Spirit was then better seen, through a meditation on the mystery of the Church, as the one who points out the ways leading to the union of Christians, indeed as the supreme source of this unity, which comes from God himself and to which St. Paul gave a particular expression in the words which are frequently used to begin the Eucharistic liturgy: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."⁷

In a certain sense, my previous Encyclicals *Redemptor Hominis* and *Dives in Misericordia* took their origin and inspiration from this exhortation, celebrating as they do the event of our salvation accomplished in the Son, sent by the Father into the world "that the world might be saved through him"⁸ and "every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."⁹ From this exhortation now comes the present Encyclical on the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; with the Father and the Son he is adored and glorified: a divine Person, he is at the center of the Christian faith and is the source and dynamic power of the Church's renewal.¹⁰ The Encyclical has been drawn from the heart of the heritage of the Council. For the Conciliar texts, thanks to their teaching on the Church in herself and the Church in the world, move us to penetrate ever deeper into the Trinitarian mystery of God himself, through the Gospels, the Fathers and the liturgy: to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

In this way the Church is also responding to certain deep desires which she believes she can discern in people's hearts today: a fresh discovery of God in his transcendent reality as the infinite Spirit, just as Jesus presents him to the Samaritan woman; the need to adore him "in spirit and truth"¹¹; the hope of finding in him the secret of love and the power of a "new creation"¹²: yes, precisely the giver of life.

The Church feels herself called to this mission of proclaiming the Spirit, while together with the human family she approaches the end of the second Millennium after Christ. Against the background of a heaven and earth which will "pass away," she knows well that "the words which will not pass away"¹³ acquire a particular eloquence. They are the words of Christ about the Holy Spirit, the inexhaustible source of the "water welling up to eternal life,"¹⁴ as truth and saving grace. Upon these words she wishes to reflect, to these words she wishes to call the attention of believers and of all people, as she prepares to celebrate- as will be said later on-the great Jubilee which will mark the passage from the second to the third Christian Millennium.

Naturally, the considerations that follow do not aim to explore exhaustively the extremely rich doctrine on the Holy Spirit, nor to favor any particular solution of questions which are still open. Their main purpose is to develop in the Church the awareness that "she is compelled by the Holy Spirit to do her part towards the full realization of the will of God, who has established Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world."¹⁵

PART I - THE SPIRIT OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON, GIVEN TO THE CHURCH

1. Jesus' Promise and Revelation at the Last Supper

3. When the time for Jesus to leave this world had almost come, he told the Apostles of "another Counselor."¹⁶ The evangelist John, who was present, writes that, during the Last Supper before the day of his Passion and Death, Jesus addressed the Apostles with these words: "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.... I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth."¹⁷

It is precisely this Spirit of truth whom Jesus calls the Paraclete-and parakletos means "counselor," and also "intercessor," or "advocate." And he says that the Paraclete is "another" Counselor, the second one, since he, Jesus himself, is the first Counselor, ¹⁸ being the first bearer and giver of the Good News. The Holy Spirit comes after him and because of him, in order to continue in the world, through the Church, the work of the Good News of salvation. Concerning this continuation of his own work by the Holy Spirit Jesus speaks more than once during the same farewell discourse, preparing the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room for his departure, namely for his Passion and Death on the Cross.

The words to which we will make reference here are found in the Gospel of John. Each one adds a new element to that prediction and promise. And at the same time they are intimately interwoven, not only from the viewpoint of the events themselves but also from the viewpoint of the mystery of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which perhaps in no passage of Sacred Scripture finds so emphatic an expression as here.

4. A little while after the prediction just mentioned Jesus adds: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."¹⁹ The Holy Spirit will be the Counselor of the Apostles and the Church, always present in their midst-even though invisible-as the teacher of the same Good News that Christ proclaimed. The words "he will teach" and "bring to remembrance" mean not only that he, in his own particular way, will continue to inspire the spreading of the Gospel of salvation but also that he will help people to understand the correct meaning of the content of Christ's message; they mean that he will ensure continuity and identity of understanding in the midst of changing conditions and circumstances. The Holy Spirit, then, will ensure that in the Church there will always continue the same truth which the Apostles heard from their Master.

5. In transmitting the Good News, the Apostles will be in a special way associated with the Holy Spirit. This is how Jesus goes on: "When the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning."²⁰

Apostles were the direct eyewitnesses. They "have heard" and "have seen with their own eyes," "have looked upon" and even "touched with their hands" Christ, as the evangelist John says in another passage.²¹ This human, first-hand and "historical" witness to Christ is linked to the witness of the Holy Spirit: "He will bear witness to me." In the witness of the Spirit of truth, the human testimony of the Apostles will find its strongest support. And subsequently it will also find therein the hidden foundation of its continuation among the generations of Christ's disciples and believers who succeed one another down through the ages.

The supreme and most complete revelation of God to humanity is Jesus Christ himself, and the witness of the Spirit inspires, guarantees and convalidates the faithful transmission of this revelation in the preaching and writing of the Apostles, ²² while the witness of the Apostles ensures its human expression in the Church and in the history of humanity.

6. This is also seen from the strict correlation of content and intention with the just-mentioned prediction and promise, a correlation found in the next words of the text of John: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."²³

In his previous words Jesus presents the; Counselor, the Spirit of truth, as the one who "will teach" and "bring to remembrance, " as the one who "will bear witness" to him. Now he says: "He will guide you into all the truth." This "guiding into all the truth, " referring to what the Apostles "cannot bear now, " is necessarily connected with Christ's self-emptying through his Passion and Death on the Cross, which, when he spoke these words, was just about to happen.

Later however it becomes clear that this "guiding into all the truth" is connected not only with the scandal of the Cross, but also with everything that Christ "did and taught."²⁴ For the mystery of Christ taken as a whole demands faith, since it is faith that adequately introduces man into the reality of the revealed mystery. The guiding into all the truth" is therefore achieved in faith and through faith: and this is the work of the Spirit of truth and the result of his action in man. Here the Holy Spirit is to be man's supreme guide and the light of the human spirit. This holds true for the Apostles, the eyewitnesses, who must now bring to all people the proclamation of what Christ did and taught, and especially the proclamation of his Cross and Resurrection. Taking a longer view, this also holds true for all the generations of disciples and confessors of the Master. Since they will have to accept with faith and confess with candor the mystery of God at work in human history, the revealed mystery which explains the definitive meaning of that history.

7. Between the Holy Spirit and Christ there thus subsists, in the economy of salvation, an intimate bond, whereby the Spirit works in human history as "another Counselor, " permanently ensuring the transmission and spreading of the Good News revealed by Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, in the Holy Spirit-Paraclete, who in the mystery and action of the Church unceasingly continues the historical presence on earth of the Redeemer and his saving work, the glory of Christ shines forth, as the following words of John attest: "He [the Spirit of truth] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."²⁵ By these words all the preceding statements are once again confirmed: "He will teach..., will bring to your remembrance..., will bear witness." The supreme and complete self-revelation of God, accomplished in Christ and witnessed to by the preaching of the Apostles, continues to be manifested in the Church through the mission of the invisible Counselor, the Spirit of truth. How intimately this mission is linked with the mission of Christ, how fully it draws from this mission of Christ, consolidating and developing in history its salvific results, is expressed by the verb "take": "He will take what is mine and declare it to you." As if to explain the words "he will take" by clearly expressing the divine and Trinitarian unity of the source, Jesus adds: "All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."²⁶ By the very fact of taking what is "mine, " he will draw from "what is the Father's."

In the light of these words "he will take, " one can therefore also explain the other significant words about the Holy Spirit spoken by Jesus in the Upper Room before the Passover: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."²⁷ It will be necessary to return to these words in a separate reflection.

2. Father, Son and Holy Spirit

8. It is a characteristic of the text of John that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are clearly called Persons, the first distinct from the second and the third, and each of them from one another. Jesus speaks of the Spirit-Counselor, using several times the personal pronoun "he"; and at the same time, throughout the farewell discourse, he reveals the bonds which unite the Father, the Son and the Paraclete to one another.

Thus "the Holy Spirit...proceeds from the Father"²⁸ and the Father "gives" the Spirit.²⁹ The Father "sends" the Spirit in the name of the Son, ³⁰ the Spirit "bears witness" to the Son.³¹ The Son asks the Father to send the Spirit-Counselor, ³² but likewise affirms and promises, in relation to his own "departure" through the Cross: "If I go, I will send him to you, "³³ Thus, the Father sends the Holy Spirit in the power of his Fatherhood, as he has sent the Son³⁴; but at the same time he sends him in the power of the Redemption accomplished by Christ-and in this sense Holy Spirit is sent also by the Son: "I will send him to you."

Here it should be noted that, while all the other promises made in the Upper Room foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit after Christ's departure, the one contained in the text of John 16:7f. also includes and clearly emphasizes the relationship of interdependence which could be called causal between the manifestation of each: "If I go, I will send him to you." The Holy Spirit will come insofar as Christ will depart through the Cross: he will come not only afterwards, but because of the Redemption accomplished by Christ, through the will and action of the Father.

9.

Thus in the farewell discourse at the Last Supper, we can say that the highest point of the revelation of the Trinity is reached. At the same time, we are on the threshold of definitive events and final words which in the end will be translated into the great missionary mandate addressed to the Apostles and through them to the Church: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, " a mandate which contains, in a certain sense, the Trinitarian formula of baptism: "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."³⁵ The formula reflects the intimate mystery of God, of the divine life, which is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the divine unity of the Trinity. The farewell discourse can be read as a special preparation for this Trinitarian formula, in which is expressed the life-giving

power of the Sacrament which brings about sharing in the life of the Triune God, for it gives sanctifying grace as a supernatural gift to man. Through grace, man is called and made "capable" of sharing in the inscrutable life of God.
10.

In his intimate life, God "is love,"³⁶ the essential love shared by the three divine Persons: personal love is the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Therefore he "searches even the depths of God,"³⁷ as uncreated Love-Gift. It can be said that in the Holy Spirit the intimate life of the Triune God becomes totally gift, an exchange of mutual love between the divine Persons and that through the Holy Spirit God exists in the mode of gift. It is the Holy Spirit who is the personal expression of this self-giving, of this being-love.³⁸ He is Person-Love. He is Person-Gift. Here we have an inexhaustible treasure of the reality and an inexpressible deepening of the concept of person in God, which only divine Revelation makes known to us.

At the same time, the Holy Spirit, being consubstantial with the Father and the Son in divinity, is love and uncreated gift from which derives as from its source (*fons vivus*) all giving of gifts *vis-a-vis* creatures (created gift): the gift of existence to all things through creation; the gift of grace to human beings through the whole economy of salvation. As the Apostle Paul writes: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."³⁹

3. The Salvific Self-Giving of God in the Holy Spirit

11. Christ's farewell discourse at the Last Supper stands in particular reference to this "giving" and "self-giving" of the Holy Spirit. In John's Gospel we have as it were the revelation of the most profound "logic" of the saving mystery contained in God's eternal plan, as an extension of the ineffable communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the divine "logic" which from the mystery of the Trinity leads to the mystery of the Redemption of the world in Jesus Christ. The Redemption accomplished by the Son in the dimensions of the earthly history of humanity- accomplished in his "departure" through the Cross and Resurrection-is at the same time, in its entire salvific power, transmitted to the Holy Spirit: the one who "will take what is mine."⁴⁰ The words of the text of John indicate that, according to the divine plan, Christ's "departure" is an indispensable condition for the "sending" and the coming of the Holy Spirit, but these words also say that what begins now is the new salvific self-giving of God, in the Holy Spirit.

12. It is a new beginning in relation to the first, original beginning of God's salvific self-giving, which is identified with the mystery of creation itself. Here is what we read in the very first words of the Book of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..., and the Spirit of God (*ruah Elohim*) was moving over the face of the waters."⁴¹ This biblical concept of creation includes not only the call to existence of the very being of the cosmos, that is to say the giving of existence, but also the presence of the Spirit of God in creation, that is to say the beginning of God's salvific self-communication to the things he creates. This is true first of all concerning man, who has been created in the image and likeness of God: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."⁴² "Let us make": can one hold that the plural which the Creator uses here in speaking of himself already in some way suggests the Trinitarian mystery, the presence of the Trinity in the work of the creation of man? The Christian reader, who already knows the revelation of this mystery, can discern a reflection of it also in these words. At any rate, the context of the Book of Genesis enables us to see in the creation of man the first beginning of God's salvific self-giving commensurate with the "image and likeness" of himself which he has granted to man.

13.

It seems then that even the words spoken by Jesus in the farewell discourse should be read again in the light of that "beginning," so long ago yet fundamental, which we know from Genesis. "If I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." Describing his "departure" as a condition for the "coming" of the Counselor, Christ links the new beginning of God's salvific self-communication in the Holy Spirit with the mystery of the Redemption. It is a new beginning, first of all because between the first beginning and the whole of human history- from the original fall onwards- sin has intervened, sin which is in contradiction to the presence of the Spirit of God in creation, and which is above all in contradiction to God's salvific self-communication to man. St. Paul writes that, precisely because of sin, "creation...was subjected to futility..., has been groaning in travail together until now" and "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God."⁴³

14.

Therefore Jesus Christ says in the Upper Room "It is to your advantage I go away;...if I go, I will send him to you."⁴⁴ The "departure" of Christ through the Cross has the power of the Redemption- and this also means a new presence of the Spirit of God in creation: the new beginning of God's self-communication to man in the Holy Spirit. "And that you are children is proven by the fact that God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son who cries: *Abba, Father!*" As the Apostle Paul writes in the Letter to the Galatians.⁴⁵ The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father, as the words of the farewell discourse in the Upper Room bear witness. At the same time he is the Spirit of the Son: he is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, as the Apostles and particularly Paul of Tarsus will testify.⁴⁶ With the sending of this Spirit "into our hearts," there begins the fulfillment of that for which "creation waits with eager longing," as we read in the Letter to the Romans.

The Holy Spirit comes at the price of Christ's "departure." While this "departure" caused the Apostles to be sorrowful, 47 and this sorrow was to reach its culmination in the Passion and Death on Good Friday, "this sorrow will turn into joy."⁴⁸ For Christ will add to this redemptive "departure" the glory of his Resurrection and Ascension to the Father. Thus the sorrow with its underlying joy is, for the Apostles in the context of their Master's "departure, " an "advantageous" departure, for thanks to it another "Counselor" will come.⁴⁹ At the price of the Cross which brings about the Redemption, in the power of the whole Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes in order to remain from the day of Pentecost onwards with the Apostles, to remain with the Church and in the Church, and through her in the world.

In this way there is definitively brought about that new beginning of the self-communication of the Triune God in the Holy Spirit through the work of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man and of the world.

4. The Messiah, Anointed with the Holy Spirit

15. There is also accomplished in its entirety the mission of the Messiah, that is to say of the One who has received the fullness of the Holy Spirit for the Chosen People of God and for the whole of humanity. "Messiah" literally means "Christ, " that is, "Anointed One, " and in the history of salvation it means "the one anointed with the Holy Spirit." This was the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. Following this tradition, Simon Peter will say in the house of Cornelius: "You must have heard about the recent happenings in Judea...after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."⁵⁰

From these words of Peter and from many similar ones, ⁵¹ one must first go back to the prophecy of Isaiah, sometimes called "the Fifth Gospel" or "the Gospel of the Old Testament." Alluding to the coming of a mysterious personage, which the New Testament revelation will identify with Jesus, Isaiah connects his person and mission with a particular action of the Spirit of God-the Spirit of the Lord. These are the words of the Prophet: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be the fear of the Lord."⁵²

This text is important for the whole pneumatology of the Old Testament, because it constitutes a kind of bridge between the ancient biblical concept of "spirit, " understood primarily as a "charismatic breath of wind, " and the "Spirit" as a person and as a gift, a gift for the person. The Messiah of the lineage of David ("from the stump of Jesse") is precisely that person upon whom the Spirit of the Lord "shall rest." It is obvious that in this case one cannot yet speak of a revelation of the Paraclete. However, with this veiled reference to the figure of the future Messiah there begins, so to speak, the path towards the full revelation of the Holy Spirit in the unity of the Trinitarian mystery, a mystery which will finally be manifested in the New Covenant.

16. It is precisely the Messiah himself who is this path. In the Old Covenant, anointing had become the external symbol of the gift of the Spirit. The Messiah (more than any other anointed personage in the Old Covenant) is that single great personage anointed by God himself. He is the Anointed One in the sense that he possesses the fullness of the Spirit of God. He himself will also be the mediator in granting this Spirit to the whole People. Here in fact are other words of the Prophet: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."⁵³

The Anointed One is also sent "with the Spirit of the Lord ": "Now the Lord God has sent me and his Spirit."⁵⁴

According to the Book of Isaiah, the Anointed One and the One sent together with the Spirit of the Lord is also the chosen Servant of the Lord upon whom the Spirit of God comes down: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him."⁵⁵

We know that the Servant of the Lord is revealed in the Book of Isaiah as the true Man of Sorrows: the Messiah who suffers for the sins of the world.⁵⁶ And at the same time it is precisely he whose mission will bear for all humanity the true fruits of salvation: "He will bring forth justice to the nations..."⁵⁷; and he will become "a covenant to the people, a light to the nations..."⁵⁸; "that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."⁵⁹

For: "My spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your children's children, says the Lord, from this time forth and for evermore."⁶⁰

The prophetic texts quoted here are to be read in the light of the Gospel- just as, in its turn, the New Testament draws a particular clarification from the marvelous light contained in these Old Testament texts. The Prophet presents the Messiah as the one who comes in the Holy Spirit, the one who possesses the fullness of this Spirit in himself and at the same time for others, for Israel, for all the nations, for all humanity. The fullness of the Spirit of God is accompanied by many different gifts, the treasures of salvation, destined in a particular way for the poor and suffering, for all those who open their hearts to these gifts-sometimes through the painful experience of their own existence-but first of all through that interior availability which comes from faith. The aged Simeon, the "righteous and devout man" upon whom "rested the Holy Spirit, " sensed this at the moment of Jesus' presentation in the Temple, when he perceived in him the "salvation...prepared in the presence of all peoples" at the price of the great suffering-the Cross- which he would have

to embrace together with his Mother.⁶¹ The Virgin Mary, who "had conceived by the Holy Spirit,"⁶² sensed this even more clearly, when she pondered in her heart the "mysteries" of the Messiah, with whom she was associated.⁶³

17. Here it must be emphasized that clearly the "spirit of the Lord" who rests upon the future Messiah is above all a gift of God for the person of that Servant of the Lord. But the latter is not an isolated and independent person, because he acts in accordance with the will of the Lord, by virtue of the Lord's decision or choice. Even though in the light of the texts of Isaiah the salvific work of the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, includes the action of the Spirit which is carried out through himself, nevertheless in the Old Testament context there is no suggestion of a distinction of subjects, or of the Divine Persons as they subsist in the mystery of the Trinity, and as they are later revealed in the New Testament. Both in Isaiah and in the whole of the Old Testament the personality of the Holy Spirit is completely hidden: in the revelation of the one God, as also in the foretelling of the future Messiah.

18. Jesus Christ will make reference to this prediction contained in the words of Isaiah at the beginning of his messianic activity. This will happen in the same Nazareth where he had lived for thirty years in the house of Joseph the carpenter, with Mary, his Virgin Mother. When he had occasion to speak in the Synagogue, he opened the Book of Isaiah and found the passage where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me"; and having read this passage he said to those present: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."⁶⁴ In this way he confessed and proclaimed that he was the Messiah, the one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells as the gift of God himself, the one who possesses the fullness of this Spirit, the one who marks the "new beginning" of the gift which God makes to humanity in the Spirit.

5. Jesus of Nazareth, "Exalted" in the Holy Spirit

19. Even though in his hometown of Nazareth Jesus is not accepted as the Messiah, nonetheless, at the beginning of his public activity, his messianic mission in the Holy Spirit is revealed to the people by John the Baptist. The latter, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, foretells at the Jordan the coming of the Messiah and administers the baptism of repentance. He says: "I baptize you with water; he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."⁶⁵ John the Baptist foretells the Messiah-Christ not only as the one who "is coming" in the Holy Spirit but also as the one who "brings" the Holy Spirit, as Jesus will reveal more clearly in the Upper Room. Here John faithfully echoes the words of Isaiah, words which in the ancient Prophet concerned the future, while in John's teaching on the banks of the Jordan they are the immediate introduction to the new messianic reality. John is not only a prophet but also a messenger: he is the precursor of Christ. What he foretells is accomplished before the eyes of all. Jesus of Nazareth too comes to the Jordan to receive the baptism of repentance. At the sight of him arriving, John proclaims: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."⁶⁶ He says this through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, ⁶⁷ bearing witness to the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. At the same time he confesses his faith in the redeeming mission of Jesus of Nazareth. On the lips of John the Baptist, "Lamb of God" is an expression of truth about the Redeemer no less significant than the one used by Isaiah: "Servant of the Lord."

Thus, by the testimony of John at the Jordan, Jesus of Nazareth, rejected by his own fellow-citizens, is exalted before the eyes of Israel as the Messiah, that is to say the "One Anointed" with the Holy Spirit. And this testimony is corroborated by another testimony of a higher order, mentioned by the three Synoptics. For when all the people were baptized and as Jesus, having received baptism, was praying, "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove"⁶⁸ and at the same time "a voice from heaven said "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."⁶⁹

This is a Trinitarian theophany which bears witness to the exaltation of Christ on the occasion of his baptism in the Jordan. It not only confirms the testimony of John the Baptist but also reveals another more profound dimension of the truth about Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah. It is this: the Messiah is the beloved Son of the Father. His solemn exaltation cannot be reduced to the messianic mission of the "Servant of the Lord." In the light of the theophany at the Jordan, this exaltation touches the mystery of the very person of the Messiah. He has been raised up because he is the beloved Son in whom God is well pleased. The voice from on high says: "my Son."

20. The theophany at the Jordan clarifies only in a fleeting way the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, whose entire activity will be carried out in the active presence of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ This mystery would be gradually revealed and confirmed by Jesus himself by means of everything that he "did and taught."⁷¹ In the course of this teaching and of the messianic signs which Jesus performed before he came to the farewell discourse in the Upper Room, we find events and words which constitute particularly important stages of this progressive revelation. Thus the evangelist Luke, who has already presented Jesus as "full of the Holy Spirit" and "led by the Spirit...in the wilderness,"⁷² tells us that, after the return of the seventy-two disciples from the mission entrusted to them by the Master, ⁷³ while they were joyfully recounting the fruits of their labors, "in that same hour [Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was your gracious will.'"⁷⁴ Jesus rejoices at the fatherhood of God: he rejoices because it has been given to him to reveal this fatherhood; he rejoices, finally, as at a particular outpouring of this divine fatherhood on the "little ones." And the evangelist describes all this as "rejoicing in the Holy Spirit."

This "rejoicing" in a certain sense prompts Jesus to say still more. We hear: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."⁷⁵

21. That which during the theophany at the Jordan came so to speak "from outside," from on high, here comes "from within," that is to say from the depths of who Jesus is. It is another revelation of the Father and the Son, united in the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks only of the fatherhood of God and of his own sonship—he does not speak directly of the Spirit, who is Love and thereby the union of the Father and the Son. Nonetheless what he says of the Father and of himself—the Son—flows from that fullness of the Spirit which is in him, which fills his heart, pervades his own "I," inspires and enlivens his action from the depths. Hence that "rejoicing in the Holy Spirit." The union of Christ with the Holy Spirit, a union of which he is perfectly aware, is expressed in that "rejoicing," which in a certain way renders "perceptible" its hidden source. Thus there is a particular manifestation and rejoicing which is proper to the Son of Man, the Christ-Messiah, whose humanity belongs to the person of the Son of God, substantially one with the Holy Spirit in divinity. In the magnificent confession of the fatherhood of God, Jesus of Nazareth also manifests himself, his divine "I"—for he is the Son "of the same substance," and therefore "no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son," that Son who "for us and for our salvation" became man by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of a virgin whose name was Mary.

6. The Risen Christ Says: "Receive the Holy Spirit"

22. It is thanks to Luke's narrative that we are brought closest to the truth contained in the discourse in the Upper Room. Jesus of Nazareth, "raised up" in the Holy Spirit, during this discourse and conversation presents himself as the one who brings the Spirit, as the one who is to bring him and "give" him to the Apostles and to the Church at the price of his own "departure" through the Cross.

The verb "bring" is here used to mean first of all "reveal." In the Old Testament, from the Book of Genesis onwards, the Spirit of God was in some way made known, in the first place as a "breath" of God which gives life, as a supernatural "living breath." In the Book of Isaiah, he is presented as a "gift" for the person of the Messiah, as the one who comes down and rests upon him, in order to guide from within all the salvific activity of the "Anointed One." At the Jordan, Isaiah's proclamation is given a concrete form: Jesus of Nazareth is the one who comes in the Holy Spirit and who brings the Spirit as the gift proper to his own Person, in order to distribute that gift by means of this humanity: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."⁷⁶ In the Gospel of Luke, this revelation of the Holy Spirit is confirmed and added to, as the intimate source of the life and messianic activity of Jesus Christ. In the light of what Jesus says in the farewell discourse in the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit is revealed in a new and fuller way. He is not only the gift to the person (the person of the Messiah), but is a Person-gift. Jesus foretells his coming as that of "another Counselor" who, being the Spirit of truth, will lead the Apostles and the Church "into all the truth."⁷⁷ This will be accomplished by reason of the particular communion between the Holy Spirit and Christ: "He will take what is mine and declare it to you."⁷⁸ This communion has its original source in the Father: "All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."⁷⁹ Coming from the Father the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father.⁸⁰ The Holy Spirit is first sent as a gift for the Son who was made man, in order to fulfill the messianic prophecies. After the "departure" of Christ the Son, the Johannine text says that the Holy Spirit "will come" directly (it is his new mission), to complete the work of the Son. Thus it will be he who brings to fulfillment the new era of the history of salvation.

23. We find ourselves on the threshold of the Paschal events. The new, definitive revelation of the Holy Spirit as a Person who is the gift is accomplished at this precise moment. The Paschal events—the Passion, Death and Resurrection—of Christ—are also the time of the new coming of the Holy Spirit, as the Paraclete and the Spirit of truth. They are the time of the "new beginning" of the self-communication of the Triune God to humanity in the Holy Spirit through the work of Christ the Redeemer. This new beginning is the Redemption of the world: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."⁸¹ Already the "giving" of the Son, the gift of the Son, expresses the most profound essence of God who, as Love, is the inexhaustible source of the giving of gifts. The gift made by the Son completes the revelation and giving of the eternal love: the Holy Spirit, who in the inscrutable depths of the divinity is a Person-Gift, through the work of the Son, that is to say by means of the Paschal Mystery, is given to the Apostles and to the Church in a new way, and through them is given to humanity and the whole world.

24. The definitive expression of this mystery is had on the day of the Resurrection. On this day Jesus of Nazareth "descended from David according to the flesh," as the Apostle Paul writes, is "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his Resurrection from the dead."⁸² It can be said therefore that the messianic "raising up" of Christ in the Holy Spirit reaches its zenith in the Resurrection, in which he reveals himself also as the Son of God, "full of power." And this power, the sources of which gush forth in the inscrutable Trinitarian communion, is manifested, first of all, in the fact that the Risen Christ does two things: on the one hand he fulfills God's promise already expressed through the Prophet's words: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you,...my spirit"⁸³; and on the other hand he fulfills his own promise made to the Apostles with the words: "If I go, I will send him to you."⁸⁴ It is he: the Spirit of truth, the Paraclete sent by the Risen Christ to transform us into his own risen image.⁸⁵

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"86

All the details of this key-text of John's Gospel have their own eloquence, especially if we read them in reference to the words spoken in the same Upper Room at the beginning of the Paschal event. And now these events-the Triduum Sacrum of Jesus whom the Father consecrated with the anointing and sent into the world-reach their fulfillment. Christ, who "gave up his spirit" on the Cross87 as the Son of Man and the Lamb of God, once risen goes to the Apostles 'to breathe on them' with that power spoken of in the Letter to the Romans.88 The Lord's coming fills those present with joy: "Your sorrow will turn into joy,"89 as he had already promised them before his Passion. And above all there is fulfilled the principal prediction of the farewell discourse: the Risen Christ, as it were beginning a new creation, "brings" to the Apostles the Holy Spirit. He brings him at the price of his own "departure": he gives them this Spirit as it were through the wounds of his crucifixion: "He showed them his hands and his side." It is in the power of this crucifixion that he says to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Thus there is established a close link between the sending of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

There is no sending of the Holy Spirit (after original sin) without the Cross and the Resurrection: "If I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you."90 There is also established a close link between the mission of the Holy Spirit and that of the Son in the Redemption. The mission of the Son, in a certain sense, finds its "fulfillment" in the Redemption. The mission of the Holy Spirit "draws from" the Redemption: "He will take what is mine and declare it to you."91 The Redemption is totally carried out by the Son as the Anointed One, who came and acted in the power of the Holy Spirit, offering himself finally in sacrifice on the wood of the Cross. And this Redemption is, at the same time, constantly carried out in human hearts and minds-in the history of the world-by the Holy Spirit, who is the "other Counselor. "

7. The Holy Spirit and the Era of the Church

25. "Having accomplished the work that the Father had entrusted to the Son on earth (cf. Jn 17:4), on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was sent to sanctify the Church forever, so that believers might have access to the Father through Christ in one Spirit (cf. Eph 2:18). He is the Spirit of life, the fountain of water springing up to eternal life (cf. Jn 4:14; 7:38ff.), the One through whom the Father restores life to those who are dead through sin, until one day he will raise in Christ their mortal bodies" (cf. Rom 8:10f.).92

In this way the Second Vatican Council speaks of the Church's birth on the day of Pentecost. This event constitutes the definitive manifestation of what had already been accomplished in the same Upper Room on Easter Sunday. The Risen Christ came and "brought" to the Apostles the Holy Spirit. He gave him to them, saying "Receive the Holy Spirit." What had then taken place inside the Upper Room, "the doors being shut, " later, on the day of Pentecost is manifested also outside, in public. The doors of the Upper Room are opened and the Apostles go to the inhabitants and the pilgrims who had gathered in Jerusalem on the occasion of the feast, in order to bear witness to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way the prediction is fulfilled: "He will bear witness to me: and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning."93

We read in another document of the Second Vatican Council: "Doubtless, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified. Yet on the day of Pentecost, he came down upon the disciples to remain with them for ever. On that day the Church was publicly revealed to the multitude, and the Gospel began to spread among the nations by means of preaching."94

The era of the Church began with the "coming, " that is to say with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, together with Mary, the Lord's Mother.95 The time of the Church began at the moment when the promises and predictions that so explicitly referred to the Counselor, the Spirit of truth, began to be fulfilled in complete power and clarity upon the Apostles, thus determining the birth of the Church. The Acts of the Apostles speak of this at length and in many passages, which state that in the mind of the first community, whose convictions Luke expresses, the Holy Spirit assumed the invisible-but in a certain way "perceptible"-guidance of those who after the departure of the Lord Jesus felt profoundly that they had been left orphans. With the coming of the Spirit they felt capable of fulfilling the mission entrusted to them. They felt full of strength. It is precisely this that the Holy Spirit worked in them and this is continually at work in the Church, through their successors. For the grace of the Holy Spirit which the Apostles gave to their collaborators through the imposition of hands continues to be transmitted in Episcopal Ordination. The bishops in turn by the Sacrament of Orders render the sacred ministers sharers in this spiritual gift and, through the Sacrament of Confirmation, ensure that all who are reborn of water and the Holy Spirit are strengthened by this gift. And thus, in a certain way, the grace of Pentecost is perpetuated in the Church.

As the Council writes, "the Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). In them he prays and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15-16:26). The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth (cf. Jn 16:13) and gives her a unity of fellowship and service. He

furnishes and directs her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic, and adorns her with the fruits of his grace (cf Eph 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22). By the power of the Gospel he makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse."⁹⁶

26. These passages quoted from the Conciliar Constitution *Lumen Gentium* tell us that the era of the Church began with the coming of the Holy Spirit. They also tell us that this era, the era of the Church, continues. It continues down the centuries and generations. In our own century, when humanity is already close to the end of the second Millennium after Christ, this era of the Church expressed itself in a special way through the Second Vatican Council, as the Council of our century. For we know that it was in a special way an "ecclesiological" Council: a Council on the theme of the Church. At the same time, the teaching of this Council is essentially "pneumatological": it is permeated by the truth about the Holy Spirit, as the soul of the Church. We can say that in its rich variety of teaching the Second Vatican Council contains precisely all that "the Spirit says to the Churches"⁹⁷ with regard to the present phase of the history of salvation.

Following the guidance of the Spirit of truth and bearing witness together with him, the Council has given a special confirmation of the presence of the Holy Spirit-the Counselor. In a certain sense, the Council has made the Spirit newly "present" in our difficult age. In the light of this conviction one grasps more clearly the great importance of all the initiatives aimed at implementing the Second Vatican Council, its teaching and its pastoral and ecumenical thrust. In this sense also the subsequent Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops are to be carefully studied and evaluated, aiming as they do to ensure that the fruits of truth and love-the authentic fruits of the Holy Spirit-become a lasting treasure for the People of God in its earthly pilgrimage down the centuries. This work being done by the Church for the testing and bringing together of the salvific fruits of the Spirit bestowed in the Council is something indispensable. For this purpose one must learn how to "discern" them carefully from everything that may instead come originally from the "prince of this world."⁹⁸ This discernment in implementing the Council's work is especially necessary in view of the fact that the Council opened itself widely to the contemporary world, as is clearly seen from the important Conciliar Constitutions *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*.

We read in the Pastoral Constitution: "For theirs (i.e., of the disciples of Christ) is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history."⁹⁹ "The Church truly knows that only God, whom she serves, meets the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what the world has to offer."¹⁰⁰ "God's Spirit... with a marvelous providence directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth."¹⁰¹

PART II - THE SPIRIT WHO CONVINCES THE WORLD CONCERNING SIN

1. Sin, Righteousness and Judgment

27. When Jesus during the discourse in the Upper Room foretells the coming of the Holy Spirit "at the price of" his own departure, and promises "I will send him to you," in the very same context he adds: "And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."¹⁰² The same Counselor and Spirit of truth who has been promised as the one who "will teach" and "bring to remembrance," who "will bear witness," and "guide into all the truth," in the words just quoted is foretold as the one who "will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

The context too seems significant. Jesus links this foretelling of the Holy Spirit to the words indicating his "departure" through the Cross, and indeed emphasizes the need for this departure: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you."¹⁰³

But what counts more is the explanation that Jesus himself adds to these three words: sin, righteousness, judgment. For he says this: "He will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father,

and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of the world is judged."¹⁰⁴ In the mind of Jesus, sin, righteousness and judgment have a very precise meaning, different from the meaning that one might be inclined to attribute to these words independently of the speaker's explanation. This explanation also indicates how one is to understand the "convincing the world" which is proper to the action of the Holy Spirit. Both the meaning of the individual words and the fact that Jesus linked them together in the same phrase are important here.

"Sin," in this passage, means the incredulity that Jesus encountered among "his own," beginning with the people of his own town of Nazareth. Sin means the rejection of his mission, a rejection that will cause people to condemn him to death. When he speaks next of "righteousness," Jesus seems to have in mind that definitive justice, which the Father will restore to him when he grants him the glory of the Resurrection and Ascension into heaven: "I go to the Father." In its turn, and in the context of "sin" and "righteousness" thus understood, "judgment" means that the Spirit of truth will show the guilt of the "world" in condemning Jesus to death on the Cross. Nevertheless, Christ did not come into the world only to judge it and condemn it: he came to save it.¹⁰⁵ Convincing about sin and righteousness has as its purpose

the salvation of the world, the salvation of men. Precisely this truth seems to be emphasized by the assertion that "judgment" concerns only the prince of this world, "Satan, the one who from the beginning has been exploiting the work of creation against salvation, against the covenant and the union of man with God: he is "already judged" from the start. If the Spirit-Counselor is to convince the world precisely concerning judgment, it is in order to continue in the world the salvific work of Christ.

28. Here we wish to concentrate our attention principally on this mission of the Holy Spirit, which is "to convince the world concerning sin, " but at the same time respecting the general context of Jesus' words in the Upper Room. The Holy Spirit, who takes from the Son the work of the Redemption of the world, by this very fact takes the task of the salvific "convincing of sin." This convincing is in permanent reference to "righteousness": that is to say to definitive salvation in God, to the fulfillment of the economy that has as its center the crucified and glorified Christ. And this salvific economy of God in a certain sense removes man from "judgment, " that is from the damnation which has been inflicted on the Sill or Satan, "the prince of this world, " the one who because of his sin has become "the ruler of this world of darkness."¹⁰⁶ And here we see that, through this reference to "judgment, " vast horizons open up for understanding "sin" and also "righteousness." The Holy Spirit, by showing sin against the background of Christ's Cross in the economy of salvation (one could say "sin saved"), enables us to understand how his mission is also "to convince" of the sin that has already been definitively judged ("sin condemned").

29. All the words uttered by the Redeemer in the Upper Room on the eve of his Passion become part of the era of the Church: first of all, the words about the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete and Spirit of truth. The words become part of it in an ever new way, in every generation, in every age. This is confirmed, as far as our own age is concerned, by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council as a whole, and especially in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. Many passages of this document indicate clearly that the Council, by opening itself to the light of the Spirit of truth, is seen to be the authentic depositary of the predictions and promises made by Christ to the Apostles and to the Church in the farewell discourse: in a particular way as the depositary of the predictions that the Holy Spirit would "convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

This is already indicated by the text in which the Council explains how it understands the "world": "The Council focuses its attention on the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which that family lives. It gazes upon the world which is the theater of man's history, and carries the marks of his energies, his tragedies, and his triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ. He was crucified and rose again to break the stranglehold of personified Evil, so that this world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfillment."¹⁰⁷ This very rich text needs to be read in conjunction with the other passages in the Constitution that seek to show with all the realism of faith the situation of sin in the contemporary world and that also seek to explain its essence, beginning from different points of view.¹⁰⁸

When on the eve of the Passover Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the one who "will convince the world concerning sin, " on the one hand this statement must be given the widest possible meaning, insofar as it includes all the sin in the history of humanity. But on the other hand, when Jesus explains that this sin consists in the fact that "they do not believe in him, " this meaning seems to apply only to those who rejected the messianic mission of the Son of Man and condemned him to death on the Cross. But one can hardly fail to notice that this more "limited" and historically specified meaning of sin expands, until it assumes a universal dimension by reason of the universality of the Redemption, accomplished through the Cross. The revelation of the mystery of the Redemption opens the way to an understanding in which every sin wherever and whenever committed has a reference to the Cross of Christ-and therefore indirectly also to the sin of those who "have not believed in him, " and who condemned Jesus Christ to death on the Cross.

From this point of view we must return to the event of Pentecost.

2. The Testimony of the Day of Pentecost

30. Christ's prophecies in the farewell discourse found their most exact and direct confirmation on the day of Pentecost, in particular the prediction which we are dealing with: "The Counselor...will convince the world concerning sin." On that day, the promised Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles gathered in prayer together with Mary the Mother of Jesus, in the same Upper Room, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance, "¹⁰⁹ "thus bringing back to unity the scattered races and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all the nations."¹¹⁰

The connection between Christ's prediction and this event is clear. We perceive here the first and fundamental fulfillment of the promise of the Paraclete. He comes, sent by the Father, "after" the departure of Christ, "at the price of" that departure. This is first a departure through the Cross, and later, forty days after the Resurrection, through his Ascension into heaven. Once more, at the moment of the Ascension, Jesus orders the Apostles "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father"; "but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit"; "but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."¹¹¹

These last words contain an echo or reminder of the prediction made in the Upper Room. And on the day of Pentecost this prediction is fulfilled with total accuracy. Acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who had been received by the Apostles while they were praying in the Upper Room, Peter comes forward and speaks before a multitude of people of different languages, gathered for the feast. He proclaims what he certainly would not have had the courage to say before: Men of Israel,...Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it."112

Jesus had foretold and promised: "He will bear witness to me,...and you also are my witnesses." In the first discourse of Peter in Jerusalem this "witness" finds its clear beginning: it is the witness to Christ crucified and risen. The witness of the Spirit- Paraclete and of the Apostles. And in the very content of that first witness, the Spirit of truth, through the lips of Peter, "convinces the world concerning sin": first of all, concerning the sin which is the rejection of Christ even to his condemnation to death, to death on the Cross on Golgotha. Similar proclamations will be repeated, according to the text of the Acts of the Apostles, on other occasions and in various places.113

31. Beginning from this initial witness at Pentecost and for all future time the action of the Spirit of truth who "convinces the world concerning the sin" of the rejection of Christ is linked inseparably with the witness to be borne to the Paschal Mystery: the mystery of the Crucified and Risen One. And in this link the same "convincing concerning sin" reveals its own salvific dimension. For it is a "convincing" that has as its purpose not merely the accusation of the world and still less its condemnation. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to judge it and condemn it but to save it.114 This is emphasized in this first discourse, when Peter exclaims: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."115 And then, when those present ask Peter and the Apostles: "Brethren, what shall we do?" this is Peter's answer: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."116

In this way "convincing concerning sin" becomes at the same time a convincing concerning the remission of sins, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter in his discourse in Jerusalem calls people to conversion, as Jesus called his listeners to conversion at the beginning of his messianic activity.117 Conversion requires convincing of sin; it includes the interior judgment of the conscience, and this, being a proof of the action of the Spirit of truth in man's inmost being, becomes at the same time a new beginning of the bestowal of grace and love: "Receive the Holy Spirit."118 Thus in this "convincing concerning sin" we discover a double gift: the gift of the truth of conscience and the gift of the certainty of redemption. The Spirit of truth is the Counselor.

The convincing concerning sin, through the ministry of the apostolic kerygma in the early Church, is referred-under the impulse of the Spirit poured out at Pentecost-to the redemptive power of Christ crucified and risen. Thus the promise concerning the Holy Spirit made before Easter is fulfilled: "He will take what is mine and declare it to you." When therefore, during the Pentecost event, Peter speaks of the sin of those who "have not believed"119 and have sent Jesus of Nazareth to an ignominious death, he bears witness to victory over sin: a victory achieved, in a certain sense, through the greatest sin that man could commit: the killing of Jesus, the Son of God, consubstantial with the Father! Similarly, the death of the Son of God conquers human death: "I will be your death, O death,"120 as the sin of having crucified the Son of God "conquers" human sin! That sin which was committed in Jerusalem on Good Friday-and also every human sin. For the greatest sin on man's part is matched, in the heart of the Redeemer, by the oblation of supreme love that conquers the evil of all the sins of man. On the basis of this certainty the Church in the Roman liturgy does not hesitate to repeat every year, at the Easter Vigil, "O happy fault!" in the deacon's proclamation of the Resurrection when he sings the "Exsultet. "

32. However, no one but he himself, the Spirit of truth, can "convince the world, " man or the human conscience of this ineffable truth. He is the Spirit who "searches even the depths of God."121 Faced with the mystery of sin, we have to search "the depths of God" to their very depth. It is not enough to search the human conscience, the intimate mystery of man, but we have to penetrate the inner mystery of God, those "depths of God" that are summarized thus: to the Father-in the Son- through the Holy Spirit. It is precisely the Holy Spirit who "searches" the "depths of God, " and from them draws God's response to man's sin. With this response there closes the process of "convincing concerning sin, " as the event of Pentecost shows.

By convincing the "world" concerning the sin of Golgotha, concerning the death of the innocent Lamb, as happens on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit also convinces of every sin, committed in any place and at any moment in human history: for he demonstrates its relationship with the Cross of Christ. The "convincing" is the demonstration of the evil of sin, of every sin, in relation to the Cross of Christ. Sin, shown in this relationship, is recognized in the entire dimension of evil proper to it, through the "mysterium iniquitatis"122 which is hidden within it. Man does not know this dimension-he is absolutely ignorant of it apart from the Cross of Christ. So he cannot be "convinced" of it except by the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of truth but who is also the Counselor.

For sin, shown in relation to the cross of Christ, is at the same time identified in the full dimension of the "mysterium pietatis,"123 as indicated by the Post- Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*.124 Man is also

absolutely ignorant of this dimension of sin apart from the Cross Christ. And he cannot be "convinced" of this dimension either, except by the Holy Spirit: the one who "searches the depths of God."

3. The Witness Concerning the Beginning: the Original Reality of Sin 33. This is the dimension of sin that we find in the witness concerning the beginning, commented on in the Book of Genesis.¹²⁵ It is the sin that according to the revealed Word of God constitutes the principle and root of all the others. We find ourselves faced with the original reality of sin in human history and at the same time in the whole of the economy of salvation. It can be said that in this sin the "mysterium iniquitatis" has its beginning, but it can also be said that this is the sin concerning which the redemptive power of the "mysterium pietatis" becomes particularly clear and efficacious. This is expressed by St. Paul, when he contrasts the "disobedience" of the first Adam with the "obedience" of Christ, the second Adam: "Obedience unto death."¹²⁶

According to the witness concerning the beginning, sin in its original reality takes place in man's will-and conscience-first of all as "disobedience, " that is, as opposition of the will of man to the will of God. This original disobedience presupposes a rejection, or at least a turning away from the truth contained in the Word of God, who creates the world. This Word is the same Word who was "in the beginning with God, " who "was God, " and without whom "nothing has been made of all that is, " since "the world was made through him."¹²⁷ He is the Word who is also the eternal law, the source of every law which regulates the world and especially human acts. When therefore on the eve of his Passion Jesus Christ speaks of the sin of those who "do not believe in him, " in these words of his, full of sorrow, there is as it were a distant echo of that sin which in its original form is obscurely inscribed in the mystery of creation. For the one who is speaking is not only the Son of Man but the one who is also "the first-born of all creation, " "for in him all things were created...through him and for him."¹²⁸ In the light of this truth we can understand that the "disobedience" in the mystery of the beginning presupposes in a certain sense the same "non-faith, " that same "they have not believed" which will be repeated in the Paschal Mystery. As we have said, it is a matter of a rejection or at least a turning away from the truth contained in the Word of the Father. The rejection expresses itself in practice as "disobedience, " in an act committed as an effect of the temptation which comes from the "father of lies."¹²⁹ Therefore, at the root of human sin is the lie which is a radical rejection of the truth contained in the Word of the Father, through whom is expressed the loving omnipotence of the Creator: the omnipotence and also the love "of God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth."

34. "The Spirit of God, " who according to the biblical description of creation "was moving over the face of the water, " ¹³⁰ signifies the same "Spirit who searches the depths of God": "searches the depths of the Father and of the Word-Son in the mystery of creation. Not only is he the direct witness of their mutual love from which creation derives, but he himself is this love. He himself, as love, is the eternal uncreated gift. In him is the source and the beginning of every giving of gifts to creatures. The witness concerning the beginning, which we find in the whole of Revelation, beginning with the Book of Genesis, is unanimous on this point. To create means to call into existence from nothing: therefore, to create means to give existence. And if the visible world is created for man, therefore the world is given to man.¹³¹ And at the same time that same man in his own humanity receives as a gift a special "image and likeness" to God. This means not only rationality and freedom as constitutive properties of human nature, but also, from the very beginning, the capacity of having a personal relationship with God, as "I" and "you, " and therefore the capacity of having a covenant, which will take place in God's salvific communication with man. Against the background of the "image and likeness" of God, "the gift of the Spirit" ultimately means a call to friendship, in which the transcendent "depths of God" become in some way opened to participation on the part of man. The Second Vatican Council teaches; "The invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself."¹³²

35. The Spirit, therefore, who "searches everything, even the depths of God, " knows from the beginning "the secrets of man."¹³³ For this reason he alone can fully "convince concerning the sin" that happened at the beginning, that sin which is the root of all other sins and the source of man's sinfulness on earth, a source which never ceases to be active. The Spirit of truth knows the original reality of the sin caused in the will of man by the "father of lies, " he who already "has been judged."¹³⁴ The Holy Spirit therefore convinces the world of sin in connection with this "judgment, " but by constantly guiding toward the "righteousness" that has been revealed to man together with the Cross of Christ: through "obedience unto death."¹³⁵

Only the Holy Spirit can convince concerning the sin of the human beginning, precisely he who is the love of the Father and of the Son, he who is gift, whereas the sin of the human beginning consists in untruthfulness and in the rejection of the gift and the love which determine the beginning of the world and of man.

36. According to the witness concerning the beginning which we find in the Scriptures and in Tradition, after the first (and also more complete) description in the Book of Genesis, sin in its original form is understood as "disobedience, " and this means simply and directly transgression of a prohibition laid down by God.¹³⁶ But in the light of the whole context it is also obvious that the ultimate roots of this disobedience are to be sought in the whole real situation of man. Having been called into existence, the human being-man and woman-is a creature. The "image of God, " consisting in rationality and freedom, expresses the greatness and dignity of the human subject, who is a person. But this personal subject is also always a creature: in his existence and essence he depends on the Creator. According to the Book of Genesis, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" was to express and constantly remind man of the "limit" impassable for a created being. God's prohibition is to be understood in this sense: the Creator forbids man and woman

to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The words of the enticement, that is to say the temptation, as formulated in the sacred text, are an inducement to transgress this prohibition-that is to say, to go beyond that "limit": "When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ["like gods"], knowing good and evil."137

"Disobedience" means precisely going beyond that limit, which remains impassable to the will and the freedom of man as a created being. For God the Creator is the one definitive source of the moral order in the world created by him. Man cannot decide by himself what is good and what is evil-cannot "know good and evil, like God." In the created world God indeed remains the first and sovereign source for deciding about good and evil, through the intimate truth of being, which is the reflection of the Word, the eternal Son, consubstantial with the Father. To man, created to the image of God, the Holy Spirit gives the gift of conscience, so that in this conscience the image may faithfully reflect its model, which is both Wisdom and eternal Law, the source of the moral order in man and in the world. "Disobedience, " as the original dimension of sin, means the rejection of this source, through man's claim to become an independent and exclusive source for deciding about good and evil. The Spirit who "searches the depths of God, " and who at the same time is for man the light of conscience and the source of the moral order, knows in all its fullness this dimension of the sin inscribed in the mystery of man's beginning. And the Spirit does not cease "convincing the world of it" in connection with the Cross of Christ on Golgotha.

37. According to the witness of the beginning, God in creation has revealed himself as omnipotence, which is love. At the same time he has revealed to man that, as the "image and likeness" of his Creator, he is called to participate in truth and love. This participation means a life in union with God, who is "eternal life."138 But man, under the influence of the "father of lies, " has separated himself from this participation.

To what degree? Certainly not to the degree of the sin of a pure spirit, to the degree of the sin of Satan. The human spirit is incapable of reaching such a degree.139 In the very description given in Genesis it is easy to see the difference of degree between the "breath of evil" on the part of the one who "has sinned (or remains in sin) from the beginning"140 and already "has been judged, "141 and the evil of disobedience on the part of man.

Man's disobedience, nevertheless, always means a turning away from God, and in a certain sense the closing up of human freedom in his regard. It also means a certain opening of this freedom-of the human mind and will-to the one who is the "father of lies." This act of conscious choice is not only "disobedience" but also involves a certain consent to the motivation which was contained in the first temptation to sin and which is unceasingly renewed during the whole history of man on earth: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Here we find ourselves at the very center of what could be called the "anti-Word, " that is to say the "anti-truth:" For the truth about man becomes falsified: who man is and what are the impassable limits of his being and freedom. This "anti-truth" is possible because at the same time there is a complete falsification of the truth about who God is. God the Creator is placed in a state of suspicion, indeed of accusation, in the mind of the creature. For the first time in human history there appears the perverse "genius of suspicion." He seeks to "falsify" Good itself; the absolute Good, which precisely in the work of creation has manifested itself as the Good which gives in an inexpressible way: as *bonum diffusivum sui*, as creative love. Who can completely "convince concerning sin, " or concerning this motivation of man's original disobedience, except the one who alone is the gift and the source of all giving of gifts, except the Spirit, who "searches the depths of God" and is the love of the Father and the Son?

38. For in spite of all the witness of creation and of the salvific economy inherent in it, the spirit of darkness142 is capable of showing God as an enemy of his own creature, and in the first place as an enemy of man, as a source of danger and threat to man. In this way Satan manages to sow in man's soul the seed of opposition to the one who "from the beginning" would be considered as man's enemy-and not as Father. Man is challenged to become the adversary of God!

The analysis of sin in its original dimension indicates that, through the influence of the "father of lies, " throughout the history of humanity there will be a constant pressure on man to reject God, even to the point of hating him: "Love of self to the point of contempt for God, " as St. Augustine puts it.143 Man will be inclined to see in God primarily a limitation of himself, and not the source of his own freedom and the fullness of good. We see this confirmed in the modern age, when the atheistic ideologies seek to root out religion on the grounds that religion causes the radical "alienation" of man, as if man were dispossessed of his own humanity when, accepting the idea of God, he attributes to God what belongs to man, and exclusively to man! Hence a process of thought and historico-sociological practice in which the rejection of God has reached the point of declaring his "death." An absurdity, both in concept and expression! But the ideology of the "death of God" is more a threat to man, as the Second Vatican Council indicates when it analyzes the question of the "independence of earthly affairs" and writes: "For without the Creator the creature would disappear...when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible."144 The ideology of the "death of God" easily demonstrates in its effects that on the "theoretical and practical" levels it is the ideology of the "death of man."

4. The Spirit Who Transforms Suffering into Salvific Love

39. The Spirit who searches the depths of God was called by Jesus in his discourse in the Upper Room the Paraclete. For from the beginning the Spirit "is invoked"¹⁴⁵ in order to "convince the world concerning sin." He is invoked in a definitive way through the Cross of Christ. Convincing concerning sin means showing the evil that sin contains, and this is equivalent to revealing the mystery of iniquity. It is not possible to grasp the evil of sin in all its sad reality without "searching the depths of God." From the very beginning, the obscure mystery of sin has appeared in the world against the background of a reference to the Creator of human freedom. Sin has appeared as an act of the will of the creature-man contrary to the will of God, to the salvific will of God; indeed, sin has appeared in opposition to the truth, on the basis of the lie which has now been definitively "judged": the lie that has placed in a state of accusation, a state of

permanent suspicion, creative and salvific love itself. Man has followed the "father of lies, " setting himself up in opposition to the Father of life and the Spirit of truth.

Therefore, will not "convincing concerning sin" also have to mean revealing suffering? Revealing the pain, unimaginable and inexpressible, which on account of sin the Book of Genesis in its anthropomorphic vision seems to glimpse in the "depths of God" and in a certain sense in the very heart of the ineffable Trinity?

The Church, taking her inspiration from Revelation, believes and professes that sin is an offense against God. What corresponds, in the inscrutable intimacy of the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, to this "offense, " this rejection of the Spirit who is love and gift? The concept of God as the necessarily most perfect being certainly excludes from God any pain deriving from deficiencies or wounds; but in the "depths of God" there is a Father's love that, faced with man's sin, in the language of the Bible reacts so deeply as to say: "I am sorry that I have made him."¹⁴⁶ "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.... And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth.... The Lord said: 'I am sorry that I have made them.'"¹⁴⁷ But more often the Sacred Book speaks to us of a Father who feels compassion for man, as though sharing his pain. In a word, this inscrutable and indescribable fatherly "pain" will bring about above all the wonderful economy of redemptive love in Jesus Christ, so that through the *mysterium pietatis* love can reveal itself in the history of man as stronger than sin. So that the "gift" may prevail!

The Holy Spirit, who in the words of Jesus "convincing concerning sin, " is the love of the Father and the Son, and as such is the Trinitarian gift, and at the same time the eternal source of every divine giving of gifts to creatures. Precisely in him we can picture as personified and actualized in a transcendent way that mercy which the patristic and theological tradition following the line of the Old and New Testaments, attributes to God. In man, mercy includes sorrow and compassion for the misfortunes of one's neighbor. In God, the Spirit- Love expresses the consideration of human sin in a fresh outpouring of salvific love. From God, in the unity of the Father with the Son, the economy of salvation is born, the economy which fills the history of man with the gifts of the Redemption. Whereas sin, by rejecting love, has caused the "suffering"

of man which in some way has affected the whole of creation, ¹⁴⁸ the Holy Spirit will enter into human and cosmic suffering with a new outpouring of love, which will redeem the world. And on the lips of Jesus the Redeemer, in whose humanity the "suffering" of God is concretized, there will be heard a word which manifests the eternal love full of mercy: "Misereor." ¹⁴⁹ Thus, on the part of the Holy Spirit, "convincing of sin" becomes a manifestation before creation, which is "subjected to futility, " and above all in the depth of human consciences, that sin is conquered through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who has become even "unto death" the obedient servant who, by making up for man's disobedience, accomplishes the redemption of the world. In this way the spirit of truth, the Paraclete, "convincing concerning sin."

40. The redemptive value of Christ's sacrifice is expressed in very significant words by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, who after recalling the sacrifices of the Old Covenant in which "the blood of goats and bulls..." purifies in "the flesh, " adds: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"¹⁵⁰ Though we are aware of other possible interpretations, our considerations on the presence of the Holy Spirit in the whole of Christ's life lead us to see this text as an invitation to reflect on the presence of the same Spirit also in the redemptive sacrifice of the Incarnate Word.

To begin with we reflect on the first words dealing with this sacrifice, and then separately on the "purification of conscience" which it accomplishes. For it is a sacrifice offered "through the eternal Spirit, " that "derives" from it the power to "convince concerning sin." It is the same Holy Spirit, whom, according to the promise made in the Upper Room, Jesus Christ "will bring" to the Apostles on the day of his Resurrection, when he presents himself to them with the wounds of the crucifixion, and whom "he will give" them "for the remission of sins": "Receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."¹⁵¹

We know that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, " as Simon Peter said in the house of the centurion Cornelius.¹⁵² We know of the Paschal Mystery of his "departure, " from the Gospel of John. The words of the Letter to the Hebrews now explain to us how Christ "offered himself without blemish to God, " and how he did this "with an eternal Spirit." In the sacrifice of the Son of Man the Holy Spirit is present and active just as he acted in Jesus' conception, in his coming into the world, in his hidden life and in his public ministry. According to the Letter to the Hebrews, on the way to his "departure" through Gethsemani and Golgotha, the same Christ Jesus in his own humanity opened himself totally to this action of the Spirit-Paraclete, who from suffering enables eternal salvific

love to spring forth. Therefore he "was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."¹⁵³

In this way this Letter shows how humanity, subjected to sin, in the descendants of the first Adam, in Jesus Christ became perfectly subjected to God and united to him, and at the same time full of compassion towards men. Thus there is a new humanity, which in Jesus Christ through the suffering of the Cross has returned to the love which was betrayed by Adam through sin. This new humanity is discovered precisely in the divine source of the original outpouring of gifts: in the Spirit, who "searches...the depths of God" and is himself love and gift.

The Son of God Jesus Christ, as man, in the ardent prayer of his Passion, enabled the Holy Spirit, who had already penetrated the inmost depths of his humanity, to transform that humanity into a perfect sacrifice through the act of his death as the victim of love on the Cross. He made this offering by himself. As the one priest, "he offered himself without blemish to God:¹⁵⁴ In his humanity he was worthy to become this sacrifice, for he alone was "without blemish." But he offered it "through the eternal Spirit, " which means that the Holy Spirit acted in a special way in this absolute self-giving of the Son of Man, in order to transform this suffering into redemptive love.

41. The Old Testament on several occasions speaks of "fire from heaven" which burnt the oblations presented by men.¹⁵⁵ By analogy one can say that the Holy Spirit is the "fire from heaven" which works in the depth of the mystery of the Cross. Proceeding from the Father, he directs toward the Father the sacrifice of the Son, bringing it into the divine reality of the Trinitarian communion. If sin caused suffering, now the pain of God in Christ crucified acquires through the Holy Spirit its full human expression. Thus there is a paradoxical mystery of love: in Christ there suffers a God who has been rejected by his own creature: "They do not believe in me!"; but at the same time, from the depth of this suffering-and indirectly from the depth of the very sin "of not having believed"-the Spirit draws a new measure of the gift made to man and to creation from the beginning. In the depth of the mystery of the Cross, love is at work, that love which brings man back again to share in the life that is in God himself.

The Holy Spirit as Love and Gift comes down, in a certain sense, into the very heart of the sacrifice which is offered on the Cross. Referring here to the biblical tradition, we can say: He consumes this sacrifice with the fire of the love which unites the Son with the Father in the Trinitarian communion. And since the sacrifice of the Cross is an act proper to Christ, also in this sacrifice he "receives" the Holy Spirit. He receives the Holy Spirit in such a way that afterwards-and he alone with God the Father- can "give him" to the Apostles, to the Church, to humanity. He alone "sends" the Spirit from the Father.¹⁵⁶ He alone presents himself before the Apostles in the Upper Room, "breathes upon them" and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, "¹⁵⁷ as John the Baptist had foretold: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."¹⁵⁸ With those words of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is revealed and at the same time made present as the Love that works in the depths of the Paschal Mystery, as the source of the salvific power of the Cross of Christ, and as the gift of new and eternal life.

This truth about the Holy Spirit finds daily expression in the Roman liturgy, when before Communion the priest pronounces those significant words; "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit your death brought life to the world...." And in the Third Eucharistic Prayer, referring to the same salvific plan, the priest asks God that the Holy Spirit may "make us an everlasting gift to you."

5. The Blood that Purifies the Conscience

42. We have said that, at the climax of the Paschal Mystery, the Holy Spirit is definitively revealed and made present in a new way. The Risen Christ says to the Apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit." Thus the Holy Spirit is revealed, for the words of Christ constitute the confirmation of what he had promised and foretold during the discourse in the Upper Room. And with this the Paraclete is also made present in a new way. In fact, he was already at work from the beginning in the mystery of creation and throughout the history of the Old Covenant of God with man. His action was fully confirmed by the sending of the Son of Man as the Messiah, who came in the power of the Holy Spirit. At the climax of Jesus' messianic mission, the Holy Spirit becomes present in the Paschal Mystery in all his divine subjectivity: as the one who is now to continue the salvific work rooted in the sacrifice of the Cross. Of course Jesus entrusts this work to humanity: to the Apostles, to the Church. Nevertheless, in these men and through them the Holy Spirit remains the transcendent principal agent of the accomplishment of this work in the human spirit and in the history of the world: the invisible and at the same time omnipresent Paraclete! The Spirit who "blows where he wills."¹⁵⁹

The words of the Risen Christ on the "first day of the week" give particular emphasis to the presence of the Paraclete-Counselor as the one who "convinces the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment." For it is only in this relationship that it is possible to explain the words which Jesus directly relates to the "gift" of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles. He says: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ¹⁶⁰ Jesus confers on the Apostles the power to forgive sins, so that they may pass it on to their successors in the Church. But this power granted to men presupposes and includes the saving action of the Holy Spirit. By becoming "the light of hearts," ¹⁶¹ that is to say the light of consciences, the Holy Spirit "convinces concerning sin, " which is to say, he makes man realize his own evil and at the same time directs him toward what is good. Thanks to the multiplicity of the Spirit's gifts, by reason of which he is invoked as the "sevenfold one, " every kind of human sin

can be reached by God's saving power. In reality-as St. Bonaventure says-"by virtue of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit all evils are destroyed and all good things are produced."¹⁶²

Thus the conversion of the human heart, which is an indispensable condition for the forgiveness of sins, is brought about by the influence of the Counselor. Without a true conversion, which implies inner contrition, and without a sincere and firm purpose of amendment, sins remain "unforgiven," in the words of Jesus, and with him in the Tradition of the Old and New Covenants. For the first words uttered by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, according to the Gospel of Mark, are these: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

"¹⁶³ A confirmation of this exhortation is the "convincing concerning sin" that the Holy Spirit undertakes in a new way by virtue of the Redemption accomplished by the Blood of the Son of Man. Hence the Letter to the Hebrews says that this "blood purifies the conscience."¹⁶⁴ It therefore, so to speak, opens to the Holy Spirit the door into man's inmost being, namely into the sanctuary of human consciences.

43. The Second Vatican Council mentioned the Catholic teaching on conscience when it spoke about man's vocation and in particular about the dignity of the human person. It is precisely the conscience in particular which determines this dignity. For the conscience is "the most secret core and sanctuary of a man, where he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths." It "can...speak to his heart more specifically: do this, shun that." This capacity to command what is good and to forbid evil, placed in man by the Creator, is the main characteristic of the personal subject. But at the same time, "in the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience."¹⁶⁵ The conscience therefore is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it a principle of obedience vis-a-vis the objective norm which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behavior, as from the passage of the Book of Genesis which we have already considered. ¹⁶⁶ Precisely in this sense the conscience is the "secret sanctuary" in which "God's voice echoes." The conscience is "the voice of God," even when man recognizes in it nothing more than the principle of the moral order which it is not humanly possible to doubt, even without any direct reference to the Creator. It is precisely in reference to this that the conscience always finds its foundation and justification.

The Gospel's "convincing concerning sin" under the influence of the Spirit of truth can be accomplished in man in no other way except through the conscience. If the conscience is upright, it serves "to resolve according to truth the moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships"; then "persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by the objective standards of moral conduct."¹⁶⁷

A result of an upright conscience is, first of all, to call good and evil by their proper name, as we read in the same Pastoral Constitution: "whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons"; and having called by name the many different sins that are so frequent and widespread in our time, the Constitution adds: "All these things and others of their kind are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator"¹⁶⁸

By calling by their proper name the sins that most dishonor man, and by showing that they are a moral evil that weighs negatively on any balance-sheet of human progress, the Council also describes all this as a stage in "a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness," which characterizes "all of human life, whether individual or collective."¹⁶⁹ The 1983 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on reconciliation and penance specified even more clearly the personal and social significance of human sin.¹⁷⁰

44. In the Upper Room, on the eve of his Passion and again on the evening of Easter Day, Jesus Christ spoke of the Holy Spirit as the one who bears witness that in human history sin continues to exist. Yet sin has been subjected to the saving power of the Redemption. "Convincing the world concerning sin" does not end with the fact that sin is called by its right name and identified for what it is throughout its entire range. In convincing the world concerning sin the Spirit of truth comes into contact with the voice of human consciences. By following this path we come to a demonstration of the roots of sin, which are to be found in man's inmost being, as described by the same Pastoral Constitution: "The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance rooted in the heart of man. For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways. On the other, he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions, he is constantly forced to choose among them and to renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would."¹⁷¹ The Conciliar text is here referring to the well-known words of St. Paul.¹⁷² The "convincing concerning sin" which accompanies the human conscience in every careful reflection upon itself thus leads to the discovery of sin's roots in man, as also to the discovery of the way in which the conscience has been conditioned in the course of history. In this way we discover that original reality of sin of which we have already spoken. The Holy Spirit "convince concerning sin" in relation to the mystery of man's origins, showing the fact that man is a created being, and therefore

in complete ontological and ethical dependence upon the Creator. The Holy Spirit reminds us, at the same time, of the hereditary sinfulness of human nature. But the Holy Spirit the Counselor "convinces concerning sin" always in relation to the Cross of Christ. In the context of this relationship Christianity rejects any "fatalism" regarding sin. As the Council teaches: "A monumental struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man. The battle was joined from the very origins of the world and will continue until the last day, as the Lord has attested."¹⁷³ "But the Lord himself came to free and strengthen man."¹⁷⁴ Man, therefore, far from allowing himself to be "ensnared" in his sinful condition, by relying upon the voice of his own conscience "is obliged to wrestle constantly if he is to cling to what is good. Nor can he achieve his own interior integrity without valiant efforts and the help of God's grace."¹⁷⁵ The Council rightly sees sin as a factor of alienation which weighs heavily on man's personal and social life. But at the same time it never tires of reminding us of the possibility of victory.

45. The Spirit of truth, who "convinces the world concerning sin," comes into contact with that laborious effort on the part of the human conscience which the Conciliar texts speak of so graphically. This laborious effort of conscience also determines the paths of human conversion: turning one's back on sin, in order to restore truth and love in man's very heart. We know that recognizing evil in ourselves sometimes demands a great effort. We know that conscience not only commands and forbids but also Judges in the light of interior dictates and prohibitions. It is also the source of remorse: man suffers interiorly because of the evil he has committed. Is not this suffering, as it were, a distant echo of that "repentance at having created man" which in anthropomorphic language the Sacred Book attributes to God? Is it not an echo of that "reprobation" which is interiorized in the "heart" of the Trinity and by virtue of the eternal love is translated into the suffering of the Cross, into Christ's obedience unto death? When the Spirit of truth permits the human conscience to share in that suffering, the suffering of the conscience becomes particularly profound, but also particularly salvific. Then, by means of an act of perfect contrition, the authentic conversion of the heart is accomplished: this is the evangelical "metanoia."

The laborious effort of the human heart, the laborious effort of the conscience in which this "metanoia," or conversion, takes place, is a reflection of that process whereby reprobation is transformed into salvific love, a love which is capable of suffering. The hidden giver of this saving power is the Holy Spirit: he whom the Church calls "the light of consciences" penetrates and fills "the depths of the human heart."¹⁷⁶ Through just such a conversion in the Holy Spirit a person becomes open to forgiveness, to the remission of sins. And in all this wonderful dynamism of conversion-forgiveness there is confirmed the truth of what St. Augustine writes concerning the mystery of man, when he comments on the words of the Psalm: "The abyss calls to the abyss."¹⁷⁷ Precisely with regard to these "unfathomable depths" of man, of the human conscience, the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit is accomplished. The Holy Spirit "comes" by virtue of Christ's "departure" in the Paschal Mystery: he comes in each concrete case of conversion-forgiveness, by virtue of the sacrifice of the Cross. For in this sacrifice "the blood of Christ...purifies your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."¹⁷⁸ Thus there are continuously fulfilled the words about the Holy Spirit as "another Counselor," the words spoken in the Upper Room to the Apostles and indirectly spoken to everyone: "You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."¹⁷⁹

6. The Sin Against the Holy Spirit

46. Against the background of what has been said so far, certain other words of Jesus, shocking and disturbing ones, become easier to understand. We might call them the words of "unforgiveness." They are reported for us by the Synoptics in connection with a particular sin which is called "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." This is how they are reported in their three versions:

Matthew: "Whoever says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."¹⁸⁰

Mark: "All sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."¹⁸¹

Luke: "Every one who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven."¹⁸²

Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit unforgivable? How should this blasphemy be understood? St. Thomas Aquinas replies that it is a question of a sin that is "unforgivable by its very nature, insofar as it excludes the elements through which the forgiveness of sin takes place."¹⁸³

According to such an exegesis, "blasphemy" does not properly consist in offending against the Holy Spirit in words; it consists rather in the refusal to accept the salvation which God offers to man through the Holy Spirit, working through the power of the Cross. If man rejects the "convincing concerning sin" which comes from the Holy Spirit and which has the power to save, he also rejects the "coming" of the Counselor-that "coming" which was accomplished in the Paschal Mystery, in union with the redemptive power of Christ's Blood: the Blood which "purifies the conscience from dead works."

We know that the result of such a purification is the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, whoever rejects the Spirit and the Blood remains in "dead works," in sin. And the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit consists precisely in the radical refusal to accept this forgiveness, of which he is the intimate giver and which presupposes the genuine conversion

which he brings about in the conscience. If Jesus says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven either in this life or in the next, it is because this "non-forgiveness" is linked, as to its cause, to "non-repentance," in other words to the radical refusal to be converted. This means the refusal to come to the sources of Redemption, which nevertheless remain "always" open in the economy of salvation in which the mission of the Holy Spirit is accomplished. The Spirit has infinite power to draw from these sources: "he will take what is mine," Jesus said. In this way he brings to completion in human souls the work of the Redemption accomplished by Christ, and distributes its fruits. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, then, is the sin committed by the person who claims to have a "right" to persist in evil-in any sin at all-and who thus rejects Redemption. One closes oneself up in sin, thus making impossible one's conversion, and consequently the remission of sins, which one considers not essential or not important for one's life. This is a state of spiritual ruin, because blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not allow one to escape from one's self-imposed imprisonment and open oneself to the divine sources of the purification of consciences and of the remission of sins.

47. The action of the Spirit of truth, which works toward salvific "convincing concerning sin," encounters in a person in this condition an interior resistance, as it were an impenetrability of conscience, a state of mind which could be described as fixed by reason of a free choice. This is what Sacred Scripture usually calls "hardness of heart."¹⁸⁴ In our own time this attitude of mind and heart is perhaps reflected in the loss of the sense of sin, to which the Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* devotes many pages.¹⁸⁵ Pope Pius XII had already declared that "the sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin,"¹⁸⁶ and this loss goes hand in hand with the "loss of the sense of God." In the Exhortation just mentioned we read: "In fact, God is the origin and the supreme end of man, and man carries in himself a divine seed. Hence it is the reality of God that reveals and illustrates the mystery of man. It is therefore vain to hope that there will take root a sense of sin against man and against human values, if there is no sense of offense against God, namely the true sense of sin."¹⁸⁷

Hence the Church constantly implores from God the grace that integrity of human consciences will not be lost, that their healthy sensitivity with regard to good and evil will not be blunted. This integrity and sensitivity are profoundly linked to the intimate action of the Spirit of truth. In this light the exhortations of St. Paul assume particular eloquence: "Do not quench the Spirit"; "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit."¹⁸⁸ But above all the Church constantly implores with the greatest fervor that there will be no increase in the world of the sin that the Gospel calls "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." Rather, she prays that it will decrease in human souls-and consequently in the forms and structures of society itself-and that it will make room for that openness of conscience necessary for the saving action of the Holy Spirit. The Church prays that the dangerous sin against the Spirit will give way to a holy readiness to accept his mission as the Counselor, when he comes to "convince the world concerning sin, and righteousness and judgment."

48. In his farewell discourse Jesus linked these three areas of "convincing" as elements of the mission of the Paraclete: sin, righteousness and judgment. They mark out the area of that *mysterium pietatis* that in human history is opposed to sin, to the mystery of iniquity.¹⁸⁹ On the one hand, as St. Augustine says, there is "love of self to the point of contempt of God"; on the other, "love-of God to the point of contempt of self."¹⁹⁰ The Church constantly lifts up her prayer and renders her service in order that the history of consciences and the history of societies in the great human family will not descend toward the pole of sin, by the rejection of God's commandments "to the point of contempt of God," but rather will rise toward the love in which the Spirit that gives life is revealed.

Those who let themselves be "convinced concerning sin" by the Holy Spirit, also allow themselves to be convinced "concerning righteousness and judgment." The Spirit of truth who helps human beings, human consciences, to know the truth concerning sin, at the same time enables them to know the truth about that righteousness which entered human history in Jesus Christ. In this way, those who are "convinced concerning sin" and who are converted through the action of the Counselor are, in a sense, led out of the range of the "judgment" that "judgment" by which "the ruler of this world is judged."¹⁹¹ In the depths of its divine-human mystery, conversion means the breaking of every fetter by which sin binds man to the whole of the mystery of iniquity.

Those who are converted, therefore, are led by the Holy Spirit out of the range of the "judgment," and introduced into that righteousness which is in Christ Jesus, and is in him precisely because he receives it from the Father,¹⁹² as a reflection of the holiness of the Trinity. This is the righteousness of the Gospel and of the Redemption, the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount and of the Cross, which effects the purifying of the conscience through the Blood of the Lamb. It is the righteousness which the Father gives to the Son and to all those united with him in truth and in love.

In this righteousness the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, who "convinces the world concerning sin," reveals himself and makes himself present in man as the Spirit of eternal life.

PART III - THE SPIRIT WHO GIVES LIFE

1. Reason for the Jubilee of the Year 2000: Christ Who Was Conceived of the Holy Spirit

49. The Church's mind and heart turn to the Holy Spirit as this twentieth century draws to a close and the third Millennium since the coming of Jesus Christ into the world approaches, and as we look toward the great Jubilee with

which the Church will celebrate the event. For according to the computation of time this coming is measured as an event belonging to the history of man on earth. The measurement of time in common use defines years, centuries and millennia according to whether they come before or after the birth of Christ. But it must also be remembered that for us Christians this event indicates, as St. Paul says, the "fullness of time,"¹⁹³ because in it human history has been wholly permeated by the "measurement" of God himself: a transcendent presence of the "eternal now." He "who is, who was, and who is to come"; he who is "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."¹⁹⁴ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."¹⁹⁵ "When the time had finally come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman...so that we might receive adoption as sons."¹⁹⁶ And this Incarnation of the Son-Word came about "by the power of the Holy Spirit."

The two Evangelists to whom we owe the narrative of the birth and infancy of Jesus of Nazareth express themselves on this matter in an identical way. According to Luke, at the Annunciation of the birth of Jesus, Mary asks: "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" and she receives this answer: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you: therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."¹⁹⁷

Matthew narrates directly: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit."¹⁹⁸ Disturbed by this turn of events, Joseph receives the following explanation in a dream: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."¹⁹⁹

Thus from the beginning the Church confesses the mystery of the Incarnation, this key-mystery of the faith, by making reference to the Holy Spirit. The Apostles' Creed says: "He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." Similarly, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed professed: "By the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man."

"By the power of the Holy Spirit" there became man he whom the Church, in the words of the same Creed, professes to be the Son, of the same substance as the Father: "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten, not made." He was made man by becoming "incarnate from the Virgin Mary." This is what happened when "the fullness of time had come."

50. The great Jubilee at the close of the second Millennium, for which the Church is already preparing, has a directly Christological aspect: for it is a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. At the same time it has a pneumatological aspect, since the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished "by the power of the Holy Spirit." It was "brought about" by that Spirit-consubstantial with the Father and the Son-who, in the absolute mystery of the Triune God, is the Person-love, the uncreated gift, who is the eternal source of every gift that comes from God in the order of creation, the direct principle and, in a certain sense, the subject of God's self-communication in the order of grace. The mystery of the Incarnation constitutes the climax of this giving, this divine self-communication.

The conception and birth of Jesus Christ are in fact the greatest work accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the history of creation and salvation: the supreme grace "the grace of union," source of every other grace, as St. Thomas explains.²⁰⁰ The great Jubilee refer to this work and also-if we penetrate its depths-to the author of this work, to the person of the Holy Spirit.

For the "fullness of time" is matched by a particular fullness of the self-communication of the Triune God in the Holy Spirit. "By the power of the Holy Spirit" the mystery of the "hypostatic union" is brought about-that is, the union of the divine nature and the human nature, of the divinity and the humanity in the one Person of the Word-Son. When at the moment of the Annunciation Mary utters her "fiat": "Be it done unto me according to your word,"²⁰¹ she conceives in a virginal way a man, the Son of Man, who is the Son of God. By means of this "humanization" of the Word-Son the self-communication of God reaches its definitive fullness in the history of creation and salvation. This fullness acquires a special wealth and expressiveness in the text of John's Gospel: "The Word became flesh."²⁰² The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is "flesh": the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The "first-born of all creation,"²⁰³ becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also "flesh" ²⁰⁴-and in this reality with all "flesh," with the whole of creation.

51. All this is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, and so is part of the great Jubilee to come. The Church cannot prepare for the Jubilee in any other way than in the Holy Spirit. What was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit "in the fullness of time" can only through the Spirit's power now emerge from the memory of the Church. By his power it can be made present in the new phase of man's history on earth: the year 2000 from the birth of Christ.

The Holy Spirit, who with his power overshadowed the virginal body of Mary, bringing about in her the beginning of her divine Motherhood, at the same time made her heart perfectly obedient to that self-communication of God which surpassed every human idea and faculty. "Blessed is she who believed!"²⁰⁵ thus Mary is greeted by her cousin Elizabeth, herself "full of the Holy Spirit."²⁰⁶ In the words of greeting addressed to her "who believed" we seem to detect a distant (but in fact very close) contrast with all those about whom Christ will say that "they do not believe."²⁰⁷ Mary entered the history of the salvation of the world through the obedience of faith. And faith, in its deepest essence, is the openness of the human heart to the gift: to God's self-communication in the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes: "The

Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."208 When the Triune; God opens himself to man in the Holy Spirit, this opening of God reveals and also gives to the human creature the fullness of freedom. This fullness was manifested in a sublime way precisely through the faith of Mary, through the "obedience of faith"209: truly, "Blessed is she who believed!"

2. Reason for the Jubilee: Grace Has Been Made Manifest

52. In the mystery of the Incarnation the work of the Spirit "who gives life" reaches its highest point. It is not possible to give life, which in its fullest form is in God, except by making it the life of a Man, as Christ is in his humanity endowed with personhood by the Word in the hypostatic union. And at the same time, with the mystery of the Incarnation there opens in a new way the source of this divine life in the history of mankind: the Holy Spirit. The Word, "the first-born of all creation, " becomes "the first-born of many brethren."210 And thus he also becomes the head of the Body which is the Church, which will be born on the Cross and revealed on the day of Pentecost-and in the Church, he becomes the head of humanity: of the people of every nation, every race, every country and culture, every language and continent, all called to salvation. "The Word became flesh, (that Word in whom) was life and the life was the light of men...to all who received him he gave the power to become the children of God."211 But all this was accomplished and is unceasingly accomplished "by the power of the Holy Spirit."

For as St. Paul teaches, "all who are led by the Spirit of God" are "children of God."212 The filiation of divine adoption is born in man on the basis of the mystery of the Incarnation, therefore through Christ the eternal Son. But the birth, or rebirth, happens when God the Father "sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts."213 Then "we receive a spirit of adopted sons by which we cry 'Abba, Father!'"214 Hence the divine filiation planted in the human soul through sanctifying grace is the work of the Holy Spirit. "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."215 Sanctifying grace is the principle and source of man's new life: divine, supernatural life

The giving of this new life is as it were God's definitive answer to the Psalmist's words, which in a way echo the voice of all creatures: "When you send forth your Spirit, they shall be created; and you shall renew the face of the earth."216 He who in the mystery of creation gives life to man and the cosmos in its many different forms, visible and invisible, again renews this life through the mystery of the Incarnation. Creation is thus completed by the Incarnation and since that moment is permeated by the powers of the Redemption, powers which fill humanity and all creation. This is what we are told by St. Paul, whose cosmic and theological vision seems to repeat the words of the ancient Psalm: creation "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, "217 that is, those whom God has "foreknown" and whom he "has predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."218 Thus there is a supernatural "adoption, " of which the source is the Holy Spirit, love and gift. As such he is given to man. And in the superabundance of the uncreated gift there begins in the heart of all human beings that particular created gift whereby they "become partakers of the divine nature."219 Thus human life becomes permeated, through participation, by the divine life, and itself acquires a divine, supernatural dimension. There is granted the new life, in which as a sharer in the mystery of Incarnation "man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit."220 Thus there is a close relationship between the Spirit who gives life and sanctifying grace and the manifold supernatural vitality which derives from it in man: between the uncreated Spirit and the created human spirit.

53. All this may be said to fall within the scope of the great Jubilee mentioned above. For we must go beyond the historical dimension of the event considered in its surface value. Through the Christological content of the event we have to reach the pneumatological dimension, seeing with the eyes of faith the two thousand years of the action of the Spirit of truth, who down the centuries has drawn from the treasures of the Redemption achieved by Christ and given new life to human beings, bringing about in them adoption in the only-begotten Son, sanctifying them, so that they can repeat with St. Paul: "We have received...the Spirit which is from God."221

But as we follow this reason for the Jubilee, we cannot limit ourselves to the two thousand years which have passed since the birth of Christ. We need to go further back, to embrace the whole of the action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ-from the beginning, throughout the world, and especially in the economy of the Old Covenant. For this action has been exercised, in every place and at every time, indeed in every individual, according to the eternal plan of salvation, whereby this action was to be closely linked with the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, which in its turn exercised its influence on those who believed in the future coming of Christ. This is attested to especially in the Letter to the Ephesians.222 Grace, therefore, bears within itself both a Christological aspect and a pneumatological one, which becomes evident above all in those who expressly accept Christ: "In him [in Christ] you...were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it."223

But, still within the perspective of the great Jubilee, we need to look further and go further afield, knowing that "the wind blows where it wills, " according to the image used by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus.224 The Second Vatican Council, centered primarily on the theme of the Church, reminds us of the Holy Spirit's activity also "outside the visible body of the Church." The council speaks precisely of "all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought

to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal Mystery."²²⁵

54. "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."²²⁶ These words were spoken by Jesus in another conversation, the one with the Samaritan woman. The great Jubilee to be celebrated at the end of this Millennium and at the beginning of the next ought to constitute a powerful call to all those who "worship God in spirit and truth." It should be for everyone a special occasion for meditating on the mystery of the Triune God, who in himself is wholly transcendent with regard to the world, especially the visible world. For he is absolute Spirit, "God is spirit"²²⁷; and also, in such a marvelous way, he is not only close to this world but present in it, and in a sense immanent, penetrating it and giving it life from within. This is especially true in relation to man: God is present in the intimacy of man's being, in his mind, conscience and heart: an ontological and psychological reality, in considering which St. Augustine said of God that he was "closer than my inmost being."²²⁸ These words help us to understand better the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: "God is spirit." Only the Spirit can be "closer than my spiritual experience. Only the spirit can be so permanent in man and in the world, while remaining inviolable and immutable in his absolute transcendence.

But in Jesus Christ the divine presence in the world and in man has been made manifest in a new way and in visible form. In him "the grace of God has appeared indeed."²²⁹ The love of God the Father, as a gift, infinite grace, source of life, has been made visible in Christ, and in his humanity that love has become "part" of the universe, the human family and history. This appearing of grace in human history, through Jesus Christ, has been accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the source of all God's salvific activity in the world: he, the "hidden God,"²³⁰ who as love and gift "fills the universe."²³¹ The Church's entire life, as will appear in the great Jubilee, means going to meet the invisible God, the hidden God: a meeting with the Spirit "who gives life."

3. The Holy Spirit in Man's Inner Conflict: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh" ⁵⁵. Unfortunately, the history of salvation shows that God's coming close and making himself present to man and the world, that marvelous "condescension" of the Spirit, meets with resistance and opposition in our human reality. How eloquent from this point of view are the prophetic words of the old man Simeon who, inspired by the Spirit, came to the Temple in Jerusalem, in order to foretell in the presence of the new-born Babe of Bethlehem that he "is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, for a sign of contradiction."²³² Opposition to God, who is an invisible Spirit, to a certain degree originates in the very fact of the radical difference of the world from God, that is to say in the world's "visibility" and "materiality" in contrast to him who is "invisible" and "absolute Spirit"; from the world's essential and inevitable imperfection in contrast to him, the perfect being. But this opposition becomes conflict and rebellion on the ethical plane by reason of that sin which takes possession of the human heart, wherein "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh."²³³ Concerning this sin, the Holy Spirit must "convince the world," as we have already said.

It is St. Paul who describes in a particularly eloquent way the tension and struggle that trouble the human heart. We read in the Letter to the Galatians: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would."²³⁴ There already exists in man, as a being made up of body and spirit, a certain tension, a certain struggle of tendencies between the "spirit" and the "flesh." But this struggle in fact belongs to the heritage of sin, is a consequence of sin and at the same time a confirmation of it. This is part of everyday experience. As the Apostle writes: "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness... drunkenness, carousing and the like." These are the sins that could be called "carnal." But he also adds others: "enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy."²³⁵ All of this constitutes the "works of the flesh."

But with these works, which are undoubtedly evil, Paul contrasts "the fruit of the Spirit," such as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."²³⁶ From the context it is clear that for the Apostle it is not a question of discriminating against and condemning the body, which with the spiritual soul constitutes man's nature and personal subjectivity. Rather, he is concerned with the morally good or bad works, or better the permanent dispositions-virtues and vices-which are the fruit of submission to (in the first case) or of resistance to (in the second case) the saving action of the Holy Spirit. Consequently the Apostle writes: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."²³⁷ And in other passages: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit"; "You are in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you."²³⁸ The contrast that St. Paul makes between life "according to the Spirit" and life "according to the flesh" gives rise to a further contrast: that between "life" and "death." "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace"; hence the warning: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live."²³⁹

Properly understood, this is an exhortation to live in the truth, that is, according to the dictates of an upright conscience, and at the same time it is a profession of faith in the Spirit of truth as the one who gives life. For the body is "dead because of sin, but your spirits are alive because of righteousness." "So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh."²⁴⁰ Rather we are debtors to Christ, who in the Paschal Mystery has effected our justification, obtaining for us the Holy Spirit: "Indeed, we have been bought at a great price."²⁴¹

In the texts of St. Paul there is a superimposing- and a mutual compenetration-of the ontological dimension (the flesh and the spirit), the ethical (moral good and evil), and the pneumatological (the action of the Holy Spirit in the order of grace). His words (especially in the Letters to the Romans and Galatians) enable us to know and feel vividly the strength of the tension and struggle going on in man between openness to the action of the Holy Spirit and resistance and opposition to him, to his saving gift. The terms or poles of contrast are, on man's part, his limitation and sinfulness, which are essential elements of his psychological and ethical reality; and on God's part, the mystery of the gift, that unceasing self-giving of divine life in the Holy Spirit.- Who will win? The one who welcomes the gift.

56. Unfortunately, the resistance to the Holy Spirit which St. Paul emphasizes in the interior and subjective dimension as tension, struggle and rebellion taking place in the human heart, finds in every period of history and especially in the modern era its external dimension, which takes concrete form as the content of culture and civilization, as a philosophical system, an ideology, a program for action and for the shaping of human behavior. It reaches its clearest expression in materialism, both in its theoretical form: as a system of thought, and in its practical form: as a method of interpreting and evaluating facts, and likewise as a program of corresponding conduct. The system which has developed most and carried to its extreme practical consequences this form of thought, ideology and praxis is dialectical and historical materialism, which is still recognized as the essential core of Marxism.

In principle and in fact, materialism radically excludes the presence and action of God, who is spirit, in the world and above all in man. Fundamentally this is because it does not accept God's existence, being a system that is essentially and systematically atheistic. This is the striking phenomenon of our time: atheism, to which the Second Vatican Council devoted some significant pages.²⁴² Even though it is not possible to speak of atheism in a univocal way or to limit it exclusively to the philosophy of materialism, since there exist numerous forms of atheism and the word is perhaps often used in a wrong sense, nevertheless it is certain that a true and proper materialism, understood as a theory which explains reality and accepted as the key-principle of personal and social action, is characteristically atheistic. The order of values and the aims of action which it describes are strictly bound to a reading of the whole of reality as "matter." Though it sometimes also speaks of the "spirit" and of "questions of the spirit," as for example in the fields of culture or morality, it does so only insofar as it considers certain facts as derived from matter (epiphenomena), since according to this system matter is the one and only form of being. It follows, according to this interpretation, that religion can only be understood as a kind of "idealistic illusion," to be fought with the most suitable means and methods according to circumstances of time and place, in order to eliminate it from society and from man's very heart.

It can be said therefore that materialism is the systematic and logical development of that resistance" and opposition condemned by St. Paul with the words: "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit." But, as St. Paul emphasizes in the second part of his aphorism, this antagonism is mutual: "The desires of the Spirit are against the flesh." Those who wish to live by the Spirit, accepting and corresponding to his salvific activity, cannot but reject the internal and external tendencies and claims of the "flesh," also in its ideological and historical expression as anti-religious "materialism." Against this background so characteristic of our time, in preparing for the great Jubilee we must emphasize the "desires of the spirit," as exhortations echoing in the night of a new time of advent. at the end of which, like two thousand years ago, "every man will see the salvation of God."²⁴³ This is a possibility and a hope that the Church entrusts to the men and women of today. She knows that the meeting or collision between the "desires against the spirit" which mark so many aspects of contemporary civilization, especially in some of its spheres, and "the desires against the flesh," with God's approach to us, his Incarnation, his constantly renewed communication of the Holy Spirit-this meeting or collision may in many cases be of a tragic nature and may perhaps lead to fresh defeats for humanity. But the Church firmly believes that on God's part there is always a salvific self-giving, a salvific coming and, in some way or other, a salvific "convincing concerning sin" by the power of the Spirit.

57. The Pauline contrast between the "Spirit" and the "flesh" also includes the contrast between "life" and "death." This is a serious problem, and concerning it one must say at once that materialism, as a system of thought, in all its forms, means the acceptance of death as the definitive end of human existence. Everything that is material is corruptible, and therefore the human body (insofar as it is "animal") is mortal. If man in his essence is only "flesh," death remains for him an impassable frontier and limit. Hence one can understand how it can be said that human life is nothing but an "existence in order to die."

It must be added that on the horizon of contemporary civilization-especially in the form that is most developed in the technical and scientific sense-the signs and symptoms of death have become particularly present and frequent. One has only to think of the arms race and of its inherent danger of nuclear self-destruction. Moreover, everyone has become more and more aware of the grave situation of vast areas of our planet marked by death-dealing poverty and famine. It is a question of problems that are not only economic but also and above all ethical. But on the horizon of our era there are gathering ever darker "signs of death": a custom has become widely established- in some places it threatens to become almost an institution-of taking the lives of human beings even before they are born, or before they reach the natural point of death. Furthermore, despite many noble efforts for peace, new wars have broken out and are taking place, wars which destroy the lives or the health of hundreds of thousands of people. And how can one fail to mention the attacks against human life by terrorism, organized even on an international scale?

Unfortunately, this is only a partial and in complete sketch of the picture of death being composed in our age as we come ever closer to the end of the second Millennium of the Christian era. Does there not rise up a new and more or

less conscious plea to the life-giving Spirit from the dark shades of materialistic civilization, and especially from those increasing signs of death in the sociological and historical picture in which that civilization has been constructed? At any rate, even independently of the measure of human hopes or despairs, and of the illusions or deceptions deriving from the development of materialistic systems of thought and life, there remains the Christian certainty that the Spirit blows where he wills and that we possess "the first fruits of the Spirit, " and that therefore even though we may be subjected to the sufferings of time that passes away, "we groan inwardly as we wait for...the redemption of our bodies,"²⁴⁴ or of all our human essence, which is bodily and spiritual. Yes, we groan, but in an expectation filled with unflagging hope, because it is precisely this human being that God has drawn near to, God who is Spirit. God the Father, "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."²⁴⁵ At the culmination of the Paschal Mystery, the Son of God, made man and crucified for the sins of the world, appeared in the midst of his Apostles after the Resurrection, breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This "breath" continues forever, for "the Spirit helps us in our weakness."²⁴⁶

4. The Holy Spirit Strengthens the "Inner Man"

58. The mystery of the resurrection and of Pentecost is proclaimed and lived by the Church, which has inherited and which carries on the witness of the Apostles about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. She is the perennial witness to this victory over death which revealed the power of the Holy Spirit and determined his new coming, his new presence in people and in the world. For in Christ's Resurrection the Holy Spirit-Paraclete revealed himself especially as he who gives life: "He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you."²⁴⁷ In the name of the Resurrection of Christ the Church proclaims life, which manifested itself beyond the limits of death, the life which is stronger than death. At the same time, she proclaims him who gives this life: the Spirit, the Giver of Life; she proclaims him and cooperates with him in giving life. For "although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness,"²⁴⁸ the righteousness accomplished by the Crucified and Risen Christ. And in the name of Christ's Resurrection the Church serves the life that comes from God himself, in close union with and humble service to the Spirit.

Precisely through this service man becomes in an ever new manner the "way of the Church, " as I said in the Encyclical on Christ the Redeemer²⁴⁹ and as I now repeat in this present one on the Holy Spirit. United with the Spirit, the Church is supremely aware of the reality of the inner man, of what is deepest and most essential in man, because it is spiritual and incorruptible. At this level the Spirit grafts the "root of immortality,"²⁵⁰ from which the new life springs. This is man's life in God, which, as a fruit of God's salvific self-communication in the Holy Spirit, can develop and flourish only by the Spirit's action. Therefore St. Paul speaks to God on behalf of believers, to whom he declares "I bow my knees before the Father..., that he may grant you...to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man."²⁵¹

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit this inner, "spiritual, " man matures and grows strong. Thanks to the divine self-communication, the human spirit which "knows the secrets of man" meets the "Spirit who searches everything, even the depths of God."²⁵² In this Spirit, who is the eternal gift, the Triune God opens himself to man, to the human spirit. The hidden breath of the divine Spirit enables the human spirit to open in its turn before the saving and sanctifying self-opening of God. Through the gift of grace, which comes from the Holy Spirit, man enters a "new life, " is brought into the supernatural reality of the divine

life itself and becomes a "dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, " a living temple of God.²⁵³ For through the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son come to him and take up their abode with him.²⁵⁴ In the communion of grace with the Trinity, man's "living area" is broadened and raised up to the supernatural level of divine life. Man lives in God and by God: he lives "according to the Spirit, " and "sets his mind on the things of the Spirit."

59. Man's intimate relationship with God in the Holy Spirit also enables him to understand himself, his own humanity, in a new way. Thus that image and likeness of God which man is from his very beginning is fully realized.²⁵⁵ This intimate truth of the human being has to be continually rediscovered in the light of Christ who is the prototype of the relationship with God. There also has to be rediscovered in Christ the reason for "full self-discovery through a sincere gift of himself" to others, as the Second Vatican Council writes: precisely by reason of this divine likeness which "shows that on earth man...is the only creature that God wishes for himself" in his dignity as a person, but as one open to integration and social communion.²⁵⁶ The effective knowledge and full implementation of this truth of his being come about only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Man learns this truth from Jesus Christ and puts it into practice in his own life by the power of the Spirit, whom Jesus himself has given to us.

Along this path-the path of such an inner maturity, which includes the full discovery of the meaning of humanity-God comes close to man, and permeates more and more completely the whole human world. The Triune God, who "exists" in himself as a transcendent reality of interpersonal gift, giving himself in the Holy Spirit as gift to man, transforms the human world from within, from inside hearts and minds. Along this path the world, made to share in the divine gift, becomes-as the Council teaches-"ever more human, ever more profoundly human, " ²⁵⁷ while within the world, through people's hearts and minds, the Kingdom develops in which God will be definitively "all in all"²⁵⁸: as gift and love. Gift and love: this is the eternal power of the opening of the Triune God to an and the world, in the Holy Spirit.

As the year 2000 since the birth of Christ draws near, it is a question of ensuring that an ever greater number of people "may fully find themselves...through a sincere gift of self," according to the expression of the Council already quoted. Through the action of the Spirit-Paraclete, may there be accomplished in our world a process of true growth in humanity, in both individual and community life. In this regard Jesus himself "when he prayed to the Father, 'that all may be one...as we are one' (Jn 17:21-22)...implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine persons and the union of the children of God in truth and charity."²⁵⁹ The Council repeats this truth about man, and the Church sees in it a particularly strong and conclusive indication of her own apostolic tasks. For if man is the way of the Church, this way passes through the whole mystery of Christ, as man's divine model. Along this way the Holy Spirit, strengthening in each of us "the inner man," enables man ever more "fully to find himself through a sincere gift of self." These words of the Pastoral Constitution of the Council can be said to sum up the whole of Christian anthropology: that theory and practice, based on the Gospel, in which man discovers himself as belonging to Christ and discovers that in Christ he is raised to the status of a child of God, and so understands better his own dignity as man, precisely because he is the subject of God's approach and presence, the subject of the divine condescension, which contains the prospect and the very root of definitive glorification. Thus it can truly be said that "the glory of God is the living man, yet man's life is the vision of God" ²⁶⁰: man, living a divine life, is the glory of God, and the Holy Spirit is the hidden dispenser of this life and this glory. The Holy Spirit-says the great Basil- "while simple in essence and manifold in his virtues...extends himself without undergoing any diminishing, is present in each subject capable of receiving him as if he were the only one, and gives grace which is sufficient for all."²⁶¹

60. When, under the influence of the Paraclete, people discover this divine dimension of their being and life, both as individuals and as a community, they are able to free themselves from the various determinisms which derive mainly from the materialistic bases of thought, practice and related modes of action. In our age these factors have succeeded in penetrating into man's inmost being, into that sanctuary of the conscience where the Holy Spirit continuously radiates the light and strength of new life in the "freedom of the children of God." Man's growth in this life is hindered by the conditionings and pressures exerted upon him by dominating structures and mechanisms in the various spheres of society. It can be said that in many cases social factors, instead of fostering the development and expansion of the human spirit, ultimately deprive the human spirit of the genuine truth of its being and life-over which the Holy Spirit keeps vigil-in order to subject it to the "prince of this world."

The great Jubilee of the year 2000 thus contains a message of liberation by the power of the Spirit, who alone can help individuals and communities to free themselves from the old and new determinisms, by guiding them with the "law of the Spirit, which gives life in Christ Jesus,"²⁶² and thereby discovering and accomplishing the full measure of man's true freedom. For, as St. Paul writes, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."²⁶³ This revelation of freedom and hence of man's true dignity acquires a particular eloquence for Christians and for the Church in a state of persecution-both in ancient times and in the present-because the witnesses to divine Truth then become a living proof of the action of the Spirit of truth present in the hearts and minds of the faithful, and they often mark with their own death by martyrdom the supreme glorification of human dignity.

Also in the ordinary conditions of society, Christians, as witnesses to man's authentic dignity, by their obedience to the Holy Spirit contribute to the manifold "renewal of the face of the earth," working together with their brothers and sisters in order to achieve and put to good use everything that is good, noble and beautiful in the modern progress of civilization, culture, science, technology and the other areas of thought and human activity.²⁶⁴ They do this as disciples of Christ who-as the Council writes-"appointed Lord by his Resurrection...is now at work in the hearts of men through the power of his Spirit. He arouses not only a desire for the age to come but by that very fact, he animates, purifies and strengthens those noble longings too by which the human family strives to make its life more humane and to render the earth submissive to this goal."²⁶⁵ Thus they affirm still more strongly the greatness of man, made in the image and likeness of God, a greatness shown by the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, who "in the fullness of time," by the power of the Holy Spirit, entered into history and manifested himself as true man, he who was begotten before every creature, "through whom are all things and through whom we exist"²⁶⁶

5. The Church as the Sacrament of Intimate Union with God

61. As the end of the second Millennium approaches, an event which should recall to everyone and as it were make present anew the coming of the Word in the fullness of time, the Church once more means to ponder the very essence of her divine-human constitution and of that mission which enables her to share in the messianic mission of Christ, according to the teaching and the ever valid plan of the Second Vatican Council. Following this line, we can go back to the Upper Room, where Jesus Christ reveals the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, and where he speaks of his own "departure" through the Cross as the necessary condition for the Spirit's "coming": "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."²⁶⁷ We have seen that this prediction first came true the evening of Easter day and then during the celebration of Pentecost in Jerusalem, and we have seen that ever since then it is being fulfilled in human history through the Church.

In the light of that prediction, we also grasp the full meaning of what Jesus says, also at the Last Supper, about his new "coming." For it is significant that in the same farewell discourse Jesus foretells not only his "departure" but also his

new "coming." His exact words are: "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you."²⁶⁸ And at the moment of his final farewell before he ascends into heaven, he will repeat even more explicitly: "Lo, I am with you, " and this "always, to the close of the age."²⁶⁹ This new "coming" of Christ, this continuous coming of his, in order to be with his Apostles, with the Church, this "I am with you always, to the close of the age, " does not of course change the fact of his "departure." It follows that departure, after the close of Christ's messianic activity on earth, and it occurs in the context of the predicted sending of the Holy Spirit and in a certain sense forms part of his own mission. And yet it occurs by the power of the Holy Spirit, who makes it possible for Christ, who has gone away, to come now and for ever in a new way. This new coming of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and his constant presence and action in the spiritual life are accomplished in the sacramental reality. In this reality, Christ, who has gone away in his visible humanity, comes, is present and acts in the Church in such an intimate way as to make it his own Body. As such, the Church lives, works and grows "to the close of the age." All this happens through the power of the Holy Spirit.

62. The most complete sacramental expression of the "departure" of Christ through the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection is the Eucharist. In every celebration of the Eucharist his coming, his salvific presence, is sacramentally realized: in the Sacrifice and in Communion. It is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, as part of his own mission.²⁷⁰ Through the Eucharist the Holy Spirit accomplishes that "strengthening of the inner man" spoken of in the Letter to the Ephesians.²⁷¹ Through the Eucharist, individuals and communities, by the action of the Paraclete-Counselor, learn to discover the divine sense of human life, as spoken of by the Council: that sense whereby Jesus Christ "fully reveals man to man himself, " suggesting "a certain likeness between the union of the divine persons, and the union of God's children in truth and charity."²⁷² This union is expressed and made real especially through the Eucharist, in which man shares in the sacrifice of Christ which this celebration actualizes, and he also learns to "find himself...through a...gift of himself, "²⁷³ through communion with God and with others, his brothers and sisters.

For this reason the early Christians, right from the days immediately following the coming down of the Holy Spirit, "devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and the prayers, " and in this way they formed a community united by the teaching of the Apostles.²⁷⁴ Thus "they recognized" that their Risen Lord, who had ascended into heaven, came into their midst anew in that Eucharistic community of the Church and by means of it. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church from the beginning expressed and confirmed her identity through the Eucharist. And so it has always been, in every Christian generation, down to our own time, down to this present period when we await the end of the second Christian Millennium. Of course, we unfortunately have to acknowledge the fact that the Millennium which is about to end is the one in which there have occurred the great separations between Christians. All believers in Christ, therefore, following the example of the Apostles, must fervently strive to conform their thinking and action to the will of the Holy Spirit, "the principle of the Church's unity, "²⁷⁵ so that all who have been baptized in the one Spirit in order to make up one body may be brethren joined in the celebration of the same Eucharist, "a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity!"²⁷⁶

63. Christ's Eucharistic presence, his sacramental "I am with you, " enables the Church to discover ever more deeply her own mystery, as shown by the whole ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, whereby "the Church is in Christ as a sacrament or sign and instrument of the intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."²⁷⁷ As a sacrament, the Church is a development from the Paschal Mystery of Christ's "departure, " living by his ever new "coming" by the power of the Holy Spirit, within the same mission of the Paraclete- Spirit of truth. Precisely this is the essential mystery of the Church, as the Council professes.

While it is through creation that God is he in whom we all "live and move and have our being, "²⁷⁸ in its turn the power of the Redemption endures and develops in the history of man and the world in a double "rhythm" as it were, the source of which is found in the Eternal Father. On the one hand there is the rhythm of the mission of the Son, who came into the world and was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit; and on the other hand there is also the rhythm of the mission of the Holy Spirit, as he was revealed definitively by Christ. Through the "departure" of the Son, the Holy Spirit came and continues to come as Counselor and Spirit of truth. And in the context of his mission, as it were within the indivisible presence of the Holy Spirit, the Son, who "had gone away" in the Paschal Mystery, "comes" and is continuously present in the mystery of the Church, at times concealing himself and at times revealing himself in her history, and always directing her steps. All of this happens in a sacramental way, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who, "drawing from the wealth of Christ's Redemption, " constantly gives life. As the Church becomes ever more aware of this mystery, she sees herself more clearly, above all as a sacrament.

This also happens because, by the will of her Lord, through the individual sacraments the Church fulfills her salvific ministry to man. This sacramental ministry, every time it is accomplished, brings with it the mystery of the "departure" of Christ through the Cross and the Resurrection, by virtue of which the Holy Spirit comes. He comes and works: "He gives life." For the sacraments signify grace and confer grace: they signify life and give life. The Church is the visible dispenser of the sacred signs, while the Holy Spirit acts in them as the invisible dispenser of the life which they signify. Together with the Spirit, Christ Jesus is present and acting.

64. If the Church is the sacrament of intimate union with God, she is such in Jesus Christ, in whom this same union is accomplished as a salvific reality. She is such in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The fullness of the salvific reality, which is Christ in history, extends in a sacramental way in the power of the Spirit Paraclete. In this way

the Holy Spirit is "another Counselor, " or new Counselor, because through his action the Good News takes shape in human minds and hearts and extends through history. In all this it is the Holy Spirit who gives life.

When we use the word "sacrament" in reference to the Church, we must bear in mind that in the texts of the Council the sacramentality of the Church appears as distinct from the sacramentality that is proper, in the strict sense, to the Sacraments. Thus we read: "The Church is...in the nature of a sacrament-a sign and instrument of communion with God." But what matters and what emerges from the analogical sense in which the word is used in the two cases is the relationship which the Church has with the power of the Holy Spirit, who alone gives life: the Church is the sign and instrument of the presence and action of the life-giving Spirit.

Vatican II adds that the Church is "a sacrament... of the unity of all mankind. "Obviously it is a question of the unity which the human race which in itself is differentiated in various ways-has from God and in God. This unity has its roots in the mystery of creation and acquires a new dimension in the mystery of the Redemption, which is ordered to universal salvation. Since God "wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, "279 the Redemption includes all humanity and in a certain way all of creation. In the same universal dimension of Redemption the Holy Spirit is acting, by virtue of the "departure of Christ." Therefore the Church, rooted through her own mystery in the Trinitarian plan of salvation with good reason regards herself as the "sacrament of the unity of the whole human race." She knows that she is such through the power of the Holy Spirit, of which power she is a sign and instrument in the fulfillment of God's salvific plan.

In this way the "condescension" of the infinite Trinitarian Love is brought about: God, who is infinite Spirit, comes close to the visible world. The Triune God communicates himself to man in the Holy Spirit from the beginning through his "image and likeness." Under the action of the same Spirit, man, and through him the created world, which has been redeemed by Christ, draw near to their ultimate destinies in God. The Church is "a sacrament, that is sign and instrument" of this coming together of the two poles of creation and redemption, God and man. She strives to restore and strengthen the unity at the very roots of the human race: in the relationship of communion that man has with God as his Creator, Lord and Redeemer. This is a truth which on the basis of the Council's teaching we can meditate on, explain and apply in all the fullness of its meaning in this phase of transition from the second to the third Christian Millennium. And we rejoice to realize ever more clearly that within the work carried out by the Church in the history of salvation, which is part of the history of humanity, the Holy Spirit is present and at work-he who with the breath of divine life permeates man's earthly pilgrimage and causes all creation, all history, to flow together to its ultimate end, in the infinite ocean of God.

6. The Spirit and the Bride Say: "Come!"

65. The breath of the divine life, the Holy Spirit, in its simplest and most common manner, expresses itself and makes itself felt in prayer. It is a beautiful and salutary thought that, wherever people are praying in the world, there the Holy Spirit is, the living breath of prayer. It is a beautiful and salutary thought to recognize that, if prayer is offered throughout the world, in the past, in the present and in the future, equally widespread is the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, who "breathes" prayer in the heart of man in all the endless range of the most varied situations and conditions, sometimes favorable and sometimes unfavorable to the spiritual and religious life. Many times, through the influence of the Spirit, prayer rises from the human heart in spite of prohibitions and persecutions and even official proclamations regarding the non-religious or even atheistic character of public life. Prayer always remains the voice of all those who apparently have no voice-and in this voice there always echoes that "loud cry" attributed to Christ by the Letter to the Hebrews.²⁸⁰ Prayer is also the revelation of that abyss which is the heart of man: a depth which comes from God and which only God can fill, precisely with the Holy Spirit. We read in Luke: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."²⁸¹

The Holy Spirit is the gift that comes into man's heart together with prayer. In prayer he manifests himself first of all and above all as the gift that "helps us in our weakness." This is the magnificent thought developed by St. Paul in the Letter to the Romans, when he writes: "For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words."²⁸² Therefore, the Holy Spirit not only enables us to pray, but guides us "from within" in prayer: he is present in our prayer and gives it a divine dimension.²⁸³ Thus "he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."²⁸⁴ Prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit becomes the ever more mature expression of the new man, who by means of this prayer participates in the divine life.

Our difficult age has a special need of prayer. In the course of history-both in the past and in the present-many men and women have borne witness to the importance of prayer by consecrating themselves to the praise of God and to the life of prayer, especially in monasteries and convents. So, too, recent years have been seeing a growth in the number of people who, in ever more widespread movements and groups, are giving first place to prayer and seeking in prayer a renewal of their spiritual life. This is a significant and comforting sign, for from this experience there is coming a real contribution to the revival of prayer among the faithful, who have been helped to gain a clearer idea of the Holy Spirit as he who inspires in hearts a profound yearning for holiness. In many individuals and many communities there is a

growing awareness that, even with all the rapid progress of technological and scientific civilization, and despite the real conquests and goals attained, man is threatened, humanity is threatened. In the face of this danger, and indeed already experiencing the frightful reality of man's spiritual decadence, individuals and whole communities, guided as it were by an inner sense of faith, are seeking the strength to raise man up again, to save him from himself, from his own errors and mistakes that often make harmful his very conquests. And thus they are discovering prayer, in which the "Spirit who helps us in our weakness" manifests himself. In this way the times in which we are living are bringing the Holy Spirit closer to the many who are returning to prayer. And I trust that all will find in the teaching of this Encyclical nourishment for their interior life, and that they will succeed in strengthening, under the action of the Spirit, their commitment to prayer in harmony with the Church and her Magisterium.

66. In the midst of the problems, disappointments and hopes, desertions and returns of these times of ours, the Church remains faithful to the mystery of her birth. While it is an historical fact that the Church came forth from the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost, in a certain sense one can say that she has never left it. Spiritually the event of Pentecost does not belong only to the past: the Church is always in the Upper Room that she bears in her heart. The Church perseveres in preserves, like the Apostles together with Mary, the Mother of Christ, and with those who in Jerusalem were the first seed of the Christian community and who awaited in prayer the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Church perseveres in prayer with Mary. This union of the praying Church with the Mother of Christ has been part of the mystery of the Church from the beginning: we see her present in this mystery as she is present in the mystery of her Son. It is the Council that says to us: "The Blessed Virgin...overshadowed by the Holy Spirit... brought forth...the Son..., he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (cf. Rom 8:29), namely the faithful. In their birth and development she cooperates with a maternal love"; she is through "his singular graces and offices...intimately united with the Church... [She] is a model of the Church."²⁸⁵ "The Church, moreover, contemplating Mary's mysterious sanctity, imitating her charity,... becomes herself a mother" and "herself is a virgin, who keeps...the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse. Imitating the Mother of The Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she preserves with virginal purity an integral faith, a firm hope, and a sincere charity."²⁸⁶

Thus one can understand the profound reason why the Church, united with the Virgin Mother, prays unceasingly as the Bride to her divine Spouse, as the words of the Book of Revelation, quoted by the Council, attest: "The Spirit and the bride say to the Lord Jesus Christ: Come!"²⁸⁷ The Church's prayer is this unceasing invocation, in which "the Spirit himself intercedes for us": in a certain sense, the Spirit himself utters it with the Church and in the Church. For the Spirit is given to the Church in order that through his power the whole community of the People of God, however widely scattered and diverse, may persevere in hope: that hope in which "we have been saved."²⁸⁸ It is the eschatological hope, the hope of definitive fulfillment in God, the hope of the eternal Kingdom, that is brought about by participation in the life of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit, given to the Apostles as the Counselor, is the guardian and animator of this hope in the heart of the Church.

In the time leading up to the third Millennium after Christ, while "the Spirit and the bride say to the Lord Jesus: Come!" this prayer of theirs is filled, as always, with an eschatological significance, which is also destined to give fullness of meaning to the celebration of the great Jubilee. It is a prayer concerned with the salvific destinies toward which the Holy Spirit by his action opens hearts throughout the history of man on earth. But at the same time this prayer is directed toward a precise moment of history which highlights the "fullness of time" marked by the year 2000. The Church wishes to prepare for this Jubilee in the Holy Spirit, just as the Virgin of Nazareth in whom the Word was made flesh was prepared by the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

67. We wish to bring to a close these considerations in the heart of the Church and in the heart of man. The way of the Church passes through the heart of man, because here is the hidden place of the salvific encounter with the Holy Spirit, with the hidden God, and precisely here the Holy Spirit becomes "a spring of water welling up to eternal life."²⁸⁹ He comes here as the Spirit of truth and as the Paraclete, as he was promised by Christ. From here he acts as Counselor, Intercessor, Advocate, especially when man, when humanity find themselves before the judgment of condemnation by that "accuser" about whom the Book of Revelation says that "he accuses them day and night before our God."²⁹⁰ "The Holy Spirit does not cease to be the guardian of hope in the human heart: the hope of all human creatures, and especially of those who "have the first fruits of the Spirit" and "wait for the redemption of their bodies."²⁹¹

The Holy Spirit, in his mysterious bond of divine communion with the Redeemer of man, is the one who brings about the continuity of his work: he takes from Christ and transmits to all, unceasingly entering into the history of the world through the heart of man. Here he becomes—as the liturgical Sequence of the Solemnity of Pentecost proclaims—the true "father of the poor, giver of gifts, light of hearts"; he becomes the "sweet guest of the soul, " whom the Church unceasingly greets on the threshold of the inmost sanctuary of every human being. For he brings "rest and relief" in the midst of toil, in the midst of the work of human hands and minds; he brings "rest" and "ease" in the midst of the heat of the day, in the midst of the anxieties, struggles and perils of every age; he brings "consolation, " when the human heart grieves and is tempted to despair.

And therefore the same Sequence exclaims: "without your aid nothing is in man, nothing is without fault." For only the Holy Spirit "convinces concerning sin, " concerning evil, in order to restore what is good in man and in the world: in order to "renew the face of the earth." Therefore, he purifies from everything that "disfigures" man, from "what is unclean"; he heals even the deepest wounds of human existence; he changes the interior dryness of souls, transforming them into the fertile fields of grace and holiness. What is "hard he softens, " what is "frozen he warms, " what is "wayward he sets anew" on the paths of salvation.²⁹²

Praying thus, the Church unceasingly professes her faith that there exists in our created world a Spirit who is an uncreated gift. He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son: like the Father and the Son he is uncreated, without limit, eternal, omnipotent, God, Lord.²⁹³ This Spirit of God "fills the universe, " and all that is created recognizes in him the source of its own identity, finds in him its own transcendent expression, turns to him and awaits him, invokes him with its own being. Man turns to him, as to the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth and of love, man who lives by truth and by love, and who without the source of truth and of love cannot live. To him turns the Church, which is the heart of humanity, to implore for all

and dispense to all those gifts of the love which through him "has been poured into our hearts."²⁹⁴ To him turns the Church, along the intricate paths of man's pilgrimage on earth: she implores, she unceasingly implores uprightness of human acts, as the Spirit's work; she implores the joy and consolation that only he, the true Counselor, can bring by coming down into people's inmost hearts²⁹⁵; the Church implores the grace of the virtues that merit heavenly glory, implores eternal salvation, in the full communication of the divine life, to which the Father has eternally "predestined" human beings, created through love in the image and likeness of the Most Holy Trinity.

The Church with her heart which embraces all human hearts implores from the Holy Spirit that happiness which only in God has its complete realization: the joy "that no one will be able to take away, "²⁹⁶ the joy which is the fruit of love, and therefore of God who is love; she implores "the righteousness, the peace and the joy of the Holy Spirit" in which, in the words of St. Paul, consists the Kingdom of God.²⁹⁷

Peace too is the fruit of love: that interior peace, which weary man seeks in his inmost being; that peace besought by humanity, the human family, peoples, nations, continents, anxiously hoping to obtain it in the prospect of the transition from the second to the third Christian Millennium. Since the way of peace passes in the last analysis through love and seeks to create the civilization of love, the Church fixes her eyes on him who is the love of the Father and the Son, and in spite of increasing dangers she does not cease to trust, she does not cease to invoke and to serve the peace of man on earth. Her trust is based on him who, being the Spirit-love, is also the Spirit of peace and does not cease to be present in our human world, on the horizon of minds and hearts, in order to "fill the universe" with love and peace.

Before him I kneel at the end of these considerations, and implore him, as the Spirit of the Father and the Son, to grant to all of us the blessing and grace which I desire to pass on, in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, to the sons and daughters of the Church and to the whole human family.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on May 18, the Solemnity of Pentecost, in the year 1986, the eighth of my Pontificate.

1. Jn 7:37f.

2. Jn 7:39.

3. Jn 4:14; cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 4.

4. Cf. Jn 3:5.

5. Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical *Divinum Illud Munus* (May 9, 1897): *Acta Leonis*, 17 (1898), pp. 125-148; Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (June 29, 1943): *AAS* 35 (1943), pp. 193-248.

6. General Audience of June 6, 1973: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XI (1973), 477.

7. Roman Missal; cf. 2 Cor 13:13.

8. Jn 3:17.

9. Phil 2:11.

10. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 4; John Paul II, Address to Those Taking Part in the International Congress on Pneumatology (March 26, 1982), I: *Insegnamenti V/1* (1982), p. 1004.

11. Cf. Jn 4:24.

12. Cf. Rom 8:22; Gal 6:15.

13. Cf. Mt 24:35.

14. Jn 4:14.

15. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 17.

16. Allon parakleton: Jn 14:16.

17. Jn 14:13, 16f.

18. Cf. 1 Jn 2:1.

19. Jn 14:26.

20. Jn 15:26f.

21. Cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3; 4:14.

22. "The divinely revealed truths, which are contained and expressed in the books of the Sacred Scripture, were written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, " and thus the same Sacred Scripture must be "read and interpreted with the help of the same Spirit by means of whom it was written": Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, nn. 11, 12.

23. Jn 16:12f.

24. Acts 1:1.

25. Jn 16:14.

26. Jn 16:15.

27. Jn 16:7f.

28. Jn 15:26.

29. Jn 14:16.

30. Jn 14:26.

31. Jn 15:26.

32. Jn 14:16.

33. Jn 16:7.

34. Cf. Jn 3:16f., 34; 6:57; 17:3, 18, 23.

35. Mt 28:19.

36. Cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16.

37. Cf. I Cor 2:10.

38. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theo. Ia, qq. 37-38.

39. Rom 5:5.

40. Jn 16:14.

41. Gen 1:1f.

42. Gen 1:26.

43. Rom 8:19-22.

44. Jn 16:7.

45. Gal 4:6; cf. Rom 8:15.

46. Cf. Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; Rom 8:11.

47. Cf. Jn 16:6.

48. Cf. Jn 16:20.

49. Cf. Jn 16:7.

50. Acts 10:37f.

51. Cf. Lk 4:16-21; 3:16; 4:14; Mk 1:10.

52. 11:1-3.

53. 61:1f.

54. 48:16.

55. Is 42:1.

56. Cf. Is 53:5-6, 8.

57. Is 42:1.

58. Is 42:6.

59. Is 49:6.

60. Is 59:21.

61. Cf. Lk 2:25-35.

62. Cf. Lk 1:35.

63. Cf. Lk 2:19, 51.

64. Cf. Lk 4:16-21; Is 61:1f.

65. Lk 3:16; cf. Mt 3:11; Mk 1:7f.; Jn 1:33.

66. n 1:29.

67. Cf. Jn 1:33f.

68. Lk 3:21f.; cf. Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10.

69. Mt 3:17.

70. Cf. St. Basil, De Spiritu Sancto, XVI, 39: PG 32, 139.

71. Acts 1:1.

72. Cf. Lk 4:1.

73. Cf. Lk 10:17-20.

74. Lk 10:21; cf. Mt 11:25f.

75. Lk 10:22; cf. Mt 11:27.

76. Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16.

77. Jn 16:13.

78. Jn 16:14.

79. Jn 16:15.
80. Cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26.
81. Jn 3:16.
82. Rom 1:3f.
83. Ez 36:26f.; cf. Jn 7:37-39; 19:34.
84. Jn 16:7.
85. St. Cyril of Alexandria, In Ioannis Evangelium, Bk. V, Ch. II: PG 73, 755.
86. Jn 20:19-22.
87. Cf. Jn 19:30.
88. Cf. Rom 1:4.
89. Cf. Jn 16:20.
90. Jn 16:7.
91. Jn 16:15.
92. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, n. 4.
93. Jn 15:26f.
94. n. 4.
95. Cf. Acts 1:14.
96. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, n. 4. There is a whole Patristic and theological tradition concerning the intimate union between the Holy Spirit and the Church, a union presented sometimes as analogous to the relation between the soul and the body in man: cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 24, 1: SC 211, pp. 470-474; St. Augustine, *Sermo* 267, 4, 4: PL 38, 1231; *Sermo* 268, 2: PL 38, 1232; In *Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, XXV, 13; XXVII, 6: CCL 36, 266, 272f.; St. Gregory the Great, In *Septem Psalmos Poenitentiales Expositio*, Psal. V, 1: PL 79, 602; Didymus the Blind, *De Trinitate*, II, 1: PG 39, 449f.; St. Athanasius, *Oratio* 111 *Contra Arianos*, 22, 23, 24: PG 26, 368f., 372f.; St. John Chrysostom, In *Epistolam ad Ephesios*, Homily IX, 3: PG 62, 72f. St. Thomas Aquinas has synthesized the preceding Patristic and theological tradition, presenting the Holy Spirit as the "heart" and the "soul" of the Church; cf. *Summa Theo.*, III, q. 8, a. 1, ad 3; In *Symbolum Apostolorum Expositio*, a. IX; In *Tertiurn Librum Sententiarum*, Dist. XIII, q. 2, a. 2, *Quaestiuncula* 3. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*,
97. Cf. Rev 2:29; 3:6, 13, 22.
98. Cf. Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11.
99. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1.
100. *Ibid.*, n. 41.
101. *Ibid.*, n. 26.
102. Jn 16:7f.
103. Jn 16:7.
104. Jn 16:8-11.
105. Cf. Jn 3:17; 12:47.
106. Cf. Eph 6:12.
107. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 2.
108. Cf. *ibid.*, nn. 10, 13, 27, 37, 63, 73, 79, 80.
109. Acts 2:4.
110. Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 17, 2: SC 211, pp. 330-332.
111. Acts 1:4, S, 8.
112. Acts 2:22-24.
113. Cf. Acts 3:14f.; 4:10, 27f.; 7:52; 10:39; 13:28f.; etc.
114. Cf. Jn 3:17; 12:47.
115. Acts 2:36.
116. Acts 2:37f.
117. Cf. Mk 1:15.
118. Jn 20:22.
119. Cf. Jn 16:9.
120. Hos 14:14 Vulgate; cf. 1 Cor 15:55.
121. Cf. 1 Cor 2:10.
122. Cf. 2 Thess 2:7.
123. Cf. 1 Tim 3:16.
124. Cf. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 19-22: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 229-233.
125. Cf. Gen 1-3.
126. Cf. Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8.
127. Cf. Jn 1:1, 2, 3, 10.
128. Cf. Col 1:15-18.
129. Cf. Jn 8:44.

130. Cf. Gen 1:2.
131. Cf. Gen 1:26, 28, 29.
132. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, n. 2.
133. Cf. 1 Cor 2:10f.
134. Cf. Jn 16:11.
135. Cf. Phil 2:8.
136. Cf. Gen 2:16f.
137. Gen 3:5.
138. Cf. Gen 3:22 concerning the "tree of life"; cf. also Jn 3:36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 10:28; 12:50; 14:6; Acts 13:48; Rom 6:23; Gal 6:8; 1 Tim 1:16; Tit 1:2; 3:7; 1 Pet 3:22; 1 Jn 1:2; 2:25; 5:11, 13; Rev 2:7.
139. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theo.*, Ia-IIae, q. 80, a. 4, ad 3.
140. 1 Jn 3:8.
141. Jn 16:11.
142. Cf. Eph 6:12; Lk 22:53.
143. *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 28: CCL 48, p. 541.
144. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 36.
145. In Greek the verb is *parakalem*, which means to invoke, to call to oneself.
146. Cf. Gen 6:7.
147. Gen 6:5-7.
148. Cf. Rom 8:20-22.
149. Cf. Mt 15:32; Mk 8:2.
150. Heb 9:13f.
151. Jn 20:22f.
152. Acts 10:38.
153. Heb 5:7f.
154. Heb 9:14.
155. Cf. Lev 9:24; 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Chron 7:1.
156. Cf. Jn 15:26.
157. Jn 20:22f.
158. Mt 3:11.
159. Cf. Jn 3:8.
160. Jn. 20:22f.
161. Cf. Sequence *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*.
162. St. Bonaventure, *De Septem Donis Spiritus Sancti*, *Collatio II*, 3: *Ad Claras Aquas*, V, 463.
163. Mk 1:15.
164. Cf. Heb 9:14.
165. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.
166. Cf. Gen 2:9, 17.
167. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 16.
168. *Ibid.*, n. 27.
169. Cf. *ibid.*, n. 13.
170. Cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 16: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 213-217.
171. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 10.
172. Cf. Rom 7:14-15, 19.
173. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 37.
174. *Ibid.*, n. 13.
175. *Ibid.*, n. 37.
176. Cf. Sequence of Pentecost: *Reple Cordis Intirna*.
177. Cf. St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. XLI*, 13: CCL, 38, 470: "What is the abyss, and what does the abyss invoke? If abyss means depth, do we not consider that perhaps the heart of man is an abyss? What indeed is more deep than this abyss? Men can speak, can be seen through the working of their members, can be heard in conversation; but whose thought can be penetrated, whose heart can be read?"
178. Cf. Heb 9:14.
179. Jn 14:17.
180. Mt 12:31f.
181. Mk 3:28f.
182. Lk 12:10.
183. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theo.*IIa-IIae, q. 14, a. 3: cf. St. Augustine, *Epist.* 185, 11, 48-49: PL 33, 814f.; St. Bonaventure *Comment. in Evang. S. Lucae*, Ch. XIV, 15-16: *Ad Claras Aquas VII*, 314f.

184. Cf. Ps 81/80:13; Jer 7:24; Mk 3:5.
185. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), n. 18: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 224-228.
186. Pius XII, Radio Message to the National Catechetical Congress of the United States of America in Boston (October 26, 1946): *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, VIII (1946), 228.
187. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), n. 18: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 225f
188. I Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30.
189. Cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), nn. 14-22: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 211-233
190. Cf. St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIV 28: CCL 48 451
191. Cf. Jn 16:11.
192. Cf. Jn 16:15.
193. Cf. Gal 4:4.
194. Rev 1:8; 22:13.
195. Jn 3:16.
196. Gal 4:4f.
197. Lk 1:34f.
198. Mt 1:18.
199. Mt 1:20f.
200. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theo.* IIIa, q. 2, aa. 10-12; q. 6, a. 6; q. 7, a. 13.
201. Lk 1:38.
202. Jn 1:14.
203. Col 1:15.
204. Cf., for example, Gen 9: 11; Deut 5:26; Job 34:15; Is 40:6; 42:10; Ps 145/144:21; Lk 3:6; 1 Pet 1:24.
205. Lk 1:45.
206. Cf. Lk 1:41.
207. Cf. Jn 16:9.
208. 2 Cor 3:17.
209. Cf. Rom 1:5.
210. Rom 8:29.
211. Cf. Jn 1:14, 4, 12f.
212. Cf. Rom 8:14.
213. Cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 5:5; 2 Cor 1:22.
214. Rom 8:15.
215. Rom 8:16f.
216. Cf. Ps 104/103:30.
217. Rom 8:19.
218. Rom 8:29.
219. Cf. 2 Pet 1:4.
220. Cf. Eph 2:18; Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, n. 2.
221. Cf. 1 Cor 2:12.
222. Cf. Eph 1:3-14.
223. Eph 1:13f.
224. Cf. Jn 3:8.
225. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 16.
226. Jn 4:24.
227. *Ibid.*
228. Cf. St. Augustine, *Confess.*, III, 6, 11: CCL 27, 33.
229. Cf. Tit 2:11.
230. Cf. Is 45:15.
231. Cf. Wis 1:7.
232. Lk 2:27, 34.
233. Gal 5:17.
234. Gal 5:16f.
235. Cf. Gal 5:9-21.
236. Gal 5:22f.
237. Gal 5:25.
238. Cf. Rom 8:5, 9.

239. Rom 8:6, 13.
240. Rom 8:10, 12.
241. Cf. 1 Cor 6:20.
242. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 19, 20, 21.
243. Lk 3:6; cf. Is 40:5.
244. Cf. Rom 8:23.
245. Rom 8:3.
246. Rom 8:26.
247. Rom 8:11.
248. Rom 8:10.
249. Cf. Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), n. 14: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 284f.
250. Cf. Wis 15:3.
251. Cf. Eph 3:14-16.
252. Cf. 1 Cor 2:10f.
253. Cf. Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 6:19.
254. Cf. Jn 14:23; St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, V, 6, 1: SC 153, pp. 72-80; St. Hilary, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 19, 21: PL 10, 250, 252; St. Ambrose, *De Spiritu Sancto*, I, 6, 8: PL 16, 752f.; St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. XLIX*, 2: CCL 38, pp. 575f.; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ioannis Evangelium*, Bk. I; II: PG 73, 154-158; 246; Bk. IX: PG 74, 262; St. Athanasius, *Oratio 111 Contra Arianos*, 24: PG 26, 374f.; *Epist. I ad Serapionem*, 24: PG 26, 586f.; Didymus the Blind, *De Trinitate*, II, 6-7: PG 39, 523-530; St. John Chrysostom, *In Epist. ad Romanos Homilia XIII*, 8: PG 60, 519; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theo. Ia*, q. 43, aa. 1, 3-6.
255. Cf. Gen 1:26f.; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theo. Ia*, q. 93, aa. 4, 5, 8.
256. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 24; cf. also n. 25.
257. Cf. *ibid.*, nn. 38, 40.
258. Cf. 1 Cor 15:28.
259. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 24.
260. Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7: SC 100/2, p. 648.
261. St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, IX, 22: PG 32, 110.
262. Rom 8:2.
263. 2 Cor 3:17.
264. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 53-59.
265. *Ibid.*, n. 38.
266. 1 Cor 8:6.
267. Jn 16:7.
268. Jn 14:18.
269. Mt 28:20.
270. This is what the "Epiclesis" before the Consecration expresses: "Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ" (*Eucharistic Prayer II*).
271. Cf. Eph 3:16.
272. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 24.
273. *Ibid.*
274. Cf. Acts 2:42.
275. Second Vatican Council, Decree on *Ecumenism*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 2.
276. St. Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus XXVI*, 13, CCL 36, p. 266; cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 47.
277. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1.
278. Acts 17:28.
279. 1 Tim 2:4.
280. Cf. Heb 5:7.
281. Lk 11:13.
282. Rom 8:26.
283. Cf. Origen, *De Oratone*, 2: PG 11, p. 419-423.
284. Rom 8:27.
285. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 63.
286. *Ibid.*, n. 64.
287. *Ibid.*, n. 4; cf. Rev 22:17.
288. Cf. Rom 8:24.
289. Cf. Jn 4:14; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 4.
290. Cf. Rev 12:10.

291. Cf. Rom 8:23.

292. Cf. Sequence Veni, Sancte Spiritus.

293. Cf. Creed Quicumque: DS 75.

294. Cf. Rom 5:5.

295. One should mention here the important Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete in Domino*, published by Pope Paul VI on May 9, in the Holy Year 1975; ever relevant is the invitation expressed there "to implore the gift of joy from the Holy Spirit, " and likewise "to appreciate the properly spiritual joy that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit": AAS 67 (1975), pp. 289, 302.

296. Cf. Jn 16:22.

297. Cf. Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22.

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Encyclical Epistle
Slavorum Apostoli
Of The Supreme Pontiff
John Paul II
To The Bishops, Priests
And Religious Families And
To All The Christian Faithful
In Commemoration
Of The Eleventh Centenary Of
The Evangelizing Work
Of Saints Cyril And Methodius

I
INTRODUCTION

1.

THE APOSTLES OF THE SLAVS, Saints Cyril and Methodius, are remembered by the Church together with the great work of evangelization which they carried out. Indeed it can be said that their memory is particularly vivid and relevant to our day.

Considering the grateful veneration enjoyed for centuries by the holy Brothers from Salonika (the ancient Thessalonica), especially among the Slav nations, and mindful of their incalculable contribution to the work of proclaiming the Gospel among those peoples; mindful too of the cause of reconciliation, friendly coexistence, human development and respect for the intrinsic dignity of every nation, by my Apostolic Letter *Egregiae Virtutis*(1) of 31 December 1980 I proclaimed Saints Cyril and Methodius Co-Patrons of Europe. In this way I followed the path already traced out by my Predecessors, and notably by Leo XIII, who over a hundred years ago, on 30 September 1880, extended the cult of the two Saints to the whole Church, with the Encyclical Epistle *Grande Munus*, (2) and by Paul VI, who, with the Apostolic Letter *Pacis Nuntius*(3) of 24 October 1964, proclaimed Saint Benedict Patron of Europe.

2.

The purpose of the document of five years ago was to remind people of these solemn acts of the Church and to call the attention of Christians and of all people of good will who have at heart the welfare, harmony and unity of Europe to the ever-living relevance of the eminent figures of Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, as concrete models and spiritual aids for the Christians of today, and especially for the nations of the continent of Europe, which, especially through the prayers and work of these saints, have long been consciously and originally rooted in the Church and in Christian tradition.

The publication of my Apostolic Letter in 1980, which was dictated by the firm hope of a gradual overcoming in Europe and the world of everything that divides the Churches, nations and peoples, was linked to three circumstances that were the subject of my prayer and reflection. The first was the eleventh centenary of the Pontifical Letter *Industriae Tuae*, (4) whereby Pope John VIII in the year 880 approved the use of the Old Slavonic language in the liturgy translated by the two holy Brothers. The second circumstance was the first centenary of the above-mentioned Encyclical Epistle *Grande Munus*. The third was the beginning, precisely in 1980, of the happy and promising theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches on the Island of Patmos.

3. In the present document I wish to make particular reference to the Epistle *Grande Munus*, by which Pope Leo III intended to remind the Church and the world of the apostolic merits of both the Brothers-not only of Methodius, who, according to tradition, ended his days at Velehrad in Greater Moravia in the year 885, but also of Cyril, whom death separated from his brother in 869, when he was in Rome, the city which received and which still preserves his relics with profound veneration in the Basilica of Saint Clement.

Recalling the holy lives and apostolic merits of the two Brothers from Salonika, Pope Leo XIII fixed their annual liturgical feast on 7 July. After the Second Vatican Council, as a result of the liturgical reform, the feast was transferred to 14 February, which from the historical point of view is the date of the heavenly birthday of Saint Cyril.(5) At a distance of over a hundred years from Pope Leo's Epistle, the new circumstances in which it so happens that there falls the eleventh centenary of the death of Saint Methodius encourage us to give renewed expression to the Church's memory of this important anniversary. And a particular obligation to do so is felt by the first Pope called to the See of Peter from Poland, and thus from the midst of the Slav nations.

The events of the last hundred years and especially of the last decades have helped to revive in the Church not only the religious memory of the two holy Brothers but also a historical and cultural interest in them. Their special charisms have become still better understood in the light of the situations and experiences of our own times. A contribution to this has been made by many events which belong, as true signs of the times, to the history of the twentieth century; the first of these is that great event which took place in the life of the Church: the Second Vatican Council. In the light of

the magisterium and pastoral orientation of that Councils we can look in a new way—a more mature and profound way—at these two holy figures, now separated from us by eleven centuries. And we can read in their lives and apostolic activity the elements that the wisdom of divine Providence placed in them, so that they might be revealed with fresh fullness in our own age and might bear new fruits.

II - BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

4. Following the example offered by the Epistle Grande Munus, I wish to recall the life of Saint Methodius, without however thereby ignoring the life—so closely linked to it—of his brother Saint Cyril. This I will do in general terms, leaving to historical research the detailed discussion of individual points.

The city which saw the birth of the two holy Brothers is the modern Salonika, which in the ninth century was an important centre of commercial and political life in the Byzantine Empire, and occupied a notable position in the intellectual and social life of that part of the Balkans. Being situated on the frontier of the Slav territories, it also certainly had a Slav name: Solun.

Methodius was the elder brother and his baptismal name was probably Michael. He was born between 815 and 820. His younger brother Constantine, who came to be better known by his religious name Cyril, was born in 827 or 828. Their father was a senior official of the imperial administration. The family's social position made possible for the two Brothers a similar career, which in fact Methodius did take up, reaching the rank of Archon or Prefect in one of the frontier Provinces where many Slavs lived. However, towards the year 840 he interrupted his career and retired to one of the monasteries at the foot of Mount Olympus in Bithynia, then known as the Holy Mountain.

His brother Cyril studied with great success in Byzantium, where he received Holy Orders, after having resolutely refused a brilliant political future. By reason of his exceptional intellectual and religious talents and knowledge, there were entrusted to him while he was still a young man delicate ecclesiastical appointments, such as that of Librarian of the Archive attached to the great church of Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, and, simultaneously, the prestigious position of Secretary to the Patriarch of that city. However, he very soon made it known that he wished to be relieved of these posts, in order to be able to devote himself to study and the contemplative life, far from the pursuit of ambition. Thus he retired secretly to a monastery on the Black Sea coast. He was discovered six months later, and was persuaded to accept the task of teaching philosophy in the School of higher learning in Constantinople, where by reason of the excellence of his knowledge he gained the epithet of The Philosopher by which he is still known. Later on he was sent by the emperor and the Patriarch on a mission to the Saracens. On the completion of this task he retired from public life in order to join his elder brother Methodius and share with him the monastic life. But once again, together with Methodius, he was included in a Byzantine delegation sent to the Khazars, acting as a religious and cultural expert. While staying in the Crimea at Kherson, they identified what they believed to be the church in which had been buried Saint Clement, Pope of Rome and martyr, who had been exiled to that distant region. They recovered his relics and took them with them.⁽⁶⁾ These relics later accompanied the two holy Brothers on their missionary journey to the West, until they were able to bring them solemnly to Rome and present them to Pope Hadrian II.

5. The event which was to determine the whole of the rest of their lives was the request made by Prince Rastislav of Greater Moravia to the Emperor Michael III, to send to his peoples "a Bishop and teacher... able to explain to them the true Christian faith in their own language".⁽⁷⁾

Those chosen were Saints Cyril and Methodius, who readily accepted, set out and, probably by the year 863, reached Greater Moravia—a State then including various Slav peoples of Central Europe, at the crossroads of the mutual influences between East and West. They undertook among these peoples that mission to which both of them devoted the rest of their lives, spent amidst journeys, privations, sufferings, hostility and persecution, which for Methodius included even a period of cruel imprisonment. All of this they bore with strong faith and indomitable hope in God. They had in fact prepared well for the task entrusted to them: they took with them the texts of the Sacred Scriptures needed for celebrating the Sacred Liturgy, which they had prepared and translated into the Old Slavonic language and written in a new alphabet, devised by Constantine the Philosopher and perfectly adapted to the sounds of that language. The missionary activity of the two Brothers was accompanied by notable success, but also by the understandable difficulties which the preceding initial Christianization, carried out by the neighboring Latin Churches, placed in the way of the new missionaries.

About three years later, while travelling to Rome, they stopped in Pannonia where the Slav Prince Kocel, who had fled from the important civil and religious center of Nitra, gave them a hospitable reception. From here, after some months, they set out again for Rome together with their followers, for whom they desired to obtain Holy Orders. Their route passed through Venice, where the innovating elements of the mission they were carrying out were subjected to a public discussion. In Rome Pope Hadrian II, who had in the meantime succeeded Nicholas I, received them very cordially. He approved the Slavonic liturgical books, which he ordered to be solemnly placed on the altar in the Church of Saint Mary ad Praesepe, today known as Saint Mary Major, and recommended that their followers be ordained priests. This phase of their efforts concluded in a most favorable manner. Methodius however had to carry out the next stages by himself, because his younger brother, now gravely ill, scarcely had time to take religious vows and put on the monastic habit before he died shortly afterwards, on 14 February 869 in Rome.

6. Saint Methodius remained faithful to the words which Cyril had said to him on his deathbed: "Behold, my brother, we have shared the same destiny, ploughing the same furrow; I now fall in the field at the end of my day. I know that you greatly love your Mountain; but do not for the sake of the Mountain give up your work of teaching. For where better can you and salvation?"(8)

Consecrated Archbishop for the territory of the ancient Diocese of Pannonia, and named Papal Legate "ad gentes" (for the Slav peoples), he assumed the ecclesiastical title of the re-established Episcopal See of Sirmium. However, Methodius' apostolic activity was cut short as the result of political and religious complications which culminated in his imprisonment for two years, on the charge of having invaded the episcopal jurisdiction of another. He was set free only on the personal intervention of Pope John VIII. The new sovereign of Greater Moravia, Prince Svatopluk, also subsequently showed hostility to the work of Methodius. He opposed the Slavonic liturgy and spread doubts in Rome about the new Archbishop's orthodoxy. In the year 880 Methodius was called ad limina Apostolorum, to present once more the whole question personally to John VIII. In Rome, absolved of all the accusations, he obtained from the Pope the publication of the Bull *Industriae Tuae*, (9) which, at least in substance, restored the prerogatives granted to the liturgy in Slavonic by Pope John's predecessor Hadrian II.

When in 881 or 882 Methodius went to Constantinople, he received a similar recognition of perfect legitimacy and orthodoxy also from the Byzantine Emperor and the Patriarch Photius, who at that time was in full communion with Rome. He devoted the last years of his life principally to making further translations of the Sacred Scriptures, the liturgical books, the works of the Fathers of the Church and also the collection of ecclesiastical and Byzantine civil laws called the *Nomocanon*. Concerned for the survival of the work which he had begun, he named as his successor his disciple Gorazd. He died on 6 April 885 in the service of the Church established among the Slav peoples.

7. His far-seeing work, his profound and orthodox doctrine, his balance, loyalty, apostolic zeal and intrepid magnanimity gained Methodius the recognition and trust of Roman Pontiffs, of Patriarchs of Constantinople, of Byzantine Emperors and of various Princes of the young Slav peoples. Thus he became the guide and legitimate Pastor of the Church which in that age became established in the midst of those nations. He is unanimously venerated, together with his brother Constantine, as the preacher of the Gospel and teacher "from God and the holy Apostle Peter", (10) and as the foundation of full unity between the Churches of recent foundation and the more ancient ones.

For this reason, "men and women, humble and powerful, rich and poor, free men and slaves, widows and orphans, foreigners and local people, the healthy and the sick"(11) made up the throng that amid tears and songs accompanied to his burial place the good Teacher and Pastor who had become "all things to all men, that I might by all means save some".(12)

To tell the truth, after the death of Methodius the work of the holy Brothers suffered a grave crisis, and persecution of their followers grew so severe that the latter were forced to abandon their missionary field. Nonetheless, their sowing of the Gospel seed did not cease to bear fruit, and their pastoral attitude of concern to bring the revealed truth to new peoples while respecting their cultural originality remains a living model for the Church and for the missionaries of all ages.

III - HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

8. Byzantine in culture, the brothers Cyril and Methodius succeeded in becoming apostles of the Slavs in the full sense of the word. Separation from one's homeland, which God sometimes requires of those he has chosen, when accepted with faith in his promise is always a mysterious and fertile pre-condition for the development and growth of the People of God on earth. The Lord said to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing".(13)

In the dream which Saint Paul had at Troas in Asia Minor, a Macedonian, therefore an inhabitant of the European continent, came before him and implored him to come to his country to proclaim there the Word of God: "Come over to Macedonia and help us".(14)

Divine Providence, which for the two holy Brothers expressed itself through the voice and authority of the Emperor of Byzantium and of the Patriarch of the Church of Constantinople, addressed to them a similar exhortation, when it asked them to go as missionaries among the Slavs. For them, this task meant giving up not only a position of honour but also the contemplative life. It meant leaving the area of the Byzantine Empire and undertaking a long pilgrimage in the service of the Gospel among peoples that, in many aspects, were still very alien to the system of civil society based on the advanced organization of the State and the refined culture of Byzantium, imbued with Christian principles. A similar request has addressed three times to Methodius by the Roman Pontiff, when he sent him as Bishop among the Slavs of Greater Moravia, in the ecclesiastical regions of the ancient Diocese of Pannonia.

9. The Slavonic Life of Methodius reports in the following words the request made by the Prince Rastislav to the Emperor Michael III through his envoys: "Many Christian teachers have reached us from Italy, from Greece and from Germany, who instruct us in different ways. But we Slavs... have no one to direct us towards the truth and instruct us in an understandable way".(15) It was then that Constantine and Methodius were invited to go there. Their profoundly Christian response to the invitation in this circumstance and on all similar occasions is admirably expressed by the

words of Constantine to the Emperor: "However tired and physically worn out I am, I will go with joy to that land";(16) "with joy I depart for the sake of the Christian faith".(17)

The truth and the power of their missionary mandate came from the depths of the mystery of the Redemption, and their evangelizing work among the Slav peoples was to constitute an important link in the mission entrusted by the Savior to the Church until the end of time. It was a fulfillment-in time and in concrete circumstances-of the words of Christ, who in the power of his Cross and Resurrection told the Apostles: "Preach the Gospel to the whole creation";(18) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations".

(19) In so doing, the preachers and teachers of the Slav peoples let themselves be guided by the apostolic ideal of Saint Paul: "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus".(20)

Together with a great respect for persons and a disinterested concern for their true good, the two holy Brothers had the resources of energy, prudence, zeal and charity needed for bringing the light to the future believers, and at the same time for showing them what is good and offering concrete help for attaining it. For this purpose they desired to become similar in every aspect to those to whom they were bringing the Gospel; they wished to become part of those peoples and to share their lot in everything.

10.

Precisely for this reason they found it natural to take a clear position in all the conflicts which were disturbing the societies as they became organized. They took as their own the difficulties and problems inevitable for peoples who were defending their own identity against the military and cultural pressure of the new Romano-Germanic Empire, and who were attempting to resist forms of life which they felt to be foreign. It was also the beginning of wider divergencies, which were unfortunately destined to increase, between Eastern and Western Christianity, and the two holy missionaries found themselves personally involved in this. But they always succeeded in maintaining perfect orthodoxy and consistent attention both to the deposit of tradition and to the new elements in the lives of the peoples being evangelized. Situations of opposition often weighed upon them in all their uncertain and painful complexity. But this did not cause Constantine and Methodius to try to withdraw from the trial. Misunderstanding, overt bad faith and even, for Saint Methodius, imprisonment accepted for love of Christ, did not deflect either of them from their tenacious resolve to help and to serve the good of the Slav peoples and the unity of the universal Church. This was the price which they had to pay for the spreading of the Gospel, the missionary enterprise, the courageous search for new forms of living and effective ways of bringing the Good News to the Slav nations which were then forming.

For the purposes of evangelization, the two holy Brothers-as their biographies indicate-undertook the difficult task of translating the texts of the Sacred Scriptures, which they knew in Greek, into the language of the Slav population which had settled along the borders of their own region and native city. Making use of their own Greek language and culture for this arduous and unusual enterprise, they set themselves to understanding and penetrating the language, customs and traditions of the Slav peoples, faithfully interpreting the aspirations and human values which were present and expressed therein.

11.

In order to translate the truths of the Gospel into a new language, they had to make an effort to gain a good grasp of the interior world of those to whom they intended to proclaim the word of God in images and concepts that would sound familiar to them. They realized that an essential condition of the success of their missionary activity was to transpose correctly Biblical notions and Greek theological concepts into a very different context of thought and historical experience. It was a question of a new method of catechesis. To defend its legitimacy and prove its value, Saint Methodius, at first together with his brother and then alone, did not hesitate to answer with docility the invitations to come to Rome, invitations received first from Pope Nicholas I in 867 and then from Pope John VIII in 879. Both Popes wished to compare the doctrine being taught by the Brothers in Greater Moravia with that which the holy Apostles Peter and Paul had passed down, together with the glorious trophy of their holy relics, to the Church's chief episcopal See.

Previously, Constantine and his fellow workers had been engaged in creating a new alphabet, so that the truths to be proclaimed and explained could be written in Old Slavonic and would thus be fully comprehended and grasped by their hearers. The effort to learn the language and to understand the mentality of the new peoples to whom they wished to bring the faith was truly worthy of the missionary spirit. Exemplary too was their determination to assimilate and identify themselves with all the needs and expectations of the Slav peoples. Their generous decision to identify themselves with those peoples' life and traditions, once having purified and enlightened them by Revelation, make Cyril and Methodius true models for all the missionaries who in every period have accepted Saint Paul's invitation to become all things to all people in order to redeem all. And in particular for the missionaries who, from ancient times until the present day, from Europe to Asia and today in every continent, have labored to translate the Bible and the texts of the liturgy into the living languages of the various peoples, so as to bring them the one word of God, thus made accessible in each civilization's own forms of expression.

Perfect communion in love preserves the Church from all forms of particularism, ethnic exclusivism or racial prejudice, and from any nationalistic arrogance. This communion must elevate and sublimate every purely natural legitimate sentiment of the human heart.

IV - THEY PLANTED THE CHURCH OF GOD

12. But the characteristic of the approach adopted by the Apostles of the Slavs Cyril and Methodius which I especially wish to emphasize is the peaceful way in which they built up the Church, guided as they were by their vision of the Church as one, holy and universal.

Even though Slav Christians, more than others, tend to think of the holy Brothers as "Slavs at heart", the latter nevertheless remain men of Hellenic culture and Byzantine training. In other words, men who fully belonged to the civil and ecclesiastical tradition of the Christian East.

Already in their time certain differences between Constantinople and Rome had begun to appear as pretexts for disunity, even though the deplorable split between the two parts of the same Christian world was still in the distant future. The evangelizers and teachers of the Slavs set out for Greater Moravia imbued with all the wealth of tradition and religious experience which marked Eastern Christianity and which was particularly evident in theological teaching and in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy.

The sacred rites in all the Churches within the borders of the Byzantine Empire had long been celebrated in Greek. However; the traditions of many national Churches of the East, such as the Georgian and Syriac, which used the language of the people in their liturgies, were well known to the advanced cultural milieu of Constantinople. They were especially well known to Constantine the Philosopher, as a result of his studies and of his many contacts with Christians belonging to those Churches, both in the capital and in the course of his journeys.

Both the Brothers were aware of the antiquity and legitimacy of these traditions, and were therefore not afraid to use the Slavonic language in the liturgy and to make it into an effective instrument for bringing the divine truths to those who spoke it. This they did without any spirit of superiority or domination, but out of love of justice and with a clear apostolic zeal for peoples then developing.

Western Christianity, after the migrations of the new peoples, had amalgamated the newly arrived ethnic groups with the Latin-speaking population already living there, and had extended to all, in order to unite them, the Latin language, liturgy and culture which had been transmitted by the Church of Rome. The uniformity thus achieved gave relatively young and rapidly expanding societies a sense of strength and compactness, which contributed to a closer unity among them and a more forceful affirmation in Europe. It is understandable that in such a situation differences sometimes came to be regarded as a threat to a still incomplete unity. One can also understand how strongly the temptation was felt to eliminate such differences, even by using forms of coercion.

13. At this point it is an unusual and admirable thing that the holy Brothers, working in such complex and precarious situations, did not seek to impose on the peoples assigned to their preaching either the undeniable superiority of the Greek language and Byzantine culture, or the customs and way of life of the more advanced society in which they had grown up and which necessarily remained familiar and dear to them. Inspired by the ideal of uniting in Christ the new believers, they adapted to the Slavonic language the rich and refined texts of the Byzantine liturgy and likewise adapted to the mentality and customs of the new

peoples the subtle and complex elaborations of Greco-Roman law. In following this programme of harmony and peace, Cyril and Methodius were ever respectful of the obligations of their mission. They acknowledged the traditional prerogatives and ecclesiastical rights laid down by Conciliar Canons. Thus, though subjects of the Eastern Empire and believers subject to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, they considered it their duty to give an account of their missionary work to the Roman Pontiff. They likewise submitted to his judgment, in order to obtain his approval, the doctrine which they professed and taught, the liturgical books which they had written in the Slavonic language, and the methods which they were using in evangelizing those peoples.

Having undertaken their mission under orders from Constantinople, they then in a sense sought to have it confirmed by approaching the Apostolic See of Rome, the visible center of the Church's unity.(21) Thus they established the Church with an awareness of her universality as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This is clearly and explicitly seen in their whole way of acting. It can be said that Jesus' priestly prayer- *ut unum sint* (22) is their missionary motto in accordance with the Psalmist's words: "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples".(23) For us today their apostolate also possesses the eloquence of an ecumenical appeal: it is an invitation to restore, in the peace of reconciliation, the unity that was gravely damaged after the time of Cyril and Methodius, and, first and foremost, the unity between East and West.

The conviction held by the holy Brothers from Salonika, namely that each local Church is called to enrich with its own endowments the Catholic "pleroma", was in perfect harmony with their evangelical insight that the different conditions of life of the individual Christian Churches can never justify discord, disagreement and divisions in the profession of the one faith and in the exercise of charity.

14. As we know, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council " the 'ecumenical movement' means those activities and enterprises which, according to various needs of the Church and as opportunities offer, are initiated and

organized to promote Christian unity".(24) Thus it seems in no way anachronistic to see Saints Cyril and Methodius as the authentic precursors of ecumenism, inasmuch as they wished to eliminate effectively or to reduce any divisions, real or only apparent, between the individual communities belonging to the same Church. For the division which unfortunately occurred in the course of the Church's history and which sadly still persists "not only openly contradicts the will of Christ, (but) provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Gospel to every creature".(25)

The fervent solicitude shown by both Brothers and especially by Methodius by reason of his episcopal responsibility, to preserve unity of faith and love between the Churches of which they were members, namely, between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome on the one hand, and the Churches which arose in the lands of the Slavs on the other, was and will always remain their great merit. This merit is all the greater if one takes into account the fact that their mission was exercised in the years 863-885, thus in the critical years when there emerged and began-to grow more serious the fatal discord and bitter controversy between the Churches of the East and the West. The division was accentuated by the question of where Bulgaria, which had just officially accepted Christianity, canonically belonged.

In this stormy period, which was also marked by armed conflicts between neighboring Christian peoples, the holy Brothers from Salonika preserved a resolute and vigilant fidelity to right doctrine and to the tradition of the perfectly united Church, and in particular to the "divine teachings" and "ecclesiastical teachings"(26) on which, in accordance with the Canons of the ancient Councils, her structure and organization was founded. This fidelity enabled them to complete their great missionary tasks and to remain in full spiritual and canonical unity with the Church of Rome, with the Church of Constantinople and with the new Churches which they had founded among the Slav peoples.

15. Methodius especially did not hesitate to face misunderstandings, conflicts and even slanders and physical persecution, rather than fall short of his exemplary ecclesial fidelity, and in order to remain faithful to his duties as a Christian and a Bishop and to the obligations which he had assumed vis-a-vis the Church of Byzantium which had begotten him and sent him out as a missionary together with Cyril. Then there were his obligations to the Church of Rome, thanks to which he fulfilled his charge as Archbishop in "the territory of Saint Peter";(27) likewise his obligations to that Church growing in the lands of the Slavs, which he accepted as his own and successfully defended-convicted of his just-right before the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, protecting in particular the liturgy in the Old Slavonic language and the fundamental ecclesiastical rights proper to the Churches in the various nations.

By thus acting, he always resorted, as did Constantine the Philosopher, to dialogue with those who opposed his ideas or his pastoral initiatives and who cast doubt on their legitimacy. Thus he would always remain a teacher for all those who, in whatever age, seek to eliminate discord by respecting the manifold fullness of the Church, which, conforming to the will of its Founder Jesus Christ, must be always one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This task was perfectly reflected in the Creed of the 150 Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, which is the unalterable profession of faith of all Christians.

V - CATHOLIC SENSE OF THE CHURCH

16. It is not only the evangelical content of the doctrine proclaimed by Saints Cyril and Methodius that merits particular emphasis. Also very expressive and instructive for the Church today is the catechetical and pastoral method that they applied in their apostolic activity among the peoples who had not yet heard the Sacred Mysteries celebrated in their native language, nor heard the word of God proclaimed in a way that completely fitted their own mentality and respected the actual conditions of their own life.

We know that the Second Vatican Council, twenty years ago, had as one of its principal tasks that of reawakening the self-awareness of the Church and, through her interior renewal, of impressing upon her a fresh missionary impulse for the proclamation of the eternal message of salvation, peace and mutual concord among peoples and nations, beyond all the frontiers that yet divide our planet, which is intended by the will of God the Creator and Redeemer to be the common dwelling for all humanity. The dangers that in our times are accumulating over our world cannot make us forget the prophetic insight of Pope John XXIII, who convoked the Council with the intent and the conviction that it would be capable of preparing and initiating a period of springtime and rebirth in the life of the Church.

And, among its statements on the subject of universality, the same Council included the following: "All men are called to belong to the new People of God. Wherefore this People, while remaining one and unique, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the purpose of God's will may be fulfilled. In the beginning God made human nature one. After his children were scattered, he decreed that they should at length be unified again (cf. Jn 11:52)... The Church or People of God takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people by establishing that kingdom. Rather does she foster and take to herself, insofar as they are good, the abilities, resources, and customs of each people. Taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens, and ennobles them... This characteristic of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself... In virtue of this catholicity each individual part of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church.

Thus through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of its parts receive increase".(28)

17. We can say without fear of contradiction that such a traditional and at the same time extremely up-to-date vision of the catholicity of the Church-like a symphony of the various liturgies in all the world's languages united in one single liturgy, or a melodious chorus sustained by the voices of unnumbered multitudes, rising in countless modulations, tones and harmonies for the praise of God from every part of the globe, at every moment of history-this vision corresponds in a particular way to the theological and pastoral vision which inspired the apostolic and missionary work of Constantine the Philosopher and of Methodius, and which sustained their mission among the Slav nations.

In Venice, before the representatives of the ecclesiastical world, who held a rather narrow idea of the Church and were opposed to this vision, Saint Cyril defended it with courage. He showed that many peoples had already in the past introduced and now possessed a liturgy written and celebrated in their own language, such as " the Armenians, the Persians, the Abasgians, the Georgians, the Sogdians, the Goths, the Avars, the Tirsians, the Khazars, the Arabs, the Copts, the Syrians and many others".(29)

Reminding them that God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on all people without exception, (30) he said: "Do not all breathe the air in the same way? And you are not ashamed to decree only three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), deciding that all other peoples and races should remain blind and deaf! Tell me: do you hold this because you consider God is so weak that he cannot grant it, or so envious that he does not wish it?".(31) To the historical and logical arguments which they brought against him Cyril replied by referring to the inspired basis of Sacred Scripture: "Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father";(32) "All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name";(33) "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!".(34)

18. The Church is catholic also because she is able to present in every human context the revealed truth, preserved by her intact in its divine content, in such a way as to bring it into contact with the lofty thoughts and just expectations of every individual and every people. Moreover, the entire patrimony of good which every generation transmits to posterity, together with the priceless gift of life, forms as it were an immense and many-coloured collection of tesserae that together make up the living mosaic of the Pantocrator, who will manifest himself in his total splendour only at the moment of the Parousia.

The Gospel does not lead to the impoverishment or extinction of those things which every individual, people and nation and every culture throughout history recognizes and brings into being as goodness, truth and beauty. On the contrary, it strives to assimilate and to develop all these values: to live them with magnanimity and joy and to perfect them by the mysterious and ennobling light of Revelation.

The concrete dimension of catholicity, inscribed by Christ the Lord in the very make-up of the Church, is not something static, outside history and flatly uniform. In a certain sense it wells up and develops every day as something new from the unanimous faith of all those who believe in God, One and Three, revealed by Jesus Christ and preached by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. This dimension issues quite spontaneously from mutual respect proper to fraternal love-for every person and every nation, great or small, and from the honest acknowledgment of the qualities and rights of brethren in the faith.

19. The catholicity of the Church is manifested in the active joint responsibility and generous cooperation of all for the sake of the common good. The Church everywhere effects her universality by accepting, uniting and exalting in the way that is properly hers, with motherly care, every real human value. At the same time, she strives in every clime and every historical situation to win for God each and every human person, in order to unite them with one another and with him in his truth and his love.

All individuals, all nations, cultures and civilizations have their own part to play and their own place in God's mysterious plan and in the universal history of salvation. This was the thought of the two holy Brothers: God "merciful and kind", (35) "waiting for all people to repent,) that all may be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth, (36)... does not allow the human race to succumb to weakness and perish, and to fall into the temptation of the enemy. But year by year and at every time he does not cease to lavish on us a manifold grace, from the beginning until today in the same way: first, through the Patriarchs and Fathers, and after them through the Prophets; and again through the Apostles and Martyrs, the just men and the Doctors whom he chooses in the midst of this stormy life".(37)

20. The message of the Gospel which Saints Cyril and Methodius translated for the Slav peoples, drawing with wisdom from the treasury of the Church "things old and new", (38) was transmitted through preaching and instruction in accordance with the eternal truths, at the same time being adapted to the concrete historical situation. Thanks to the missionary efforts of both Saints, the Slav peoples were able for the first time to realize their own vocation to share in the eternal design of the Most Holy Trinity, in the universal plan for the salvation of the world. At the same time, they can recognized their role at the service of the whole history of the humanity created by God the Father, redeemed by the Son our Savior and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Thanks to this preaching, duly approved by the authorities of the Church-the Bishops of Rome and the Patriarchs of Constantinople-the Slavs were able to feel that they too, together with the other nations of the earth, were descendants and heirs of the promise made by God to Abraham.(39) In this way, thanks to the ecclesiastical organization created by Saint Methodius and thanks to their awareness of their own Christian identity, the Slavs took their destined place in the Church which had now arisen also in that part of Europe. For this reason, their modern descendants keep in grateful and everlasting remembrance the one who became the link that binds them to the chain of the great heralds of the divine Revelation of the Old and New Testaments: "After all of these, the merciful God, in our own time, raised up for the good work, for the sake of our own people, for whom

nobody had ever cared, our Teacher, the holy Methodius, whose virtues and struggles we unblushingly compare, one by one, to those of these men pleasing to God". (40)

VI - THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE

21. The Brothers from Salonika were not only heirs of the faith but also heirs of the culture of Ancient Greece, continued by Byzantium. Everyone knows how important this heritage is for the whole of European culture and, directly or indirectly, for the culture of the entire world. The work of evangelization which they carried out as pioneers in territory inhabited by Slav peoples-contains both a model of what today is called "inculturation the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church.

By incarnating the Gospel in the native culture of the peoples which they were evangelizing, Saints Cyril and Methodius were especially meritorious for the formation and development of that same culture, or rather of many cultures. Indeed all the cultures of the Slav nations owe their "beginning" or development to the work of the Brothers from Salonika. For by their original and ingenious creation of an alphabet for the Slavonic language the Brothers made a fundamental contribution to the culture and literature of all the Slav nations.

Furthermore, the translation of the sacred books, carried out by Cyril and Methodius together with their pupils, conferred a capacity and cultural dignity upon the Old Slavonic liturgical language, which became for many hundreds of years not only the ecclesiastical but also the official and literary language, and even the common language of the more educated classes of the greater part of the Slav nations, and in particular of all the Slavs of the Eastern Rite. It was also used in the Church of the Holy Cross in Cracow, where the Slav Benedictines had established themselves. Here were published the first liturgical books printed in this language. Up to the present day this is the language used in the Byzantine liturgy of the Slavonic Eastern Churches of the Rite of Constantinople, both Catholic and Orthodox, in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, as well as in various countries of Western Europe. It is also used in the Roman liturgy of the Catholics of Croatia.

22. In the historical development of the Slavs of Eastern Rite, this language played a role equal to that of the Latin language in the West. It also lasted longer than Latin in part until the nineteenth century-and exercised a much more direct influence on the formation of the local literary languages, thanks to its close kinship with them. These merits vis-a-vis the culture of all the Slav peoples and nations make the work of evangelization carried out by Saints Cyril and Methodius in a certain sense constantly present in the history and in the life of these peoples and nations.

VII - THE SIGNIFICANCE AND INFLUENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN MILLENNIUM IN THE SLAV WORLD

23.

The apostolic and missionary activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius, which belongs to the second half of the ninth century, can be considered the first effective evangelization of the Slavs.

This activity involved the individual territories in varying degrees, and was mainly concentrated in the territories of the then existing State of Greater Moravia. It principally included the regions belonging to the metropolis of which Methodius was pastor, namely Moravia, Slovakia and Pannonia, the last being a part of modern Hungary. Included in the sphere of the wider influence exercised by this apostolic activity, especially that of the missionaries trained by Methodius, were the other groups of Western Slavs, particularly those of Bohemia. The first historical Prince of Bohemia of the dynasty of the Premyslids, Bozyvoj (Borivoj), was probably baptized according to the Slavonic Rite. Later this influence reached the Sorbo-Lusatian tribes, and the territories of southern Poland. However, from the time of the fall of Greater Moravia in about 905- 906 the Latin Rite took the place of the Slav Rite and Bohemia was assigned ecclesiastically to the Bishop of Regensburg and the metropolis of Salzburg. However, it is worthy of note that about the middle of the tenth century, at the time of Saint Wenceslaus, there was still a strong intermingling of the elements of both rites, and an advanced coexistence of both languages in the liturgy: Slavonic and Latin. Moreover, the Christianization of the people was not possible without using the native language. And only upon such a foundation could the development of the Christian terminology in Bohemia take place, and from here, subsequently, the development and consolidation of ecclesiastical terminology in Poland. Information about the Prince of the Vislits in the Lite of Methodius is the most ancient historical reference to one of the Polish tribes.(41) Insufficient data exist for it to be possible to link this item of information with the institution in the Polish territories of a Slav Rite ecclesiastical organization.

24. The Baptism of Poland in 966, in the person of the first historical sovereign, Mieszko, who married the Bohemian princess Dubravka, took place principally through the Bohemian Church, and by this route Christianity reached Poland from Rome in the Latin form. But the fact remains that the beginnings of Christianity in Poland are in a way linked with the work of the Brothers who set out from distant Salonika.

Among the Slavs of the Balkan peninsula the efforts of the holy Brothers bore fruit in an even more visible way. Thanks to their apostolate the Christianity which had already for some time been established in Croatia was consolidated.

Principally through their disciples who had been expelled from the area where they had originally worked the mission of Cyril and Methodius was confirmed and developed wonderfully in Bulgaria. Here, thanks to Saint Clement of Ohrid, dynamic centers of monastic life arose, and here particularly the Cyrillic alphabet developed. From here too Christianity moved to other territories, until it passed through neighboring Romania and reached the ancient Rus' of Kiev, and then spread from Moscow eastwards. In a few years, in 1988 to be exact, the millennium of the baptism of Saint Vladimir, Grand Duke of Kiev, will be celebrated.

25. Rightly therefore Saints Cyril and Methodius were at an early date recognized by the family of Slav peoples as the fathers of both their Christianity and their culture. In many of the territories mentioned above, although there had been various missionaries, the majority of the Slav population in the ninth century still retained pagan customs and beliefs. Only in the land cultivated by our Saints, or at least prepared by them for cultivation, did Christianity definitively enter the history of the Slavs during the following century.

Their work is an outstanding contribution to the formation of the common Christian roots of Europe, roots which by their strength and vitality are one of the most solid points of reference, which no serious attempt to reconstruct in a new and relevant way the unity of the Continent can ignore.

After eleven centuries of Christianity among the Slavs, we clearly see that the heritage of the Brothers from Salonika is and remains for the Slavs deeper and stronger than any division. Both Christian traditions—the Eastern deriving from Constantinople and the Western deriving from Rome arose in the bosom of the one Church, even though against the background of different cultures and of a different approach to the same problems. This diversity, when its origin is properly understood and when its value and meaning are properly considered, can only enrich the culture of Europe and its religious tradition, and likewise become an adequate foundation for its hoped-for spiritual renewal.

26. Ever since the ninth century, when in Christian Europe a new organization was emerging, Saints Cyril and Methodius have held out to us a message clearly of great relevance for our own age, which precisely by reason of the many complex problems of a religious, cultural, civil and international nature, is seeking a vital unity in the real communion of its various elements. It can be said of the two evangelizers that characteristic of them was their love for the communion of the universal Church both in the East and in the West, and, within the universal Church, love for the particular Church that was coming into being in the Slav nations. From them also comes for the Christians and-people of our time the invitation to build communion together.

But it is in the specific area of missionary activity that the example of Cyril and Methodius is of even greater value. For this activity is an essential task of the Church, and is urgent today in the already mentioned form of "inculturation". The two Brothers not only carried out their mission with full respect for the culture already existing among the Slav peoples, but together with religion they eminently and unceasingly promoted and extended that culture. By analogy, today the Churches of ancient origin can and must help the young Churches and peoples to mature in their own identity and progress in it.(42)

27. Cyril and Methodius are as it were the connecting links or spiritual bridge between the Eastern and Western traditions, which both come together in the one great Tradition of the universal Church. For us they are the champions and also the patrons of the ecumenical endeavor of the sister Churches of East and West, for the rediscovery through prayer and dialogue of visible Unity in perfect and total communion, "the unity which", as I said on the occasion of my visit to Bari, "is neither absorption nor fusion".(43) Unity is a meeting in truth and love, granted to us by the Spirit. Cyril and Methodius, in their personality and their work, are figures that awaken in all Christians a great "longing for union" and for unity between the two sister Churches of East and West.(44) For full catholicity, every nation, every culture has its own part to play in the universal plan of salvation. Every particular tradition, every local Church must remain open and alert to the other Churches and traditions and, at the same time, to universal and catholic communion; were it to remain closed in on itself, it too would run the risk of becoming impoverished.

By exercising their own charism, Cyril and Methodius made a decisive contribution to the building of Europe not only in Christian religious communion but also to its civil and cultural union. Not even today does there exist any other way of overcoming tensions and repairing the divisions and antagonisms both in Europe: and in the world which threaten to cause a frightful destruction of lives and values. Being Christians in our day means being builders of communion in the Church and in society. This calls for openness to others, mutual understanding, and readiness to cooperate through the generous exchange of cultural and spiritual resources.

One of the fundamental aspirations of humanity today is to rediscover unity and communion for a life truly worthy of man on the worldwide level. The Church, conscious of being the universal sign and sacrament of salvation and of the unity of the human race, declares her readiness to accomplish this duty of hers, to which "the conditions of this age lend special urgency so that all people joined more closely today by various social, technical, and cultural bonds can achieve as well full unity in Christ".(45)

VIII - CONCLUSION

28. It is fitting, then, that the Church should celebrate with solemnity and joy the eleven centuries that have elapsed since the close of the apostolic work of the first Archbishop, ordained in Rome for the Slav peoples, Methodius, and of his brother Cyril, and that she should thus commemorate the entry of these peoples on to the scene of the history of

salvation and into the of European nations which during the preceding centuries had already accepted the Gospel message. Everyone will understand with what profound happiness I will share in this celebration as the first son of the Slav race to be called, after nearly two millennia, to occupy the episcopal see that once belonged to Peter in this city of Rome.

29. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit": we salute the eleventh centenary of Saint Methodius' death with the very words which as his Life in Old Slavonic recounts he uttered before he died, when he was about to join his fathers in faith, hope and charity: the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Doctors and Martyrs. By the testimony of his words and life, sustained by the charism of the Spirit, he gave an example of a vocation fruitful not only for the century in which he lived but also for the centuries which followed, and in a special way for our own times. His blessed "passing" in the spring of the year 885 after the Incarnation of Christ (and according to the Byzantine calculation of time, in the year 6393 since the creation of the world took place at a time when disquieting clouds were gathering above Constantinople and hostile tensions were increasingly threatening the peace and life of the nations, and even threatening the sacred bonds of Christian brotherhood and communion linking the Churches of the East and West.

In his Cathedral, filled with the faithful of different races, the disciples of Saint Methodius paid solemn homage to their dead pastor for the message of salvation, peace and reconciliation which he had brought and to which he had devoted his life: "They celebrated a sacred office in Latin, Greek and Slavonic", (47) adoring God and venerating the first Archbishop of the Church which he established among the Slavs, to whom he and his brother had proclaimed the Gospel in their own language. This Church grew even stronger when through the explicit consent of the Pope it received a native hierarchy, rooted in the apostolic succession and remaining in unity of faith and love both with the Church of Rome and with that of Constantinople, from which the Slav mission had begun.

Now that eleven centuries have passed since his death, I desire to be present at least spiritually in Velehrad, where-it seems-Providence enabled Methodius to end his apostolic life:

-I desire also to pause in the Basilica of Saint Clement in Rome, in the place where Saint Cyril was buried;

-and at the Tombs of both these Brothers, the Apostles of the Slavs, I desire to recommend to the Most Blessed Trinity their spiritual heritage with a special prayer.

30. "Into your hands I commend..."

O great God, One in Trinity, I entrust to you the heritage of faith of the Slav nations; preserve and bless this work of yours!

Remember, O Almighty Father, the moment when, in accordance with your will, the "fullness of time" arrived for these peoples and nations, and the holy Missionaries from Salonika faithfully fulfilled the command that your Son Jesus Christ had entrusted to his Apostles; following in their footsteps and in those of their successors, they brought into the lands inhabited by the Slavs the light of the Gospel, the Good News of salvation and, in their presence, bore testimony -that you are the Creator of man, that you are our Father and that in you we are all brethren;

-that through the Son, your eternal Word, you have given existence to all things, and have called human beings to share in your life without end;

-that you have so loved the world as to grant it the gift of your only begotten Son, who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and by the power of the Holy Spirit became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary and was made man;

-and that finally you have sent the Spirit of power and consolation so that every human being, redeemed by Christ, may in him receive the dignity of a child and become a co-heir of the unfailing promises which you have made to humanity! Your plan of creation, O Father, culminating in the Redemption, touches the living man and embraces his entire life and the history of all peoples.

Grant, O Father, what the whole Church today implores from you and grant also that the people and the nations which, thanks to the apostolic mission of the holy Brothers from Salonika, have known and accepted you, the true God, and through Baptism have entered into the holy community of your children, may still continue, without hindrance, to accept with enthusiasm and trust this evangelical programme and continue to realize all their human possibilities on the foundation of their teachings!

-May they follow, in conformity with their own conscience, the voice of your call along the paths shown to them for the first time eleven centuries ago!

-May their membership of the Kingdom of your Son never be considered by anyone to be contrary to the good of their earthly homeland!

-May they render to you due praise in private and in public life!

-May they live in truth, charity, justice and in the enjoyment of the messianic peace which enfolds human hearts, communities, the earth and the entire universe!

-Aware of their dignity as human beings and children of God, may they have the strength to overcome all hatred and to conquer evil with good!

But also grant to the whole of Europe, O Most Holy Trinity, that through the intercession of the two holy Brothers it may feel ever more strongly the need for religious and Christian unity and for a brotherly communion of all its peoples, so that when incomprehension and mutual distrust have been overcome and when ideological conflicts have been

conquered in the common awareness of the truth, it may be for the whole world an example of just and peaceful coexistence in mutual respect and inviolate liberty.

31. To you, therefore, God the Father Almighty, God the Son who have redeemed the world, God the Spirit who are the sustainer and teacher of all holiness, I desire to entrust the whole Church of yesterday, today and tomorrow, the Church both in Europe and throughout the earth. Into your hands I commit this singular wealth, made up of so many different gifts, ancient and new, placed in the common treasury by so many different sons and daughters.

The whole Church thanks you, who called the Slav nations into the communion of the faith, for this heritage and for the contribution made by them to the universal patrimony. The Pope of Slav origin in a special way thanks you for this. May this contribution never cease to enrich the Church, the Continent of Europe and the whole world! May it never fail in Europe and in the world of today! May it never fade from the memories of our contemporaries! We desire to accept in its entirety everything original and valid which the Slav nations have brought and continue to bring to the spiritual patrimony of the Church and of humanity. The whole Church, aware of this common treasure, professes her spiritual solidarity with them and reaffirms her own responsibility towards the Gospel, for the work of salvation which she is called upon to accomplish also today in the whole world, unto the ends of the earth. It is essential to go back to the past in order to understand, in the light of the past, the present reality and in order to discern tomorrow. For the mission of the Church is always oriented and directed with unflinching hope towards the future.

32. The future! However much it may humanly speaking seem filled with threats and uncertainties, we trustfully place it in your hands, Heavenly Father, invoking upon it the intercession of the Mother of your Son and Mother of the Church, the intercession of your Apostles Peter and Paul, and of Saints Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, of Augustine and Boniface and all the other evangelizers of Europe who, strong in faith, hope and charity, proclaimed to our fathers your salvation and your peace, and amid the toils of the spiritual sowing began to build the civilization of love and the new order based on your holy law and the help of your grace, which at the end of the age will give life to all things and all people in the heavenly Jerusalem. Amen!

To you, dear brothers and sisters, my Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 2 June, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, in the year 1985, the seventh of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

1. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Egregiae Virtutis* (31 December 1980): AAS 73 (1981), pp. 258-262.
2. LEO XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Grande Munus* (30 September 1880), in *Leonis XIII Pont. Max. Acta*, II, PP. 125-137; cf. also PIUS XI, Letter *Quod S. Cyrillum* (13 February 1927) to the Archbishops and Bishops of the Kingdom of the Serbs- Croats-Slovenes and of the Czechoslovakian Republic: AAS 19 (1927), pp. 93-96; JOHN XXIII, Apostolic Letter *Magnifici Eventus* (11 May 1963) to the Prelates of the Slav Nations: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 434-439. PAUL VI, Apostolic Epistle *Antiquae Nobilitatis* (2 February 1969) for the eleventh centenary of the death of Saint Cyril: AAS 61 (1969), pp. 137-149).
3. PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Pacis Nuntius* (24 October 1964): AAS 56 (1964), pp. 965-967.
4. Cf. *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici*, t. III, Brno 1969, pp. 197- 208.
5. Only in a few Slav nations is the feast still celebrated on 7 July.
6. Cf. *Vita Constantini VIII*, 16-18: *Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses*, *Fontes, recensuerunt et illustraverunt Fr. Grivec et Fr. Tomsic* (*Radovi Staroslavenskog Instituta, Knjiga 4, Zagreb 1960*), p. 184.
7. Cf. *Vita Constantini XIV*, 2-4; ed. cit., pp. 199f.
8. *Vita Methodii VI*, 2-3; ed. cit., p. 225.
9. Cf. *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici*, t. III, Brno 1969, pp. 197- 208.
10. Cf. *Vita Methodii VIII*, 1-2: ed. cit., p. 225.
11. Cf. *Vita Methodii XVII*, 13: ed. cit., p. 237.
12. Cf. *ibid.*; cf. also 1 Cor 9:22.
13. Gen 12:1-2.
14. Acts 16:9.
15. *Vita Methodii V*, 2: ed. cit., p. 223.
16. *Vita Constantini XIV*, 9: ed. cit., p. 200.
17. *Vita Constantini VI*, 7: ed. cit., p. 179.
18. Mk 16:15.
19. Mt 28:19.
20. Gal 3:26-28
21. The successors of Pope Nicholas 1, even though they were concerned at conflicting reports regarding the teaching and activity of Cyril and Methodius, expressed their full agreement when they had a direct meeting with the Brothers.

Prohibitions or limitations in the use of the new liturgy are to be attributed more than anything else to the pressures of the moment, to changing political alliances, and to the need to maintain harmony.

22. Jn 17:21 f.

23. Ps 117[116]:1.

24. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.

25. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.

26. *Vita Methodii IX*, 3: VIII, 16: ed. cit., pp. 229; 228.

27. Cf. *Vita Methodii IX*, 2: ed. cit., p. 229.

28. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

29. *Vita Constantini XVI*, 8: ed. cit., p. 205.

30. Cf. Mt 5:45.

31. *Vita Constantini XVI*, 4-6: ed. cit., p. 205.

32. *Vita Constantini XVI*, 58: ed. cit., p. 208; Phil 2:11.

33. *Vita Constantini XVI*, 12: ed. cit., p. 206; Ps 66 [65]:4.

34. *Vita Constantini XVI*, 13: ed. cit., p. 206; Ps 117 [116]:1.

35. Cf. Ps 112 [113]:4; Jl 2-13.

36. Cf. 1 Tim 2:4.

37. *Vita Constantini I*, 1: ed. cit., p. 169.

38. Cf. Mt 13:52.

39. Cf. Gen 15:1-21.

40. *Vita Methodii II*, 1: ed. cit., pp. 220f.

41. Cf. *Vita Methodii XI*, 2-3: ed. cit., p. 231.

42. Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 38.

43. JOHN PAUL II, Speech at the ecumenical meeting in the Basilica of Saint Nicholas at Bari (26 February 1984), No. 2: *Insegnamenti VII*, 1 (1984), p. 532.

44. *Ibid.*, No. 1: loc. cit., p. 531.

45. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

46. Cf. *Vita Methodii XVII*, 9-10: ed. cit., p. 237; Lk 23:46; Ps 31 [30]: 6.

47. *Vita Methodii XVII*, 11: ed. cit., p. 237.

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To His Venerable Brothers
in the Episcopate
to the Priests to the Religious Families
to the sons and daughters of the Church
and to all Men and Women of good will
on Human Work
on the ninetieth anniversary of Rerum Novarum

1981.09.14

Blessing
Venerable Brothers and Dear Sons and Daughters, Greetings and apostolic Blessing

THROUGH WORK man must earn his daily bread¹ and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family. And work means any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances; it means any human activity that can and must be recognized as work, in the midst of all the many activities of which man is capable and to which he is predisposed by his very nature, by virtue of humanity itself. Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself², and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth³. From the beginning therefore he is called to work. Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth. Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Human Work on the Ninetieth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum

Since 15 May of the present year was the ninetieth anniversary of the publication by the great Pope of the "social question", Leo XIII, of the decisively important Encyclical which begins with the words Rerum Novarum, I wish to devote this document to human work and, even more, to man in the vast context of the reality of work. As I said in the Encyclical Redemptor Hominis, published at the beginning of my service in the See of Saint Peter in Rome, man "is the primary and fundamental way for the Church"⁴, precisely because of the inscrutable mystery of Redemption in Christ; and so it is necessary to return constantly to this way and to follow it ever anew in the various aspects in which it shows us all the wealth and at the same time all the toil of human existence on earth.

Work is one of these aspects, a perennial and fundamental one, one that is always relevant and constantly demands renewed attention and decisive witness. Because fresh questions and problems are always arising, there are always fresh hopes, but also fresh fears and threats, connected with this basic dimension of human existence: man's life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity, but at the same time work contains the unceasing measure of human toil and suffering, and also of the harm and injustice which penetrate deeply into social life within individual nations and on the international level.

While it is true that man eats the bread produced by the work of his hands⁵ - and this means not only the daily bread by which his body keeps alive but also the bread of science and progress, civilization and culture - it is also a perennial truth that he eats this bread by "the sweat of his face"⁶, that is to say, not only by personal effort and toil but also in the midst of many tensions, conflicts and crises, which, in relationship with the reality of work, disturb the life of individual societies and also of all humanity.

We are celebrating the ninetieth anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum on the eve of new developments in technological, economic and political conditions which, according to many experts, will influence the world of work and production no less than the industrial revolution of the last century. There are many factors of a general nature: the widespread introduction of automation into many spheres of production, the increase in the cost of energy and raw materials, the growing realization that the heritage of nature is limited and that it is being intolerably polluted, and the emergence on the political scene of peoples who, after centuries of subjection, are demanding their rightful place among the nations and in international decision-making. These new conditions and demands will require a reordering and adjustment of the structures of the modern economy and of the distribution of work. Unfortunately, for millions of skilled workers these changes may perhaps mean unemployment, at least for a time, or the need for retraining. They

will very probably involve a reduction or a less rapid increase in material well-being for the more developed countries. But they can also bring relief and hope to the millions who today live in conditions of shameful and unworthy poverty. It is not for the Church to analyze scientifically the consequences that these changes may have on human society. But the Church considers it her task always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to help to guide the above-mentioned changes so as to ensure authentic progress by man and society.

2. In the Organic Development of the Church's Social Action

It is certainly true that work, as a human issue, is at the very centre of the "social question" to which, for almost a hundred years, since the publication of the above-mentioned Encyclical, the Church's teaching and the many undertakings connected with her apostolic mission have been especially directed. The present reflections on work are not intended to follow a different line, but rather to be in organic connection with the whole tradition of this teaching and activity. At the same time, however, I am making them, according to the indication in the Gospel, in order to bring out from the heritage of the Gospel "what is new and what is old"⁷. Certainly, work is part of "what is old"- as old as man and his life on earth. Nevertheless, the general situation of man in the modern world, studied and analyzed in its various aspects of geography, culture and civilization, calls for the discovery of the new meanings of human work. It likewise calls for the formulation of the new tasks that in this sector face each individual, the family, each country, the whole human race, and, finally, the Church herself.

During the years that separate us from the publication of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the social question has not ceased to engage the Church's attention. Evidence of this are the many documents of the Magisterium issued by the Popes and by the Second Vatican Council, pronouncements by individual Bishops, and the activity of the various centres of thought and of practical apostolic initiatives, both on the international level and at the level of the local Churches. It is difficult to list here in detail all the manifestations of the commitment of the Church and of Christians in the social question, for they are too numerous. As a result of the Council, the main coordinating centre in this field is the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, which has corresponding bodies within the individual Bishops' Conferences. The name of this institution is very significant. It indicates that the social question must be dealt with in its whole complex dimension. Commitment to justice must be closely linked with commitment to peace in the modern world. This twofold commitment is certainly supported by the painful experience of the two great world wars which in the course of the last ninety years have convulsed many European countries and, at least partially, countries in other continents. It is supported, especially since the Second World War, by the permanent threat of a nuclear war and the prospect of the terrible self-destruction that emerges from it.

If we follow the main line of development of the documents of the supreme Magisterium of the Church, we find in them an explicit confirmation of precisely such a statement of the question. The key position, as regards the question of world peace, is that of John XXIII's Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. However, if one studies the development of the question of social justice, one cannot fail to note that, whereas during the period between *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* the Church's teaching concentrates mainly on the just solution of the "labour question" within individual nations, in the next period the Church's teaching widens its horizon to take in the whole world. The disproportionate distribution of wealth and poverty and the existence of some countries and continents that are developed and of others that are not call for a levelling out and for a search for ways to ensure just development for all. This is the direction of the teaching in John XXIII's Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council, and in Paul VI's Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.

This trend of development of the Church's teaching and commitment in the social question exactly corresponds to the objective recognition of the state of affairs. While in the past the "class" question was especially highlighted as the centre of this issue, in more recent times it is the "world" question that is emphasized. Thus, not only the sphere of class is taken into consideration but also the world sphere of inequality and injustice, and as a consequence, not only the class dimension but also the world dimension of the tasks involved in the path towards the achievement of justice in the modern world. A complete analysis of the situation of the world today shows in an even deeper and fuller way the meaning of the previous analysis of social injustices; and it is the meaning that must be given today to efforts to build justice on earth, not concealing thereby unjust structures but demanding that they be examined and transformed on a more universal scale.

3. The Question of Work, the Key to the Social Question

In the midst of all these processes-those of the diagnosis of objective social reality and also those of the Church's teaching in the sphere of the complex and many-sided social question-the question of human work naturally appears many times. This issue is, in a way, a constant factor both of social life and of the Church's teaching. Furthermore, in this teaching attention to the question goes back much further than the last ninety years. In fact the Church's social teaching finds its source in Sacred Scripture, beginning with the Book of Genesis and especially in the Gospel and the writings of the Apostles. From the beginning it was part of the Church's teaching, her concept of man and life in

society, and, especially, the social morality which she worked out according to the needs of the different ages. This traditional patrimony was then inherited and developed by the teaching of the Popes on the modern "social question", beginning with the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. In this context, study of the question of work, as we have seen, has continually been brought up to date while maintaining that Christian basis of truth which can be called ageless.

While in the present document we return to this question once more-without however any intention of touching on all the topics that concern it-this is not merely in order to gather together and repeat what is already contained in the Church's teaching. It is rather in order to highlight-perhaps more than has been done before-the fact that human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of man's good. And if the solution-or rather the gradual solution-of the social question, which keeps coming up and becomes ever more complex, must be sought in the direction of "making life more human"⁸, then the key, namely human work, acquires fundamental and decisive importance.

II. WORK AND MAN

4. In the Book of Genesis

The Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth. She is confirmed in this conviction by considering the whole heritage of the many sciences devoted to man: anthropology, palaeontology, history, sociology, psychology and so on; they all seem to bear witness to this reality in an irrefutable way. But the source of the Church's conviction is above all the revealed word of God, and therefore what is a conviction of the intellect is also a conviction of faith. The reason is that the Church-and it is worthwhile stating it at this point-believes in man: she thinks of man and addresses herself to him not only in the light of historical experience, not only with the aid of the many methods of scientific knowledge, but in the first place in the light of the revealed word of the living God. Relating herself to man, she seeks to express the eternal designs and transcendent destiny which the living God, the Creator and Redeemer, has linked with him.

The Church finds in the very first pages of the Book of Genesis the source of her conviction that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth. An analysis of these texts makes us aware that they express-sometimes in an archaic way of manifesting thought-the fundamental truths about man, in the context of the mystery of creation itself. These truths are decisive for man from the very beginning, and at the same time they trace out the main lines of his earthly existence, both in the state of original justice and also after the breaking, caused by sin, of the Creator's original covenant with creation in man. When man, who had been created "in the image of God.... male and female"⁹, hears the words: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it"¹⁰, even though these words do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world. Indeed, they show its very deepest essence. Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe.

Work understood as a "transitive" activity, that is to say an activity beginning in the human subject and directed towards an external object, presupposes a specific dominion by man over "the earth", and in its turn it confirms and develops this dominion. It is clear that the term "the earth" of which the biblical text speaks is to be understood in the first place as that fragment of the visible universe that man inhabits. By extension, however, it can be understood as the whole of the visible world insofar as it comes within the range of man's influence and of his striving to satisfy his needs. The expression "subdue the earth" has an immense range. It means all the resources that the earth (and indirectly the visible world) contains and which, through the conscious activity of man, can be discovered and used for his ends. And so these words, placed at the beginning of the Bible, never cease to be relevant. They embrace equally the past ages of civilization and economy, as also the whole of modern reality and future phases of development, which are perhaps already to some extent beginning to take shape, though for the most part they are still almost unknown to man and hidden from him.

While people sometimes speak of periods of "acceleration" in the economic life and civilization of humanity or of individual nations, linking these periods to the progress of science and technology and especially to discoveries which are decisive for social and economic life, at the same time it can be said that none of these phenomena of "acceleration" exceeds the essential content of what was said in that most ancient of biblical texts. As man, through his work, becomes more and more the master of the earth, and as he confirms his dominion over the visible world, again through his work, he nevertheless remains in every case and at every phase of this process within the Creator's original ordering. And this ordering remains necessarily and indissolubly linked with the fact that man was created, as male and female, "in the image of God". This process is, at the same time, universal: it embraces all human beings, every generation, every phase of economic and cultural development, and at the same time it is a process that takes place within each human being, in each conscious human subject. Each and every individual is at the same time embraced by it. Each and every individual, to the proper extent and in an incalculable number of ways, takes part in the giant process whereby man "subdues the earth" through his work.

5. Work in the Objective Sense: Technology

This universality and, at the same time, this multiplicity of the process of "subduing the earth" throw light upon human work, because man's dominion over the earth is achieved in and by means of work. There thus emerges the meaning of work in an objective sense, which finds expression in the various epochs of culture and civilization. Man dominates the earth by the very fact of domesticating animals, rearing them and obtaining from them the food and clothing he needs, and by the fact of being able to extract various natural resources from the earth and the seas. But man "subdues the earth" much more when he begins to cultivate it and then to transform its products, adapting them to his own use. Thus agriculture constitutes through human work a primary field of economic activity and an indispensable factor of production. Industry in its turn will always consist in linking the earth's riches—whether nature's living resources, or the products of agriculture, or the mineral or chemical resources—with man's work, whether physical or intellectual. This is also in a sense true in the sphere of what are called service industries, and also in the sphere of research, pure or applied.

In industry and agriculture man's work has today in many cases ceased to be mainly manual, for the toil of human hands and muscles is aided by more and more highly perfected machinery. Not only in industry but also in agriculture we are witnessing the transformations made possible by the gradual development of science and technology. Historically speaking, this, taken as a whole, has caused great changes in civilization, from the beginning of the "industrial era" to the successive phases of development through new technologies, such as the electronics and the microprocessor technology in recent years.

While it may seem that in the industrial process it is the machine that "works" and man merely supervises it, making it function and keeping it going in various ways, it is also true that for this very reason industrial development provides grounds for repropounding in new ways the question of human work. Both the original industrialization that gave rise to what is called the worker question and the subsequent industrial and post-industrial changes show in an eloquent manner that, even in the age of ever more mechanized "work", the proper subject of work continues to be man.

The development of industry and of the various sectors connected with it, even the most modern electronics technology, especially in the fields of miniaturization, communications and telecommunications and so forth, shows how vast is the role of technology, that ally of work that human thought has produced, in the interaction between the subject and object of work (in the widest sense of the word). Understood in this case not as a capacity or aptitude for work, but rather as a whole set of instruments which man uses in his work, technology is undoubtedly man's ally. It facilitates his work, perfects, accelerates and augments it. It leads to an increase in the quantity of things produced by work, and in many cases improves their quality. However, it is also a fact that, in some instances, technology can cease to be man's ally and become almost his enemy, as when the mechanization of work "supplants" him, taking away all personal satisfaction and the incentive to creativity and responsibility, when it deprives many workers of their previous employment, or when, through exalting the machine, it reduces man to the status of its slave.

If the biblical words "subdue the earth" addressed to man from the very beginning are understood in the context of the whole modern age, industrial and post-industrial, then they undoubtedly include also a relationship with technology, with the world of machinery which is the fruit of the work of the human intellect and a historical confirmation of man's dominion over nature.

The recent stage of human history, especially that of certain societies, brings a correct affirmation of technology as a basic coefficient of economic progress; but, at the same time, this affirmation has been accompanied by and continues to be accompanied by the raising of essential questions concerning human work in relationship to its subject, which is man. These questions are particularly charged with content and tension of an ethical and an ethical and social character. They therefore constitute a continual challenge for institutions of many kinds, for States and governments, for systems and international organizations; they also constitute a challenge for the Church.

6. Work in the Subjective Sense: Man as the Subject of Work

In order to continue our analysis of work, an analysis linked with the word of the Bible telling man that he is to subdue the earth, we must concentrate our attention on work in the subjective sense, much more than we did on the objective significance, barely touching upon the vast range of problems known intimately and in detail to scholars in various fields and also, according to their specializations, to those who work. If the words of the Book of Genesis to which we refer in this analysis of ours speak of work in the objective sense in an indirect way, they also speak only indirectly of the subject of work; but what they say is very eloquent and is full of great significance.

Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the "image of God" he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. As a person, man is therefore the subject of work. As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfil the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity. The principal truths concerning this theme were recently recalled by the Second Vatican Council in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, especially in Chapter One, which is devoted to man's calling.

And so this "dominion" spoken of in the biblical text being meditated upon here refers not only to the objective dimension of work but at the same time introduces us to an understanding of its subjective dimension. Understood as a process whereby man and the human race subdue the earth, work corresponds to this basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself and confirms himself as the one who "dominates". This dominion, in a certain sense, refers to the subjective dimension even more than to the objective one: this dimension conditions the very ethical nature of work. In fact there is no doubt that human work has an ethical value of its own, which clearly and directly remain linked to the fact that the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say a subject that decides about himself.

This truth, which in a sense constitutes the fundamental and perennial heart of Christian teaching on human work, has had and continues to have primary significance for the formulation of the important social problems characterizing whole ages.

The ancient world introduced its own typical differentiation of people into classes according to the type of work done. Work which demanded from the worker the exercise of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands, was considered unworthy of free men, and was therefore given to slaves. By broadening certain aspects that already belonged to the Old Testament, Christianity brought about a fundamental change of ideas in this field, taking the whole content of the Gospel message as its point of departure, especially the fact that the one who, while being God, became like us in all things¹¹ devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the carpenter's bench. This circumstance constitutes in itself the most eloquent "Gospel of work", showing that the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person. The sources of the dignity of work are to be sought primarily in the subjective dimension, not in the objective one.

Such a concept practically does away with the very basis of the ancient differentiation of people into classes according to the kind of work done. This does not mean that, from the objective point of view, human work cannot and must not be rated and qualified in any way. It only means that the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature: however true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is "for man" and not man "for work". Through this conclusion one rightly comes to recognize the pre-eminence of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one. Given this way of understanding things, and presupposing that different sorts of work that people do can have greater or lesser objective value, let us try nevertheless to show that each sort is judged above all by the measure of the dignity of the subject of work, that is to say the person, the individual who carries it out. On the other hand: independently of the work that every man does, and presupposing that this work constitutes a purpose-at times a very demanding one-of his activity, this purpose does not possess a definitive meaning in itself. In fact, in the final analysis it is always man who is the purpose of the work, whatever work it is that is done by man-even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest "service", as the most monotonous even the most alienating work.

7. A Threat to the Right Order of Values

It is precisely these fundamental affirmations about work that always emerged from the wealth of Christian truth, especially from the very message of the "Gospel of work", thus creating the basis for a new way of thinking, judging and acting. In the modern period, from the beginning of the industrial age, the Christian truth about work had to oppose the various trends of materialistic and economic thought.

For certain supporters of such ideas, work was understood and treated as a sort of "merchandise" that the worker-especially the industrial worker-sells to the employer, who at the same time is the possessor of the capital, that is to say, of all the working tools and means that make production possible. This way of looking at work was widespread especially in the first half of the nineteenth century. Since then, explicit expressions of this sort have almost disappeared, and have given way to more human ways of thinking about work and evaluating it. The interaction between the worker and the tools and means of production has given rise to the development of various forms of capitalism - parallel with various forms of collectivism - into which other socioeconomic elements have entered as a consequence of new concrete circumstances, of the activity of workers' associations and public authorities, and of the emergence of large transnational enterprises. Nevertheless, the danger of treating work as a special kind of "merchandise", or as an impersonal "force" needed for production (the expression "workforce" is in fact in common use) always exists, especially when the whole way of looking at the question of economics is marked by the premises of materialistic economic thought.

A systematic opportunity for thinking and evaluating in this way, and in a certain sense a stimulus for doing so, is provided by the quickening process of the development of a one-sidedly materialistic civilization, which gives prime importance to the objective dimension of work, while the subjective dimension-everything in direct or indirect relationship with the subject of work-remains on a secondary level. In all cases of this sort, in every social situation of this type, there is a confusion or even a reversal of the order laid down from the beginning by the words of the Book of Genesis: man is treated as an instrument of production¹², whereas he-he alone, independently of the work he does-ought to be treated as the effective subject of work and its true maker and creator. Precisely this reversal of order, whatever the programme or name under which it occurs, should rightly be called "capitalism"-in the sense more fully

explained below. Everybody knows that capitalism has a definite historical meaning as a system, an economic and social system, opposed to "socialism" or "communism". But in the light of the analysis of the fundamental reality of the whole economic process—first and foremost of the production structure that work is—it should be recognized that the error of early capitalism can be repeated wherever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work—that is to say, where he is not treated as subject and maker, and for this very reason as the true purpose of the whole process of production.⁹

This explains why the analysis of human work in the light of the words concerning man's "dominion" over the earth goes to the very heart of the ethical and social question. This concept should also find a central place in the whole sphere of social and economic policy, both within individual countries and in the wider field of international and intercontinental relationships, particularly with reference to the tensions making themselves felt in the world not only between East and West but also between North and South. Both John XXIII in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* and Paul VI in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* gave special attention to these dimensions of the modern ethical and social question.

8. Worker Solidarity

When dealing with human work in the fundamental dimension of its subject, that is to say, the human person doing the work, one must make at least a summary evaluation of developments during the ninety years since *Rerum Novarum* in relation to the subjective dimension of work. Although the subject of work is always the same, that is to say man, nevertheless wide-ranging changes take place in the objective aspect. While one can say that, by reason of its subject, work is one single thing (one and unrepeatable every time), yet when one takes into consideration its objective directions one is forced to admit that there exist many works, many different sorts of work. The development of human civilization brings continual enrichment in this field. But at the same time, one cannot fail to note that in the process of this development not only do new forms of work appear but also others disappear. Even if one accepts that on the whole this is a normal phenomenon, it must still be seen whether certain ethically and socially dangerous irregularities creep in, and to what extent.

It was precisely one such wide-ranging anomaly that gave rise in the last century to what has been called "the worker question", sometimes described as "the proletariat question". This question and the problems connected with it gave rise to a just social reaction and caused the impetuous emergence of a great burst of solidarity between workers, first and foremost industrial workers. The call to solidarity and common action addressed to the workers—especially to those engaged in narrowly specialized, monotonous and depersonalized work in industrial plants, when the machine tends to dominate man—was important and eloquent from the point of view of social ethics. It was the reaction against the degradation of man as the subject of work, and against the unheard-of accompanying exploitation in the field of wages, working conditions and social security for the worker. This reaction united the working world in a community marked by great solidarity.

Following the lines laid down by the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and many later documents of the Church's Magisterium, it must be frankly recognized that the reaction against the system of injustice and harm that cried to heaven for vengeance¹³ and that weighed heavily upon workers in that period of rapid industrialization was justified from the point of view of social morality. This state of affairs was favoured by the liberal socio-political system, which, in accordance with its "economistic" premises, strengthened and safeguarded economic initiative by the possessors of capital alone, but did not pay sufficient attention to the rights of the workers, on the grounds that human work is solely an instrument of production, and that capital is the basis, efficient factor and purpose of production.

From that time, worker solidarity, together with a clearer and more committed realization by others of workers' rights, has in many cases brought about profound changes. Various forms of neo-capitalism or collectivism have developed. Various new systems have been thought out. Workers can often share in running businesses and in controlling their productivity, and in fact do so. Through appropriate associations, they exercise influence over conditions of work and pay, and also over social legislation. But at the same time various ideological or power systems, and new relationships which have arisen at various levels of society, have allowed flagrant injustices to persist or have created new ones. On the world level, the development of civilization and of communications has made possible a more complete diagnosis of the living and working conditions of man globally, but it has also revealed other forms of injustice, much more extensive than those which in the last century stimulated unity between workers for particular solidarity in the working world. This is true in countries which have completed a certain process of industrial revolution. It is also true in countries where the main working milieu continues to be agriculture or other similar occupations.

Movements of solidarity in the sphere of work—a solidarity that must never mean being closed to dialogue and collaboration with others—can be necessary also with reference to the condition of social groups that were not previously included in such movements but which, in changing social systems and conditions of living, are undergoing what is in effect "proletarianization" or which actually already find themselves in a "proletariat" situation, one which, even if not yet given that name, in fact deserves it. This can be true of certain categories or groups of the working "intelligentsia", especially when ever wider access to education and an ever increasing number of people with degrees or

diplomas in the fields of their cultural preparation are accompanied by a drop in demand for their labour. This unemployment of intellectuals occurs or increases when the education available is not oriented towards the types of employment or service required by the true needs of society, or when there is less demand for work which requires education, at least professional education, than for manual labour, or when it is less well paid. Of course, education in itself is always valuable and an important enrichment of the human person; but in spite of that, "proletarianization" processes remain possible.

For this reason, there must be continued study of the subject of work and of the subject's living conditions. In order to achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries, and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger. The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the "Church of the poor". And the "poor" appear under various forms; they appear in various places and at various times; in many cases they appear as a result of the violation of the dignity of human work: either because the opportunities for human work are limited as a result of the scourge of unemployment, or because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.

9. Work and Personal Dignity

Remaining within the context of man as the subject of work, it is now appropriate to touch upon, at least in a summary way, certain problems that more closely define the dignity of human work, in that they make it possible to characterize more fully its specific moral value. In doing this we must always keep in mind the biblical calling to "subdue the earth"¹⁴, in which is expressed the will of the Creator that work should enable man to achieve that "dominion" in the visible world that is proper to him.

God's fundamental and original intention with regard to man, whom he created in his image and after his likeness¹⁵, was not withdrawn or cancelled out even when man, having broken the original covenant with God, heard the words: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread"¹⁶. These words refer to the sometimes

heavy toil that from then onwards has accompanied human work; but they do not alter the fact that work is the means whereby man achieves that "dominion" which is proper to him over the visible world, by "subjecting" the earth. Toil is something that is universally known, for it is universally experienced. It is familiar to those doing physical work under sometimes exceptionally laborious conditions. It is familiar not only to agricultural workers, who spend long days working the land, which sometimes "bears thorns and thistles"¹⁷, but also to those who work in mines and quarries, to steel-workers at their blast-furnaces, to those who work in builders' yards and in construction work, often in danger of injury or death. It is likewise familiar to those at an intellectual workbench; to scientists; to those who bear the burden of grave responsibility for decisions that will have a vast impact on society. It is familiar to doctors and nurses, who spend days and nights at their patients' bedside. It is familiar to women, who, sometimes without proper recognition on the part of society and even of their own families, bear the daily burden and responsibility for their homes and the upbringing of their children. It is familiar to all workers and, since work is a universal calling, it is familiar to everyone. And yet, in spite of all this toil-perhaps, in a sense, because of it-work is a good thing for man. Even though it bears the mark of a bonum arduum, in the terminology of Saint Thomas¹⁸, this does not take away the fact that, as such, it is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind. Work is a good thing for man-a good thing for his humanity-because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being".

Without this consideration it is impossible to understand the meaning of the virtue of industriousness, and more particularly it is impossible to understand why industriousness should be a virtue: for virtue, as a moral habit, is something whereby man becomes good as man¹⁹. This fact in no way alters our justifiable anxiety that in work, whereby matter gains in nobility, man himself should not experience a lowering of his own dignity²⁰. Again, it is well known that it is possible to use work in various ways against man, that it is possible to punish man with the system of forced labour in concentration camps, that work can be made into a means for oppressing man, and that in various ways it is possible to exploit human labour, that is to say the worker. All this pleads in favour of the moral obligation to link industriousness as a virtue with the social order of work, which will enable man to become, in work, "more a human being" and not be degraded by it not only because of the wearing out of his physical strength (which, at least up to a certain point, is inevitable), but especially through damage to the dignity and subjectivity that are proper to him.

10. Work and Society: Family and Nation

Having thus confirmed the personal dimension of human work, we must go on to the second sphere of values which is necessarily linked to work. Work constitutes a foundation for the formation of family life, which is a natural right and something that man is called to. These two spheres of values—one linked to work and the other consequent on the family nature of human life—must be properly united and must properly permeate each other. In a way, work is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work. Work and industriousness also influence the whole process of education in the family, for the very reason that everyone "becomes a human being" through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education. Obviously, two aspects of work in a sense come into play here: the one making family life and its upkeep possible, and the other making possible the achievement of the purposes of the family, especially education. Nevertheless, these two aspects of work are linked to one another and are mutually complementary in various points.

It must be remembered and affirmed that the family constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work. The teaching of the Church has always devoted special attention to this question, and in the present document we shall have to return to it. In fact, the family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first school of work, within the home, for every person.

The third sphere of values that emerges from this point of view—that of the subject of work—concerns the great society to which man belongs on the basis of particular cultural and historical links. This society—even when it has not yet taken on the mature form of a nation—is not only the great "educator" of every man, even though an indirect one (because each individual absorbs within the family the contents and values that go to make up the culture of a given nation); it is also a great historical and social incarnation of the work of all generations. All of this brings it about that man combines his deepest human identity with membership of a nation, and intends his work also to increase the common good developed together with his compatriots, thus realizing that in this way work serves to add to the heritage of the whole human family, of all the people living in the world.

These three spheres are always important for human work in its subjective dimension. And this dimension, that is to say, the concrete reality of the worker, takes precedence over the objective dimension. In the subjective dimension there is realized, first of all, that "dominion" over the world of nature to which man is called from the beginning according to the words of the Book of Genesis. The very process of "subduing the earth", that is to say work, is marked in the course of history, and especially in recent centuries, by an immense development of technological means. This is an advantageous and positive phenomenon, on condition that the objective dimension of work does not gain the upper hand over the subjective dimension, depriving man of his dignity and inalienable rights or reducing them.

III. CONFLICT BETWEEN LABOUR AND CAPITAL IN THE PRESENT PHASE OF HISTORY

11. Dimensions of the Conflict

The sketch of the basic problems of work outlined above draws inspiration from the texts at the beginning of the Bible and in a sense forms the very framework of the Church's teaching, which has remained unchanged throughout the centuries within the context of different historical experiences. However, the experiences preceding and following the publication of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* form a background that endows that teaching with particular expressiveness and the eloquence of living relevance. In this analysis, work is seen as a great reality with a fundamental influence on the shaping in a human way of the world that the Creator has entrusted to man; it is a reality closely linked with man as the subject of work and with man's rational activity. In the normal course of events this reality fills human life and strongly affects its value and meaning. Even when it is accompanied by toil and effort, work is still something good, and so man develops through love for work. This entirely positive and creative, educational and meritorious character of man's work must be the basis for the judgments and decisions being made today in its regard in spheres that include human rights, as is evidenced by the international declarations on work and the many labour codes prepared either by the competent legislative institutions in the various countries or by organizations devoting their social, or scientific and social, activity to the problems of work. One organization fostering such initiatives on the international level is the International Labour Organization, the oldest specialized agency of the United Nations Organization.

In the following part of these considerations I intend to return in greater detail to these important questions, recalling at least the basic elements of the Church's teaching on the matter. I must however first touch on a very important field of questions in which her teaching has taken shape in this latest period, the one marked and in a sense symbolized by the publication of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Throughout this period, which is by no means yet over, the issue of work has of course been posed on the basis of the great conflict that in the age of, and together with, industrial development emerged between "capital" and "labour", that is to say between the small but highly influential group of entrepreneurs, owners or holders of the means of production, and the broader multitude of people who lacked these means and who shared in the process of production solely by their labour. The conflict originated in the fact that the workers put their powers at the disposal of the entrepreneurs, and these, following the principle of maximum profit, tried to establish the lowest possible wages for the work done by

the employees. In addition there were other elements of exploitation, connected with the lack of safety at work and of safeguards regarding the health and living conditions of the workers and their families.

This conflict, interpreted by some as a socioeconomic class conflict, found expression in the ideological conflict between liberalism, understood as the ideology of capitalism, and Marxism, understood as the ideology of scientific socialism and communism, which professes to act as the spokesman for the working class and the worldwide proletariat. Thus the real conflict between labour and capital was transformed into a systematic class struggle, conducted not only by ideological means but also and chiefly by political means. We are familiar with the history of this conflict and with the demands of both sides. The Marxist programme, based on the philosophy of Marx and Engels, sees in class struggle the only way to eliminate class injustices in society and to eliminate the classes themselves. Putting this programme into practice presupposes the collectivization of the means of production so that, through the transfer of these means from private hands to the collectivity, human labour will be preserved from exploitation.

This is the goal of the struggle carried on by political as well as ideological means. In accordance with the principle of "the dictatorship of the proletariat", the groups that as political parties follow the guidance of Marxist ideology aim by the use of various kinds of influence, including revolutionary pressure, to win a monopoly of power in each society, in order to introduce the collectivist system into it by eliminating private ownership of the means of production. According to the principal ideologists and leaders of this broad international movement, the purpose of this programme of action is to achieve the social revolution and to introduce socialism and, finally, the communist system throughout the world.

As we touch on this extremely important field of issues, which constitute not only a theory but a whole fabric of socioeconomic, political, and international life in our age, we cannot go into the details, nor is this necessary, for they are known both from the vast literature on the subject and by experience. Instead, we must leave the context of these issues and go back to the fundamental issue of human work, which is the main subject of the considerations in this document. It is clear, indeed, that this issue, which is of such importance for man-it constitutes one of the fundamental dimensions of his earthly existence and of his vocation-can also be explained only by taking into account the full context of the contemporary situation.

12. The Priority of Labour

The structure of the present-day situation is deeply marked by many conflicts caused by man, and the technological means produced by human work play a primary role in it. We should also consider here the prospect of worldwide catastrophe in the case of a nuclear war, which would have almost unimaginable possibilities of destruction. In view of this situation we must first of all recall a principle that has always been taught by the Church: the principle of the priority of labour over capital. This principle directly concerns the process of production: in this process labour is always a primary efficient cause, while capital, the whole collection of means of production, remains a mere instrument or instrumental cause. This principle is an evident truth that emerges from the whole of man's historical experience.

When we read in the first chapter of the Bible that man is to subdue the earth, we know that these words refer to all the resources contained in the visible world and placed at man's disposal. However, these resources can serve man only through work. From the beginning there is also linked with work the question of ownership, for the only means that man has for causing the resources hidden in nature to serve himself and others is his work. And to be able through his work to make these resources bear fruit, man takes over ownership of small parts of the various riches of nature: those beneath the ground, those in the sea, on land, or in space. He takes all these things over by making them his workbench. He takes them over through work and for work.

The same principle applies in the successive phases of this process, in which the first phase always remains the relationship of man with the resources and riches of nature. The whole of the effort to acquire knowledge with the aim of discovering these riches and specifying the various ways in which they can be used by man and for man teaches us that everything that comes from man throughout the whole process of economic production, whether labour or the whole collection of means of production and the technology connected with these means (meaning the capability to use them in work), presupposes these riches and resources of the visible world, riches and resources that man finds and does not create. In a sense man finds them already prepared, ready for him to discover them and to use them correctly in the productive process. In every phase of the development of his work man comes up against the leading role of the gift made by "nature", that is to say, in the final analysis, by the Creator. At the beginning of man's work is the mystery of creation. This affirmation, already indicated as my starting point, is the guiding thread of this document, and will be further developed in the last part of these reflections.

Further consideration of this question should confirm our conviction of the priority of human labour over what in the course of time we have grown accustomed to calling capital. Since the concept of capital includes not only the natural resources placed at man's disposal but also the whole collection of means by which man appropriates natural resources and transforms them in accordance with his needs (and thus in a sense humanizes them), it must immediately be noted that all these means are the result of the historical heritage of human labour. All the means of production, from the most primitive to the ultramodern ones-it is man that has gradually developed them: man's experience and intellect. In this way there have appeared not only the simplest instruments for cultivating the earth but also, through adequate progress

in science and technology, the more modern and complex ones: machines, factories, laboratories, and computers. Thus everything that is at the service of work, everything that in the present state of technology constitutes its ever more highly perfected "instrument", is the result of work.

This gigantic and powerful instrument-the whole collection of means of production that in a sense are considered synonymous with "capital"- is the result of work and bears the signs of human labour. At the present stage of technological advance, when man, who is the subject of work, wishes to make use of this collection of modern instruments, the means of production, he must first assimilate cognitively the result of the work of the people who invented those instruments, who planned them, built them and perfected them, and who continue to do so. Capacity for work-that is to say, for sharing efficiently in the modern production process-demands greater and greater preparation and, before all else, proper training. Obviously, it remains clear that every human being sharing in the production process, even if he or she is only doing the kind of work for which no special training or qualifications are required, is the real efficient subject in this production process, while the whole collection of instruments, no matter how perfect they may be in themselves, are only a mere instrument subordinate to human labour.

This truth, which is part of the abiding heritage of the Church's teaching, must always be emphasized with reference to the question of the labour system and with regard to the whole socioeconomic system. We must emphasize and give prominence to the primacy of man in the production process, the primacy of man over things. Everything contained in the concept of capital in the strict sense is only a collection of things. Man, as the subject of work, and independently of the work that he does-man alone is a person. This truth has important and decisive consequences.

13. Economism and Materialism

In the light of the above truth we see clearly, first of all, that capital cannot be separated from labour; in no way can labour be opposed to capital or capital to labour, and still less can the actual people behind these concepts be opposed to each other, as will be explained later. A labour system can be right, in the sense of being in conformity with the very essence of the issue, and in the sense of being intrinsically true and also morally legitimate, if in its very basis it overcomes the opposition between labour and capital through an effort at being shaped in accordance with the principle put forward above: the principle of the substantial and real priority of labour, of the subjectivity of human labour and its effective participation in the whole production process, independently of the nature of the services provided by the worker.

Opposition between labour and capital does not spring from the structure of the production process or from the structure of the economic process. In general the latter process demonstrates that labour and what we are accustomed to call capital are intermingled; it shows that they are inseparably linked. Working at any workbench, whether a relatively primitive or an ultramodern one, a man can easily see that through his work he enters into two inheritances: the inheritance of what is given to the whole of humanity in the resources of nature, and the inheritance of what others have already developed on the basis of those resources, primarily by developing technology, that is to say, by producing a whole collection of increasingly perfect instruments for work. In working, man also "enters into the labour of others"²¹. Guided both by our intelligence and by the faith that draws light from the word of God, we have no difficulty in accepting this image of the sphere and process of man's labour. It is a consistent image, one that is humanistic as well as theological. In it man is the master of the creatures placed at his disposal in the visible world. If some dependence is discovered in the work process, it is dependence on the Giver of all the resources of creation, and also on other human beings, those to whose work and initiative we owe the perfected and increased possibilities of our own work. All that we can say of everything in the production process which constitutes a whole collection of "things", the instruments, the capital, is that it conditions man's work; we cannot assert that it constitutes as it were an impersonal "subject" putting man and man's work into a position of dependence.

This consistent image, in which the principle of the primacy of person over things is strictly preserved, was broken up in human thought, sometimes after a long period of incubation in practical living. The break occurred in such a way that labour was separated from capital and set in opposition to it, and capital was set in opposition to labour, as though they were two impersonal forces, two production factors juxtaposed in the same "economistic" perspective. This way of stating the issue contained a fundamental error, what we can call the error of economism, that of considering human labour solely according to its economic purpose. This fundamental error of thought can and must be called an error of materialism, in that economism directly or indirectly includes a conviction of the primacy and superiority of the material, and directly or indirectly places the spiritual and the personal (man's activity, moral values and such matters) in a position of subordination to material reality. This is still not theoretical materialism in the full sense of the term, but it is certainly practical materialism, a materialism judged capable of satisfying man's needs, not so much on the grounds of premises derived from materialist theory, as on the grounds of a particular way of evaluating things, and so on the grounds of a certain hierarchy of goods based on the greater immediate attractiveness of what is material.

The error of thinking in the categories of economism went hand in hand with the formation of a materialist philosophy, as this philosophy developed from the most elementary and common phase (also called common materialism, because it professes to reduce spiritual reality to a superfluous phenomenon) to the phase of what is called dialectical materialism. However, within the framework of the present consideration, it seems that economism had a decisive

importance for the fundamental issue of human work, in particular for the separation of labour and capital and for setting them up in opposition as two production factors viewed in the above mentioned economic perspective; and it seems that economism influenced this non-humanistic way of stating the issue before the materialist philosophical system did. Nevertheless it is obvious that materialism, including its dialectical form, is incapable of providing sufficient and definitive bases for thinking about human work, in order that the primacy of man over the capital instrument, the primacy of the person over things, may find in it adequate and irrefutable confirmation and support. In dialectical materialism too man is not first and foremost the subject of work and the efficient cause of the production process, but continues to be understood and treated, in dependence on what is material, as a kind of "resultant" of the economic or production relations prevailing at a given period.

Obviously, the antinomy between labour and capital under consideration here—the antinomy in which labour was separated from capital and set up in opposition to it, in a certain sense on the ontic level, as if it were just an element like any other in the economic process—did not originate merely in the philosophy and economic theories of the eighteenth century; rather it originated in the whole of the economic and social practice of that time, the time of the birth and rapid development of industrialization, in which what was mainly seen was the possibility of vastly increasing material wealth, means, while the end, that is to say, man, who should be served by the means, was ignored. It was this practical error that struck a blow first and foremost against human labour, against the working man, and caused the ethically just social reaction already spoken of above. The same error, which is now part of history, and which was connected with the period of primitive capitalism and liberalism, can nevertheless be repeated in other circumstances of time and place, if people's thinking starts from the same theoretical or practical premises. The only chance there seems to be for radically overcoming this error is through adequate changes both in theory and in practice, changes in line with the definite conviction of the primacy of the person over things, and of human labour over capital as a whole collection of means of production.

14. Work and Ownership

The historical process briefly presented here has certainly gone beyond its initial phase, but it is still taking place and indeed is spreading in the relationships between nations and continents. It needs to be specified further from another point of view. It is obvious that, when we speak of opposition between labour and capital, we are not dealing only with abstract concepts or "impersonal forces" operating in economic production. Behind both concepts there are people, living, actual people: on the one side are those who do the work without being the owners of the means of production, and on the other side those who act as entrepreneurs and who own these means or represent the owners. Thus the issue of ownership or property enters from the beginning into the whole of this difficult historical process. The Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which has the social question as its theme, stresses this issue also, recalling and confirming the Church's teaching on ownership, on the right to private property even when it is a question of the means of production. The Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* did the same.

The above principle, as it was then stated and as it is still taught by the Church, diverges radically from the programme of collectivism as proclaimed by Marxism and put into practice in various countries in the decades following the time of Leo XIII's Encyclical. At the same time it differs from the programme of capitalism practised by liberalism and by the political systems inspired by it. In the latter case, the difference consists in the way the right to ownership or property is understood. Christian tradition has never upheld this right as absolute and untouchable. On the contrary, it has always understood this right within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation: the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone.

Furthermore, in the Church's teaching, ownership has never been understood in a way that could constitute grounds for social conflict in labour. As mentioned above, property is acquired first of all through work in order that it may serve work. This concerns in a special way ownership of the means of production. Isolating these means as a separate property in order to set it up in the form of "capital" in opposition to "labour"—and even to practise exploitation of labour—is contrary to the very nature of these means and their possession. They cannot be possessed against labour, they cannot even be possessed for possession's sake, because the only legitimate title to their possession—whether in the form of private ownership or in the form of public or collective ownership—is that they should serve labour, and thus, by serving labour, that they should make possible the achievement of the first principle of this order, namely, the universal destination of goods and the right to common use of them. From this point of view, therefore, in consideration of human labour and of common access to the goods meant for man, one cannot exclude the socialization, in suitable conditions, of certain means of production. In the course of the decades since the publication of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the Church's teaching has always recalled all these principles, going back to the arguments formulated in a much older tradition, for example, the well-known arguments of the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas Aquinas²².

In the present document, which has human work as its main theme, it is right to confirm all the effort with which the Church's teaching has striven and continues to strive always to ensure the priority of work and, thereby, man's character as a subject in social life and, especially, in the dynamic structure of the whole economic process. From this point of view the position of "rigid" capitalism continues to remain unacceptable, namely the position that defends the exclusive right to private ownership of the means of production as an untouchable "dogma" of economic life. The principle of

respect for work demands that this right should undergo a constructive revision, both in theory and in practice. If it is true that capital, as the whole of the means of production, is at the same time the product of the work of generations, it is equally true that capital is being unceasingly created through the work done with the help of all these means of production, and these means can be seen as a great workbench at which the present generation of workers is working day after day. Obviously we are dealing here with different kinds of work, not only so-called manual labour but also the many forms of intellectual work, including white-collar work and management.

In the light of the above, the many proposals put forward by experts in Catholic social teaching and by the highest Magisterium of the Church take on special significance²³: proposals for joint ownership of the means of work, sharing by the workers in the management and/or profits of businesses, so-called shareholding by labour, etc. Whether these various proposals can or cannot be applied concretely, it is clear that recognition of the proper position of labour and the worker in the production process demands various adaptations in the sphere of the right to ownership of the means of production. This is so not only in view of older situations but also, first and foremost, in view of the whole of the situation and the problems in the second half of the present century with regard to the so-called Third World and the various new independent countries that have arisen, especially in Africa but elsewhere as well, in place of the colonial territories of the past.

Therefore, while the position of "rigid" capitalism must undergo continual revision, in order to be reformed from the point of view of human rights, both human rights in the widest sense and those linked with man's work, it must be stated that, from the same point of view, these many deeply desired reforms cannot be achieved by an a priori elimination of private ownership of the means of production. For it must be noted that merely taking these means of production (capital) out of the hands of their private owners is not enough to ensure their satisfactory socialization. They cease to be the property of a certain social group, namely the private owners, and become the property of organized society, coming under the administration and direct control of another group of people, namely those who, though not owning them, from the fact of exercising power in society manage them on the level of the whole national or the local economy.

This group in authority may carry out its task satisfactorily from the point of view of the priority of labour; but it may also carry it out badly by claiming for itself a monopoly of the administration and disposal of the means of production and not refraining even from offending basic human rights. Thus, merely converting the means of production into State property in the collectivist system is by no means equivalent to "socializing" that property. We can speak of socializing only when the subject character of society is ensured, that is to say, when on the basis of his work each person is fully entitled to consider himself a part-owner of the great workbench at which he is working with every one else. A way towards that goal could be found by associating labour with the ownership of capital, as far as possible, and by producing a wide range of intermediate bodies with economic, social and cultural purposes; they would be bodies enjoying real autonomy with regard to the public powers, pursuing their specific aims in honest collaboration with each other and in subordination to the demands of the common good, and they would be living communities both in form and in substance, in the sense that the members of each body would be looked upon and treated as persons and encouraged to take an active part in the life of the body²⁴.

15. The "Personalist" Argument

Thus, the principle of the priority of labour over capital is a postulate of the order of social morality. It has key importance both in the system built on the principle of private ownership of the means of production and also in the system in which private ownership of these means has been limited even in a radical way. Labour is in a sense inseparable from capital; in no way does it accept the antinomy, that is to say, the separation and opposition with regard to the means of production that has weighed upon human life in recent centuries as a result of merely economic premises. When man works, using all the means of production, he also wishes the fruit of this work to be used by himself and others, and he wishes to be able to take part in the very work process as a sharer in responsibility and creativity at the workbench to which he applies himself.

From this spring certain specific rights of workers, corresponding to the obligation of work. They will be discussed later. But here it must be emphasized, in general terms, that the person who works desires not only due remuneration for his work; he also wishes that, within the production process, provision be made for him to be able to know that in his work, even on something that is owned in common, he is working "for himself". This awareness is extinguished within him in a system of excessive bureaucratic centralization, which makes the worker feel that he is just a cog in a huge machine moved from above, that he is for more reasons than one a mere production instrument rather than a true subject of work with an initiative of his own. The Church's teaching has always expressed the strong and deep conviction that man's work concerns not only the economy but also, and especially, personal values. The economic system itself and the production process benefit precisely when these personal values are fully respected. In the mind of Saint Thomas Aquinas²⁵, this is the principal reason in favour of private ownership of the means of production. While we accept that for certain well founded reasons exceptions can be made to the principle of private ownership-in our own time we even see that the system of "socialized ownership" has been introduced-nevertheless the personalist argument still holds good both on the level of principles and on the practical level. If it is to be rational and fruitful, any

socialization of the means of production must take this argument into consideration. Every effort must be made to ensure that in this kind of system also the human person can preserve his awareness of working "for himself". If this is not done, incalculable damage is inevitably done throughout the economic process, not only economic damage but first and foremost damage to man.

IV. RIGHTS OF WORKERS

16. Within the Broad Context of Human Rights

While work, in all its many senses, is an obligation, that is to say a duty, it is also a source of rights on the part of the worker. These rights must be examined in the broad context of human rights as a whole, which are connatural with man, and many of which are proclaimed by various international organizations and increasingly guaranteed by the individual States for their citizens. Respect for this broad range of human rights constitutes the fundamental condition for peace in the modern world: peace both within individual countries and societies and in international relations, as the Church's Magisterium has several times noted, especially since the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. The human rights that flow from work are part of the broader context of those fundamental rights of the person.

However, within this context they have a specific character corresponding to the specific nature of human work as outlined above. It is in keeping with this character that we must view them. Work is, as has been said, an obligation, that is to say, a duty, on the part of man. This is true in all the many meanings of the word. Man must work, both because the Creator has commanded it and because of his own humanity, which requires work in order to be maintained and developed. Man must work out of regard for others, especially his own family, but also for the society he belongs to, the country of which he is a child, and the whole human family of which he is a member, since he is the heir to the work of generations and at the same time a sharer in building the future of those who will come after him in the succession of history. All this constitutes the moral obligation of work, understood in its wide sense. When we have to consider the moral rights, corresponding to this obligation, of every person with regard to work, we must always keep before our eyes the whole vast range of points of reference in which the labour of every working subject is manifested.

For when we speak of the obligation of work and of the rights of the worker that correspond to this obligation, we think in the first place of the relationship between the employer, direct or indirect, and the worker.

The distinction between the direct and the indirect employer is seen to be very important when one considers both the way in which labour is actually organized and the possibility of the formation of just or unjust relationships in the field of labour.

Since the direct employer is the person or institution with whom the worker enters directly into a work contract in accordance with definite conditions, we must understand as the indirect employer many different factors, other than the direct employer, that exercise a determining influence on the shaping both of the work contract and, consequently, of just or unjust relationships in the field of human labour.

17. Direct and Indirect Employer

The concept of indirect employer includes both persons and institutions of various kinds, and also collective labour contracts and the principles of conduct which are laid down by these persons and institutions and which determine the whole socioeconomic system or are its result. The concept of "indirect employer" thus refers to many different elements. The responsibility of the indirect employer differs from that of the direct employer—the term itself indicates that the responsibility is less direct—but it remains a true responsibility: the indirect employer substantially determines one or other facet of the labour relationship, thus conditioning the conduct of the direct employer when the latter determines in concrete terms the actual work contract and labour relations. This is not to absolve the direct employer from his own responsibility, but only to draw attention to the whole network of influences that condition his conduct. When it is a question of establishing an ethically correct labour policy, all these influences must be kept in mind. A policy is correct when the objective rights of the worker are fully respected.

The concept of indirect employer is applicable to every society, and in the first place to the State. For it is the State that must conduct a just labour policy. However, it is common knowledge that in the present system of economic relations in the world there are numerous links between individual States, links that find expression, for instance, in the import and export process, that is to say, in the mutual exchange of economic goods, whether raw materials, semimanufactured goods, or finished industrial products. These links also create mutual dependence, and as a result it would be difficult to speak, in the case of any State, even the economically most powerful, of complete self-sufficiency or autarky.

Such a system of mutual dependence is in itself normal. However, it can easily become an occasion for various forms of exploitation or injustice and as a result influence the labour policy of individual States; and finally it can influence the individual worker, who is the proper subject of labour. For instance the highly industrialized countries, and even more the businesses that direct on a large scale the means of industrial production (the companies referred to as multinational or transnational), fix the highest possible prices for their products, while trying at the same time to fix the

lowest possible prices for raw materials or semi-manufactured goods. This is one of the causes of an ever increasing disproportion between national incomes. The gap between most of the richest countries and the poorest ones is not diminishing or being stabilized but is increasing more and more, to the detriment, obviously, of the poor countries. Evidently this must have an effect on local labour policy and on the worker's situation in the economically disadvantaged societies. Finding himself in a system thus conditioned, the direct employer fixes working conditions below the objective requirements of the workers, especially if he himself wishes to obtain the highest possible profits from the business which he runs (or from the businesses which he runs, in the case of a situation of "socialized" ownership of the means of production).

It is easy to see that this framework of forms of dependence linked with the concept of the indirect employer is enormously extensive and complicated. It is determined, in a sense, by all the elements that are decisive for economic life within a given society and state, but also by much wider links and forms of dependence. The attainment of the worker's rights cannot however be doomed to be merely a result of economic systems which on a larger or smaller scale are guided chiefly by the criterion of maximum profit. On the contrary, it is respect for the objective rights of the worker-every kind of worker: manual or intellectual, industrial or agricultural, etc.-that must constitute the adequate and fundamental criterion for shaping the whole economy, both on the level of the individual society and State and within the whole of the world economic policy and of the systems of international relationships that derive from it.

Influence in this direction should be exercised by all the International Organizations whose concern it is, beginning with the United Nations Organization. It appears that the International Labour Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other bodies too have fresh contributions to offer on this point in particular. Within the individual States there are ministries or public departments and also various social institutions set up for this purpose. All of this effectively indicates the importance of the indirect employer-as has been said above-in achieving full respect for the worker's rights, since the rights of the human person are the key element in the whole of the social moral order.

18. The Employment Issue

When we consider the rights of workers in relation to the "indirect employer", that is to say, all the agents at the national and international level that are responsible for the whole orientation of labour policy, we must first direct our attention to a fundamental issue: the question of finding work, or, in other words, the issue of suitable employment for all who are capable of it. The opposite of a just and right situation in this field is unemployment, that is to say the lack of work for those who are capable of it. It can be a question of general unemployment or of unemployment in certain sectors of work. The role of the agents included under the title of indirect employer is to act against unemployment, which in all cases is an evil, and which, when it reaches a certain level, can become a real social disaster. It is particularly painful when it especially affects young people, who after appropriate cultural, technical and professional preparation fail to find work, and see their sincere wish to work and their readiness to take on their own responsibility for the economic and social development of the community sadly frustrated. The obligation to provide unemployment benefits, that is to say, the duty to make suitable grants indispensable for the subsistence of unemployed workers and their families, is a duty springing from the fundamental principle of the moral order in this sphere, namely the principle of the common use of goods or, to put it in another and still simpler way, the right to life and subsistence.

In order to meet the danger of unemployment and to ensure employment for all, the agents defined here as "indirect employer" must make provision for overall planning with regard to the different kinds of work by which not only the economic life but also the cultural life of a given society is shaped; they must also give attention to organizing that work in a correct and rational way. In the final analysis this overall concern weighs on the shoulders of the State, but it cannot mean onesided centralization by the public authorities. Instead, what is in question is a just and rational coordination, within the framework of which the initiative of individuals, free groups and local work centres and complexes must be safeguarded, keeping in mind what has been said above with regard to the subject character of human labour.

The fact of the mutual dependence of societies and States and the need to collaborate in various areas mean that, while preserving the sovereign rights of each society and State in the field of planning and organizing labour in its own society, action in this important area must also be taken in the dimension of international collaboration by means of the necessary treaties and agreements. Here too the criterion for these pacts and agreements must more and more be the criterion of human work considered as a fundamental right of all human beings, work which gives similar rights to all those who work, in such a way that the living standard of the workers in the different societies will less and less show those disturbing differences which are unjust and are apt to provoke even violent reactions. The International Organizations have an enormous part to play in this area. They must let themselves be guided by an exact diagnosis of the complex situations and of the influence exercised by natural, historical, civil and other such circumstances. They must also be more highly operative with regard to plans for action jointly decided on, that is to say, they must be more effective in carrying them out.

In this direction it is possible to actuate a plan for universal and proportionate progress by all, in accordance with the guidelines of Paul VI's Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. It must be stressed that the constitutive element in this

progress and also the most adequate way to verify it in a spirit of justice and peace, which the Church proclaims and for which she does not cease to pray to the Father of all individuals and of all peoples, is the continual reappraisal of man's work, both in the aspect of its objective finality and in the aspect of the dignity of the subject of all work, that is to say, man. The progress in question must be made through man and for man and it must produce its fruit in man. A test of this progress will be the increasingly mature recognition of the purpose of work and increasingly universal respect for the rights inherent in work in conformity with the dignity of man, the subject of work.

Rational planning and the proper organization of human labour in keeping with individual societies and States should also facilitate the discovery of the right proportions between the different kinds of employment: work on the land, in industry, in the various services, white-collar work and scientific or artistic work, in accordance with the capacities of individuals and for the common good of each society and of the whole of mankind. The organization of human life in accordance with the many possibilities of labour should be matched by a suitable system of instruction and education, aimed first of all at developing mature human beings, but also aimed at preparing people specifically for assuming to good advantage an appropriate place in the vast and socially differentiated world of work.

As we view the whole human family throughout the world, we cannot fail to be struck by a disconcerting fact of immense proportions: the fact that, while conspicuous natural resources remain unused, there are huge numbers of people who are unemployed or under-employed and countless multitudes of people suffering from hunger. This is a fact that without any doubt demonstrates that both within the individual political communities and in their relationships on the continental and world level there is something wrong with the organization of work and employment, precisely at the most critical and socially most important points.

19. Wages and Other Social Benefits

After outlining the important role that concern for providing employment for all workers plays in safeguarding respect for the inalienable rights of man in view of his work, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at these rights, which in the final analysis are formed within the relationship between worker and direct employer. All that has been said above on the subject of the indirect employer is aimed at defining these relationships more exactly, by showing the many forms of conditioning within which these relationships are indirectly formed. This consideration does not however have a purely descriptive purpose; it is not a brief treatise on economics or politics. It is a matter of highlighting the deontological and moral aspect. The key problem of social ethics in this case is that of just remuneration for work done. In the context of the present there is no more important way for securing a just relationship between the worker and the employer than that constituted by remuneration for work. Whether the work is done in a system of private ownership of the means of production or in a system where ownership has undergone a certain "socialization", the relationship between the employer (first and foremost the direct employer) and the worker is resolved on the basis of the wage, that is through just remuneration for work done.

It should also be noted that the justice of a socioeconomic system and, in each case, its just functioning, deserve in the final analysis to be evaluated by the way in which man's work is properly remunerated in the system. Here we return once more to the first principle of the whole ethical and social order, namely, the principle of the common use of goods. In every system, regardless of the fundamental relationships within it between capital and labour, wages, that is to say remuneration for work, are still a practical means whereby the vast majority of people can have access to those goods which are intended for common use: both the goods of nature and manufactured goods. Both kinds of goods become accessible to the worker through the wage which he receives as remuneration for his work. Hence, in every case, a just wage is the concrete means of verifying the justice of the whole socioeconomic system and, in any case, of checking that it is functioning justly. It is not the only means of checking, but it is a particularly important one and, in a sense, the key means.

This means of checking concerns above all the family. Just remuneration for the work of an adult who is responsible for a family means remuneration which will suffice for establishing and properly maintaining a family and for providing security for its future. Such remuneration can be given either through what is called a family wage—that is, a single salary given to the head of the family for his work, sufficient for the needs of the family without the other spouse having to take up gainful employment outside the home—or through other social measures such as family allowances or grants to mothers devoting themselves exclusively to their families. These grants should correspond to the actual needs, that is, to the number of dependents for as long as they are not in a position to assume proper responsibility for their own lives.

Experience confirms that there must be a social re-evaluation of the mother's role, of the toil connected with it, and of the need that children have for care, love and affection in order that they may develop into responsible, morally and religiously mature and psychologically stable persons. It will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother—without inhibiting her freedom, without psychological or practical discrimination, and without penalizing her as compared with other women—to devote herself to taking care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs, which vary with age. Having to abandon these tasks in order to take up paid work outside the home is wrong from the point of view of the good of society and of the family when it contradicts or hinders these primary goals of the mission of a mother²⁶.

In this context it should be emphasized that, on a more general level, the whole labour process must be organized and adapted in such a way as to respect the requirements of the person and his or her forms of life, above all life in the home, taking into account the individual's age and sex. It is a fact that in many societies women work in nearly every sector of life. But it is fitting that they should be able to fulfil their tasks in accordance with their own nature, without being discriminated against and without being excluded from jobs for which they are capable, but also without lack of respect for their family aspirations and for their specific role in contributing, together with men, to the good of society. The true advancement of women requires that labour should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role.

Besides wages, various social benefits intended to ensure the life and health of workers and their families play a part here. The expenses involved in health care, especially in the case of accidents at work, demand that medical assistance should be easily available for workers, and that as far as possible it should be cheap or even free of charge. Another sector regarding benefits is the sector associated with the right to rest. In the first place this involves a regular weekly rest comprising at least Sunday, and also a longer period of rest, namely the holiday or vacation taken once a year or possibly in several shorter periods during the year. A third sector concerns the right to a pension and to insurance for old age and in case of accidents at work. Within the sphere of these principal rights, there develops a whole system of particular rights which, together with remuneration for work, determine the correct relationship between worker and employer. Among these rights there should never be overlooked the right to a working environment and to manufacturing processes which are not harmful to the workers' physical health or to their moral integrity.

20. Importance of Unions

All these rights, together with the need for the workers themselves to secure them, give rise to yet another right: the right of association, that is to form associations for the purpose of defending the vital interests of those employed in the various professions. These associations are called labour or trade unions. The vital interests of the workers are to a certain extent common for all of them; at the same time however each type of work, each profession, has its own specific character which should find a particular reflection in these organizations.

In a sense, unions go back to the mediaeval guilds of artisans, insofar as those organizations brought together people belonging to the same craft and thus on the basis of their work. However, unions differ from the guilds on this essential point: the modern unions grew up from the struggle of the workers-workers in general but especially the industrial workers-to protect their just rights vis-a-vis the entrepreneurs and the owners of the means of production. Their task is to defend the existential interests of workers in all sectors in which their rights are concerned. The experience of history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies. Obviously, this does not mean that only industrial workers can set up associations of this type. Representatives of every profession can use them to ensure their own rights. Thus there are unions of agricultural workers and of white-collar workers; there are also employers' associations. All, as has been said above, are further divided into groups or subgroups according to particular professional specializations.

Catholic social teaching does not hold that unions are no more than a reflection of the "class" structure of society and that they are a mouthpiece for a class struggle which inevitably governs social life. They are indeed a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice, for the just rights of working people in accordance with their individual professions. However, this struggle should be seen as a normal endeavour "for" the just good: in the present case, for the good which corresponds to the needs and merits of working people associated by profession; but it is not a struggle "against" others. Even if in controversial questions the struggle takes on a character of opposition towards others, this is because it aims at the good of social justice, not for the sake of "struggle" or in order to eliminate the opponent. It is characteristic of work that it first and foremost unites people. In this consists its social power: the power to build a community. In the final analysis, both those who work and those who manage the means of production or who own them must in some way be united in this community. In the light of this fundamental structure of all work-in the light of the fact that, in the final analysis, labour and capital are indispensable components of the process of production in any social system-it is clear that, even if it is because of their work needs that people unite to secure their rights, their union remains a constructive factor of social order and solidarity, and it is impossible to ignore it.

Just efforts to secure the rights of workers who are united by the same profession should always take into account the limitations imposed by the general economic situation of the country. Union demands cannot be turned into a kind of group or class "egoism", although they can and should also aim at correcting-with a view to the common good of the whole of society- everything defective in the system of ownership of the means of production or in the way these are managed. Social and socioeconomic life is certainly like a system of "connected vessels", and every social activity directed towards safeguarding the rights of particular groups should adapt itself to this system.

In this sense, union activity undoubtedly enters the field of politics, understood as prudent concern for the common good. However, the role of unions is not to "play politics" in the sense that the expression is commonly understood today. Unions do not have the character of political parties struggling for power; they should not be subjected to the decision of political parties or have too close links with them. In fact, in such a situation they easily lose contact with

their specific role, which is to secure the just rights of workers within the framework of the common good of the whole of society; instead they become an instrument used for other purposes.

Speaking of the protection of the just rights of workers according to their individual professions, we must of course always keep in mind that which determines the subjective character of work in each profession, but at the same time, indeed before all else, we must keep in mind that which conditions the specific dignity of the subject of the work. The activity of union organizations opens up many possibilities in this respect, including their efforts to instruct and educate the workers and to foster their selfeducation. Praise is due to the work of the schools, what are known as workers' or people's universities and the training programmes and courses which have developed and are still developing this field of activity. It is always to be hoped that, thanks to the work of their unions, workers will not only have more, but above all be more: in other words, that they will realize their humanity more fully in every respect.

One method used by unions in pursuing the just rights of their members is the strike or work stoppage, as a kind of ultimatum to the competent bodies, especially the employers. This method is recognized by Catholic social teaching as legitimate in the proper conditions and within just limits. In this connection workers should be assured the right to strike, without being subjected to personal penal sanctions for taking part in a strike. While admitting that it is a legitimate means, we must at the same time emphasize that a strike remains, in a sense, an extreme means. It must not be abused; it must not be abused especially for "political" purposes. Furthermore it must never be forgotten that, when essential community services are in question, they must in every case be ensured, if necessary by means of appropriate legislation. Abuse of the strike weapon can lead to the paralysis of the whole of socioeconomic life, and this is contrary to the requirements of the common good of society, which also corresponds to the properly understood nature of work itself.

21. Dignity of Agricultural Work

All that has been said thus far on the dignity of work, on the objective and subjective dimension of human work, can be directly applied to the question of agricultural work and to the situation of the person who cultivates the earth by toiling in the fields. This is a vast sector of work on our planet, a sector not restricted to one or other continent, nor limited to the societies which have already attained a certain level of development and progress. The world of agriculture, which provides society with the goods it needs for its daily sustenance, is of fundamental importance. The conditions of the rural population and of agricultural work vary from place to place, and the social position of agricultural workers differs from country to country. This depends not only on the level of development of agricultural technology but also, and perhaps more, on the recognition of the just rights of agricultural workers and, finally, on the level of awareness regarding the social ethics of work.

Agricultural work involves considerable difficulties, including unremitting and sometimes exhausting physical effort and a lack of appreciation on the part of society, to the point of making agricultural people feel that they are social outcasts and of speeding up the phenomenon of their mass exodus from the countryside to the cities and unfortunately to still more dehumanizing living conditions. Added to this are the lack of adequate professional training and of proper equipment, the spread of a certain individualism, and also objectively unjust situations. In certain developing countries, millions of people are forced to cultivate the land belonging to others and are exploited by the big landowners, without any hope of ever being able to gain possession of even a small piece of land of their own. There is a lack of forms of legal protection for the agricultural workers themselves and for their families in case of old age, sickness or unemployment. Long days of hard physical work are paid miserably. Land which could be cultivated is left abandoned by the owners. Legal titles to possession of a small portion of land that someone has personally cultivated for years are disregarded or left defenceless against the "land hunger" of more powerful individuals or groups. But even in the economically developed countries, where scientific research, technological achievements and State policy have brought agriculture to a very advanced level, the right to work can be infringed when the farm workers are denied the possibility of sharing in decisions concerning their services, or when they are denied the right to free association with a view to their just advancement socially, culturally and economically.

In many situations radical and urgent changes are therefore needed in order to restore to agriculture-and to rural people-their just value as the basis for a healthy economy, within the social community's development as a whole. Thus it is necessary to proclaim and promote the dignity of work, of all work but especially of agricultural work, in which man so eloquently "subdues" the earth he has received as a gift from God and affirms his "dominion" in the visible world.

22. The Disabled Person and Work

Recently, national communities and international organizations have turned their attention to another question connected with work, one full of implications: the question of disabled people. They too are fully human subjects with corresponding innate, sacred and inviolable rights, and, in spite of the limitations and sufferings affecting their bodies and faculties, they point up more clearly the dignity and greatness of man. Since disabled people are subjects with all their rights, they should be helped to participate in the life of society in all its aspects and at all the levels accessible to their capacities. The disabled person is one of us and participates fully in the same humanity that we possess. It would

be radically unworthy of man, and a denial of our common humanity, to admit to the life of the community, and thus admit to work, only those who are fully functional. To do so would be to practise a serious form of discrimination, that of the strong and healthy against the weak and sick. Work in the objective sense should be subordinated, in this circumstance too, to the dignity of man, to the subject of work and not to economic advantage.

The various bodies involved in the world of labour, both the direct and the indirect employer, should therefore by means of effective and appropriate measures foster the right of disabled people to professional training and work, so that they can be given a productive activity suited to them. Many practical problems arise at this point, as well as legal and economic ones; but the community, that is to say, the public authorities, associations and intermediate groups, business enterprises and the disabled themselves should pool their ideas and resources so as to attain this goal that must not be shirked: that disabled people may be offered work according to their capabilities, for this is demanded by their dignity as persons and as subjects of work. Each community will be able to set up suitable structures for finding or creating jobs for such people both in the usual public or private enterprises, by offering them ordinary or suitably adapted jobs, and in what are called "protected" enterprises and surroundings.

Careful attention must be devoted to the physical and psychological working conditions of disabled people-as for all workers-to their just remuneration, to the possibility of their promotion, and to the elimination of various obstacles. Without hiding the fact that this is a complex and difficult task, it is to be hoped that a correct concept of labour in the subjective sense will produce a situation which will make it possible for disabled people to feel that they are not cut off from the working world or dependent upon society, but that they are full-scale subjects of work, useful, respected for their human dignity and called to contribute to the progress and welfare of their families and of the community according to their particular capacities.

23. Work and the Emigration Question

Finally, we must say at least a few words on the subject of emigration in search of work. This is an age-old phenomenon which nevertheless continues to be repeated and is still today very widespread as a result of the complexities of modern life. Man has the right to leave his native land for various motives-and also the right to return-in order to seek better conditions of life in another country. This fact is certainly not without difficulties of various kinds. Above all it generally constitutes a loss for the country which is left behind. It is the departure of a person who is also a member of a great community united by history, tradition and culture; and that person must begin life in the midst of another society united by a different culture and very often by a different language. In this case, it is the loss of a subject of work, whose efforts of mind and body could contribute to the common good of his own country, but these efforts, this contribution, are instead offered to another society which in a sense has less right to them than the person's country of origin.

Nevertheless, even if emigration is in some aspects an evil, in certain circumstances it is, as the phrase goes, a necessary evil. Everything should be done-and certainly much is being done to this end-to prevent this material evil from causing greater moral harm; indeed every possible effort should be made to ensure that it may bring benefit to the emigrant's personal, family and social life, both for the country to which he goes and the country which he leaves. In this area much depends on just legislation, in particular with regard to the rights of workers. It is obvious that the question of just legislation enters into the context of the present considerations, especially from the point of view of these rights.

The most important thing is that the person working away from his native land, whether as a permanent emigrant or as a seasonal worker, should not be placed at a disadvantage in comparison with the other workers in that society in the matter of working rights. Emigration in search of work must in no way become an opportunity for financial or social exploitation. As regards the work relationship, the same criteria should be applied to immigrant workers as to all other workers in the society concerned. The value of work should be measured by the same standard and not according to the difference in nationality, religion or race. For even greater reason the situation of constraint in which the emigrant may find himself should not be exploited. All these circumstances should categorically give way, after special qualifications have of course been taken into consideration, to the fundamental value of work, which is bound up with the dignity of the human person. Once more the fundamental principle must be repeated: the hierarchy of values and the profound meaning of work itself require that capital should be at the service of labour and not labour at the service of capital.

V. ELEMENTS FOR A SPIRITUALITY OF WORK

24. A Particular Task for the Church

It is right to devote the last part of these reflections about human work, on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, to the spirituality of work in the Christian sense. Since work in its subjective aspect is always a personal action, an *actus personae*, it follows that the whole person, body and spirit, participates in it, whether it is manual or intellectual work. It is also to the whole person that the word of the living God is directed, the evangelical message of salvation, in which we find many points which concern human work and which throw particular

light on it. These points need to be properly assimilated: an inner effort on the part of the human spirit, guided by faith, hope and charity, is needed in order that through these points the work of the individual human being may be given the meaning which it has in the eyes of God and by means of which work enters into the salvation process on a par with the other ordinary yet particularly important components of its texture.

The Church considers it her duty to speak out on work from the viewpoint of its human value and of the moral order to which it belongs, and she sees this as one of her important tasks within the service that she renders to the evangelical message as a whole. At the same time she sees it as her particular duty to form a spirituality of work which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer, to participate in his salvific plan for man and the world and to deepen their friendship with Christ in their lives by accepting, through faith, a living participation in his threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King, as the Second Vatican Council so eloquently teaches.

25. Work as a Sharing in the Activity of the Creator

As the Second Vatican Council says, "throughout the course of the centuries, men have laboured to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, such human activity accords with God's will. For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth"²⁷.

The word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator and that, within the limits of his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity, and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation. We find this truth at the very beginning of Sacred Scripture, in the Book of Genesis, where the creation activity itself is presented in the form of "work" done by God during "six days"²⁸, "resting" on the seventh day²⁹. Besides,

the last book of Sacred Scripture echoes the same respect for what God has done through his creative "work" when it proclaims: "Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty"³⁰; this is similar to the Book of Genesis, which concludes the description of each day of creation with the statement: "And God saw that it was good"³¹.

This description of creation, which we find in the very first chapter of the Book of Genesis, is also in a sense the first "gospel of work". For it shows what the dignity of work consists of: it teaches that man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God. Man ought to imitate God both in working and also in resting, since God himself wished to present his own creative activity under the form of work and rest. This activity by God in the world always continues, as the words of Christ attest: "My Father is working still..."³²: he works with creative power by sustaining in existence the world that he called into being from nothing, and he works with salvific power in the hearts of those whom from the beginning he has destined for "rest"³³ in union with himself in his "Father's house"³⁴. Therefore man's work too not only requires a rest every "seventh day"³⁵, but also cannot consist in the mere exercise of human strength in external action; it must leave room for man to prepare himself, by becoming more and more what in the will of God he ought to be, for the "rest" that the Lord reserves for his servants and friends³⁶.

Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate, as the Council teaches, even "the most ordinary everyday activities. For, while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way which appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labour they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan"³⁷.

This Christian spirituality of work should be a heritage shared by all. Especially in the modern age, the spirituality of work should show the maturity called for by the tensions and restlessness of mind and heart. "Far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the flowering of his own mysterious design.

For the greater man's power becomes, the farther his individual and community responsibility extends.... People are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows. They are, rather, more stringently bound to do these very things"³⁸.

The knowledge that by means of work man shares in the work of creation constitutes the most profound motive for undertaking it in various sectors. "The faithful, therefore", we read in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, "must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, and its orientation to the praise of God. Even by their secular activity they must assist one another to live holier lives. In this way the world will be permeated by the spirit of Christ and more effectively achieve its purpose in justice, charity and peace... Therefore, by their competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them work vigorously so that by human labour, technical skill, and civil culture

created goods may be perfected according to the design of the Creator and the light of his Word"³⁹.

26. Christ, the Man of Work

The truth that by means of work man participates in the activity of God himself, his Creator, was given particular prominence by Jesus Christ-the Jesus at whom many of his first listeners in Nazareth "were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him?.. Is not this the carpenter?'"⁴⁰. For Jesus not only proclaimed but first and foremost fulfilled by his deeds the "gospel", the word of eternal Wisdom, that had been entrusted to him. Therefore this was also "the gospel of work", because he who proclaimed it was himself a man of work, a craftsman like Joseph of Nazareth⁴¹. And if we do not find in his words a special command to work-but rather on one occasion a prohibition against too much anxiety about work and life⁴²- at the same time the eloquence of the life of Christ is unequivocal: he belongs to the "working world", he has appreciation and respect for human work. It can indeed be said that he looks with love upon human work and the different forms that it takes, seeing in each one of these forms a particular facet of man's likeness with God, the Creator and Father. Is it not he who says: "My Father is the vinedresser"⁴³, and in various ways puts into his teaching the fundamental truth about work which is already expressed in the whole tradition of the Old Testament, beginning with the Book of Genesis?

The books of the Old Testament contain many references to human work and to the individual professions exercised by man: for example, the doctor⁴⁴, the pharmacist⁴⁵, the craftsman or artist⁴⁶, the blacksmith⁴⁷ -we could apply these words to today's foundry-workers-the potter⁴⁸, the farmer⁴⁹, the scholar⁵⁰, the sailor⁵¹, the builder⁵², the musician⁵³, the shepherd⁵⁴, and the fisherman⁵⁵. The words of praise for the work of women are well known⁵⁶. In his parables on the Kingdom of God Jesus Christ constantly refers to human work: that of the shepherd⁵⁷, the farmer⁵⁸, the doctor⁵⁹, the sower⁶⁰, the householder⁶¹, the servant⁶², the steward⁶³, the fisherman⁶⁴, the merchant⁶⁵, the labourer⁶⁶. He also speaks of the various form of women's work⁶⁷. He compares the apostolate to the manual work of harvesters⁶⁸ or fishermen⁶⁹. He refers to the work of scholars too⁷⁰.

This teaching of Christ on work, based on the example of his life during his years in Nazareth, finds a particularly lively echo in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. Paul boasts of working at his trade (he was probably a tent-maker)⁷¹, and thanks to that work he was able even as an Apostle to earn his own bread⁷². "With toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you"⁷³. Hence his instructions, in the form of exhortation and command, on the subject of work: "Now such persons we

command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living", he writes to the Thessalonians⁷⁴. In fact, noting that some "are living in idleness... not doing any work"⁷⁵, the Apostle does not hesitate to say in the same context: "If any one will not work, let him not eat"⁷⁶. In another passage he encourages his readers: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward"⁷⁷.

The teachings of the Apostle of the Gentiles obviously have key importance for the morality and spirituality of human work. They are an important complement to the great though discreet gospel of work that we find in the life and parables of Christ, in what Jesus "did and taught"⁷⁸.

On the basis of these illuminations emanating from the Source himself, the Church has always proclaimed what we find expressed in modern terms in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: "Just as human activity proceeds from man, so it is ordered towards man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered... Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow people as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfil it"⁷⁹.

Such a vision of the values of human work, or in other words such a spirituality of work, fully explains what we read in the same section of the Council's Pastoral Constitution with regard to the right meaning of progress: "A person is more precious for what he is than for what he has. Similarly, all that people do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, and a more humane ordering of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about"⁸⁰.

This teaching on the question of progress and development-a subject that dominates presentday thought-can be understood only as the fruit of a tested spirituality of human work; and it is only on the basis of such a spirituality that it can be realized and put into practice. This is the teaching, and also the programme, that has its roots in "the gospel of work".

27. Human Work in the Light of the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ

There is yet another aspect of human work, an essential dimension of it, that is profoundly imbued with the spirituality based on the Gospel. All work, whether manual or intellectual, is inevitably linked with toil. The Book of Genesis expresses it in a truly penetrating manner: the original blessing of work contained in the very mystery of creation and connected with man's elevation as the image of God is contrasted with the curse that sin brought with it: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life"⁸¹. This toil connected with work marks the

way of human life on earth and constitutes an announcement of death: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken"⁸². Almost as an echo of these words, the author of one of the Wisdom books says: "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it"⁸³. There is no one on earth who could not apply these words to himself.

In a sense, the final word of the Gospel on this matter as on others is found in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. It is here that we must seek an answer to these problems so important for the spirituality of human work. The Paschal Mystery contains the Cross of Christ and his obedience unto death, which the Apostle contrasts with the disobedience which from the beginning has burdened man's history on earth⁸⁴. It also contains the elevation of Christ, who by means of death on a Cross returns to his disciples in the Resurrection with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sweat and toil, which work necessarily involves the present condition of the human race, present the Christian and everyone who is called to follow Christ with the possibility of sharing lovingly in the work that Christ came to do⁸⁵. This work of salvation came about through suffering and death on a Cross. By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity. He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day⁸⁶ in the activity that he is called upon to perform.

Christ, "undergoing death itself for all of us sinners, taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who pursue peace and justice"; but also, at the same time, "appointed Lord by his Resurrection and given all authority in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in people's hearts through the power of his Spirit... He animates, purifies, and strengthens those noble longings too, by which the human family strives to make its life more human and to render the whole earth submissive to this goal"⁸⁷.

The Christian finds in human work a small part of the Cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his Cross for us. In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the Resurrection of Christ, we always find a glimmer of new life, of the new good, as if it were an announcement of "the new heavens and the new earth"⁸⁸ in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work. Through toil-and never without it. On the one hand this confirms the indispensability of the Cross in the spirituality of human work; on the other hand the Cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work.

Is this new good-the fruit of human work-already a small part of that "new earth" where justice dwells⁸⁹? If it is true that the many forms of toil that go with man's work are a small part of the Cross of Christ, what is the relationship of this new good to the Resurrection of Christ?

The Council seeks to reply to this question also, drawing light from the very sources of the revealed word: "Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world and loses himself (cf. Lk 9: 25), the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age. Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God"⁹⁰.

In these present reflections devoted to human work we have tried to emphasize everything that seemed essential to it, since it is through man's labour that not only "the fruits of our activity" but also "human dignity, brotherhood and freedom" must increase on earth⁹¹. Let the Christian who listens to the word of the living God, uniting work with prayer, know the place that his work has not only in earthly progress but also in the development of the Kingdom of God, to which we are all called through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the Gospel.

In concluding these reflections, I gladly impart the Apostolic Blessing to all of you, venerable Brothers and beloved sons and daughters.

I prepared this document for publication on 15 May last, on the ninetieth anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, but it is only after my stay in hospital that I have been able to revise it definitively.

Given at Castel Gandolfo, on the fourteenth day of September, the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, in the year 1981, the third of the Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1 Cf. Ps 127(128):2; cf. also Gen 3:17-19; Prov. 10:22; Ex 1:8-14; Jer 22:13.

2 Cf. Gen 1:26.

3 Cf. Gen 1:28.

4 Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, 14: AAS 71 (1979), p. 284.

5 Cf. Ps 127(128):2.

6 Gen 3:19.

7 Cf. Mt 13:52.

8 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 38: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1055.

9 Gen 1: 27.

10 Gen 1:28.

11 Cf. Heb 2:17; Phil 2:5-8.

12 Cf. Pope Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), p. 221.

13 Dt 24:15; Jas 5:4; and also Gen 4:10.

14 Cf. Gen 1:28.

15 Cf. Gen 1:26-27.

16 Gen 3:19.

17 Heb 6:8; cf. Gen 3:18.

18 Cf. *Summa Th.* I-II, q. 40, a. 1, c.; I-II, q. 34, a. 2, ad 1.

19 Cf. *Summa Th.* I-II, q. 40, a. 1, c.; I-II, q. 34, a. 2, ad 1.

20 Cf. Pope Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), pp. 221-222.

21 Cf. Jn 4:38.

22 On the right to property see *Summa Th.*, II-II, q. 66, arts. 2 and 6; *De Regimine Principum*, book 1, chapters 15 and 17. On the social function of property see *Summa Th.*, II-II, q. 134, art. 1, ad 3.

23 Cf. Pope Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), p. 199; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 68: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1089-1090.

24 Cf. Pope John XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), p. 419.

25 Cf. *Summa Th.*, II-II, q. 65, a. 2.

26 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 67: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1089.

27 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 34: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1052-1053.

28 Cf. Gen 2:2; Ex 20:8, 11; Dt 5:12-14.

29 Cf. Gen 2:3.

30 Rev 15: 3.

31 Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

32 Jn 5:17.

33 Cf. Heb 4:1, 9-10.

34 Jn 14:2.

35 Cf. Dt 5:12-14; Ex 20:8-12.

36 Cf. Mt 25:21.

37 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 34: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1052-1053.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 36: AAS 57 (1965), p. 41.

40 Mk 6:2-3.

41 Cf. Mt 13:55.

42 Cf. Mt 6:25-34.

43 Jn 15:1.

44 Cf. Sir 38:1-3.

45 Cf. Sir 38:4-8.

46 Cf. Ex 31:1-5; Sir 38:27.

47 Cf. Gen 4:22; Is 44:12.

48 Cf. Jer 18:3-4; Sir 38:29-30.

49 Cf. Gen 9:20; Is 5:1-2.

50 Cf. Eccles 12:9-12; Sir 39:1-8.

51 Cf. Ps:107(108): 23-30; Wis 14: 2-3 a.

52 Cf. Gen 11:3; 2 Kings 12:12-13; 22:5-6.

53 Cf. Gen 4:21.

54 Cf. Gen 4:2; 37:3; Ex 3:1; 1 Sam 16:11; et passim.

55 Cf. Ezk 47:10.

56 Cf. Prov 31:15-27.

57 E.g. Jn 10:1-16.

58 Cf. Mk 12:1-12.

59 Cf. Lk 4:23.

60 Cf. Mk 4:1-9.

- 61 Cf. Mt 13:52.
62 Cf. Mt 24:45; Lk 12:42-48.
63 Cf. Lk 16:1-8.
64 Cf. Mt 13:47-50.
65 Cf. Mt 13:45-46.
66 Cf. Mt 20:1-16.
67 Cf. Mt 13:33; Lk 15:8-9.
68 Cf. Mt 9:37; Jn 4:35-38.
69 Cf. Mt 4:19.
70 Cf. Mt 13:52.
71 Cf. Acts 18:3.
72 Cf. Acts 20:34-35.
73 2 Thess 3:8. Saint Paul recognizes that missionaries have a right to their keep: 1 Cor 9:6-14; Gal 6:6; 2 Thess 3:9; cf. Lk 10: 7.
74 2 Thess 3:12.
75 2 Thess 3:11.
76 2 Thess 3:10.
77 Col 3:23-24.
78 Cf. Acts 1:1.
79 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 35: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1053.
80 Ibid.
81 Gen 3:17.
82 Gen 3:19.
83 Eccles 2:11.
84 Cf. Rom 5:19.
85 Cf. Jn 17:4.
86 Cf. Lk 9:23.
87 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 38: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1055-1056.
88 Cf. 2 Pt 3:13; Rev 21:1.
89 Cf. 2 Pt 3:13.
90 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1057.
91 Ibid.

Ioannes Paulus PP. II
1980.11.30

Blessing

Venerable Brothers and dear sons and daughters, greetings and the apostolic blessing.

I. HE WHO SEES ME SEES THE FATHER (cf. John 14:9)

The Revelation of Mercy

It is "God, who is rich in mercy" 1 whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father: it is His very Son who, in Himself, has manifested Him and made Him known to us.² Memorable in this regard is the moment when Philip, one of the twelve Apostles, turned to Christ and said: "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied"; and Jesus replied: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me...? He who has seen me has seen the Father."³ These words were spoken during the farewell discourse at the end of the paschal supper, which was followed by the events of those holy days during which confirmation was to be given once and for all of the fact that "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."⁴

Following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and paying close attention to the special needs of our times, I devoted the encyclical *Redemptor hominis* to the truth about man, a truth that is revealed to us in its fullness and depth in Christ. A no less important need in these critical and difficult times impels me to draw attention once again in Christ to the countenance of the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort."⁵ We read in the Constitution *Gaudium et spes*: "Christ the new Adam...fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his lofty calling, " and does it "in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love."⁶ The words that I have quoted are clear testimony to the fact that man cannot be manifested in the full dignity of his nature without reference - not only on the level of concepts but also in an integrally existential way - to God. Man and man's lofty calling are revealed in Christ through the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love.

For this reason it is now fitting to reflect on this mystery. It is called for by the varied experiences of the Church and of contemporary man. It is also demanded by the pleas of many human hearts, their sufferings and hopes, their anxieties and expectations. While it is true that every individual human being is, as I said in my encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, the way for the Church, at the same time the Gospel and the whole of Tradition constantly show us that we must travel this day with every individual just as Christ traced it out by revealing in Himself the Father and His love.⁷ In Jesus Christ, every path to man, as it has been assigned once and for all to the Church in the changing context of the times, is simultaneously an approach to the Father and His love. The Second Vatican Council has confirmed this truth for our time.

The more the Church's mission is centered upon man-the more it is, so to speak, anthropocentric-the more it must be confirmed and actualized theocentrically, that is to say, be directed in Jesus Christ to the Father. While the various currents of human thought both in the past and at the present have tended and still tend to separate theocentrism and anthropocentrism, and even to set them in opposition to each other, the Church, following Christ, seeks to link them up in human history, in a deep and organic way. And this is also one of the basic principles, perhaps the most important one, of the teaching of the last Council. Since, therefore, in the present phase of the Church's history we put before ourselves as our primary task the implementation of the doctrine of the great Council, we must act upon this principle with faith, with an open mind and with all our heart. In the encyclical already referred to, I have tried to show that the deepening and the many-faceted enrichment of the Church's consciousness resulting from the Council must open our minds and our hearts more widely to Christ. Today I wish to say that openness to Christ, who as the Redeemer of the world fully reveals man himself, " can only be achieved through an ever more mature reference to the Father and His love.

2. The Incarnation of Mercy

Although God "dwells in unapproachable light,"⁸ He speaks to man he means of the whole of the universe: "ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made."⁹ This indirect and imperfect knowledge, achieved by the intellect seeking God by means of creatures through the visible world, falls short of "vision of the Father." "No one has ever seen God," writes St. John, in order to stress the truth that "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."¹⁰ This "making known" reveals God in the most profound mystery of His being, one and three, surrounded by "unapproachable light."¹¹ Nevertheless, through this "making known" by Christ we know God above all in His

relationship of love for man: in His "philanthropy."¹² It is precisely here that "His invisible nature" becomes in a special way "visible," incomparably more visible than through all the other "things that have been made": it becomes visible in Christ and through Christ, through His actions and His words, and finally through His death on the cross and His resurrection.

In this way, in Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in His mercy; that is to say, there is emphasized that attribute of the divinity which the Old Testament, using various concepts and terms, already defined as "mercy." Christ confers on the whole of the Old Testament tradition about God's mercy a definitive meaning. Not only does He speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all He Himself makes it incarnate and personifies it. He Himself, in a certain sense, is mercy. To the person who sees it in Him - and finds it in Him - God becomes "visible" in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy.¹³

The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy. The word and the concept of "mercy" seem to cause uneasiness in man, who, thanks to the enormous development of science and technology, never before known in history, has become the master of the earth and has subdued and dominated it.¹⁴ This dominion over the earth, sometimes understood in a one-sided and superficial way, seems to have no room for mercy. However, in this regard we can profitably refer to the picture of "man's situation in the world today" as described at the beginning of the Constitution *Gaudium et spes*. Here we read the following sentences: "In the light of the foregoing factors there appears the dichotomy of a world that is at once powerful and weak, capable of doing what is noble and what is base, disposed to freedom and slavery, progress and decline, brotherhood and hatred. Man is growing conscious that the forces he has unleashed are in his own hands and that it is up to him to control them or be enslaved by them."¹⁵

The situation of the world today not only displays transformations that give grounds for hope in a better future for man on earth, but also reveals a multitude of threats, far surpassing those known up till now. Without ceasing to point out these threats on various occasions (as in addresses at UNO, to UNESCO, to FAO and elsewhere), the Church must at the same time examine them in the light of the truth received from God.

The truth, revealed in Christ, about God the "Father of mercies,"¹⁶ enables us to "see" Him as particularly close to man especially when man is suffering, when he is under threat at the very heart of his existence and dignity. And this is why, in the situation of the Church and the world today, many individuals and groups guided by a lively sense of faith are turning, I would say almost spontaneously, to the mercy of God. They are certainly being moved to do this by Christ Himself, who through His Spirit works within human hearts. For the mystery of God the "Father of mercies" revealed by Christ becomes, in the context of today's threats to man, as it were a unique appeal addressed to the Church.

In the present encyclical wish to accept this appeal; I wish to draw from the eternal and at the same time-for its simplicity and depth- incomparable language of revelation and faith, in order through this same language to express once more before God and before humanity the major anxieties of our time.

In fact, revelation and faith teach us not only to meditate in the abstract upon the mystery of God as "Father of mercies," but also to have recourse to that mercy in the name of Christ and in union with Him. Did not Christ say that our Father, who "sees in secret,"¹⁷ is always waiting for us to have recourse to Him in every need and always waiting for us to study His mystery: the mystery of the Father and His love?¹⁸

I therefore wish these considerations to bring this mystery closer to everyone. At the same time I wish them to be a heartfelt appeal by the Church to mercy, which humanity and the modern world need so much. And they need mercy even though they often do not realize it.

II. THE MESSIANIC MESSAGE

3. When Christ Began To Do and To Teach

Before His own townspeople, in Nazareth, Christ refers to the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."¹⁹ These phrases, according to Luke, are His first messianic declaration. They are followed by the actions and words known through the Gospel. By these actions and words Christ makes the Father present among men. It is very significant that the people in question are especially the poor, those without means of subsistence, those deprived of their freedom, the blind who cannot see the beauty of creation, those living with broken hearts, or suffering from social injustice, and finally sinners. It is especially for these last that the Messiah becomes a particularly clear sign of God who is love, a sign of the Father. In this visible sign the people of our own time, just like the people then, can see the Father.

It is significant that, when the messengers sent by John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask Him: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?",²⁰ He answered by referring to the same testimony with which He had begun His teaching at Nazareth: "Go and tell John what it is that you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame

walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them." He then ended with the words: "And blessed is he who takes no offense at me".²¹

Especially through His lifestyle and through His actions, Jesus revealed that love is present in the world in which we live - an effective love, a love that addresses itself to man and embraces everything that makes up his humanity. This love makes itself particularly noticed in contact with suffering, injustice and poverty - in contact with the whole historical "human condition," which in various ways manifests man's limitation and frailty, both physical and moral. It is precisely the mode and sphere in which love manifests itself that in biblical language is called "mercy."

Christ, then, reveals God who is Father, who is "love," as St. John will express it in his first letter²²; Christ reveals God as "rich in mercy," as we read in St. Paul.²³ This truth is not just the subject of a teaching; it is a reality made present to us by Christ. Making the Father present as love and mercy is, in Christ's own consciousness, the fundamental touchstone of His mission as the Messiah; this is confirmed by the words that He uttered first in the synagogue at Nazareth and later in the presence of His disciples and of John the Baptist's messengers.

On the basis of this way of manifesting the presence of God who is Father, love and mercy, Jesus makes mercy one of the principal themes of His preaching. As is His custom, He first teaches "in parables," since these express better the very essence of things. It is sufficient to recall the parable of the prodigal son, ²⁴ or the parable of the Good Samaritan, ²⁵ but also - by contrast - the parable of the merciless servant.²⁶ There are many passages in the teaching of Christ that manifest love-mercy under some ever-fresh aspect. We need only consider the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep, ²⁷ or the woman who sweeps the house in search of the lost coin.²⁸ The Gospel writer who particularly treats of these themes in Christ's teaching is Luke, whose Gospel has earned the title of "the Gospel of mercy."

When one speaks of preaching, one encounters a problem of major importance with reference to the meaning of terms and the content of concepts, especially the content of the concept of "mercy" (in relationship to the concept of "love"). A grasp of the content of these concepts is the key to understanding the very reality of mercy. And this is what is most important for us. However, before devoting a further part of our considerations to this subject, that is to say, to establishing the meaning of the vocabulary and the content proper to the concept of mercy, "we must note that Christ, in revealing the love - mercy of God, at the same time demanded from people that they also should be guided in their lives by love and mercy. This requirement forms part of the very essence of the messianic message, and constitutes the heart of the Gospel ethos. The Teacher expresses this both through the medium of the commandment which He describes as "the greatest,"²⁹ and also in the form of a blessing, when in the Sermon on the Mount He proclaims: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."³⁰

In this way, the messianic message about mercy preserves a particular divine-human dimension. Christ - the very fulfillment of the messianic prophecy - by becoming the incarnation of the love that is manifested with particular force with regard to the suffering, the unfortunate and sinners, makes present and thus more fully reveals the Father, who is God "rich in mercy." At the same time, by becoming for people a model of merciful love for others, Christ proclaims by His actions even more than by His words that call to mercy which is one of the essential elements of the Gospel ethos. In this instance it is not just a case of fulfilling a commandment or an obligation of an ethical nature; it is also a case of satisfying a condition of major importance for God to reveal Himself in His mercy to man: "The merciful...shall obtain mercy."

III. THE OLD TESTAMENT

4. The Concept of "Mercy" in the Old Testament

The concept of "mercy" in the Old Testament has a long and rich history. We have to refer back to it in order that the mercy revealed by Christ may shine forth more clearly. By revealing that mercy both through His actions and through His teaching, Christ addressed Himself to people who not only knew the concept of mercy, but who also, as the People of God of the Old Covenant, had drawn from their age - long history a special experience of the mercy of God. This experience was social and communal, as well as individual and interior.

Israel was, in fact, the people of the covenant with God, a covenant that it broke many times. Whenever it became aware of its infidelity - and in the history of Israel there was no lack of prophets and others who awakened this awareness-it appealed to mercy. In this regard, the books of the Old Testament give us very many examples. Among the events and texts of greater importance one may recall: the beginning of the history of the Judges, ³¹ the prayer of Solomon at the inauguration of the Temple, ³² part of the prophetic work of Micah, ³³ the consoling assurances given by Isaiah, ³⁴ the cry of the Jews in exile, ³⁵ and the renewal of the covenant after the return from exile.³⁶

It is significant that in their preaching the prophets link mercy, which they often refer to because of the people's sins, with the incisive image of love on God's part. The Lord loves Israel with the love of a special choosing, much like the love of a spouse, ³⁷ and for this reason He pardons its sins and even its infidelities and betrayals. When He finds repentance and true conversion, He brings His people back to grace.³⁸ In the preaching of the prophets, mercy signifies a special power of love, which prevails over the sin and infidelity of the chosen people.

In this broad "social" context, mercy appears as a correlative to the interior experience of individuals languishing in a state of guilt or enduring every kind of suffering and misfortune. Both physical evil and moral evil, namely sin, cause

the sons and daughters of Israel to turn to the Lord and beseech His mercy. In this way David turns to Him, conscious of the seriousness of his guilt³⁹; Job too, after his rebellion, turns to Him in his tremendous misfortune⁴⁰; so also does Esther, knowing the mortal threat to her own people.⁴¹ And we find still other examples in the books of the Old Testament.⁴²

At the root of this many-sided conviction, which is both communal and personal, and which is demonstrated by the whole of the Old Testament down the centuries, is the basic experience of the chosen people at the Exodus: the Lord saw the affliction of His people reduced to slavery, heard their cry, knew their sufferings and decided to deliver them.⁴³ In this act of salvation by the Lord, the prophet perceived his love and compassion.⁴⁴ This is precisely the grounds upon which the people and each of its members based their certainty of the mercy of God, which can be invoked whenever tragedy strikes.

Added to this is the fact that sin too constitutes man's misery. The people of the Old Covenant experienced this misery from the time of the Exodus, when they set up the golden calf. The Lord Himself triumphed over this act of breaking the covenant when He solemnly declared to Moses that He was a "God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."⁴⁵ It is in this central revelation that the chosen people, and each of its members, will find, every time that they have sinned, the strength and the motive for turning to the Lord to remind Him of what He had exactly revealed about Himself⁴⁶ and to beseech His forgiveness.

Thus, in deeds and in words, the Lord revealed His mercy from the very beginnings of the people which He chose for Himself; and, in the course of its history, this people continually entrusted itself, both when stricken with misfortune and when it became aware of its sin, to the God of mercies. All the subtleties of love become manifest in the Lord's mercy towards those who are His own: He is their Father, ⁴⁷ for Israel is His firstborn son⁴⁸; the Lord is also the bridegroom of her whose new name the prophet proclaims: Ruhamah, "Beloved" or "she has obtained pity."⁴⁹

Even when the Lord is exasperated by the infidelity of His people and thinks of finishing with it, it is still His tenderness and generous love for those who are His own which overcomes His anger.⁵⁰ Thus it is easy to understand why the psalmists, when they desire to sing the highest praises of the Lord, break forth into hymns to the God of love, tenderness, mercy and fidelity.⁵¹

From all this it follows that mercy does not pertain only to the notion of God, but it is something that characterizes the life of the whole people of Israel and each of its sons and daughters: mercy is the content of intimacy with their Lord, the content of their dialogue with Him. Under precisely this aspect, mercy is presented in the individual books of the Old Testament with a great richness of expression. It may be difficult to find in these books a purely theoretical answer to the question of what mercy is in itself.

Nevertheless, the terminology that is used is in itself able to tell us much about this subject.⁵²

The Old Testament proclaims the mercy of the Lord by the use of many terms with related meanings; they are differentiated by their particular content, but it could be said that they all converge from different directions on one single fundamental content, to express its surpassing richness and at the same time to bring it close to man under different aspects. The Old Testament encourages people suffering from misfortune, especially those weighed down by sin - as also the whole of Israel, which had entered into the covenant with God - to appeal for mercy, and enables them to count upon it: it reminds them of His mercy in times of failure and loss of trust. Subsequently, the Old Testament gives thanks and glory for mercy every time that mercy is made manifest in the life of the people or in the lives of individuals.

In this way, mercy is in a certain sense contrasted with God's justice, and in many cases is shown to be not only more powerful than that justice but also more profound. Even the Old Testament teaches that, although justice is an authentic virtue in man, and in God signifies transcendent perfection nevertheless love is "greater" than justice: greater in the sense that it is primary and fundamental. Love, so to speak, conditions justice and, in the final analysis, justice serves love. The primacy and superiority of love vis-a-vis justice - this is a mark of the whole of revelation - are revealed precisely through mercy. This seemed so obvious to the psalmists and prophets that the very term justice ended up by meaning the salvation

accomplished by the Lord and His mercy.⁵³ Mercy differs from justice, but is not in opposition to it, if we admit in the history of man - as the Old Testament precisely does - the presence of God, who already as Creator has linked Himself to His creature with a particular love. Love, by its very nature, excludes hatred and ill - will towards the one to whom He once gave the gift of Himself: *Nihil odisti eorum quae fecisti,*

"you hold nothing of what you have made in abhorrence."⁵⁴ These words indicate the profound basis of the relationship between justice and mercy in God, in His relations with man and the world. They tell us that we must seek the life-giving roots and intimate reasons for this relationship by going back to "the beginning," in the very mystery of creation. They foreshadow in the context of the Old Covenant the full revelation of God, who is "love."⁵⁵

Connected with the mystery of creation is the mystery of the election, which in a special way shaped the history of the people whose spiritual father is Abraham by virtue of his faith. Nevertheless, through this people which journeys forward through the history both of the Old Covenant and of the New, that mystery of election refers to every man and woman, to the whole great human family. "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."⁵⁶ "For the mountains may depart...my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed."⁵⁷ This truth, once proclaimed to Israel, involves a perspective of the whole history of

man, a perspective both temporal and eschatological.⁵⁸ Christ reveals the Father within the framework of the same perspective and on ground already prepared, as many pages of the Old Testament writings demonstrate. At the end of this revelation, on the night before He dies, He says to the apostle Philip these memorable words: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me...? He who has seen me has seen the Father."⁵⁹

IV. THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

5. An Analogy

At the very beginning of the New Testament, two voices resound in St. Luke's Gospel in unique harmony concerning the mercy of God, a harmony which forcefully echoes the whole Old Testament tradition. They express the semantic elements linked to the differentiated terminology of the ancient books. Mary, entering the house of Zechariah, magnifies the Lord with all her soul for "his mercy," which "from generation to generation" is bestowed on those who fear Him. A little later, as she recalls the election of Israel, she proclaims the mercy which He who has chosen her holds "in remembrance" from all time.⁶⁰ Afterwards, when John the Baptist is born, his father Zechariah blesses the God of Israel and glorifies Him for performing the mercy promised to our fathers and for remembering His holy covenant.⁶¹

In the teaching of Christ Himself, this image inherited from the Old Testament becomes at the same time simpler and more profound. This is perhaps most evident in the parable of the prodigal son.⁶² Although the word "mercy" does not appear, it nevertheless expresses the essence of the divine mercy in a particularly clear way. This is due not so much to the terminology, as in the Old Testament books, as to the analogy that enables us to understand more fully the very mystery of mercy, as a profound drama played out between the father's love and the prodigality and sin of the son.

That son, who receives from the father the portion of the inheritance that is due to him and leaves home to squander it in a far country "in loose living," in a certain sense is the man of every period, beginning with the one who was the first to lose the inheritance of grace and original justice. The analogy at this point is very wide-ranging. The parable indirectly touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin. In this analogy there is less emphasis than in the prophetic tradition on the unfaithfulness of the whole people of Israel, although the analogy of the prodigal son may extend to this also. "When he had spent everything," the son "began to be in need," especially as "a great famine arose in that country" to which he had gone after leaving his father's house. And in this situation "he would gladly have fed on" anything, even "the pods that the swine ate," the swine that he herded for "one of the citizens of that country." But even this was refused him.

The analogy turns clearly towards man's interior. The inheritance that the son had received from his father was a quantity of material goods, but more important than these goods was his dignity as a son in his father's house. The situation in which he found himself when he lost the material goods should have made him aware of the loss of that dignity. He had not thought about it previously, when he had asked his father to give him the part of the inheritance that was due to him, in order to go away. He seems not to be conscious of it even now, when he says to himself: "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger." He measures himself by the standard of the goods that he has lost, that he no longer "possesses," while the hired servants of his father's house "possess" them. These words express above all his attitude to material goods; nevertheless under their surface is concealed the tragedy of lost dignity, the awareness of squandered sonship.

It is at this point that he makes the decision: "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"⁶³ These are words that reveal more deeply the essential problem. Through the complex material situation in which the prodigal son found himself because of his folly, because of sin, the sense of lost dignity had matured. When he decides to return to his father's house, to ask his father to be received-no longer by virtue of his right as a son, but as an employee-at first sight he seems to be acting by reason of the hunger and poverty that he had fallen into; this motive, however, is permeated by an awareness of a deeper loss: to be a hired servant in his own father's house is certainly a great humiliation and source of shame. Nevertheless, the prodigal son is ready to undergo that humiliation and shame. He realizes that he no longer has any right except to be an employee in his father's house. His decision is taken in full consciousness of what he has deserved and of what he can still have a right to in accordance with the norms of justice. Precisely this reasoning demonstrates that, at the center of the prodigal son's consciousness, the sense of lost dignity is emerging, the sense of that dignity that springs from the relationship of the son with the father. And it is with this decision that he sets out.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the term "justice" is not used even once; just as in the original text the term "mercy" is not used either. Nevertheless, the relationship between justice and love, that is manifested as mercy, is inscribed with great exactness in the content of the Gospel parable. It becomes more evident that love is transformed into mercy when it is necessary to go beyond the precise norm of justice-precise and often too narrow. The prodigal son, having wasted the property he received from his father, deserves -after his return - to earn his living by working in his father's house as a hired servant and possibly, little by little, to build up a certain provision of material goods, though perhaps never as much as the amount he had squandered. This would be demanded by the order of justice, especially as the son had not

only squandered the part of the inheritance belonging to him but had also hurt and offended his father by his whole conduct. Since this conduct had in his own eyes deprived him of his dignity as a son, it could not be a matter of indifference to his father. It was bound to make him suffer. It was also bound to implicate him in some way.

And yet, after all, it was his own son who was involved, and such a relationship could never be altered or destroyed by any sort of behavior. The prodigal son is aware of this and it is precisely this awareness that shows him clearly the dignity which he has lost and which makes him honestly evaluate the position that he could still expect in his father's house.

6. Particular Concentration on Human Dignity

This exact picture of the prodigal son's state of mind enables us to understand exactly what the mercy of God consists in. There is no doubt that in this simple but penetrating analogy the figure of the father reveals to us God as Father. The conduct of the father in the parable and his whole behavior, which manifests his internal attitude, enables us to rediscover the individual threads of the Old Testament vision of mercy in a synthesis which is totally new, full of simplicity and depth. The father of the prodigal son is faithful to his fatherhood, faithful to the love that he had always lavished on his son. This fidelity is expressed in the parable not only by his immediate readiness to welcome him home when he returns after having squandered his inheritance; it is expressed even more fully by that joy, that merrymaking for the squanderer after his return, merrymaking which is so generous that it provokes the opposition and hatred of the elder brother, who had never gone far away from his father and had never abandoned the home.

The father's fidelity to himself - a trait already known by the Old Testament term *hesed* - is at the same time expressed in a manner particularly charged with affection. We read, in fact, that when the father saw the prodigal son returning home "he had compassion, ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him."⁶⁴ He certainly does this under the influence of a deep affection, and this also explains his generosity towards his son, that generosity which so angers the elder son. Nevertheless, the causes of this emotion are to be sought at a deeper level. Notice, the father is aware that a fundamental good has been saved: the good of his son's humanity. Although the son has squandered the inheritance, nevertheless his humanity is saved. Indeed, it has been, in a way, found again. The father's words to the elder son reveal this: "It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found."⁶⁵ In the same chapter fifteen of Luke's Gospel, we read the parable of the sheep that was found⁶⁶ and then the parable of the coin that was found.⁶⁷ Each time there is an emphasis on the same joy that is present in the case of the prodigal son. The father's fidelity to himself is totally concentrated upon the humanity of the lost son, upon his dignity. This explains above all his joyous emotion at the moment of the son's return home.

Going on, one can therefore say that the love for the son the love that springs from the very essence of fatherhood, in a way obliges the father to be concerned about his son's dignity. This concern is the measure of his love, the love of which Saint Paul was to write: "Love is patient and kind...love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful...but rejoices in the right...hopes all things, endures all things" and "love never ends."⁶⁸ Mercy - as Christ has presented it in the parable of the prodigal son - has the interior form of the love that in the New Testament is called *agape*. This love is able to reach down to every prodigal son, to every human misery, and above all to every form of moral misery, to sin. When this happens, the person who is the object of mercy does not feel humiliated, but rather found again and "restored to value." The father first and foremost expresses to him his joy that he has been "found again" and that he has "returned to life. This joy indicates a good that has remained intact: even if he is a prodigal, a son does not cease to be truly his father's son; it also indicates a good that has been found again, which in the case of the prodigal son was his return to the truth about himself.

What took place in the relationship between the father and the son in Christ's parable is not to be evaluated "from the outside." Our prejudices about mercy are mostly the result of appraising them only from the outside. At times it happens that by following this method of evaluation we see in mercy above all a relationship of inequality between the one offering it and the one receiving it. And, in consequence, we are quick to deduce that mercy belittles the receiver, that it offends the dignity of man. The parable of the prodigal son shows that the reality is different: the relationship of mercy is based on the common experience of that good which is man, on the common experience of the dignity that is proper to him. This common experience makes the prodigal son begin to see himself and his actions in their full truth (this vision in truth is a genuine form of humility); on the other hand, for this very reason he becomes a particular good for his father: the father sees so clearly the good which has been achieved thanks to a mysterious radiation of truth and love, that he seems to forget all the evil which the son had committed.

The parable of the prodigal son expresses in a simple but profound way the reality of conversion. Conversion is the most concrete expression of the working of love and of the presence of mercy in the human world. The true and proper meaning of mercy does not consist only in looking, however penetratingly and compassionately, at moral, physical or material evil: mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man. Understood in this way, mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of His mission. His disciples and followers understood and practiced mercy in the same way. Mercy never ceased to reveal itself, in their hearts and in their actions, as an especially creative proof of the love which does not allow itself to be "conquered by evil, " but

overcomes "evil with good."⁶⁹ The genuine face of mercy has to be ever revealed anew. In spite of many prejudices, mercy seems particularly necessary for our times.

V. THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

7. Mercy Revealed in the Cross and Resurrection

The messianic message of Christ and His activity among people end with the cross and resurrection. We have to penetrate deeply into this final event-which especially in the language of the Council is defined as the *Mysterium Paschale* - if we wish to express in depth the truth about mercy, as it has been revealed in depth in the history of our salvation. At this point of our considerations, we shall have to draw closer still to the content of the encyclical *Redemptor hominis*. If, in fact, the reality of the Redemption, in its human dimension, reveals the unheard - of greatness of man, *qui talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem*,⁷⁰ at the same time the divine dimension of the redemption enables us, I would say, in the most empirical and "historical" way, to uncover the depth of that love which does not recoil before the extraordinary sacrifice of the Son, in order to satisfy the fidelity of the Creator and Father towards human beings, created in His image and chosen from "the beginning," in this Son, for grace and glory.

The events of Good Friday and, even before that, in prayer in Gethsemane, introduce a fundamental change into the whole course of the revelation of love and mercy in the messianic mission of Christ. The one who "went about doing good and healing"⁷¹ and "curing every sickness and disease"⁷² now Himself seems to merit the greatest mercy and to appeal for mercy, when He is arrested, abused, condemned, scourged, crowned with thorns, when He is nailed to the cross and dies amidst agonizing torments.⁷³ It is then that He particularly deserves mercy from the people to whom He has done good, and He does not receive it. Even those who are closest to Him cannot protect Him and snatch Him from the hands of His oppressors. At this final stage of His messianic activity the words which the prophets, especially Isaiah, uttered concerning the Servant of Yahweh are fulfilled in Christ: "Through his stripes we are healed."⁷⁴

Christ, as the man who suffers really and in a terrible way in the Garden of Olives and on Calvary, addresses Himself to the Father- that Father whose love He has preached to people, to whose mercy He has borne witness through all of His activity. But He is not spared - not even He-the terrible suffering of death on the cross: For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin,⁷⁵ St. Paul will write, summing up in a few words the whole depth of the cross and at the same time the divine dimension of the reality of the Redemption. Indeed this Redemption is the ultimate and definitive revelation of the holiness of God, who is the absolute fullness of perfection: fullness of justice and of love, since justice is based on love, flows from it and tends towards it. In the passion and death of Christ-in the fact that the Father did not spare His own Son, but "for our sake made him sin"⁷⁶ - absolute justice is expressed, for Christ undergoes the passion and cross because of the sins of humanity. This constitutes even a "superabundance" of justice, for the sins of man are "compensated for" by the sacrifice of the Man-God. Nevertheless, this justice, which is properly justice "to God's measure," springs completely from love: from the love of the Father and of the Son, and completely bears fruit in love. Precisely for this reason the divine justice revealed in the cross of Christ is "to God's measure," because it springs from love and is accomplished in love, producing fruits of salvation. The divine dimension of redemption is put into effect not only by bringing justice to bear upon sin, but also by restoring to love that creative power in man thanks also which he once more has access to the fullness of life and holiness that come from God. In this way, redemption involves the revelation of mercy in its fullness.

The Paschal Mystery is the culmination of this revealing and effecting of mercy, which is able to justify man, to restore justice in the sense of that salvific order which God willed from the beginning in man and, through man, in the world. The suffering Christ speaks in a special way to man, and not only to the believer. The non-believer also will be able to discover in Him the eloquence of solidarity with the human lot, as also the harmonious fullness of a disinterested dedication to the cause of man, to truth and to love. And yet the divine dimension of the Paschal Mystery goes still deeper. The cross on Calvary, the cross upon which Christ conducts His final dialogue with the Father, emerges from the very heart of the love that man, created in the image and likeness of God, has been given as a gift, according to God's eternal plan. God, as Christ has revealed Him, does not merely remain closely linked with the world as the Creator and the ultimate source of existence. He is also Father: He is linked to man, whom He called to existence in the visible world, by a bond still more intimate than that of creation. It is love which not only creates the good but also grants participation in the very life of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For he who loves desires to give himself.

The cross of Christ on Calvary stands beside the path of that admirable commercium, of that wonderful self-communication of God to man, which also includes the call to man to share in the divine life by giving himself, and with himself the whole visible world, to God, and like an adopted son to become a sharer in the truth and love which is in God and proceeds from God. It is precisely beside the path of man's eternal election to the dignity of being an adopted child of God that there stands in history the cross of Christ, the only - begotten Son, who, as "light from light, true God from true God,"⁷⁷ came to give the final witness to the wonderful covenant of God with humanity, of God with man - every human being. This covenant, as old as man - it goes back to the very mystery of creation - and afterwards many times renewed with one single chosen people, is equally the new and definitive covenant, which was established there on Calvary, and is not limited to a single people, to Israel, but is open to each and every individual.

What else, then, does the cross of Christ say to us, the cross that in a sense is the final word of His messianic message and mission? And yet this is not yet the word of the God of the covenant: that will be pronounced at the dawn when first the women and then the Apostles come to the tomb of the crucified Christ, see the tomb empty and for the first time hear the message: "He is risen." They will repeat this message to the others and will be witnesses to the risen Christ. Yet, even in this glorification of the Son of God, the cross remains, that cross which-through all the messianic testimony of the Man the Son, who suffered death upon it - speaks and never ceases to speak of God the Father, who is absolutely faithful to His eternal love for man, since He "so loved the world" - therefore man in the world-that "he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."⁷⁸ Believing in the crucified Son means "seeing the Father,"⁷⁹ means believing that love is present in the world and that this love is more powerful than any kind of evil in which individuals, humanity, or the world are involved. Believing in this love means believing in mercy. For mercy is an indispensable dimension of love; it is as it were love's second name and, at the same time, the specific manner in which love is revealed and effected vis-a-vis the reality of the evil that is in the world, affecting and besieging man, insinuating itself even into his heart and capable of causing him to "perish in Gehenna."⁸⁰

8. Love More Powerful Than Death, More Powerful Than Sin

The cross of Christ on Calvary is also a witness to the strength of evil against the very Son of God, against the one who, alone among all the sons of men, was by His nature absolutely innocent and free from sin, and whose coming into the world was untainted by the disobedience of Adam and the inheritance of original sin. And here, precisely in Him, in Christ, justice is done to sin at the price of His sacrifice, of His obedience "even to death."⁸¹ He who was without sin, "God made him sin for our sake."⁸² Justice is also brought to bear upon death, which from the beginning of man's history had been allied to sin. Death has justice done to it at the price of the death of the one who was without sin and who alone was able-by means of his own death-to inflict death upon death.⁸³ In this way the cross of Christ, on which the Son, consubstantial with the Father, renders full justice to God, is also a radical revelation of mercy, or rather of the love that goes against what constitutes the very root of evil in the history of man: against sin and death.

The cross is the most profound condescension of God to man and to what man-especially in difficult and painful moments-looks on as his unhappy destiny. The cross is like a touch of eternal love upon the most painful wounds of man's earthly existence; it is the total fulfillment of the messianic program that Christ once formulated in the synagogue at Nazareth ⁸⁴ and then repeated to the messengers sent by John the Baptist.⁸⁵ According to the words once written in the prophecy of Isaiah, ⁸⁶ this program consisted in the revelation of merciful love for the poor, the suffering and prisoners, for the blind, the oppressed and sinners. In the paschal mystery the limits of the many sided evil in which man becomes a sharer during his earthly existence are surpassed: the cross of Christ, in fact, makes us understand the deepest roots of evil, which are fixed in sin and death; thus the cross becomes an eschatological sign. Only in the eschatological fulfillment and definitive renewal of the world will love conquer, in all the elect, the deepest sources of evil, bringing as its fully mature fruit the kingdom of life and holiness and glorious immortality. The foundation of this eschatological fulfillment is already contained in the cross of Christ and in His death. The fact that Christ "was raised the third day"⁸⁷ constitutes the final sign of the messianic mission, a sign that perfects the entire revelation of merciful love in a world that is subject to evil. At the same time it constitutes the sign that foretells "a new heaven and a new earth,"⁸⁸ when God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there will be no more death, or mourning no crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away."⁸⁹

In the eschatological fulfillment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase, in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized as mercy. Christ's messianic program, the program of mercy, becomes the program of His people, the program of the Church. At its very center there is always the cross, for it is in the cross that the revelation of merciful love attains its culmination. Until "the former things pass away,"⁹⁰ the cross will remain the point of reference for other words too of the Revelation of John: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me."⁹¹ In a special way, God also reveals His mercy when He invites man to have "mercy" on His only Son, the crucified one.

Christ, precisely as the crucified one, is the Word that does not pass away, ⁹² and He is the one who stands at the door and knocks at the heart of every man, ⁹³ without restricting his freedom, but instead seeking to draw from this very freedom love, which is not only an act of solidarity with the suffering Son of man, but also a kind of "mercy" shown by each one of us to the Son of the eternal Father. In the whole of this messianic program of Christ, in the whole revelation of mercy through the cross, could man's dignity be more highly respected and ennobled, for, in obtaining mercy, He is in a sense the one who at the same time "shows mercy"? In a word, is not this the position of Christ with regard to man when He says: "As you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me"?⁹⁴ Do not the words of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,"⁹⁵ constitute, in a certain sense, a synthesis of the whole of the Good News, of the whole of the "wonderful exchange" (admirable commercium) contained therein? This exchange is a law of the very plan of salvation, a law which is simple, strong and at the same time "easy." Demonstrating from the very start what the "human heart" is capable of ("to be merciful"), do not these words from the

Sermon on the Mount reveal in the same perspective the deep mystery of God: that inscrutable unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in which love, containing justice, sets in motion mercy, which in its turn reveals the perfection of justice?

The Paschal Mystery is Christ at the summit of the revelation of the inscrutable mystery of God. It is precisely then that the words pronounced in the Upper Room are completely fulfilled: "He who has seen me has seen the Father."⁹⁶ In fact, Christ, whom the Father "did not spare"⁹⁷ for the sake of man and who in His passion and in the torment of the cross did not obtain human mercy, has revealed in His resurrection the fullness of the love that the Father has for Him and, in Him, for all people. "He is not God of the dead, but of the living."⁹⁸ In His resurrection Christ has revealed the God of merciful love, precisely because He accepted the cross as the way to the resurrection. And it is for this reason that-when we recall the cross of Christ, His passion and death-our faith and hope are centered on the Risen One: on that Christ who "on the evening of that day, the first day of the week, ...stood among them" in the upper Room, "where the disciples were, ...breathed on them, and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"⁹⁹

Here is the Son of God, who in His resurrection experienced in a radical way mercy shown to Himself, that is to say the love of the Father which is more powerful than death. And it is also the same Christ, the Son of God, who at the end of His messianic mission - and, in a certain sense, even beyond the end - reveals Himself as the inexhaustible source of mercy, of the same love that, in a subsequent perspective of the history of salvation in the Church, is to be everlastingly confirmed as more powerful than sin. The paschal Christ is the definitive incarnation of mercy, its living sign in salvation history and in eschatology. In the same spirit, the liturgy of Eastertide places on our lips the words of the Psalm: *Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*.¹⁰⁰

9. Mother of Mercy

These words of the Church at Easter re-echo in the fullness of their prophetic content the words that Mary uttered during her visit to Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah: "His mercy is...from generation to generation."¹⁰¹ At the very moment of the Incarnation, these words open up a new perspective of salvation history. After the resurrection of Christ, this perspective is new on both the historical and the eschatological level. From that time onwards there is a succession of new generations of individuals in the immense human family, in ever-increasing dimensions; there is also a succession of new generations of the People of God, marked with the Sign of the Cross and of the resurrection and "sealed"¹⁰² with the sign of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the absolute revelation of the mercy that Mary proclaimed on the threshold of her kinswoman's house: "His mercy is...from generation to generation."¹⁰³

Mary is also the one who obtained mercy in a particular and exceptional way, as no other person has. At the same time, still in an exceptional way, she made possible with the sacrifice of her heart her own sharing in revealing God's mercy. This sacrifice is intimately linked with the cross of her Son, at the foot of which she was to stand on Calvary. Her sacrifice is a unique sharing in the revelation of mercy, that is, a sharing in the absolute fidelity of God to His own love, to the covenant that He willed from eternity and that He entered into in time with man, with the people, with humanity; it is a sharing in that revelation that was definitively fulfilled through the cross. No one has experienced, to the same degree as the Mother of the crucified One, the mystery of the cross, the overwhelming encounter of divine transcendent justice with love: that "kiss"

given by mercy to justice.¹⁰⁴ No one has received into his heart, as much as Mary did, that mystery, that truly divine dimension of the redemption effected on Calvary by means of the death of the Son, together with the sacrifice of her maternal heart, together with her definitive "fiat."

Mary, then, is the one who has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy. She knows its price, she knows how great it is. In this sense, we call her the Mother of mercy: our Lady of mercy, or Mother of divine mercy; in each one of these titles there is a deep theological meaning, for they express the special preparation of her soul, of her whole personality, so that she was able to perceive, through the complex events, first of Israel, then of every individual and of the whole of humanity, that mercy of which "from generation to generation"¹⁰⁵ people become sharers according to the eternal design of the most Holy Trinity.

The above titles which we attribute to the Mother of God speak of her principally, however, as the Mother of the crucified and risen One; as the One who, having obtained mercy in an exceptional way, in an equally exceptional way "merits" that mercy throughout her earthly life and, particularly, at the foot of the cross of her Son; and finally as the one who, through her hidden and at the same time incomparable sharing in the messianic mission of her Son, was called in a special way to bring close to people that love which He had come to reveal: the love that finds its most concrete expression vis-a-vis the suffering, the poor, those deprived of their own freedom, the blind, the oppressed and sinners, just as Christ spoke of them in the words of the prophecy of Isaiah, first in the synagogue at Nazareth¹⁰⁶ and then in response to the question of the messengers of John the Baptist.¹⁰⁷

It was precisely this "merciful" love, which is manifested above all in contact with moral and physical evil, that the heart of her who was the Mother of the crucified and risen One shared in singularly and exceptionally - that Mary shared in. In her and through her, this love continues to be revealed in the history of the Church and of humanity. This revelation is especially fruitful because in the Mother of God it is based upon the unique tact of her maternal heart, on her particular sensitivity, on her particular fitness to reach all those who most easily accept the merciful love of a

mother. This is one of the great life-giving mysteries of Christianity, a mystery intimately connected with the mystery of the Incarnation.

"The motherhood of Mary in the order of grace, " as the Second Vatican Council explains, "lasts without interruption from the consent which she faithfully gave at the annunciation and which she sustained without hesitation under the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. In fact, being assumed into heaven she has not laid aside this office of salvation but by her manifold intercession she continues to obtain for us the graces of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she takes care of the brethren of her Son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home."108

VI. "MERCY...FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION"

10. An Image of Our Generation

We have every right to believe that our generation too was included in the words of the Mother of God when she glorified that mercy shared in "from generation to generation" by those who allow themselves to be guided by the fear of God. The words of Mary's Magnificat have a prophetic content that concerns not only the past of Israel but also the whole future of the People of God on earth. In fact, all of us now living on earth are the generation that is aware of the approach of the third millennium and that profoundly feels the change that is occurring in history.

The present generation knows that it is in a privileged position: progress provides it with countless possibilities that only a few decades ago were undreamed of. Man's creative activity, his intelligence and his work, have brought about profound changes both in the field of science and technology and in that of social and cultural life. Man has extended his power over nature and has acquired deeper knowledge of the laws of social behavior. He has seen the obstacles and distances between individuals and nations dissolve or shrink through an increased sense of what is universal, through a clearer awareness of the unity of the human race, through the acceptance of mutual dependence in authentic solidarity, and through the desire and possibility of making contact with one's brothers and sisters beyond artificial geographical divisions and national or racial limits. Today's young people, especially, know that the progress of science and technology can produce not only new material goods but also a wider sharing in knowledge. The extraordinary progress made in the field of information and data processing, for instance, will increase man's creative capacity and provide access to the intellectual and cultural riches of other peoples. New communications techniques will encourage greater participation in events and a wider exchange of ideas. The achievements of biological, psychological and social science will help man to understand better the riches of his own being. It is true that too often this progress is still the privilege of the industrialized countries, but it cannot be denied that the prospect of enabling every people and every country to benefit from it has long ceased to be a mere utopia when there is a real political desire for it.

But side by side with all this, or rather as part of it, there are also the difficulties that appear whenever there is growth. There is unease and a sense of powerlessness regarding the profound response that man knows that he must give. The picture of the world today also contains shadows and imbalances that are not always merely superficial. The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of the Second Vatican Council is certainly not the only document that deals with the life of this generation, but it is a document of particular importance. "The dichotomy affecting the modern world, " we read in it, "is, in fact, a symptom of a deeper dichotomy that is in man himself. He is the meeting point of many conflicting forces. In his condition as a created being he is subject to a thousand shortcomings, but feels untrammelled in his inclinations and destined for a higher form of life. Torn by a welter of anxieties he is compelled to choose between them and repudiate some among them. Worse still, feeble and sinful as he is, he often does the very thing he hates and does not do what he wants. And so he feels himself divided, and the result is a host of discords in social life."109

Towards the end of the introductory exposition we read: "...in the face of modern developments there is a growing body of men who are asking the most fundamental of all questions or are glimpsing them with a keener insight: What is man? What is the meaning of suffering, evil, death, which have not been eliminated by all this progress? What is the purpose of these achievements, purchased at so high a price?"110

In the span of the fifteen years since the end of the Second Vatican Council, has this picture of tensions and threats that mark our epoch become less disquieting? It seems not. On the contrary, the tensions and threats that in the Council document seem only to be outlined and not to manifest in depth all the dangers hidden within them have revealed themselves more clearly in the space of these years; they have in a different way confirmed that danger, and do not permit us to cherish the illusions of the past.

11. Sources of Uneasiness

hus, in our world the feeling of being under threat is increasing. There is an increase of that existential fear connected especially, as I said in the encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, with the prospect of a conflict that in view of today's atomic stockpiles could mean the partial self-destruction of humanity. But the threat does not merely concern what human beings can do to human beings through the means provided by military technology; it also concerns many other dangers produced by a materialistic society which-in spite of "humanistic" declarations-accepts the primacy of things over persons. Contemporary man, therefore, fears that by the use of the means invented by this type of society,

individuals and the environment, communities, societies and nations can fall victim to the abuse of power by other individuals, environments and societies. The history of our century offers many examples of this. In spite of all the declarations on the rights of man in his integral dimension, that is to say in his bodily and spiritual existence, we cannot say that these examples belong only to the past.

Man rightly fears falling victim to an oppression that will deprive him of his interior freedom, of the possibility of expressing the truth of which he is convinced, of the faith that he professes, of the ability to obey the voice of conscience that tells him the right path to follow. The technical means at the disposal of modern society conceal within themselves not only the possibility of self-destruction through military conflict, but also the possibility of a "peaceful" subjugation of individuals, of environments, of entire societies and of nations, that for one reason or another might prove inconvenient for those who possess the necessary means and are ready to use them without scruple. An instance is the continued existence of torture, systematically used by authority as a means of domination and political oppression and practiced by subordinates with impunity.

Together with awareness of the biological threat, therefore, there is a growing awareness of yet another threat, even more destructive of what is essentially human, what is intimately bound up with the dignity of the person and his or her right to truth and freedom.

All this is happening against the background of the gigantic remorse caused by the fact that, side by side with wealthy and surfeited people and societies, living in plenty and ruled by consumerism and pleasure, the same human family contains individuals and groups that are suffering from hunger. There are babies dying of hunger under their mothers' eyes. In various parts of the world, in various socio-economic systems, there exist entire areas of poverty, shortage and underdevelopment. This fact is universally known. The state of inequality between individuals and between nations not only still exists; it is increasing. It still happens that side by side with those who are wealthy and living in plenty there exist those who are living in want, suffering misery and often actually dying of hunger; and their number reaches tens, even hundreds of millions. This is why moral uneasiness is destined to become even more acute. It is obvious that a fundamental defect, or rather a series of defects, indeed a defective machinery is at the root of contemporary economics and materialistic civilization, which does not allow the human family to break free from such radically unjust situations.

This picture of today's world in which there is so much evil both physical and moral, so as to make of it a world entangled in contradictions and tensions, and at the same time full of threats to human freedom, conscience and religion-this picture explains the uneasiness felt by contemporary man. This uneasiness is experienced not only by those who are disadvantaged or oppressed, but also by those who possess the privileges of wealth, progress and power. And, although there is no lack of people trying to understand the causes of this uneasiness, or trying to react against it with the temporary means offered by technology, wealth or power, still in the very depth of the human spirit this uneasiness is stronger than all temporary means. This uneasiness concerns-as the analyses of the Second Vatican Council rightly pointed out-the fundamental problems of all human existence. It is linked with the very sense of man's existence in the world, and is an uneasiness for the future of man and all humanity; it demands decisive solutions, which now seem to be forcing themselves upon the human race.

12. Is Justice Enough?

It is not difficult to see that in the modern world the sense of justice has been reawakening on a vast scale; and without doubt this emphasizes that which goes against justice in relationships between individuals, social groups and "classes," between individual peoples and states, and finally between whole political systems, indeed between what are called "worlds." This deep and varied trend, at the basis of which the contemporary human conscience has placed justice, gives proof of the ethical character of the tensions and struggles pervading the world.

The Church shares with the people of our time this profound and ardent desire for a life which is just in every aspect, nor does she fail to examine the various aspects of the sort of justice that the life of people and society demands. This is confirmed by the field of Catholic social doctrine, greatly developed in the course of the last century. On the lines of this teaching proceed the education and formation of human consciences in the spirit of justice, and also individual undertakings, especially in the sphere of the apostolate of the laity, which are developing in precisely this spirit.

And yet, it would be difficult not to notice that very often programs which start from the idea of justice and which ought to assist its fulfillment among individuals, groups and human societies, in practice suffer from distortions. Although they continue to appeal to the idea of justice, nevertheless experience shows that other negative forces have gained the upper hand over justice, such as spite, hatred and even cruelty. In such cases, the desire to annihilate the enemy, limit his freedom, or even force him into total dependence, becomes the fundamental motive for action; and this contrasts with the essence of justice, which by its nature tends to establish equality and harmony between the parties in conflict. This kind of abuse of the idea of justice and the practical distortion of it show how far human action can deviate from justice itself, even when it is being undertaken in the name of justice. Not in vain did Christ challenge His listeners, faithful to the doctrine of the Old Testament, for their attitude which was manifested in the words: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."¹¹¹ This was the form of distortion of justice at that time; and today's forms continue to be modeled on it. It is obvious, in fact, that in the name of an alleged justice (for example, historical justice or class

justice) the neighbor is sometimes destroyed, killed, deprived of liberty or stripped of fundamental human rights. The experience of the past and of our own time demonstrates that justice alone is not enough, that it can even lead to the negation and destruction of itself, if that deeper power, which is love, is not allowed to shape human life in its various dimensions. It has been precisely historical experience that, among other things, has led to the formulation of the saying: *summum ius, summa iniuria*. This statement does not detract from the value of justice and does not minimize the significance of the order that is based upon it; it only indicates, under another aspect, the need to draw from the powers of the spirit which condition the very order of justice, powers which are still more profound.

The Church, having before her eyes the picture of the generation to which we belong, shares the uneasiness of so many of the people of our time. Moreover, one cannot fail to be worried by the decline of many fundamental values, which constitute an unquestionable good not only for Christian morality but simply for human morality, for moral culture: these values include respect for human life from the moment of conception, respect for marriage in its indissoluble unity, and respect for the stability of the family. Moral permissiveness strikes especially at this most sensitive sphere of life and society. Hand in hand with this go the crisis of truth in human relationships, lack of responsibility for what one says, the purely utilitarian relationship between individual and individual, the loss of a sense of the authentic common good and the ease with which this good is alienated. Finally, there is the "desacralization" that often turns into "dehumanization": the individual and the society for whom nothing is "sacred" suffer moral decay, in spite of appearances.

VII. THE MERCY OF GOD IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

In connection with this picture of our generation, a picture which cannot fail to cause profound anxiety, there come to mind once more those words which, by reason of the Incarnation of the Son of God, resounded in Mary's Magnificat, and which sing of "mercy from generation to generation." The Church of our time, constantly pondering the eloquence of these inspired words, and applying them to the sufferings of the great human family, must become more particularly and profoundly conscious of the need to bear witness in her whole mission to God's mercy, following in the footsteps of the tradition of the Old and the New Covenant, and above all of Jesus Christ Himself and His Apostles. The Church must bear witness to the mercy of God revealed in Christ, in the whole of His mission as Messiah, professing it in the first place as a salvific truth of faith and as necessary for a life in harmony with faith, and then seeking to introduce it and to make it incarnate in the lives both of her faithful and as far as possible in the lives of all people of good will. Finally, the Church-professing mercy and remaining always faithful to it-has the right and the duty to call upon the mercy of God, imploring it in the face of all the manifestations of physical and moral evil, before all the threats that cloud the whole horizon of the life of humanity today.

13. The Church Professes the Mercy of God and Proclaims It

The Church must profess and proclaim God's mercy in all its truth, as it has been handed down to us by revelation. We have sought, in the foregoing pages of the present document, to give at least an outline of this truth, which finds such rich expression in the whole of Sacred Scripture and in Sacred Tradition. In the daily life of the Church the truth about the mercy of God, expressed in the Bible, resounds as a perennial echo through the many readings of the Sacred Liturgy. The authentic sense of faith of the People of God perceives this truth, as is shown by various expressions of personal and community piety. It would of course be difficult to give a list or summary of them all, since most of them are vividly inscribed in the depths of people's hearts and minds. Some theologians affirm that mercy is the greatest of the attributes and perfections of God, and the Bible, Tradition and the whole faith life of the People of God provide particular proofs of this. It is not a question here of the perfection of the inscrutable essence of God in the mystery of the divinity itself, but of the perfection and attribute whereby man, in the intimate truth of his existence, encounters the living God particularly closely and particularly often. In harmony with Christ's words to Philip, 112 the "vision of the Father"-a vision of God through faith finds precisely in the encounter with His mercy a unique moment of interior simplicity and truth, similar to that which we discover in the parable of the prodigal son.

"He who has seen me has seen the Father."¹¹³ The Church professes the mercy of God, the Church lives by it in her wide experience of faith and also in her teaching, constantly contemplating Christ, concentrating on Him, on His life and on His Gospel, on His cross and resurrection, on His whole mystery. Everything that forms the "vision" of Christ in the Church's living faith and teaching brings us nearer to the "vision of the Father" in the holiness of His mercy. The Church seems in a particular way to profess the mercy of God and to venerate it when she directs herself to the Heart of Christ. In fact, it is precisely this drawing close to Christ in the mystery of His Heart which enables us to dwell on this point-a point in a sense central and also most accessible on the human level-of the revelation of the merciful love of the Father, a revelation which constituted the central content of the messianic mission of the Son of Man.

The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy-the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer-and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser. Of great significance in this area is constant meditation on the Word of God, and above all conscious and mature participation in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. The Eucharist

brings us ever nearer to that love which is more powerful than death: "For as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, " we proclaim not only the death of the Redeemer but also His resurrection, "until he comes" in glory.¹¹⁴ The same Eucharistic rite, celebrated in memory of Him who in His messianic mission revealed the Father to us by means of His words and His cross, attests to the inexhaustible love by virtue of which He desires always to be united with us and present in our midst, coming to meet every human heart. It is the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation that prepares the way for each individual, even those weighed down with great faults. In this sacrament each person can experience mercy in a unique way, that is, the love which is more powerful than sin. This has already been spoken of in the encyclical *Redemptor hominis*; but it will be fitting to return once more to this fundamental theme.

It is precisely because sin exists in the world, which "God so loved...that he gave his only Son, "¹¹⁵ that God, who "is love, "¹¹⁶ cannot reveal Himself otherwise than as mercy. This corresponds not only to the most profound truth of that love which God is, but also to the whole interior truth of man and of the world which is man's temporary homeland.

Mercy in itself, as a perfection of the infinite God, is also infinite. Also infinite therefore and inexhaustible is the Father's readiness to receive the prodigal children who return to His home. Infinite are the readiness and power of forgiveness which flow continually from the marvelous value of the sacrifice of the Son. No human sin can prevail over this power or even limit it. On the part of man only a lack of good will can limit it, a lack of readiness to be converted and to repent, in other words persistence in obstinacy, opposing grace and truth, especially in the face of the witness of the cross and resurrection of Christ.

Therefore, the Church professes and proclaims conversion. Conversion to God always consists in discovering His mercy, that is, in discovering that love which is patient and kind¹¹⁷ as only the Creator and Father can be; the love to which the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"¹¹⁸ is faithful to the uttermost consequences in the history of His covenant with man; even to the cross and to the death and resurrection of the Son. Conversion to God is always the fruit of the "rediscovery of this Father, who is rich in mercy.

Authentic knowledge of the God of mercy, the God of tender love, is a constant and inexhaustible source of conversion, not only as a momentary interior act but also as a permanent attitude, as a state of mind. Those who come to know God in this way, who "see" Him in this way, can live only in a state of being continually converted to Him. They live, therefore, in *statu conversionis*; and it is this state of conversion which marks out the most profound element of the pilgrimage of every man and woman on earth in *statu viatoris*. It is obvious that the Church professes the mercy of God, revealed in the crucified and risen Christ, not only by the word of her teaching but above all through the deepest pulsation of the life of the whole People of God. By means of this testimony of life, the Church fulfills the mission proper to the People of God, the mission which is a sharing in and, in a sense, a continuation of the messianic mission of Christ Himself.

The contemporary Church is profoundly conscious that only on the basis of the mercy of God will she be able to carry out the tasks that derive from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and, in the first place, the ecumenical task which aims at uniting all those who confess Christ. As she makes many efforts in this direction, the Church confesses with humility that only that love which is more powerful than the weakness of human divisions can definitively bring about that unity which Christ implored from the Father and which the Spirit never ceases to beseech for us "with sighs too deep for words."¹¹⁹

14. The Church Seeks To Put Mercy into Practice

Jesus Christ taught that man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but that he is also called "to practice mercy" towards others: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."¹²⁰ The Church sees in these words a call to action, and she tries to practice mercy. All the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount indicate the way of conversion and of reform of life, but the one referring to those who are merciful is particularly eloquent in this regard. Man attains to the merciful love of God, His mercy, to the extent that he himself is interiorly transformed in the spirit of that love towards his neighbor.

This authentically evangelical process is not just a spiritual transformation realized once and for all: it is a whole lifestyle, an essential and continuous characteristic of the Christian vocation. It consists in the constant discovery and persevering practice of love as a unifying and also elevating power despite all difficulties of a psychological or social nature: it is a question, in fact, of a merciful love which, by its essence, is a creative love. In reciprocal relationships between persons merciful love is never a unilateral

act or process. Even in the cases in which everything would seem to indicate that only one party is giving and offering, and the other only receiving and taking (for example, in the case of a physician giving treatment, a teacher teaching, parents supporting and bringing up their children, a benefactor helping the needy), in reality the one who gives is always also a beneficiary. In any case, he too can easily find himself in the position of the one who receives, who obtains a benefit, who experiences merciful love; he too can find himself the object of mercy.

In this sense Christ crucified is for us the loftiest model, inspiration and encouragement. When we base ourselves on this disquieting model, we are able with all humility to show mercy to others, knowing that Christ accepts it as if it were shown to Himself.¹²¹ On the basis of this model, we must also continually purify all our actions and all our intentions in which mercy is understood and practiced in a unilateral way, as a good done to others. An act of merciful

love is only really such when we are deeply convinced at the moment that we perform it that we are at the same time receiving mercy from the people who are accepting it from us. If this bilateral and reciprocal quality is absent, our actions are not yet true acts of mercy, nor has there yet been fully completed in us that conversion to which Christ has shown us the way by His words and example, even to the cross, nor are we yet sharing fully in the magnificent source of merciful love that has been revealed to us by Him.

Thus, the way which Christ showed to us in the Sermon on the Mount with the beatitude regarding those who are merciful is much richer than what we sometimes find in ordinary human opinions about mercy. These opinions see mercy as a unilateral act or process, presupposing and maintaining a certain distance between the one practicing mercy and the one benefitting from it, between the one who does good and the one who receives it. Hence the attempt to free interpersonal and social relationships from mercy and to base them solely on justice. However, such opinions about mercy fail to see the fundamental link between mercy and justice spoken of by the whole biblical tradition, and above all by the messianic mission of Jesus Christ. True mercy is, so to speak, the most profound source of justice. If justice is in itself suitable for "arbitration" between people concerning the reciprocal distribution of objective goods in an equitable manner, love and only love (including that kindly love that we call "mercy") is capable of restoring man to Himself.

Mercy that is truly Christian is also, in a certain sense, the most perfect incarnation of "equality" between people, and therefore also the most perfect incarnation of justice as well, insofar as justice aims at the same result in its own sphere. However, the equality brought by justice is limited to the realm of objective and extrinsic goods, while love and mercy bring it about that people meet one another in that value which is man himself, with the dignity that is proper to him. At the same time, "equality" of people through "patient and kind" love¹²² does not take away differences: the person who gives becomes more generous when he feels at the same time benefitted by the person accepting his gift; and vice versa, the person who accepts the gift with the awareness that, in accepting it, he too is doing good is in his own way serving the great cause of the dignity of the person; and this contributes to uniting people in a more profound manner.

Thus, mercy becomes an indispensable element for shaping mutual relationships between people, in a spirit of deepest respect for what is human, and in a spirit of mutual brotherhood. It is impossible to establish this bond between people, if they wish to regulate their mutual relationships solely according to the measure of justice. In every sphere of interpersonal relationships justice must, so to speak, be "corrected" to a considerable extent by that love which, as St. Paul proclaims, "is patient and kind" or, in other words, possesses the characteristics of that merciful love which is so much of the essence of the Gospel and Christianity. Let us remember, furthermore, that merciful love also means the cordial tenderness and sensitivity so eloquently spoken of in the parable of the prodigal son, ¹²³ and also in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin.¹²⁴ Consequently, merciful love is supremely indispensable between those who are closest to one another: between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between friends; and it is indispensable in education and in pastoral work.

Its sphere of action, however, is not limited to this. If Paul VI more than once indicated the civilization of love¹²⁵ as the goal towards which all efforts in the cultural and social fields as well as in the economic and political fields should tend. it must be added that this good will never be reached if in our thinking and acting concerning the vast and complex spheres of human society we stop at the criterion of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"¹²⁶ and do not try to transform it in its essence, by complementing it with another spirit. Certainly, the Second Vatican Council also leads us in this direction, when it speaks repeatedly of the need to make the world more human, ¹²⁷ and says that the realization of this task is precisely the mission of the Church in the modern world. Society can become ever more human only if we introduce into the many-sided setting of interpersonal and social relationships, not merely justice, but also that "merciful love" which constitutes the messianic message of the Gospel.

Society can become "ever more human" only when we introduce into all the mutual relationships which form its moral aspect the moment of forgiveness, which is so much of the essence of the Gospel. Forgiveness demonstrates the presence in the world of the love which is more powerful than sin. Forgiveness is also the fundamental condition for reconciliation, not only in the relationship of God with man, but also in relationships between people. A world from which forgiveness was eliminated would be nothing but a world of cold and unfeeling justice, in the name of which each person would claim his or her own rights vis-a- vis others; the various kinds of selfishness latent in man would transform life and human society into a system of oppression of the weak by the strong, or into an arena of permanent strife between one group and another.

For this reason, the Church must consider it one of her principal duties-at every stage of history and especially in our modern age-to proclaim and to introduce into life the mystery of mercy, supremely revealed in Jesus Christ. Not only for the Church herself as the community of believers but also in a certain sense for all humanity, this mystery is the source of a life different from the life which can be built by man,

who is exposed to the oppressive forces of the threefold concupiscence active within him.¹²⁸ It is precisely in the name of this mystery that Christ teaches us to forgive always. How often we repeat the words of the prayer which He Himself taught us, asking "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," which means those who are guilty of something in our regard¹²⁹ It is indeed difficult to express the profound value of the attitude which these words describe and inculcate. How many things these words say to every individual about others and also about himself. The consciousness of being trespassers against each other goes hand in hand with the call to fraternal

solidarity, which St. Paul expressed in his concise exhortation to "forbear one another in love."¹³⁰ What a lesson of humility is to be found here with regard to man, with regard both to one's neighbor and to oneself! What a school of good will for daily living, in the various conditions of our existence! If we were to ignore this lesson, what would remain of any "humanist" program of life and education?

Christ emphasizes so insistently the need to forgive others that when Peter asked Him how many times he should forgive his neighbor He answered with the symbolic number of "seventy times seven,"¹³¹ meaning that he must be able to forgive everyone every time. It is obvious that such a generous requirement of forgiveness does not cancel out the objective requirements of justice. Properly understood, justice

constitutes, so to speak, the goal of forgiveness. In no passage of the Gospel message does forgiveness, or mercy as its source, mean indulgence towards evil, towards scandals, towards injury or insult. In any case, reparation for evil and scandal, compensation for injury, and satisfaction for insult are conditions for forgiveness.

Thus the fundamental structure of justice always enters into the sphere of mercy. Mercy, however, has the power to confer on justice a new content, which is expressed most simply and fully in forgiveness. Forgiveness, in fact, shows that, over and above the process of "compensation" and "truce" which is specific to justice, love is necessary, so that man may affirm himself as man. Fulfillment of the conditions of justice is especially indispensable in order that love may reveal its own nature. In analyzing the parable of the prodigal son, we have already called attention to the fact that he who forgives and he who is forgiven encounter one another at an essential point, namely the dignity or essential value of the person, a point which cannot be lost and the affirmation of which, or its rediscovery, is a source of the greatest joy.¹³²

The Church rightly considers it her duty and the purpose of her mission to guard the authenticity of forgiveness, both in life and behavior and in educational and pastoral work. She protects it simply by guarding its source, which is the mystery of the mercy of God Himself as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The basis of the Church's mission, in all the spheres spoken of in the numerous pronouncements of the most recent Council and in the centuries-old experience of the apostolate, is none other than "drawing from the wells of the Savior"¹³³ this is what provides many guidelines for the mission of the Church in the lives of individual Christians, of individual communities, and also of the whole People of God. This "drawing from the wells of the Savior" can be done only in the spirit of that poverty to which we are called by the words

and example of the Lord: "You received without pay, give without pay."¹³⁴ Thus, in all the ways of the Church's life and ministry-through the evangelical poverty of her ministers and stewards and of the whole people which bears witness to "the mighty works" of its Lord-the God who is "rich in mercy" has been made still more clearly manifest.

VIII. THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH IN OUR TIMES

15. The Church Appeals to the Mercy of God

The Church proclaims the truth of God's mercy revealed in the crucified and risen Christ, and she professes it in various ways. Furthermore, she seeks to practice mercy towards people through people, and she sees in this an indispensable condition for solicitude for a better and "more human" world, today and tomorrow. However, at no time and in no historical period-especially at a moment as critical as our own-can the Church forget the prayer that is a cry for the mercy of God amid the many forms of evil which weigh upon humanity and threaten it. Precisely this is the fundamental right and duty of the Church in Christ Jesus, her right and duty towards God and towards humanity. The more the human conscience succumbs to secularization, loses its sense of the very meaning of the word "mercy," moves away from God and distances itself from the mystery of mercy, the more the Church has the right and the duty to appeal to the God of mercy "with loud cries."¹³⁵ These "loud cries" should be the mark of the Church of our times, cries uttered to God to implore His mercy, the certain manifestation of which she professes and proclaims as having already come in Jesus crucified and risen, that is, in the Paschal Mystery. It is this mystery which bears within itself the most complete revelation of mercy, that is, of that love which is more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and every evil, the love which lifts man up when he falls into the abyss and frees him from the greatest threats. Modern man feels these threats. What has been said above in this regard is only a rough outline. Modern man often anxiously wonders about the solution to the terrible tensions which have built up in the world and which entangle humanity. And if at times he lacks the courage to utter the word "mercy," or if in his conscience empty of religious content he does not find the equivalent, so much greater is the need for the Church to utter his word, not only in her own name but also in the name of all the men and women of our time.

Everything that I have said in the present document on mercy should therefore be continually transformed into an ardent prayer: into a cry that implores mercy according to the needs of man in the modern world. May this cry be full of that truth about mercy which has found such rich expression in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition, as also in the authentic life of faith of countless generations of the People of God. With this cry let us, like the sacred writers, call upon the God who cannot despise anything that He has made,¹³⁶ the God who is faithful to Himself, to His fatherhood and His love. And, like the prophets, let us appeal to that love which has maternal characteristics and which, like a mother, follows each of her children, each lost sheep, even if they should number millions, even if in the world evil

should prevail over goodness, even if contemporary humanity should deserve a new "flood" on account of its sins, as once the generation of Noah did. Let us have recourse to that fatherly love revealed to us by Christ in His messianic mission, a love which reached its culmination in His cross, in His death and resurrection. Let us have recourse to God through Christ, mindful of the words of Mary's Magnificat, which proclaim mercy "from generation to generation." Let us implore God's mercy for the present generation. May the Church which, following the example of Mary, also seeks to be the spiritual mother of mankind, express in this prayer her maternal solicitude and at the same time her confident love, that love from which is born the most burning need for prayer.

Let us offer up our petitions, directed by the faith, by the hope, and by the charity which Christ has planted in our hearts. This attitude is likewise love of God, whom modern man has sometimes separated far from himself, made extraneous to himself, proclaiming in various ways that God is "superfluous." This is, therefore, love of God, the insulting rejection of whom by modern man we feel profoundly, and we are ready to cry out with Christ on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."¹³⁷ At the same time it is love of people, of all men and women without any exception or division: without difference of race, culture, language, or world outlook, without distinction between friends and enemies. This is love for people-it desires every true good for each individual and for every human community, every family, every nation, every social group, for young people, adults, parents, the elderly-a love for everyone, without exception. This is love, or rather an anxious solicitude to ensure for each individual every true good and to remove and drive away every sort of evil.

And, if any of our contemporaries do not share the faith and hope which lead me, as a servant of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God, ¹³⁸ to implore God's mercy for humanity in this hour of history, let them at least try to understand the reason for my concern. It is dictated by love for man, for all that is human and which, according to the intuitions of many of our contemporaries, is threatened by an immense danger. The mystery of Christ, which reveals to us the great vocation of man and which led me to emphasize in the encyclical *Redemptor hominis* his incomparable dignity, also obliges me to proclaim mercy as God's merciful love, revealed in that same mystery of Christ. It likewise obliges me to have recourse to that mercy and to beg for it at this difficult, critical phase of the history of the Church and of the world, as we approach the end of the second millennium.

In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, in the spirit of His messianic mission, enduring in the history of humanity, we raise our voices and pray that the Love which is in the Father may once again be revealed at this stage of history, and that, through the work of the Son and Holy Spirit, it may be shown to be present in our modern world and to be more powerful than evil: more powerful than sin and death. We pray for this through the intercession of her who does not cease to proclaim "mercy...from generation to generation, " and also through the intercession of those for whom there have been completely fulfilled the words of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."¹³⁹

In continuing the great task of implementing the Second Vatican Council, in which we can rightly see a new phase of the self-realization of the Church-in keeping with the epoch in which it has been our destiny to live-the Church herself must be constantly guided by the full consciousness that in this work it is not permissible for her, for any reason, to withdraw into herself. The reason for her existence is, in fact, to reveal God, that Father who allows us to "see" Him in Christ.¹⁴⁰ No matter how strong the resistance of human history may be, no matter how marked the diversity of contemporary civilization, no matter how great the denial of God in the human world, so much the greater must be the Church's closeness to that mystery which, hidden for centuries in God, was then truly shared with man, in time, through Jesus Christ.

With my apostolic blessing.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on the thirtieth day of November, the First Sunday of Advent, in the year 1980, the third of the pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1. Eph. 2:4.
2. Cf. Jn. 1:18; Heb. 1:1f.
3. Jn. 14:8-9.
4. Eph. 2:4-5.
5. 2 Cor. 1:3.
6. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1042.
7. Cf. *ibid*
8. 1 Tm. 6:16.
9. Rom. 1:20.
10. Jn. 1:18.
11. 1 Tm. 6:16.
12. Ti. 3:4.

13. Eph. 2:4.
14. Cf. Gn. 1:28.
15. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 9: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1032.
16. 2 Cor. 1:3.
17. Mt. 6:4, 6, 18.
18. Cf. Eph. 3:18; also Lk. 11:5-13.
19. Lk. 4:18-19.
20. Lk. 7:19.
21. Lk. 7:22-23.
22. 1 Jn. 4:16
23. Eph. 2:4.
24. Lk. 15:11-32.
25. Lk. 10:30-37.
26. Mt. 18:23-35.
27. Mt. 18:12-14; Lk. 15:3-7.
28. Lk. 15:8-10.
29. Mt. 22:38.
30. Mt. 5:7.
31. Cf. Jgs. 3:7-9.
32. Cf. 1 Kgs. 8:22-53.
33. Cf. Mi. 7:18-20.
34. Cf. Is. 1:18; 51:4-16.
35. Cf. Bar. 2:11-3, 8.
36. Cf. Neh. 9.
37. Cf. e.g. Hos. 2:21-25 and 15; Is. 54:6-8.
38. Cf. Jer. 31:20; Lz. 39:25-29.
39. Cf. 2 Sm. 11; 12; 24:10.
40. Job *passim*.
41. Est. 4:17k ff.
42. Cf. e.g. Neh. 9:30-32; Tb. 3:2-3, 11-12; 8:16-17; 1 Mc. 4:24.
43. Cf. Ex. 3:7f.
44. Cf. Is. 63:9.
45. Ex. 34:6.
46. Cf. Nm. 14:18; 2 Chr. 30:9; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86(85); Wis. 15:1; Sir. 2:11; Jl. 2:13.
47. Cf. Is. 63:16.
48. Cf. Ex. 4:22.
49. Cf. Hos. 2:3.
50. Cf. Hos. 11:7-9; Jer. 31:20; Is. 54:7f.
51. Cf. Ps. 103(102) and 145(144).

52. In describing mercy, the books of the Old Testament use two expressions in particular, each having a different semantic nuance. First there is the term *hesed*, which indicates a profound attitude of "goodness." When this is established between two individuals, they do not just wish each other well; they are also faithful to each other by virtue of an interior commitment, and therefore also by virtue of a faithfulness to themselves. Since *hesed* also means "grace" or "love," this occurs precisely on the basis of this fidelity. The fact that the commitment in question has not only a moral character but almost a juridical one makes no difference. When in the Old Testament the word *hesed* is used of the Lord, this always occurs in connection with the covenant that God established with Israel. This covenant was, on God's part, a gift and a grace for Israel. Nevertheless, since, in harmony with the covenant entered into, God had made a commitment to respect it, *hesed* also acquired in a certain sense a legal content. The juridical commitment on God's part ceased to oblige whenever Israel broke the covenant and did not respect its conditions. But precisely at this point, *hesed*, in ceasing to be a juridical obligation, revealed its deeper aspect: it showed itself as what it was at the beginning, that is, as love that gives, love more powerful than betrayal, grace stronger than sin. This fidelity vis-a-vis the unfaithful "daughter of my people" (cf. Lam. 4:3, 6) is, in brief, on God's part, fidelity to Himself. This becomes obvious in the frequent recurrence together of the two terms *hesed* we've met (= grace and fidelity), which could be considered a case of *hendiadys* (cf. e.g. Ex. 34:6; 2 Sm. 2:6; 15:20; Ps. 25 [24]:10; 40[39]:11-12; 85[84]:11; 138[137]:2; Mi. 7:20). "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name" (Ez. 36:22). Therefore Israel, although burdened with guilt for having broken the covenant, cannot lay claim to God's *hesed* on the basis of (legal) justice; yet it can and must go on hoping and trusting to obtain it, since the God of the covenant is really "responsible for his love." The fruits of this love are forgiveness and restoration to grace, the reestablishment of the interior covenant. The second word which in the terminology of the Old Testament serves to define mercy is *rahamim*. This has a different nuance from that of *hesed*. While *hesed* highlights the marks of fidelity to

self and of "responsibility for one's own love" (which are in a certain sense masculine characteristics), *rahamim*, in its very root, denotes the love of a mother (*rehem* = mother's womb). From the deep and original bond—indeed the unity—that links a mother to her child there springs a particular relationship to the child, a particular love. Of this love one can say that it is completely gratuitous, not merited, and that in this aspect it constitutes an interior necessity: an exigency of the heart. It is, as it were, a "feminine" variation of the masculine fidelity to self expressed by *hesed*. Against this psychological background, *rahamim* generates a whole range of feelings, including goodness and tenderness, patience and understanding, that is, readiness to forgive. The Old Testament attributes to the Lord precisely these characteristics when it uses the term *rahamim* in speaking of Him. We read in Isaiah: "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15). This love, faithful and invincible thanks to the mysterious power of motherhood, is expressed in the Old Testament texts in various ways: as salvation from dangers, especially from enemies; also as forgiveness of sins—of individuals and also of the whole of Israel; and finally in readiness to fulfill the (eschatological) promise and hope, in spite of human infidelity, as we read in Hosea: "I will heal their faithlessness, I will love them freely" (Hos. 14:5). In the terminology of the Old Testament we also find other expressions, referring in different ways to the same basic content. But the two terms mentioned above deserve special attention. They clearly show their original anthropomorphic aspect: in describing God's mercy, the biblical authors use terms that correspond to the consciousness and experience of their contemporaries. The Greek terminology in the Septuagint translation does not show as great a wealth as the Hebrew: therefore it does not offer all the semantic nuances proper to the original text. At any rate, the New Testament builds upon the wealth and depth that already marked the Old. In this way, we have inherited from the Old Testament—as it were in a special synthesis—not only the wealth of expressions used by those books in order to define God's mercy, but also a specific and obviously anthropomorphic "psychology" of God: the image of His anxious love, which in contact with evil, and in particular with the sin of the individual and of the people, is manifested as mercy. This image is made up not only of the rather general content of the verb *hanan* but also of the content of *hesed* and *rahamim*. The term *hanan* expresses a wider concept: it means in fact the manifestation of grace, which involves, so to speak, a constant predisposition to be generous, benevolent and merciful. In addition to these basic semantic elements, the Old Testament concept of mercy is also made up of what is included in the verb *hamal*, which literally means "to spare" (a defeated enemy) but also "to show mercy and compassion," and in consequence forgiveness and remission of guilt. There is also the term *hus*, which expresses pity and compassion, but especially in the affective sense. These terms appear more rarely in the biblical texts to denote mercy. In addition, one must note the word *'emet* already mentioned: it means primarily "solidity, security" (in the Greek of the Septuagint: "truth") and then "fidelity," and in this way it seems to link up with the semantic content proper to the term *hesed*.

53. Ps. 40(39):11; 98(97):2f.; Is. 45:21; 51:5, 8; 56:1.

54. Wis. 11:24.

55. 1 Jn. 4:16.

56. Jer. 31:3.

57. Is. 54:10.

58. Jon. 4:2, 11; Ps. 145(144):9; Sir. 18:8-14; Wis. 11:23-12:1.

59. Jn. 14:9.

60. In both places it is a case of *hesed*, i.e., the fidelity that God manifests to His own love for the people, fidelity to the promises that will find their definitive fulfillment precisely in the motherhood of the Mother of God (cf. Lk. 1:49-54).

61. Cf. Lk. 1:72. Here too it is a case of mercy in the meaning of *hesed*, insofar as in the following sentences, in which Zechariah speaks of the "tender mercy of our God," there is clearly expressed the second meaning, namely, *rahamim* (Latin translation: *viscera misericordiae*), which rather identifies God's mercy with a mother's love.

62. Cf. Lk. 15:14-32.

63. Lk. 15:18-19.

64. Lk. 15:20.

65. Lk. 15:32.

66. Cf. Lk. 15:3-6.

67. Cf. Lk. 15:8-9.

68. 1 Cor. 13:4-8.

69. Cf. Rom. 12:21.

70. Cf. the liturgy of the Easter Vigil: the Exsultet.

71. Acts 10:38.

72. Mt. 9:35.

73. Cf. Mk. 15:37; Jn. 19:30.

74. Is. 53:5.

75. 2 Cor. 5:21.

76. Ibid.

77. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

78. Jn. 3:16.

79. Cf. Jn. 14:9.
80. Mt. 10:28.
81. Phil. 2:8.
82. 2 Cor. 5:21.
83. Cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-55.
84. Cf. Lk. 4:18-21.
85. Cf. Lk. 7:20-23.
86. Cf. Is. 35:5; 61:1-3.
87. 1 Cor. 15:4.
88. Rv. 21:1.
89. Rv. 21:4.
90. Cf. Rv. 21:4.
91. Rv. 3:20.
92. Cf. Mt. 24:35.
93. Cf. Rv. 3:20.
94. Mt. 25:40.
95. Mt. 5:7.
96. Jn. 14:9.
97. Rom. 8:32.
98. Mk. 12:27.
99. Jn. 20:19-23.
100. Ps. 89(88):2.
101. Lk. 1:50.
102. Cf. 2 Cor. 1:21-22.
103. Lk. 1:50.
104. Cf. Ps. 85(84):11.
105. Lk. 1:50.
106. Cf. Lk. 4:18.
107. Cf. Lk. 7:22.
108. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 62: AAS 57 (1965), p. 63.
109. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 10: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1032.
110. *Ibid*
111. Mt. 5:38.
112. Cf. Jn. 14:9-10.
113. Jn. 14:9.
114. Cf. 1 Cor. 11:26; acclamation in the Roman Missal.
115. Jn. 3:16.
116. 1 Jn. 4:8.
117. Cf. 1 Cor. 13:4.
118. 2 Cor. 1:3.
119. Rom. 8:26.
120. Mt. 5:7.
121. Cf. Mt. 25:34-40.
122. Cf. 1 Cor. 13:4.
123. Cf. Lk. 15:11-32.
124. Cf. Lk. 15:1-10.
125. Cf. *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XIII (1975), p. 1568 (close of the Holy Year, December 25, 1975).
126. Mt. 5:38.
127. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 40 AAS 58 (1966), pp.1057-1059; Pope Paul VI: Apostolic Exhortation *Paterna cum benevolentia*, in particular nos. 1-6: AAS 67 (1975), pp. 7-9, 17-23.
128. Cf. 1 Jn. 2:16.
129. Mt. 6:12.
130. Eph. 4:2; cf. Gal. 6:2.
131. Mt. 18:22.
132. Cf. Lk. 15:32.
133. Cf. Is. 12:3.
134. Mt. 10:8.
135. Cf. Heb. 5:7.
136. Cf. Wis. 11:24; Ps. 145(144):9; Gn. 1:31.

137. Lk. 23:34.
138. Cf. 1 Cor. 4:1.
139. Mt. 5:7.
140. Cf. Jn. 14:9.

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Ioannes Paulus PP. II

To his venerable Brothers in the Episcopate
the Priests
the religious families, the sons and daughters of the Church
and to all men and women of good will
at the beginning of his papal ministry

1979.03.04

Blessing

Venerable Brothers, and dear Sons and Daughters greetings and the Apostolic Blessing

I. INHERITANCE

1. At the close of the second Millennium

THE REDEEMER OF MAN, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history. To him go my thoughts and my heart in this solemn moment of the world that the Church and the whole family of present-day humanity are now living. In fact, this time, in which God in his hidden design has entrusted to me, after my beloved Predecessor John Paul I, the universal service connected with the Chair of Saint Peter in Rome, is already very close to the year 2000. At this moment it is difficult to say what mark that year will leave on the face of human history or what it will bring to each people, nation, country and continent, in spite of the efforts already being made to foresee some events. For the Church, the People of God spread, although unevenly, to the most distant limits of the earth, it will be the year of a great Jubilee. We are already approaching that date, which, without prejudice to all the corrections imposed by chronological exactitude, will recall and reawaken in us in a special way our awareness of the key truth of faith which Saint John expressed at the beginning of his Gospel: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us"¹, and elsewhere: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"².

We also are in a certain way in a season of a new Advent, a season of expectation: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son..."³, by the Son, his Word, who became man and was born of the Virgin Mary. This act of redemption marked the high point of the history of man within God's loving plan. God entered the history of humanity and, as a man, became an actor in that history, one of the thousands of millions of human beings but at the same time Unique! Through the Incarnation God gave human life the dimension that he intended man to have from his first beginning; he has granted that dimension definitively-in the way that is peculiar to him alone, in keeping with his eternal love and mercy, with the full freedom of God-and he has granted it also with the bounty that enables us, in considering the original sin and the whole history of the sins of humanity, and in considering the errors of the human intellect, will and heart, to repeat with amazement the words of the Sacred Liturgy: "O happy fault... which gained us so great a Redeemer!"⁴

The first words of the new Pontificate

It was to Christ the Redeemer that my feelings and my thoughts were directed on 16 October of last year, when, after the canonical election, I was asked: "Do you accept?" I then replied: "With obedience in faith to Christ, my Lord, and with trust in the Mother of Christ and of the Church, in spite of the great difficulties, I accept". Today I wish to make that reply known publicly to all without exception, thus showing that there is a link between the first fundamental truth of the Incarnation, already mentioned, and the ministry that, with my acceptance of my election as Bishop of Rome and Successor of the Apostle Peter, has become my specific duty in his See.

I chose the same names that were chosen by my beloved Predecessor John Paul I. Indeed, as soon as he announced to the Sacred College on 26 August 1978 that he wished to be called John Paul-such a double name being unprecedented in the history of the Papacy-I saw in it a clear presage of grace for the new pontificate. Since that pontificate lasted barely 33 days, it falls to me not only to continue it but in a certain sense to take it up again at the same starting point. This is confirmed by my choice of these two names. By following the example of my venerable Predecessor in choosing them, I wish like him to express my love for the unique inheritance left to the Church by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI and my personal readiness to develop that inheritance with God's help.

Through these two names and two pontificates I am linked with the whole tradition of the Apostolic See and with all my Predecessors in the expanse of the twentieth century and of the preceding centuries. I am connected, through one

after another of the various ages back to the most remote, with the line of the mission and ministry that confers on Peter's See an altogether special place in the Church. John XXIII and Paul VI are a stage to which I wish to refer directly as a threshold from which I intend to continue, in a certain sense together with John Paul I, into the future, letting myself be guided by unlimited trust in and obedience to the Spirit that Christ promised and sent to his Church. On the night before he suffered he said to his apostles: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you"⁵. "When the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning"⁶. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come"⁷.

Trust in the Spirit of Truth and of Love

Entrusting myself fully to the Spirit of truth, therefore, I am entering into the rich inheritance of the recent pontificates. This inheritance has struck deep roots in the awareness of the Church in an utterly new way, quite unknown previously, thanks to the Second Vatican Council, which John XXIII convened and opened and which was later successfully concluded and perseveringly put into effect by Paul VI, whose activity I was myself able to watch from close at hand. I was constantly amazed at his profound wisdom and his courage and also by his constancy and patience in the difficult postconciliar period of his pontificate. As helmsman of the Church, the bark of Peter, he knew how to preserve a providential tranquillity and balance even in the most critical moments, when the Church seemed to be shaken from within, and he always maintained unhesitating hope in the Church's solidity. What the Spirit said to the Church through the Council of our time, what the Spirit says in this Church to all the Churches⁸ cannot lead to anything else-in spite of momentary uneasinesses-but still more mature solidity of the whole People of God, aware of their salvific mission. Paul VI selected this present-day consciousness of the Church as the first theme in his fundamental Encyclical beginning with the words *Ecclesiam Suam*. Let me refer first of all to this Encyclical and link myself with it in this first document that, so to speak, inaugurates the present pontificate. The Church's consciousness, enlightened and supported by the Holy Spirit and fathoming more and more deeply both her divine mystery and her human mission, and even her human weaknesses-this consciousness is and must remain the first source of the Church's love, as love in turn helps to strengthen and deepen her consciousness. Paul VI left us a witness of such an extremely acute consciousness of the Church. Through the many things, often causing suffering, that went to make up his pontificate he taught us intrepid love for the Church, which is, as the Council states, a "sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind"⁹.

4. Reference to Paul VI's first Encyclical

Precisely for this reason, the Church's consciousness must go with universal openness, in order that all may be able to find in her "the unsearchable riches of Christ"¹⁰ spoken of by the Apostle of the Gentiles. Such openness, organically joined with the awareness of her own nature and certainty of her own truth, of which Christ said: "The word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me"¹¹, is what gives the Church her apostolic, or in other words her missionary, dynamism, professing and proclaiming in its integrity the whole of the truth transmitted by Christ. At the same time she must carry on the dialogue that Paul VI, in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* called "the dialogue of salvation", distinguishing with precision the various circles within which it was to be carried on¹². In referring today to this document that gave the programme of Paul VI's pontificate, I keep thanking God that this great Predecessor of mine, who was also truly my father, knew how to display *ad extra*, externally, the true countenance of the Church, in spite of the various internal weaknesses that affected her in the postconciliar period. In this way much of the human family has become, it seems, more aware, in all humanity's various spheres of existence, of how really necessary the Church of Christ, her mission and her service are to humanity. At times this awareness has proved stronger than the various critical attitudes attacking *ab intra*, internally, the Church, her institutions and structures, and ecclesiastics and their activities. This growing criticism was certainly due to various causes and we are furthermore sure that it was not always without sincere love for the Church. Undoubtedly one of the tendencies it displayed was to overcome what has been called triumphalism, about which there was frequent discussion during the Council. While it is right that, in accordance with the example of her Master, who is "humble in heart"¹³, the Church also should have humility as her foundation, that she should have a critical sense with regard to all that goes to make up her human character and activity, and that she should always be very demanding on herself, nevertheless criticism too should have its just limits. Otherwise it ceases to be constructive and does not reveal truth, love and thankfulness for the grace in which we become sharers principally and fully in and through the Church. Furthermore such criticism does not express an attitude of service but rather a wish to direct the opinion of others in accordance with one's own, which is at times spread abroad in too thoughtless a manner.

Gratitude is due to Paul VI because, while respecting every particle of truth contained in the various human opinions, he preserved at the same time the providential balance of the bark's helmsman¹⁴. The Church that I-through John Paul

I have had entrusted to me almost immediately after him is admittedly not free of internal difficulties and tension. At the same time, however, she is internally more strengthened against the excesses of self-criticism: she can be said to be more critical with regard to the various thoughtless criticisms, more resistant with respect to the various "novelties", more mature in her spirit of discerning, better able to bring out of her everlasting treasure "what is new and what is old"¹⁵, more intent on her own mystery, and because of all that more serviceable for her mission of salvation for all: God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"¹⁶.

Collegiality and apostolate

In spite of all appearances, the Church is now more united in the fellowship of service and in the awareness of apostolate. This unity springs from the principle of collegiality, mentioned by the Second Vatican Council. Christ himself made this principle a living part of the apostolic College of the Twelve with Peter at their head, and he is continuously renewing it in the College of the Bishops, which is growing more and more over all the earth, remaining united with and under the guidance of the Successor of Saint Peter. The Council did more than mention the principle of collegiality: it gave it immense new life, by -among other things-expressing the wish for a permanent organ of collegiality, which Paul VI founded by setting up the Synod of the Bishops, whose activity not only gave a new dimension to his pontificate but was also later clearly reflected in the pontificate of John Paul I and that of his unworthy Successor from the day they began.

The principle of collegiality showed itself particularly relevant in the difficult postconciliar period, when the shared unanimous position of the College of the Bishops-which displayed, chiefly through the Synod, its union with Peter's Successor-helped to dissipate doubts and at the same time indicated the correct ways for renewing the Church in her universal dimension. Indeed, the Synod was the source, among other things, of that essential momentum for evangelization that found expression in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*¹⁷, which was so joyously welcomed as a programme for renewal which was both apostolic and also pastoral. The same line was followed in the work of the last ordinary session of the Synod of the Bishops, held about a year before the death of Pope Paul VI and dedicated, as is known, to catechesis. The results of this work have still to be arranged and enunciated by the Apostolic See.

As we are dealing with the evident development of the forms in which episcopal collegiality is expressed, mention must be made at least of the process of consolidation of National Episcopal Conferences throughout the Church and of other collegial structures of an international or continental character. Referring also to the centuries-old tradition of the Church, attention should be directed to the activity of the various diocesan, provincial and national Synods. It was the Council's idea, an idea consistently put into practice by Paul VI, that structures of this kind, with their centuries of trial by the Church, and the other forms of collegial collaboration by Bishops, such as the metropolitan structure-not to mention each individual diocese-should pulsate in full awareness of their own identity and, at the same time, of their own originality within the universal unity of the Church. The same spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility is spreading among priests also, as is confirmed by the many Councils of Priests that have sprung up since the Council. That spirit has extended also among the laity, not only strengthening the already existing organizations for lay apostolate but also creating new ones that often have a different outline and excellent dynamism. Furthermore, lay people conscious of their responsibility for the Church have willingly committed themselves to collaborating with the Pastors and with the representatives of the Institutes of consecrated life, in the spheres of the diocesan Synods and of the pastoral Councils in the parishes and dioceses.

I must keep all this in mind at the beginning of my pontificate as a reason for giving thanks to God, for warmly encouraging all my brothers and sisters and for recalling with heartfelt gratitude the work of the Second Vatican Council and my great Predecessors, who set in motion this new surge of life for the Church, a movement that is much stronger than the symptoms of doubt, collapse and crisis.

6. The road to Christian unity

What shall I say of all the initiatives that have sprung from the new ecumenical orientation? The unforgettable Pope John XXIII set out the problem of Christian unity with evangelical clarity as a simple consequence of the will of Jesus Christ himself, our Master, the will that Jesus stated on several occasions but to which he gave expression in a special way in his prayer in the Upper Room the night before he died: "I pray... Father... that they may all be one"¹⁸. The Second Vatican Council responded concisely to this requirement with its Decree on ecumenism. Pope Paul VI, availing himself of the activities of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, began the first difficult steps on the road to the attainment of that unity. Have we gone far along that road? Without wishing to give a detailed reply, we can say that we have made real and important advances. And one thing is certain: we have worked with perseverance and consistency, and the representatives of other Christian Churches and Communities have also committed themselves together with us, for which we are heartily grateful to them. It is also certain that in the present historical situation of Christianity and the world the only possibility we see of fulfilling the Church's universal mission, with regard to ecumenical questions, is that of seeking sincerely, perseveringly, humbly and also courageously the ways of drawing

closer and of union. Pope Paul VI gave us his personal example for this. We must therefore seek unity without being discouraged at the difficulties that can appear or accumulate along that road; otherwise we would be unfaithful to the word of Christ, we would fail to accomplish his testament. Have we the right to run this risk?

There are people who in the face of the difficulties or because they consider that the first ecumenical endeavours have brought negative results would have liked to turn back. Some even express the opinion that these efforts are harmful to the cause of the Gospel, are leading to a further rupture in the Church, are causing confusion of ideas in questions of faith and morals and are ending up with a specific indifferentism. It is perhaps a good thing that the spokesmen for these opinions should express their fears. However, in this respect also, correct limits must be maintained. It is obvious that this new stage in the Church's life demands of us a faith that is particularly aware, profound and responsible. True ecumenical activity means openness, drawing closer, availability for dialogue, and a shared investigation of the truth in the full evangelical and Christian sense; but in no way does it or can it mean giving up or in any way diminishing the treasures of divine truth that the Church has constantly confessed and taught. To all who, for whatever motive, would wish to dissuade the Church from seeking the universal unity of Christians the question must once again be put: Have we the right not to do it? Can we fail to have trust-in spite of all human weakness and all the faults of past centuries-in our Lord's grace as revealed recently through what the Holy Spirit said and we heard during the Council? If we were to do so, we would deny the truth concerning ourselves that was so eloquently expressed by the Apostle: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain"¹⁹.

What we have just said must also be applied -although in another way and with the due differences-to activity for coming closer together with the representatives of the non-Christian religions, an activity expressed through dialogue, contacts, prayer in common, investigation of the treasures of human spirituality, in which, as we know well, the members of these religions also are not lacking. Does it not sometimes happen that the firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religions-a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body-can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church and so prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissiveness. It is a noble thing to have a predisposition for understanding every person, analyzing every system and recognizing what is right; this does not at all mean losing certitude about one's own faith²⁰ or weakening the principles of morality, the lack of which will soon make itself felt in the life of whole societies, with deplorable consequences besides.

II. THE MYSTERY OF THE REDEMPTION

Within the Mystery of Christ

While the ways on which the Council of this century has set the Church going, ways indicated by the late Pope Paul VI in his first Encyclical, will continue to be for a long time the ways that all of us must follow, we can at the same time rightly ask at this new stage: How, in what manner should we continue? What should we do, in order that this new advent of the Church connected with the approaching end of the second millennium may bring us closer to him whom Sacred Scripture calls "Everlasting Father", *Pater futuri saeculi*²¹? This is the fundamental question that the new Pope must put to himself on accepting in a spirit of obedience in faith the call corresponding to the command that Christ gave Peter several times: "Feed my lambs"²², meaning: Be the shepherd of my sheepfold, and again: "And when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren"²³.

To this question, dear Brothers, sons and daughters, a fundamental and essential response must be given. Our response must be: Our spirit is set in one direction, the only direction for our intellect, will and heart is-towards Christ our Redeemer, towards Christ, the Redeemer of man. We wish to look towards him-because there is salvation in no one else but him, the Son of God- repeating what Peter said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"²⁴.

Through the Church's consciousness, which the Council considerably developed, through all levels of this self-awareness, and through all the fields of activity in which the Church expresses, finds and confirms herself, we must constantly aim at him "who is the head"²⁵, "through whom are all things and through whom we exist"²⁶, who is both "the way, and the truth"²⁷ and "the resurrection and the life",²⁸ seeing whom, we see the Father²⁹, and who had to go away from us³⁰-that is, by his death on the Cross and then by his Ascension into heaven-in order that the Counsellor should come to us and should keep coming to us as the Spirit of truth³¹. In him are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"³², and the Church is his Body³³. "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind"³⁴, and the source of this is he, he himself, he the Redeemer.

The Church does not cease to listen to his words. She rereads them continually. With the greatest devotion she reconstructs every detail of his life. These words are listened to also by non-Christians. The life of Christ speaks, also, to many who are not capable of repeating with Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"³⁵. He, the Son of the living God, speaks to people also as Man: it is his life that speaks, his humanity, his fidelity to the truth, his all-embracing love. Furthermore, his death on the Cross speaks-that is to say the inscrutable depth of his suffering and

abandonment. The Church never ceases to relive his death on the Cross and his Resurrection, which constitute the content of the Church's daily life. Indeed, it is by the command of Christ himself, her Master, that the Church unceasingly celebrates the Eucharist, finding in it the "fountain of life and holiness"³⁶, the efficacious sign of grace and reconciliation with God, and the pledge of eternal life. The Church lives his mystery, draws unwearingly from it and continually seeks ways of bringing this mystery of her Master and Lord to humanity-to the peoples, the nations, the succeeding generations, and every individual human being-as if she were ever repeating, as the Apostle did: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified"³⁷. The Church stays within the sphere of the mystery of the Redemption, which has become the fundamental principle of her life and mission.

8. Redemption as a new creation

The Redeemer of the world! In him has been revealed in a new and more wonderful way the fundamental truth concerning creation to which the Book of Genesis gives witness when it repeats several times: "God saw that it was good"³⁸. The good has its source in Wisdom and Love. In Jesus Christ the visible world which God created for man³⁹-the world that, when sin entered, "was subjected to futility"⁴⁰ - recovers again its original link with the divine source of Wisdom and Love. Indeed, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son"⁴¹. As this link was broken in the man Adam, so in the Man Christ it was reforged⁴². Are we of the twentieth century not convinced of the over poweringly eloquent words of the Apostle of the Gentiles concerning the "creation (that) has been groaning in travail together until now"⁴³ and "waits with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God"⁴⁴, the creation that "was subjected to futility"? Does not the previously unknown immense progress-which has taken place especially in the course of this century-in the field of man's dominion over the world itself reveal-to a previously unknown degree-that manifold subjection "to futility"? It is enough to recall certain phenomena, such as the threat of pollution of the natural environment in areas of rapid industrialization, or the armed conflicts continually breaking out over and over again, or the prospectives of self-destruction through the use of atomic, hydrogen, neutron and similar weapons, or the lack of respect for the life of the unborn. The world of the new age, the world of space flights, the world of the previously unattained conquests of science and technology -is it not also the world "groaning in travail"⁴⁵ that "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God"⁴⁶?

In its penetrating analysis of "the modern world", the Second Vatican Council reached that most important point of the visible world that is man, by penetrating like Christ the depth of human consciousness and by making contact with the inward mystery of man, which in Biblical and non-Biblical language is expressed by the word "heart". Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his "heart". Rightly therefore does the Second Vatican Council teach: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come (Rom 5:14), Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling". And the Council continues: "He who is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin"⁴⁷, he, the Redeemer of man.

9. The divine dimension of the mystery of the Redemption

As we reflect again on this stupendous text from the Council's teaching, we do not forget even for a moment that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, become our reconciliation with the Father⁴⁸. He it was, and he alone, who satisfied the Father's eternal love, that fatherhood that from the beginning found expression in creating the world, giving man all the riches of creation, and making him "little less than God"⁴⁹, in that he was created "in the image and after the likeness of God".⁵⁰ He and he alone also satisfied that fatherhood of God and that love which man in a way rejected by breaking the first Covenant⁵¹ and the later covenants that God "again and again offered to man"⁵². The redemption of the world-this tremendous mystery of love in which creation is renewed-⁵³ is, at its deepest root, the fullness of justice in a human Heart-the Heart of the First-born Son-in order that it may become justice in the hearts of many human beings, predestined from eternity in the Firstborn Son to be children of God⁵⁴ and called to grace, called to love. The Cross on Calvary, through which Jesus Christ-a Man, the Son of the Virgin Mary, thought to be the son of Joseph of Nazareth- "leaves" this world, is also a fresh manifestation of the eternal fatherhood of God, who in him draws near again to humanity, to each human being, giving him the thrice holy "Spirit of truth"⁵⁵.

This revelation of the Father and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which stamp an indelible seal on the mystery of the Redemption, explain the meaning of the Cross and death of Christ. The God of creation is revealed as the God of redemption, as the God who is "faithful to himself"⁵⁶, and faithful to his love for man and the world, which he revealed on the day of creation. His is a love that does not draw back before anything that justice requires in him. Therefore "for

our sake (God) made him (the Son) to be sin who knew no sin"⁵⁷. If he "made to be sin" him who was without any sin whatever, it was to reveal the love that is always greater than the whole of creation, the love that is he himself, since "God is love"⁵⁸. Above all, love is greater than sin, than weakness, than the "futility of creation"⁵⁹, it is stronger than death; it is a love always ready to raise up and forgive, always ready to go to meet the prodigal son⁶⁰, always looking for "the revealing of the sons of God"⁶¹, who are called to the glory that is to be revealed"⁶². This revelation of love is also described as mercy⁶³; and in man's history this revelation of love and mercy has taken a form and a name: that of Jesus Christ.

10. The human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself". If we may use the expression, this is the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption. In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity. In the mystery of the Redemption man becomes newly "expressed" and, in a way, is newly created. He is newly created! "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"⁶⁴. The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly-and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being-he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must "appropriate" and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself. How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he "gained so great a Redeemer"⁶⁵, and if God "gave his only Son "in order that man "should not perish but have eternal life"⁶⁶.

In reality, the name for that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News. It is also called Christianity. This amazement determines the Church's mission in the world and, perhaps even more so, "in the modern world". This amazement, which is also a conviction and a certitude-at its deepest root it is the certainty of faith, but in a hidden and mysterious way it vivifies every aspect of authentic humanism-is closely connected with Christ. It also fixes Christ's place-so to speak, his particular right of citizenship-in the history of man and mankind. Unceasingly contemplating the whole of Christ's mystery, the Church knows with all the certainty of faith that the Redemption that took place through the Cross has definitively restored his dignity to man and given back meaning to his life in the world, a meaning that was lost to a considerable extent because of sin. And for that reason, the Redemption was accomplished in the paschal mystery, leading through the Cross and death to Resurrection.

The Church's fundamental function in every age and particularly in ours is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God, to help all men to be familiar with the profundity of the Redemption taking place in Christ Jesus. At the same time man's deepest sphere is involved-we mean the sphere of human hearts, consciences and events.

11. The mystery of Christ as the basis of the Church's mission and of Christianity

The Second Vatican Council did immense work to form that full and universal awareness by the Church of which Pope Paul VI wrote in his first Encyclical. This awareness-or rather self-awareness-by the Church is formed a "in dialogue"; and before this dialogue becomes a conversation, attention must be directed to "the other", that is to say: the person with whom we wish to speak. The Ecumenical Council gave a fundamental impulse to forming the Church's self-awareness by so adequately and competently presenting to us a view of the terrestrial globe as a map of various religions. It showed furthermore that this map of the world's religions has superimposed on it, in previously unknown layers typical of our time, the phenomenon of atheism in its various forms, beginning with the atheism that is programmed, organized and structured as a political system. With regard to religion, what is dealt with is in the first place religion as a universal phenomenon linked with man's history from the beginning, then the various non-Christian religions, and finally Christianity itself. The Council document on non-Christian religions, in particular, is filled with deep esteem for the great spiritual values, indeed for the primacy of the spiritual, which in the life of mankind finds expression in religion and then in morality, with direct effects on the whole of culture. The Fathers of the Church rightly saw in the various religions as it were so many reflections of the one truth, "seeds of the Word"⁶⁷, attesting that, though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life. The Council gave particular attention to the Jewish religion, recalling the great spiritual heritage common to Christians and Jews. It also expressed its esteem for the believers of Islam, whose faith also looks to Abraham⁶⁸.

The opening made by the Second Vatican Council has enabled the Church and all Christians to reach a more complete awareness of the mystery of Christ, "the mystery hidden for ages"⁶⁹ in God, to be revealed in time in the Man Jesus

Christ, and to be revealed continually in every time. In Christ and through Christ God has revealed himself fully to mankind and has definitively drawn close to it; at the same time, in Christ and through Christ man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence.

All of us who are Christ's followers must therefore meet and unite around him. This unity in the various fields of the life, tradition, structures and discipline of the individual Christian Churches and ecclesial Communities cannot be brought about without effective work aimed at getting to know each other and removing the obstacles blocking the way to perfect unity. However, we can and must immediately reach and display to the world our unity in proclaiming the mystery of Christ, in revealing the divine dimension and also the human dimension of the Redemption, and in struggling with unwearying perseverance for the dignity that each human being has reached and can continually reach in Christ, namely the dignity of both the grace of divine adoption and the inner truth of humanity, a truth which-if in the common awareness of the modern world it has been given such fundamental importance-for us is still clearer in the light of the reality that is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the stable principle and fixed centre of the mission that God himself has entrusted to man. We must all share in this mission and concentrate all our forces on it, since it is more necessary than ever for modern mankind. If this mission seems to encounter greater opposition nowadays than ever before, this shows that today it is more necessary than ever and, in spite of the opposition, more awaited than ever. Here we touch indirectly on the mystery of the divine "economy" which linked salvation and grace with the Cross. It was not without reason that Christ said that "the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force"⁷⁰ and moreover that "the children of this world are more astute... than are the children of light"⁷¹. We gladly accept this rebuke, that we may be like those "violent people of God" that we have so often seen in the history of the Church and still see today, and that we may consciously join in the great mission of revealing Christ to the world, helping each person to find himself in Christ, and helping the contemporary generations of our brothers and sisters, the peoples, nations, States, mankind, developing countries and countries of opulence-in short, helping everyone to get to know "the unsearchable riches of Christ"⁷², since these riches are for every individual and are everybody's property.

12. The Church's mission and human freedom

In this unity in mission, which is decided principally by Christ himself, all Christians must find what already unites them, even before their full communion is achieved. This is apostolic and missionary unity, missionary and apostolic unity. Thanks to this unity we can together come close to the magnificent heritage of the human spirit that has been manifested in all religions, as the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* says ⁷³. It also enables us to approach all cultures, all ideological concepts, all people of good will. We approach them with the esteem, respect and discernment that since the time of the Apostles has marked the missionary attitude, the attitude of the missionary. Suffice it to mention Saint Paul and, for instance, his address in the Areopagus at Athens⁷⁴. The missionary attitude always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for "what is in man"⁷⁵, for what man has himself. worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which "blows where it will"⁷⁶. The mission is never destruction, but instead is a taking up and fresh building, even if in practice there has not always been full correspondence with this high ideal. And we know well that the conversion that is begun by the mission is a work of grace, in which man must fully find himself again.

For this reason the Church in our time attaches great importance to all that is stated by the Second Vatican Council in its Declaration on Religious Freedom, both the first and the second part of the document⁷⁷. We perceive intimately that the truth revealed to us by God imposes on us an obligation. We have, in particular, a great sense of responsibility for this truth. By Christ's institution the Church is its guardian and teacher, having been endowed with a unique assistance of the Holy Spirit in order to guard and teach it in its most exact integrity⁷⁸. In fulfilling this mission, we look towards Christ himself, the first evangelizer⁷⁹, and also towards his Apostles, martyrs and confessors. The Declaration on Religious Freedom shows us convincingly that, when Christ and, after him, his Apostles proclaimed the truth that comes not from men but from God ("My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me"⁸⁰, that is the Father's), they preserved, while acting with their full force of spirit, a deep esteem for man, for his intellect, his will, his conscience and his freedom⁸¹. Thus the human person's dignity itself becomes part of the content of that proclamation, being included not necessarily in words but by an attitude towards it. This attitude seems to fit the special needs of our times. Since man's true freedom is not found in everything that the various systems and individuals see and propagate as freedom, the Church, because of her divine mission, becomes all the more the guardian of this freedom, which is the condition and basis for the human person's true dignity.

Jesus Christ meets the man of every age, including our own, with the same words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"⁸². These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man

and the world. Today also, even after two thousand years, we see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man's soul, his heart and his conscience. What a stupendous confirmation of this has been given and is still being given by those who, thanks to Christ and in Christ, have reached true freedom and have manifested it even in situations of external constraint!

When Jesus Christ himself appeared as a prisoner before Pilate's tribunal and was interrogated by him about the accusation made against him by the representatives of the Sanhedrin, did he not answer: "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth"⁸³? It was as if with these words spoken before the judge at the decisive moment he was once more confirming what he had said earlier: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free". In the course of so many centuries, of so many generations, from the time of the Apostles on, is it not often Jesus Christ himself that has made an appearance at the side of people judged for the sake of the truth? And has he not gone to death with people condemned for the sake of the truth? Does he ever cease to be the continuous spokesman and advocate for the person who lives "in spirit and truth"⁸⁴? Just as he does not cease to be it before the Father, he is it also with regard to the history of man. And in her turn the Church, in spite of all the weaknesses that are part of her human history, does not cease to follow him who said: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth"⁸⁵.

III. REDEEMED MAN AND HIS SITUATION IN THE MODERN WORLD

13. Christ united himself with each man

When we penetrate by means of the continually and rapidly increasing experience of the human family into the mystery of Jesus Christ, we understand with greater clarity that there is at the basis of all these ways that the Church of our time must follow, in accordance with the wisdom of Pope Paul VI⁸⁶, one single way: it is the way that has stood the test of centuries and it is also the way of the future. Christ the Lord indicated this way especially, when, as the Council teaches, "by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man"⁸⁷. The Church therefore sees its fundamental task in enabling that union to be brought about and renewed continually. The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life, with the power of the truth about man and the world that is contained in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption and with the power of the love that is radiated by that truth. Against a background of the ever increasing historical processes, which seem at the present time to have results especially within the spheres of various systems, ideological concepts of the world and regimes, Jesus Christ becomes, in a way, newly present, in spite of all his apparent absences, in spite of all the limitations of the presence and of the institutional activity of the Church. Jesus Christ becomes present with the power of the truth and the love that are expressed in him with unique unrepeatable fullness in spite of the shortness of his life on earth and the even greater shortness of his public activity. Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church. He himself is our way "to the Father's house"⁸⁸ and is the way to each man. On this way leading from Christ to man, on this way on which Christ unites himself with each man, nobody can halt the Church. This is an exigency of man's temporal welfare and of his eternal welfare. Out of regard for Christ and in view of the mystery that constitutes the Church's own life, the Church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves man's true welfare, any more than she can remain indifferent to what threatens it. In various passages in its documents the Second Vatican Council has expressed the Church's fundamental solicitude that life in "the world should conform more to man's surpassing dignity"⁸⁹ in all its aspects, so as to make that life "ever more human"⁹⁰. This is the solicitude of Christ himself, the good Shepherd of all men. In the name of this solicitude, as we read in the Council's Pastoral Constitution, "the Church must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person"⁹¹. Accordingly, what is in question here is man in all his truth, in his full magnitude. We are not dealing with the "abstract" man, but the real, "concrete", "historical" man. We are dealing with "each" man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself for ever through this mystery. Every man comes into the world through being conceived in his mother's womb and being born of his mother, and precisely on account of the mystery of the Redemption is entrusted to the solicitude of the Church. Her solicitude is about the whole man and is focussed on him in an altogether special manner. The object of her care is man in his unique unrepeatable human reality, which keeps intact the image and likeness of God himself⁹². The Council points out this very fact when, speaking of that likeness, it recalls that "man is the only creature on earth that God willed for itself"⁹³. Man as "willed" by God, as "chosen" by him from eternity and called, destined for grace and glory-this is "each" man, "the most concrete" man, "the most real"; this is man in all the fullness of the mystery in which he has become a sharer in Jesus Christ, the mystery in which each one of the four thousand million human beings living on our planet has become a sharer from the moment he is conceived beneath the heart of his mother.

14. For the Church all ways lead to man

The Church cannot abandon man, for his "destiny", that is to say his election, calling, birth and death, salvation or perdition, is so closely and unbreakably linked with Christ. We are speaking precisely of each man on this planet, this earth that the Creator gave to the first man, saying to the man and the women: "subdue it and have dominion"⁹⁴. Each man in all the unrepeatability of what he is and what he does, of his intellect and will, of his conscience and heart. Man who in his reality has, because he is a "person", a history of his life that is his own and, most important, a history of his soul that is his own. Man who, in keeping with the openness of his spirit within and also with the many diverse needs of his body and his existence in time, writes this personal history of his through numerous bonds, contacts, situations, and social structures linking him with other men, beginning to do so from the first moment of his existence on earth, from the moment of his conception and birth. Man in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being-in the sphere of his own family, in the sphere of society and very diverse contexts, in the sphere of his own nation or people (perhaps still only that of his clan or tribe), and in the sphere of the whole of mankind-this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption.

It was precisely this man in all the truth of his life, in his conscience, in his continual inclination to sin and at the same time in his continual aspiration to truth, the good, the beautiful, justice and love that the Second Vatican Council had before its eyes when, in outlining his situation in the modern world, it always passed from the external elements of this situation to the truth within humanity: "In man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways. On the other, he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions, he is constantly forced to choose among them and to renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society"⁹⁵.

This man is the way for the Church-a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk-because man-every man without any exception whatever-has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man-with each man without any exception whatever-Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it: "Christ, who died and was raised up for all, provides man"-each man and every man- "with the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme calling"⁹⁶.

Since this man is the way for the Church, the way for her daily life and experience, for her mission and toil, the Church of today must be aware in an always new manner of man's "situation". That means that she must be aware of his possibilities, which keep returning to their proper bearings and thus revealing themselves. She must likewise be aware of the threats to man and of all that seems to oppose the endeavour "to make human life ever more human"⁹⁷ and make every element of this life correspond to man's true dignity-in a word, she must be aware of all that is opposed to that process.

15. What modern man is afraid of

Accordingly, while keeping alive in our memory the picture that was so perspicaciously and authoritatively traced by the Second Vatican Council, we shall try once more to adapt it to the "signs of the times" and to the demands of the situation, which is continually changing and evolving in certain directions.

The man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces, that is to say from the result of the work of his hands and, even more so, of the work of his intellect and the tendencies of his will. All too soon, and often in an unforeseeable way, what this manifold activity of man yields is not only subjected to "alienation", in the sense that it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, but rather it turns against man himself, at least in part, through the indirect consequences of its effects returning on himself. It is or can be directed against him. This seems to make up the main chapter of the drama of present-day human existence in its broadest and universal dimension. Man therefore lives increasingly in fear. He is afraid that what he produces-not all of it, of course, or even most of it, but part of it and precisely that part that contains a special share of his genius and initiative-can radically turn against himself; he is afraid that it can become the means and instrument for an unimaginable self-destruction, compared with which all the cataclysms and catastrophes of history known to us seem to fade away. This gives rise to a question: Why is it that the power given to man from the beginning by which he was to subdue the earth⁹⁸ turns against himself, producing an understandable state of disquiet, of conscious or unconscious fear and of menace, which in various ways is being communicated to the whole of the present-day human family and is manifesting itself under various aspects?

This state of menace for man from what he produces shows itself in various directions and various degrees of intensity. We seem to be increasingly aware of the fact that the exploitation of the earth, the planet on which we are living, demands rational and honest planning. At the same time, exploitation of the earth not only for industrial but also for military purposes and the uncontrolled development of technology outside the framework of a long-range authentically humanistic plan often bring with them a threat to man's natural environment, alienate him in his relations with nature and remove him from nature. Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. Yet it was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble "master" and "guardian", and not as a heedless "exploiter" and "destroyer".

The development of technology and the development of contemporary civilization, which is marked by the ascendancy of technology, demand a proportional development of morals and ethics. For the present, this last development seems unfortunately to be always left behind. Accordingly, in spite of the marvel of this progress, in which it is difficult not to see also authentic signs of man's greatness, signs that in their creative seeds were revealed to us in the pages of the Book of Genesis, as early as where it describes man's creation⁹⁹, this progress cannot fail to give rise to disquiet on many counts. The first reason for disquiet concerns the essential and fundamental question: Does this progress, which has man for its author and promoter, make human life on earth "more human" in every aspect of that life? Does it make it more "worthy of man"? There can be no doubt that in various aspects it does. But the question keeps coming back with regard to what is most essential -whether in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all.

This question must be put by Christians, precisely because Jesus Christ has made them so universally sensitive about the problem of man. The same question must be asked by all men, especially those belonging to the social groups that are dedicating themselves actively to development and progress today. As we observe and take part in these processes we cannot let ourselves be taken over merely by euphoria or be carried away by one-sided enthusiasm for our conquests, but we must all ask ourselves, with absolute honesty, objectivity and a sense of moral responsibility, the essential questions concerning man's situation today and in the future. Do all the conquests attained until now and those projected for the future for technology accord with man's moral and spiritual progress? In this context is man, as man, developing and progressing or is he regressing and being degraded in his humanity? In men and "in man's world", which in itself is a world of moral good and evil, does good prevail over evil? In men and among men is there a growth of social love, of respect for the rights of others-for every man, nation and people-or on the contrary is there an increase of various degrees of selfishness, exaggerated nationalism instead of authentic love of country, and also the propensity to dominate others beyond the limits of one's legitimate rights and merits and the propensity to exploit the whole of material progress and that in the technology of production for the exclusive purpose of dominating others or of favouring this or that imperialism?

These are the essential questions that the Church is bound to ask herself, since they are being asked with greater or less explicitness by the thousands of millions of people now living in the world. The subject of development and progress is on everybody's lips and appears in the columns of all the newspapers and other publications in all the languages of the modern world. Let us not forget however that this subject contains not only affirmations and certainties but also questions and points of anguished disquiet. The latter are no less important than the former. They fit in with the dialectical nature of human knowledge and even more with the fundamental need for solicitude by man for man, for his humanity, and for the future of people on earth. Inspired by eschatological faith, the Church considers an essential, unbreakably united element of her mission this solicitude for man, for his humanity, for the future of men on earth and therefore also for the course set for the whole of development and progress. She finds the principle of this solicitude in Jesus Christ himself, as the Gospels witness. This is why she wishes to make it grow continually through her relationship with Christ, reading man's situation in the modern world in accordance with the most important signs of our time.

16. Progress or threat

If therefore our time, the time of our generation, the time that is approaching the end of the second millennium of the Christian era, shows itself a time of great progress, it is also seen as a time of threat in many forms for man. The Church must speak of this threat to all people of good will and must always carry on a dialogue with them about it. Man's situation in the modern world seems indeed to be far removed from the objective demands of the moral order, from the requirements of justice, and even more of social love. We are dealing here only with that which found expression in the Creator's first message to man at the moment in which he was giving him the earth, to "subdue" it¹⁰⁰. This first message was confirmed by Christ the Lord in the mystery of the Redemption. This is expressed by the Second Vatican Council in these beautiful chapters of its teaching that concern man's "kingship"; that is to say his call to share in the kingly function-the *munus regale* of Christ himself¹⁰¹. The essential meaning of this "kingship" and "dominion" of man over the visible world, which the Creator himself gave man for his task, consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter.

This is why all phases of present-day progress must be followed attentively. Each stage of that progress must, so to speak, be x-rayed from this point of view. What is in question is the advancement of persons, not just the multiplying of things that people can use. It is a matter-as a contemporary philosopher has said and as the Council has stated-not so much of "having more" as of "being more"¹⁰². Indeed there is already a real perceptible danger that, while man's dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he should lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to the world and become himself something subject to manipulation in many ways-even if the manipulation is often not perceptible directly-through the whole of the organization of community life, through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication. Man cannot relinquish himself or the place in the visible world that belongs to him; he cannot become the slave of things,

the slave of economic systems, the slave of production, the slave of his own products. A civilization purely materialistic in outline condemns man to such slavery, even if at times, no doubt, this occurs contrary to the intentions and the very premises of its pioneers. The present solicitude for man certainly has at its root this problem. It is not a matter here merely of giving an abstract answer to the question: Who is man? It is a matter of the whole of the dynamism of life and civilization. It is a matter of the mean ingfulness of the various initiatives of everyday life and also of the premises for many civilization programmes, political programmes, economic ones, social ones, state ones, and many others.

If we make bold to describe man's situation in the modern world as far removed from the objective demands of the moral order, from the exigencies of justice, and still more from social love, we do so because this is confirmed by the well-known facts and comparisons that have already on various occasions found an echo in the pages of statements by the Popes, the Council and the Synod¹⁰³. Man's situation today is certainly not uniform but marked with numerous differences. These differences have causes in history, but they also have strong ethical effects. Indeed everyone is familiar with the picture of the consumer civilization, which consists in a certain surplus of goods necessary for man and for entire societies-and we are dealing precisely with the rich highly developed societies-while the remaining societies-at least broad sectors of them-are suffering from hunger, with many people dying each day of starvation and malnutrition. Hand in hand go a certain abuse of freedom by one group-an abuse linked precisely with a consumer attitude uncontrolled by ethics -and a limitation by it of the freedom of the others, that is to say those suffering marked shortages and being driven to conditions of even worse misery and destitution.

This pattern, which is familiar to all, and the contrast referred to, in the documents giving their teaching, by the Popes of this century, most recently by John XXIII and by Paul VI, ¹⁰⁴ represent, as it were, the gigantic development of the parable in the Bible of the rich banqueter and the poor man Lazarus¹⁰⁵. So widespread is the phenomenon that it brings into question the financial, monetary, production and commercial mechanisms that, resting on various political pressures, support the world economy. These are proving incapable either of remedying the unjust social situations inherited from the past or of dealing with the urgent challenges and ethical demands of the present. By submitting man to tensions created by himself, dilapidating at an accelerated pace material and energy resources, and compromising the geophysical environment, these structures unceasingly make the areas of misery spread, accompanied by anguish, frustration and bitterness¹⁰⁶.

We have before us here a great drama that can leave nobody indifferent. The person who, on the one hand, is trying to draw the maximum profit and, on the other hand, is paying the price in damage and injury is always man. The drama is made still worse by the presence close at hand of the privileged social classes and of the rich countries, which accumulate goods to an excessive degree and the misuse of whose riches very often becomes the cause of various ills. Add to this the fever of inflation and the plague of unemployment -these are further symptoms of the moral disorder that is being noticed in the world situation and therefore requires daring creative resolves in keeping with man's authentic dignity¹⁰⁷.

Such a task is not an impossible one. The principle of solidarity, in a wide sense, must inspire the effective search for appropriate institutions and mechanisms, whether in the sector of trade, where the laws of healthy competition must be allowed to lead the way, or on the level of a wider and more immediate redistribution of riches and of control over them, in order that the economically developing peoples may be able not only to satisfy their essential needs but also to advance gradually and effectively.

This difficult road of the indispensable transformation of the structures of economic life is one on which it will not be easy to go forward without the intervention of a true conversion of mind, will and heart. The task requires resolute commitment by individuals and peoples that are free and linked in solidarity. All too often freedom is confused with the instinct for individual or collective interest or with the instinct for combat and domination, whatever be the ideological colours with which they are covered. Obviously these instincts exist and are operative, but no truly human economy will be possible unless they are taken up, directed and dominated by the deepest powers in man, which decide the true culture of peoples. These are the very sources for the effort which will express man's true freedom and which will be capable of ensuring it in the economic field also. Economic development, with every factor in its adequate functioning, must be constantly programmed and realized within a perspective of universal joint development of each individual and people, as was convincingly recalled by my Predecessor Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*. Otherwise, the category of "economic progress" becomes in isolation a superior category subordinating the whole of human existence to its partial demands, suffocating man, breaking up society, and ending by entangling itself in its own tensions and excesses.

It is possible to undertake this duty. This is testified by the certain facts and the results, which it would be difficult to mention more analytically here. However, one thing is certain: at the basis of this gigantic sector it is necessary to establish, accept and deepen the sense of moral responsibility, which man must undertake. Again and always man.

This responsibility becomes especially evident for us Christians when we recall-and we should always recall it-the scene of the last judgment according to the words of Christ related in Matthew's Gospel¹⁰⁸.

This eschatological scene must always be "applied" to man's history; it must always be made the "measure" for human acts as an essential outline for an examination of conscience by each and every one: "I was hungry and you gave me no food... naked and you did not clothe me... in prison and you did not visit me"¹⁰⁹. These words become charged with even stronger warning, when we think that, instead of bread and cultural aid, the new States and nations awakening to

independent life are being offered, sometimes in abundance, modern weapons and means of destruction placed at the service of armed conflicts and wars that are not so much a requirement for defending their just rights and their sovereignty but rather a form of chauvinism, imperialism, and neocolonialism of one kind or another. We all know well that the areas of misery and hunger on our globe could have been made fertile in a short time, if the gigantic investments for armaments at the service of war and destruction had been changed into investments for food at the service of life.

This consideration will perhaps remain in part an "abstract" one. It will perhaps offer both "sides" an occasion for mutual accusation, each forgetting its own faults. It will perhaps provoke new accusations against the Church. The Church, however, which has no weapons at her disposal apart from those of the spirit, of the word and of love, cannot renounce her proclamation of "the word... in season and out of season"¹¹⁰. For this reason she does not cease to implore each side of the two and to beg everybody in the name of God and in the name of man: Do not kill! Do not prepare destruction and extermination for men! Think of your brothers and sisters who are suffering hunger and misery! Respect each one's dignity and freedom!

17. Human rights: "letter" or "spirit"

This century has so far been a century of great calamities for man, of great devastations, not only material ones but also moral ones, indeed perhaps above all moral ones. Admittedly it is not easy to compare one age or one century with another under this aspect, since that depends also on changing historical standards. Nevertheless, without applying these comparisons, one still cannot fail to see that this century has so far been one in which people have provided many injustices and sufferings for themselves. Has this process been decisively curbed? In any case, we cannot fail to recall at this point, with esteem and profound hope for the future, the magnificent effort made to give life to the United Nations Organization, an effort conducive to the definition and establishment of man's objective and inviolable rights, with the member States obliging each other to observe them rigorously. This commitment has been accepted and ratified by almost all present-day States, and this should constitute a guarantee that human rights will become throughout the world a fundamental principle of work for man's welfare.

There is no need for the Church to confirm how closely this problem is linked with her mission in the modern world. Indeed it is at the very basis of social and international peace, as has been declared by John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, and later Paul VI, in detailed documents. After all, peace comes down to respect for man's inviolable rights-*Opus iustitiae pax*-while war springs from the violation of these rights and brings with it still graver violations of them. If human rights are violated in time of peace, this is particularly painful and from the point of view of progress it represents an incomprehensible manifestation of activity directed against man, which can in no way be reconciled with any programme that describes itself as "humanistic". And what social, economic, political or cultural programme could renounce this description? We are firmly convinced that there is no programme in today's world in which man is not invariably brought to the fore, even when the platforms of the programmes are made up of conflicting ideologies concerning the way of conceiving the world.

If, in spite of these premises, human rights are being violated in various ways, if in practice we see before us concentration camps, violence, torture, terrorism, and discrimination in many forms, this must then be the consequence of the other premises, undermining and often almost annihilating the effectiveness of the humanistic premises of these modern programmes and systems. This necessarily imposes the duty to submit these programmes to continual revision from the point of view of the objective and inviolable rights of man.

The Declaration of Human Rights linked with the setting up of the United Nations Organization certainly had as its aim not only to depart from the horrible experiences of the last world war but also to create the basis for continual revision of programmes, systems and regimes precisely from this single fundamental point of view, namely the welfare of man-or, let us say, of the person in the community-which must, as a fundamental factor in the common good, constitute the essential criterion for all programmes, systems and regimes. If the opposite happens, human life is, even in time of peace, condemned to various sufferings and, along with these sufferings, there is a development of various forms of domination, totalitarianism, neocolonialism and imperialism, which are a threat also to the harmonious living together of the nations. Indeed, it is a significant fact, repeatedly confirmed by the experiences of history, that violation of the rights of man goes hand in hand with violation of the rights of the nation, with which man is united by organic links as with a larger family.

Already in the first half of this century, when various State totalitarianisms were developing, which, as is well known, led to the horrible catastrophe of war, the Church clearly outlined her position with regard to these regimes that to all appearances were acting for a higher good, namely the good of the State, while history was to show instead that the good in question was only that of a certain party, which had been identified with the State¹¹¹. In reality, those regimes had restricted the rights of the citizens, denying them recognition precisely of those inviolable human rights that have reached formulation on the international level in the middle of our century. While sharing the joy of all people of good will, of all people who truly love justice and peace, at this conquest, the Church, aware that the "letter" on its own can kill, while only "the spirit gives life"¹¹², must continually ask, together with these people of good will, whether the Declaration of Human Rights and the acceptance of their "letter" mean everywhere also the actualization of their

"spirit". Indeed, well founded fears arise that very often we are still far from this actualization and that at times the spirit of social and public life is painfully opposed to the declared "letter" of human rights. This state of things, which is burdensome for the societies concerned, would place special responsibility towards these societies and the history of man on those contributing to its establishment.

The essential sense of the State, as a political community, consists in that the society and people composing it are master and sovereign of their own destiny. This sense remains unrealized if, instead of the exercise of power with the moral participation of the society or people, what we see is the imposition of power by a certain group upon all the other members of the society. This is essential in the present age, with its enormous increase in people's social awareness and the accompanying need for the citizens to have a right share in the political life of the community, while taking account of the real conditions of each people and the necessary vigour of public authority¹¹³. These therefore are questions of primary importance from the point of view of the progress of man himself and the overall development of his humanity.

The Church has always taught the duty to act for the common good and, in so doing, has likewise educated good citizens for each State. Furthermore, she has always taught that the fundamental duty of power is solicitude for the common good of society; this is what gives power its fundamental rights. Precisely in the name of these premises of the objective ethical order, the rights of power can only be understood on the basis of respect for the objective and inviolable rights of man. The common good that authority in the State serves is brought to full realization only when all the citizens are sure of their rights. The lack of this leads to the dissolution of society, opposition by citizens to authority, or a situation of oppression, intimidation, violence, and terrorism, of which many examples have been provided by the totalitarianisms of this century. Thus the principle of human rights is of profound concern to the area of social justice and is the measure by which it can be tested in the life of political bodies.

These rights are rightly reckoned to include the right to religious freedom together with the right to freedom of conscience. The Second Vatican Council considered especially necessary the preparation of a fairly long declaration on this subject. This is the document called *Dignitatis Humanae*, ¹¹⁴ in which is expressed not only the theological concept of the question but also the concept reached from the point of view of natural law, that is to say from the "purely human" position, on the basis of the premises given by man's own experience, his reason and his sense of human dignity. Certainly the curtailment of the religious freedom of individuals and communities is not only a painful experience but it is above all an attack on man's very dignity, independently of the religion professed or of the concept of the world which these individuals and communities have. The curtailment and violation of religious freedom are in contrast with man's dignity and his objective rights. The Council document mentioned above states clearly enough what that curtailment or violation of religious freedom is. In this case we are undoubtedly confronted with a radical injustice with regard to what is particularly deep within man, what is authentically human. Indeed, even the phenomenon of unbelief, a-religiousness and atheism, as a human phenomenon, is understood only in relation to the phenomenon of religion and faith. It is therefore difficult, even from a "purely human" point of view, to accept a position that gives only atheism the right of citizenship in public and social life, while believers are, as though by principle, barely tolerated or are treated as second-class citizens or are even-and this has already happened- entirely deprived of the rights of citizenship.

Even if briefly, this subject must also be dealt with, because it too enters into the complex of man's situations in the present-day world and because it too gives evidence of the degree to which this situation is overburdened by prejudices and injustices of various kinds. If we refrain from entering into details in this field in which we would have a special right and duty to do so, it is above all because, together with all those who are suffering the torments of discrimination and persecution for the name of God, we are guided by faith in the redeeming power of the Cross of Christ. However, because of my office, I appeal in the name of all believers throughout the world to those on whom the organization of social and public life in some way depends, earnestly requesting them to respect the rights of religion and of the Church's activity. No privilege is asked for, but only respect for an elementary right. Actuation of this right is one of the fundamental tests of man's authentic progress in any regime, in any society, system or milieu.

IV. THE CHURCH'S MISSION AND MAN'S DESTINY

18. The Church as concerned for man's vocation in Christ

This necessarily brief look at man's situation in the modern world makes us direct our thoughts and our hearts to Jesus Christ, and to the mystery of the Redemption, in which the question of man is inscribed with a special vigour of truth and love. If Christ "united himself with each man"¹¹⁵, the Church lives more profoundly her own nature and mission by penetrating into the depths of this mystery and into its rich universal language. It was not without reason that the Apostle speaks of Christ's Body, the Church¹¹⁶. If this Mystical Body of Christ is God's People -as the Second Vatican Council was to say later on the basis of the whole of the Biblical and patristic tradition-this means that in it each man receives within himself that breath of life that comes from Christ. In this way, turning to man and his real problems, his hopes and sufferings, his achievements and falls-this too also makes the Church as a body, an organism, a social unit perceive the same divine influences, the light and strength of the Spirit that come from the crucified and risen Christ, and it is for this very reason that she lives her life. The Church has only one life: that which

is given her by her Spouse and Lord. Indeed, precisely because Christ united himself with her in his mystery of Redemption, the Church must be strongly united with each man.

This union of Christ with man is in itself a mystery. From the mystery is born "the new man", called to become a partaker of God's life¹¹⁷, and newly created in Christ for the fullness of grace and truth¹¹⁸. Christ's union with man is power and the source of power, as Saint John stated so incisively in the prologue of his Gospel: "(The Word) gave power to become children of God"¹¹⁹. Man is transformed inwardly by this power as the source of a new life that does not disappear and pass away but lasts to eternal life¹²⁰. This life, which the Father has promised and offered to each man in Jesus Christ, his eternal and only Son, who, "when the time had fully come"¹²¹, became incarnate and was born of the Virgin Mary, is the final fulfilment of man's vocation. It is in a way the fulfilment of the "destiny" that God has prepared for him from eternity. This "divine destiny" is advancing, in spite of all the enigmas, the unsolved riddles, the twists and turns of "human destiny" in the world of time. Indeed, while all this, in spite of all the riches of life in time, necessarily and inevitably leads to the frontier of death and the goal of the destruction of the human body, beyond that goal we see Christ. "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me... shall never die"¹²². In Jesus Christ, who was crucified and laid in the tomb and then rose again, "our hope of resurrection dawned... the bright promise of immortality"¹²³, on the way to which man, through the death of the body, shares with the whole of visible creation the necessity to which matter is subject. We intend and are trying to fathom ever more deeply the language of the truth that man's Redeemer enshrined in the phrase "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail"¹²⁴. In spite of appearances, these words express the highest affirmation of man—the affirmation of the body given life by the Spirit.

The Church lives these realities, she lives by this truth about man, which enables him to go beyond the bounds of temporariness and at the same time to think with particular love and solicitude of everything within the dimensions of this temporariness that affect man's life and the life of the human spirit, in which is expressed that never-ending restlessness referred to in the words of Saint Augustine: "You made us for yourself, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you"¹²⁵. In this creative restlessness beats and pulsates what is most deeply human—the search for truth, the insatiable need for the good, hunger for freedom, nostalgia for the beautiful, and the voice of conscience. Seeking to see man as it were with "the eyes of Christ himself", the Church becomes more and more aware that she is the guardian of a great treasure, which she may not waste but must continually increase. Indeed, the Lord Jesus said: "He who does not gather with me scatters"¹²⁶. This treasure of humanity enriched by the inexpressible mystery of divine filiation¹²⁷ and by the grace of "adoption as sons"¹²⁸ in the Only Son of God, through whom we call God "Abba, Father"¹²⁹, is also a powerful force unifying the Church above all inwardly and giving meaning to all her activity. Through this force the Church is united with the Spirit of Christ, that Holy Spirit promised and continually communicated by the Redeemer and whose descent, which was revealed on the day of Pentecost, endures for ever. Thus the powers of the Spirit¹³⁰, the gifts of the Spirit¹³¹, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit¹³² are revealed in men. The present-day Church seems to repeat with ever greater fervour and with holy insistence: "Come, Holy Spirit!". Come! Come! "Heal our wounds, our strength renew; On our dryness pour your dew; Wash the stains of guilt away; Bend the stubborn heart and will; Melt the frozen, warm the chill; Guide the steps that go astray"¹³³.

This appeal to the Spirit, intended precisely to obtain the Spirit, is the answer to all the "materialisms" of our age. It is these materialisms that give birth to so many forms of insatiability in the human heart. This appeal is making itself heard on various sides and seems to be bearing fruit also in different ways. Can it be said that the Church is not alone in making this appeal? Yes it can, because the "need" for what is spiritual is expressed also by people who are outside the visible confines of the Church¹³⁴. Is not this confirmed by the truth concerning the Church that the recent Council so acutely emphasized at the point in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* where it teaches that the Church is a "sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind?"¹³⁵. This invocation addressed to the Spirit to obtain the Spirit is really a constant self-insertion into the full magnitude of the mystery of the Redemption, in which Christ, united with the Father and with each man, continually communicates to us the Spirit who places within us the sentiments of the Son and directs us towards the Father¹³⁶. This is why the Church of our time—a time particularly hungry for the Spirit, because it is hungry for justice, peace, love, goodness, fortitude, responsibility, and human dignity—must concentrate and gather around that Mystery, finding in it the light and the strength that are indispensable for her mission. For if, as was already said, man is the way for the Church's daily life, the Church must be always aware of the dignity of the divine adoption received by man in Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit¹³⁷ and of his destination to grace and glory¹³⁸. By reflecting ever anew on all this, and by accepting it with a faith that is more and more aware and a love that is more and more firm, the Church also makes herself better fitted for the service to man to which Christ the Lord calls her when he says: "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve"¹³⁹. The Church performs this ministry by sharing in the "triple office" belonging to her Master and Redeemer. This teaching, with its Biblical foundation, was brought fully to the fore by the Second Vatican Council, to the great advantage of the Church's life. For when we become aware that we share in Christ's triple mission, his triple office as priest, as prophet and as king¹⁴⁰, we also become more aware of what must receive service from the whole of the Church as the society and community of the People of God on earth, and we likewise understand how each one of us must share in this mission and service.

In the light of the sacred teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the Church thus appears before us as the social subject of responsibility for divine truth. With deep emotion we hear Christ himself saying: "The word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me"¹⁴¹. In this affirmation by our Master do we not notice responsibility for the revealed truth, which is the "property" of God himself, since even he, "the only Son", who lives "in the bosom of the Father"¹⁴², when transmitting that truth as a prophet and teacher, feels the need to stress that he is acting in full fidelity to its divine source? The same fidelity must be a constitutive quality of the Church's faith, both when she is teaching it and when she is professing it. Faith as a specific supernatural virtue infused into the human spirit makes us sharers in knowledge of God as a response to his revealed word. Therefore it is required, when the Church professes and teaches the faith, that she should adhere strictly to divine truth¹⁴³, and should translate it into living attitudes of "obedience in harmony with reason"¹⁴⁴. Christ himself, concerned for this fidelity to divine truth, promised the Church the special assistance of the Spirit of truth, gave the gift of infallibility¹⁴⁵ to those whom he entrusted with the mandate of transmitting and teaching that truth¹⁴⁶-as has besides been clearly defined by the First Vatican Council¹⁴⁷ and has then been repeated by the Second Vatican Council¹⁴⁸-and he furthermore endowed the whole of the People of God with a special sense of the faith¹⁴⁹.

Consequently, we have become sharers in this mission of the prophet Christ, and in virtue of that mission we together with him are serving divine truth in the Church. Being responsible for that truth also means loving it and seeking the most exact understanding of it, in order to bring it closer to ourselves and others in all its saving power, its splendour and its profundity joined with simplicity. This love and this aspiration to understand the truth must go hand in hand, as is confirmed by the histories of the saints in the Church. These received most brightly the authentic light that illuminates divine truth and brings close God's very reality, because they approached this truth with veneration and love-love in the first place for Christ, the living Word of divine truth, and then love for his human expression in the Gospel, tradition and theology. Today we still need above all that understanding and interpretation of God's Word; we need that theology. Theology has always had and continues to have great importance for the Church, the People of God, to be able to share creatively and fruitfully in Christ's mission as prophet. Therefore, when theologians, as servants of divine truth, dedicate their studies and labours to ever deeper understanding of that truth, they can never lose sight of the meaning of their service in the Church, which is enshrined in the concept *intellectus fidei*. This concept has, so to speak, a two-way function, in line with Saint Augustine's expression: *intellege, ut credas-crede, ut intellegas*,¹⁵⁰ and it functions correctly when they seek to serve the Magisterium, which in the Church is entrusted to the Bishops joined by the bond of hierarchical communion with Peter's Successor, when they place themselves at the service of their solicitude in teaching and giving pastoral care, and when they place themselves at the service of the apostolic commitments of the whole of the People of God.

As in preceding ages, and perhaps more than in preceding ages, theologians and all men of learning in the Church are today called to unite faith with learning and wisdom, in order to help them to combine with each other, as we read in the prayer in the liturgy of the memorial of Saint Albert, Doctor of the Church. This task has grown enormously today because of the advance of human learning, its methodology, and the achievements in knowledge of the world and of man. This concerns both the exact sciences and the human sciences, as well as philosophy, which, as the Second Vatican Council recalled, is closely linked with theology¹⁵¹.

In this field of human knowledge, which is continually being broadened and yet differentiated, faith too must be investigated deeply, manifesting the magnitude of revealed mystery and tending towards an understanding of truth, which has in God its one supreme source. If it is permissible and even desirable that the enormous work to be done in this direction should take into consideration a certain pluralism of methodology, the work cannot however depart from the fundamental unity in the teaching of Faith and Morals which is that work's end. Accordingly, close collaboration by theology with the Magisterium is indispensable. Every theologian must be particularly aware of what Christ himself stated when he said: "The word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me"¹⁵². Nobody, therefore, can make of theology as it were a simple collection of his own personal ideas, but everybody must be aware of being in close union with the mission of teaching truth for which the Church is responsible.

The sharing in the prophetic office of Christ himself shapes the life of the whole of the Church in her fundamental dimension. A particular share in this office belongs to the Pastors of the Church, who teach and continually and in various ways proclaim and transmit the doctrine concerning the Christian faith and morals. This teaching, both in its missionary and its ordinary aspect, helps to assemble the People of God around Christ, prepares for participation in the Eucharist and points out the ways for sacramental life. In 1977 the Synod of the Bishops dedicated special attention to catechesis in the modern world, and the mature results of its deliberations, experiences and suggestions will shortly find expression-in keeping with the proposal made by the participants in the Synod-in a special papal document. Catechesis certainly constitutes a permanent and also fundamental form of activity by the Church, one in which her prophetic charism is manifested: witnessing and teaching go hand in hand. And although here we are speaking in the first place of priests, it is however impossible not to mention also the great number of men and women religious dedicating themselves to catechetical activity for love of the divine Master. Finally, it would be difficult not to mention the many lay people who find expression in this activity for their faith and their apostolic responsibility.

Furthermore, increasing care must be taken that the various forms of catechesis and its various fields—beginning with the fundamental field, family catechesis, that is the catechesis by parents of their children—should give evidence of the universal sharing by the whole of the People of God in the prophetic office of Christ himself. Linked with this fact, the Church's responsibility for divine truth must be increasingly shared in various ways by all. What shall we say at this point with regard to the specialists in the various disciplines, those who represent the natural sciences and letters, doctors, jurists, artists and technicians, teachers at various levels and with different specializations? As members of the People of God, they all have their own part to play in Christ's prophetic mission and service of divine truth, among other ways by an honest attitude towards truth, whatever field it may belong to, while educating others in truth and teaching them to mature in love and justice. Thus, a sense of responsibility for truth is one of the fundamental points of encounter between the Church and each man and also one of the fundamental demands determining man's vocation in the community of the Church. The present-day Church, guided by a sense of responsibility for truth, must persevere in fidelity to her own nature, which involves the prophetic mission that comes from Christ himself: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you... Receive the Holy Spirit"¹⁵³.

20. Eucharist and Penance

In the mystery of the Redemption, that is to say in Jesus Christ's saving work, the Church not only shares in the Gospel of her Master through fidelity to the word and service of truth, but she also shares, through a submission filled with hope and love, in the power of his redeeming action expressed and enshrined by him in a sacramental form, especially in the Eucharist¹⁵⁴. The Eucharist is the centre and summit of the whole of sacramental life, through which each Christian receives the saving power of the Redemption, beginning with the mystery of Baptism, in which we are buried into the death of Christ, in order to become sharers in his Resurrection¹⁵⁵, as the Apostle teaches. In the light of this teaching, we see still more clearly the reason why the entire sacramental life of the Church and of each Christian reaches its summit and fullness in the Eucharist. For by Christ's will there is in this Sacrament a continual renewing of the mystery of the Sacrifice of himself that Christ offered to the Father on the altar of the Cross, a Sacrifice that the Father accepted, giving, in return for this total self-giving by his Son, who "became obedient unto death"¹⁵⁶, his own paternal gift, that is to say the grant of new immortal life in the resurrection, since the Father is the first source and the giver of life from the beginning. That new life, which involves the bodily glorification of the crucified Christ, became an efficacious sign of the new gift granted to humanity, the gift that is the Holy Spirit, through whom the divine life that the Father has in himself and gives to his Son¹⁵⁷ is communicated to all men who are united with Christ.

The Eucharist is the most perfect Sacrament of this union. By celebrating and also partaking of the Eucharist we unite ourselves with Christ on earth and in heaven who intercedes for us with the Father¹⁵⁸ but we always do so through the redeeming act of his Sacrifice, through which he has redeemed us, so that we have been "bought with a price"¹⁵⁹. The "price" of our redemption is likewise a further proof of the value that God himself sets on man and of our dignity in Christ. For by becoming "children of God"¹⁶⁰, adopted sons¹⁶¹, we also become in his likeness "a kingdom and priests" and obtain "a royal priesthood"¹⁶², that is to say we share in that unique and irreversible restoration of man and the world to the Father that was carried out once for all by him, who is both the eternal Son¹⁶³ and also true Man. The Eucharist is the Sacrament in which our new being is most completely expressed and in which Christ himself unceasingly and in an ever new manner "bears witness" in the Holy Spirit to our spirit¹⁶⁴ that each of us, as a sharer in the mystery of the Redemption, has access to the fruits of the filial reconciliation with God¹⁶⁵ that he himself actuated and continually actuates among us by means of the Church's ministry.

It is an essential truth, not only of doctrine but also of life, that the Eucharist builds the Church¹⁶⁶, building it as the authentic community of the People of God, as the assembly of the faithful, bearing the same mark of unity that was shared by the Apostles and the first disciples of the Lord. The Eucharist builds ever anew this community and unity, ever building and regenerating it on the basis of the Sacrifice of Christ, since it commemorates his death on the Cross¹⁶⁷, the price by which he redeemed us. Accordingly, in the Eucharist we touch in a way the very mystery of the Body and Blood of the Lord, as is attested by the very words used at its institution, the words that, because of that institution, have become the words with which those called to this ministry in the Church unceasingly celebrate the Eucharist.

The Church lives by the Eucharist, by the fullness of this Sacrament, the stupendous content and meaning of which have often been expressed in the Church's Magisterium from the most distant times down to our own days¹⁶⁸. However, we can say with certainty that, although this teaching is sustained by the acuteness of theologians, by men of deep faith and prayer, and by ascetics and mystics, in complete fidelity to the Eucharistic mystery, it still reaches no more than the threshold, since it is incapable of grasping and translating into words what the Eucharist is in all its fullness, what is expressed by it and what is actuated by it. Indeed, the Eucharist is the ineffable Sacrament! The essential commitment and, above all, the visible grace and source of supernatural strength for the Church as the People of God is to persevere and advance constantly in Eucharistic life and Eucharistic piety and to develop spiritually in the climate of the Eucharist. With all the greater reason, then, it is not permissible for us, in thought, life or action, to take away from this truly most holy Sacrament its full magnitude and its essential meaning. It is at one and the same time a Sacrifice-Sacrament, a Communion-Sacrament, and a Presence-Sacrament And, although it is true that the Eucharist

always was and must continue to be the most profound revelation of the human brotherhood of Christ's disciples and confessors, it cannot be treated merely as an "occasion" for manifesting this brotherhood. When celebrating the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the full magnitude of the divine mystery must be respected, as must the full meaning of this sacramental sign in which Christ is really present and is received, the soul is filled with grace and the pledge of future glory is given¹⁶⁹.

This is the source of the duty to carry out rigorously the liturgical rules and everything that is a manifestation of community worship offered to God himself, all the more so because in this sacramental sign he entrusts himself to us with limitless trust, as if not taking into consideration our human weakness, our unworthiness, the force of habit, routine, or even the possibility of insult. Every member of the Church, especially Bishops and Priests, must be vigilant in seeing that this Sacrament of love shall be at the centre of the life of the People of God, so that through all the manifestations of worship due to it Christ shall be given back «love for love "and truly become "the life of our souls"¹⁷⁰. Nor can we, on the other hand, ever forget the following words of Saint Paul: "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup"¹⁷¹.

This call by the Apostle indicates at least indirectly the close link between the Eucharist and Penance.

Indeed, if the first word of Christ's teaching, the first phrase of the Gospel Good News, was "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (metanoete), ¹⁷² the Sacrament of the Passion, Cross and Resurrection seems to strengthen and consolidate in an altogether special way this call in our souls. The Eucharist and Penance thus become in a sense two closely connected dimensions of authentic life in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel, of truly Christian life. The Christ who calls to the Eucharistic banquet is always the same Christ who exhorts us to penance and repeats his "Repent"¹⁷³. Without this constant ever renewed endeavour for conversion, partaking of the Eucharist would lack its full redeeming effectiveness and there would be a loss or at least a weakening of the special readiness to offer God the spiritual sacrifice¹⁷⁴ in which our sharing in the priesthood of Christ is expressed in an essential and universal manner. In Christ, priesthood is linked with his Sacrifice, his selfgiving to the Father; and, precisely because it is without limit, that self-giving gives rise in us human beings subject to numerous limitations to the need to turn to God in an ever more mature way and with a constant, ever more profound, conversion.

In the last years much has been done to highlight in the Church's practice-in conformity with the most ancient tradition of the Church- he community aspect of penance and especially of the sacrament of Penance. We cannot however forget that conversion is a particularly profound inward act in which the individual cannot be replaced by others and cannot make the community be a substitute for him. Although the participation by the fraternal community of the faithful in the penitential celebration is a great help for the act of personal conversion, nevertheless, in the final analysis, it is necessary that in this act there should be a pronouncement by the individual himself with the whole depth of his conscience and with the whole of his sense of guilt and of trust in God, placing himself like the Psalmist before God to confess: "Against you... have I sinned"¹⁷⁵. In faithfully observing the centuries-old practice of the Sacrament of Penance-the practice of individual confession.with a personal act of sorrow and the intention to amend and make satisfaction-the Church is therefore defending the human soul's individual right: man's right to a more personal encounter with the crucified forgiving Christ, with Christ saying, through the minister of the sacrament of Reconciliation: "Your sins are forgiven"¹⁷⁶; "Go, and do not sin again"¹⁷⁷. As is evident, this is also a right on Christ's part with regard to every human being redeemed by him: his right to meet each one of us in that key moment in the soul's life constituted by the moment of conversion and forgiveness. By guarding the sacrament of Penance, the Church expressly affirms her faith in the mystery of the Redemption as a living and life-giving reality that fits in with man's inward truth, with human guilt and also with the desires of the human conscience. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"¹⁷⁸. The sacrament of Penance is the means to satisfy man with the righteousness that comes from the Redeemer himself.

In the Church, gathering particularly today in a special way around the Eucharist and desiring that the authentic Eucharistic community should become a sign of the gradually maturing unity of all Christians, there must a lively-felt need for penance, both in its sacramental aspect¹⁷⁹, and in what concerns penance as a virtue. This second aspect was expressed by Paul VI in the Apostolic Constitution Paenitemini¹⁸⁰. One of the Church's tasks is to put into practice the teaching Paenitemini contains; this subject must be investigated more deeply by us in common reflection, and many more decisions must be made about it in a spirit of pastoral collegiality and with respect for the different traditions in this regard and the different circumstances of the lives of the people of today. Nevertheless, it is certain that the Church of the new Advent, the Church that is continually preparing for the new coming of the Lord, must be the Church of the Eucharist and of Penance. Only when viewed in this spiritual aspect of her life and activity is she seen to be the Church of the divine mission, the Church in statu missionis, as the Second Vatican Council has shown her to be.

21. The Christian vocation to service and kingship

In building up from the very foundations the picture of the Church as the People of God-by showing the threefold mission of Christ himself, through participation in which we become truly God's People-the Second Vatican Council] highlighted, among other characteristics of the Christian vocation, the one that can be described as "kingly". To present all the riches of the Council's teaching we would here have to make reference to numerous chapters and paragraphs of

the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and of many other documents by the Council. However, one element seems to stand out in the midst of all these riches: the sharing in Christ's kingly mission, that is to say the fact of rediscovering in oneself and others the special dignity of our vocation that can be described as "kingship". This dignity is expressed in readiness to serve, in keeping with the example of Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve"¹⁸¹. If, in the light of this attitude of Christ's, "being a king" is truly possible only by "being a servant" then "being a servant" also demands so much spiritual maturity that it must really be described as "being a king". In order to be able to serve others worthily and effectively we must be able to master ourselves, possess the virtues that make this mastery possible. Our sharing in Christ's kingly mission-his "kingly function" (*munus*) is closely linked with every sphere of both Christian and human morality.

In presenting the complete picture of the People of God and recalling the place among that people held not only by priests but also by the laity, not only by the representatives of the Hierarchy but also by those of the Institutes of Consecrated Life, the Second Vatican Council did not deduce this picture merely from a sociological premise. The Church as a human society can of course be examined and described according to the categories used by the sciences with regard to any human society. But these categories are not enough. For the whole of the community of the People of God and for each member of it what is in question is not just a specific "social membership"; rather, for each and every one what is essential is a particular "vocation". Indeed, the Church as the People of God is also-according to the teaching of Saint Paul mentioned above, of which Pius XII reminded us in wonderful terms-"Christ's Mystical Body"¹⁸². Membership in that body has for its source a particular call, united with the saving action of grace. Therefore, if we wish to keep in mind this community of the People of God, which is so vast and so extremely differentiated, we must see first and foremost Christ saying in a way to each member of the community: "Follow me"¹⁸³. It is the community of the disciples, each of whom in a different way -at times very consciously and consistently, at other times not very consciously and very inconsistently-is following Christ. This shows also the deeply "personal" aspect and dimension of this society, which, in spite of all the deficiencies of its community life-in the human meaning of this word-is a community precisely because all its members form it together with Christ himself, at least because they bear in their souls the indelible mark of a Christian.

The Second Vatican Council devoted very special attention to showing how this "ontological" community of disciples and confessors must increasingly become, even from the "human" point of view, a community aware of its own life and activity. The initiatives taken by the Council in this field have been followed up by the many further initiatives of a synodal, apostolic and organizational kind. We must however always keep in mind the truth that every initiative serves true renewal in the Church and helps to bring the authentic light that is Christ¹⁸⁴ insofar as the initiative is based on adequate awareness of the individual Christian's vocation and of responsibility for this singular, unique and unrepeatable grace by which each Christian in the community of the People of God builds up the Body of Christ. This principle, the key rule for the whole of Christian practice-apostolic and pastoral practice, practice of interior and of social life-must with due proportion be applied to the whole of humanity and to each human being. The Pope too and every Bishop must apply this principle to himself. Priests and religious must be faithful to this principle. It is the basis on which their lives must be built by married people, parents, and women and men of different conditions and professions, from those who occupy the highest posts in society to those who perform the simplest tasks. It is precisely the principle of the "kingly service" that imposes on each one of us, in imitation of Christ's example, the duty to demand of himself exactly what we have been called to, what we have personally obliged ourselves to by God's grace, in order to respond to our vocation. This fidelity to the vocation received from God through Christ involves the joint responsibility for the Church for which the Second Vatican Council wishes to educate all Christians. Indeed, in the Church as the community of the People of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit's working, each member has "his own special gift", as Saint Paul teaches¹⁸⁵. Although this "gift" is a personal vocation and a form of participation in the Church's saving work, it also serves others builds the Church and the fraternal communities in the various spheres of human life on earth.

Fidelity to one's vocation, that is to say persevering readiness for "kingly service", has particular significance for these many forms of building, especially with regard to the more exigent tasks, which have more influence on the life of our neighbour and of the whole of society. Married people must be distinguished for fidelity to their vocation, as is demanded by the indissoluble nature of the sacramental institution of marriage. Priests must be distinguished for a similar fidelity to their vocation, in view of the indelible character that the sacrament of Orders stamps on their souls. In receiving this sacrament, we in the Latin Church knowingly and freely commit ourselves to live in celibacy, and each one of us must therefore do all he can, with God's grace, to be thankful for this gift and faithful to the bond that he has accepted for ever. He must do so as married people must, for they must endeavour with all their strength to persevere in their matrimonial union, building up the family community through this witness of love and educating new generations of men and women, capable in their turn of dedicating the whole of their lives to their vocation, that is to say to the "kingly service" of which Jesus Christ has offered us the example and the most beautiful model. His Church, made up of all of us, is "for men" in the sense that, by basing ourselves on Christ's example¹⁸⁶ and collaborating with the grace that he has gained for us, we are able to attain to "being kings", that is to say we are able to produce a mature humanity in each one of us. Mature humanity means full use of the gift of freedom received from the Creator when he called to existence the man made "in his image, after his likeness". This gift finds its full realization in the unreserved giving of

the whole of one's human person, in a spirit of the love of a spouse, to Christ and, with Christ, to all those to whom he sends men and women totally consecrated to him in accordance with the evangelical counsels. This is the ideal of the religious life, which has been undertaken by the Orders and Congregations both ancient and recent, and by the Secular Institutes.

Nowadays it is sometimes held, though wrongly, that freedom is an end in itself, that each human being is free when he makes use of freedom as he wishes, and that this must be our aim in the lives of individuals and societies. In reality, freedom is a great gift only when we know how to use it consciously for everything that is our true good. Christ teaches us that the best use of freedom is charity, which takes concrete form in self-giving and in service. For this "freedom Christ has set us free"¹⁸⁷ and ever continues to set us free. The Church draws from this source the unceasing inspiration, the call and the drive for her mission and her service among all mankind. The full truth about human freedom is indelibly inscribed on the mystery of the Redemption. The Church truly serves mankind when she guards this truth with untiring attention, fervent love and mature commitment and when in the whole of her own community she transmits it and gives it concrete form in human life through each Christian's fidelity to his vocation. This confirms what we have already referred to, namely that man is and always becomes the "way" for the Church's daily life.

22. The Mother in whom we trust

When therefore at the beginning of the new pontificate I turn my thoughts and my heart to the Redeemer of man, I thereby wish to enter and penetrate into the deepest rhythm of the Church's life. Indeed, if the Church lives her life, she does so because she draws it from Christ, and he always wishes but one thing, namely that we should have life and have it abundantly¹⁸⁸. This fullness of life in him is at the same time for man. Therefore the Church, uniting herself with all the riches of the mystery of the Redemption, becomes the Church of living people, living because given life from within by the working of "the Spirit of truth"¹⁸⁹ and visited by the love that the Holy Spirit has poured into our hearts¹⁹⁰. The aim of any service in the Church, whether the service is apostolic, pastoral, priestly or episcopal, is to keep up this dynamic link between the mystery of the Redemption and every man.

If we are aware of this task, then we seem to understand better what it means to say that the Church is a mother¹⁹¹ and also what it means to say that the Church always, and particularly at our time, has need of a Mother. We owe a debt of special gratitude to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, who expressed this truth in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* with the rich Mariological doctrine contained in it¹⁹². Since Paul VI, inspired by that teaching, proclaimed the Mother of Christ "Mother of the Church"¹⁹³, and that title has become known far and wide, may it be permitted to his unworthy Successor to turn to Mary as Mother of the Church at the close of these reflections which it was opportune to make at the beginning of his papal service. Mary is Mother of the Church because, on account of the Eternal Father's ineffable choice¹⁹⁴ and due to the Spirit of Love's special action¹⁹⁵, she gave human life to the Son of God, "for whom and by whom all things exist"¹⁹⁶ and from whom the whole of the People of God receives the grace and dignity of election. Her Son explicitly extended his Mother's maternity in a way that could easily be understood by every soul and every heart by designating, when he was raised on the Cross, his beloved disciple as her son¹⁹⁷. The Holy Spirit inspired her to remain in the Upper Room, after our Lord's Ascension, recollected in prayer and expectation, together with the Apostles, until the day of Pentecost, when the Church was to be born in visible form, coming forth from darkness¹⁹⁸. Later, all the generations of disciples, of those who confess and love Christ, like the Apostle John, spiritually took this Mother to their own homes¹⁹⁹, and she was thus included in the history of salvation and in the Church's mission from the very beginning, that is from the moment of the Annunciation. Accordingly, we who form today's generation of disciples of Christ all wish to unite ourselves with her in a special way. We do so with all our attachment to our ancient tradition and also with full respect and love for the members of all the Christian Communities.

We do so at the urging of the deep need of faith, hope and charity. For if we feel a special need, in this difficult and responsible phase of the history of the Church and of mankind, to turn to Christ, who is Lord of the Church and Lord of man's history on account of the mystery of the Redemption, we believe that nobody else can bring us as Mary can into the divine and human dimension of this mystery. Nobody has been brought into it by God himself as Mary has. It is in this that the exceptional character of the grace of the divine Motherhood consists. Not only is the dignity of this Motherhood unique and unrepeatable in the history of the human race, but Mary's participation, due to this Maternity, in God's plan for man's salvation through the mystery of the Redemption is also unique in profundity and range of action.

We can say that the mystery of the Redemption took shape beneath the heart of the Virgin of Nazareth when she pronounced her "fiat". From then on, under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, this heart, the heart of both a virgin and a mother, has always followed the work of her Son and has gone out to all those whom Christ has embraced and continues to embrace with inexhaustible love. For that reason her heart must also have the inexhaustibility of a mother. The special characteristic of the motherly love that the Mother of God inserts in the mystery of the Redemption and the life of the Church finds expression in its exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him. It is in this that the mystery of the Mother consists. The Church, which looks to her with altogether special love and hope, wishes to make

this mystery her own in an ever deeper manner. For in this the Church also recognizes the way for her daily life, which is each person.

The Father's eternal love, which has been manifested in the history of mankind through the Son whom the Father gave, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"²⁰⁰, comes close to each of us through this Mother and thus takes on tokens that are of more easy understanding and access by each person. Consequently, Mary must be on all the ways for the Church's daily life. Through her maternal presence the Church acquires certainty that she is truly living the life of her Master and Lord and that she is living the mystery of the Redemption in all its life-giving profundity and fullness. Likewise the Church, which has struck root in many varied fields of the life of the whole of present-day humanity, also acquires the certainty and, one could say, the experience of being close to man, to each person, of being each person's Church, the Church of the People of God.

Faced with these tasks that appear along the ways for the Church, those ways that Pope Paul VI clearly indicated in the first Encyclical of his pontificate, and aware of the absolute necessity of all these ways and also of the difficulties thronging them, we feel all the more our need for a profound link with Christ. We hear within us, as a resounding echo, the words that he spoke: "Apart from me you can do nothing"²⁰¹. We feel not only the need but even a categorical imperative for great, intense and growing prayer by all the Church. Only prayer can prevent all these great succeeding tasks and difficulties from becoming a source of crisis and make them instead the occasion and, as it were, the foundation for ever more mature achievements on the People of God's march towards the Promised Land in this stage of history approaching the end of the second millennium. Accordingly, as I end this meditation with a warm and humble call to prayer, I wish the Church to devote herself to this prayer, together with Mary the Mother of Jesus²⁰², as the Apostles and disciples of the Lord did in the Upper Room in Jerusalem after his Ascension²⁰³. Above all, I implore Mary, the heavenly Mother of the Church, to be so good as to devote herself to this prayer of humanity's new Advent, together with us who make up the Church, that is to say the Mystical Body of her Only Son. I hope that through this prayer we shall be able to receive the Holy Spirit coming upon us²⁰⁴ and thus become Christ's witnesses "to the end of the earth"²⁰⁵, like those who went forth from the Upper Room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

With the Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the fourth of March, the First Sunday of Lent, in the year 1979, the first year of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

1. Jn. 1:14.
2. Jn. 3:16.
3. Heb. 1:1-2.
4. Exsultet at the Easter Vigil.
5. Jn. 16:7.
6. Jn. 15:26-27.
7. Jn. 16:13.
8. Cf. Rev. 2:7.
9. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1: AAS 57 (1965) 5.
10. Eph. 3:8.
11. Jn. 14:24.
12. Pope Paul VI: Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*: AAS 56 (1964) 650ff.
13. Mt. 11:29.
14. Mention must be made here of the salient documents of the pontificate of Paul VI, some of which were spoken of by himself in his address during Mass on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in 1978: Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: AAS 56 (1964) 609-659; Apostolic Letter *Investigabiles Divitias Christi*: AAS 57 (1965) 298-301; Encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*: AAS 59 (1967) 657-697; Solemn Profession of Faith: AAS 60 (1968) 433-445; Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*: AAS 60 (1968) 481-503; Apostolic Exhortation *Quinque Iam Anni*: AAS 63 (1971) 97-106; Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*: AAS 63 (1971) 497-535; Apostolic Exhortation *Paterna cum Benevolentia*: AAS 67 (1975) 5-23; Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*: AAS 67 (1975) 289-322; Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: AAS 68 (1976) 5-76.
15. Mt. 13:52.
16. 1 Tim. 2:4.
17. Pope Paul VI: Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: AAS 68 (1976) 5-76.
18. Jn. 17:21; cf. 17:11, 22-23; 10:16; Lk 9:49, 50, 54.
19. 1 Cor. 15:10.

20. Cf. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution Dei Filius, Cap. III De fide, can. 6: Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, Ed. Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, Bologna 1973 3, p. 811.
21. Is. 9:6.
22. Jn. 21:15.
23. Lk. 22:32.
24. Jn. 6:68; cf. Acts 4:8-12.
25. Cf. Eph. 1:10, 22; 4:25; Col. 1:18.
26. 1 Cor 8:6; cf. Col. 1:17.
27. Jn. 14:6.
28. Jn. 11:25.
29. Cf. Jn. 14:9.
30. Cf. Jn. 16:7.
31. Cf. Jn. 16:7, 13.
32. Col. 2:3.
33. Cf. Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 6:15; 10:17; 12:12, 27; Eph. 1:23; 2:16; 4:4; Col. 1:24; 3:15.
34. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 1: AAS 57 (1965) 5.
35. Mt. 16:16.
36. Cf. Litany of the Sacred Heart.
37. 1 Cor. 2:2.
38. Cf. Gen. 1 passim.
39. Cf. Gen. 1:26-30.
40. Rom. 8: 20; cf. 8:19-22; Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 2, 13: AAS 58 (1966) 1026, 1034-1035.
41. Jn. 3:16.
42. Cf. Rom. 5:12-21.
43. Rom. 8:22.
44. Rom. 8:19.
45. Rom. 8:22.
46. Rom. 8:19.
47. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 22: AAS 58 (1966) 1042-1043.
48. Rom. 5:11; Col. 1:20.
49. Ps. 8:6.
50. Cf. Gn. 1:26.
51. Cf. Gn. 3:6-13.
52. Cf. Eucharistic Prayer IV.
53. Cf. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 37: AAS 58 (1966) 1054-1055; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 48: AAS 57 (1965) 53-54.
54. Cf. Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:8.
55. Cf. Jn. 16:13.
56. Cf. 1 Thes. 5:24.
57. 2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Gal. 3:13.
58. 1 Jn. 4:8, 16.
59. Cf. Rom. 8:20.
60. Cf. Lk. 15:11-32.
61. Rom. 8:19.
62. Cf. Rom. 8:18.
63. Cf. St. Thomas, Summa Theol., III, q. 46, a. 1, ad 3.
64. Gal. 3:28.
65. Exsultet at the Easter Vigil.
66. Cf. Jn. 3:16.
67. Cf. St. Justin, I Apologia, 46, 1-4; II Apologia, 7 (8), 1-4; 10, 1-3; 13, 3-4; Florilegium Patristicum, II, Bonn 1911 2, pp. 81, 125, 129, 133; Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, I, 19, 91 and 94: Sources Chrétiennes, 30, pp. 117-118; 119-120; Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity Ad Gentes, 11: AAS 58 (1966) 960; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 17: AAS 57 (1965) 21.
68. Cf. Vatican Council II: Declaration on the Church's Relations with Non-Christian Religions Nostra Aetate, 3-
69. Col. 1:26.
70. Mt. 11:12.
71. Lk. 16:8.
72. Eph. 3:8.

73. Cf. Vatican Council II: Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 1-2: AAS 58 (1966) 740-741.
74. Acts 17:22-31.
75. Jn. 2:26.
76. Jn. 3:8.
77. Cf. AAS 58 (1966) 929-946.
78. Cf. Jn. 14:26.
79. Pope Paul VI: Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 6: AAS 68 (1976) 9.
80. Jn. 7:16.
81. Cf. AAS 58 (1966) 936-938.
82. Jn. 8:32.
83. Jn. 18:37.
84. Cf. Jn. 4:23.
85. Jn. 4:23-24.
86. Cf. Pope Paul VI: Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: AAS 56 (1964) 609-659.
87. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22: AAS 58 (1966) 1042.
88. Cf. Jn. 14:1ff.
89. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 91: AAS 58 (1966) 1113.
90. *Ibid.*, 38: 1. c., p. 1056.
91. *Ibid.*, 76: 1. c., p. 1099.
92. Cf. Gn. 1:26.
93. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24: AAS 58 (1966) 1045.
94. Gn. 1:28.
95. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 10: AAS 58 (1966) 1032.
96. *Ibid.*, 10: 1. c., p. 1033.
97. *Ibid.*, 38: 1. c., p. 1056; Pope Paul VI: Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 21: AAS 59 (1967) 267-268.
98. Cf. Gn. 1:28.
99. Cf. Gn. 1-2.
100. Gn. 1:28; cf. Vatican Council II: Decree on the Social Communications Media *Inter Mirifica*, 6: AAS 56 (1964) 147; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 74, 78: AAS 58 (1966) 1095-1096, 1101-1102.
101. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10, 36: AAS 57 (1965) 14-15, 41-42.
102. Cf. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 35: AAS 58 (1966) 1053; Pope Paul VI: Address to Diplomatic Corps, January 7, 1965: AAS 57 (1965) 232; Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 14: AAS 59 (1967) 264.
103. Cf. Pope Pius XII: Radio Message on the Fiftieth Anniversary of Leo XIII's Encyclical "*Rerum Novarum*," June 1, 1941: AAS 33 (1941) 195-205; Christmas Radio Message, December 24, 1941: AAS 34 (1942) 10-21; Christmas Radio Message, December 24, 1942: AAS 35 (1943) 9-24; Christmas Radio Message, December 24, 1943: AAS 36 (1944) 11-24; Christmas Radio Message, December 24, 1944: AAS 37 (1945) 10-23; Address to the Cardinals, December 24, 1945: AAS 38 (1946) 15-25; Address to the Cardinals, December 24, 1946: AAS 39 (1947) 7-17; Christmas Radio Message, December 24, 1947: AAS 40 (1948) 8-16; Pope John XXIII: Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961) 401-464; Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963) 257-304; Pope Paul VI: Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: AAS 56 (1964) 609-659; Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, October 4, 1965: AAS 57 (1965) 877-885; Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*: AAS 59 (1967) 257-299; Address to the Campesinos of Colombia, August 23, 1968: RRS 60 (1968) 619-623; Speech to the General Assembly of the Latin-American Episcopate, August 24, 1968: AAS 60 (1968) 639-649; Speech to the Conference of FAO, November 16, 1970: AAS 62 (1970) 830-838; Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*: AAS 63 (1971) 401-441; Address to the Cardinals, June 23, 1972: AAS 64 (1972) 496-505; Pope Paul VI: Address to the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate, January 28, 1979: AAS 71 (1979) 187ff.; Address to the Indians at Cuilipan, January 29, 1979: 1. c., pp. 207ff.; Address to the Guadalajara Workers, January 30, 1979: 1. c., pp. 221ff.; Address to the Monterrey Workers, January 31, 1979: 1. c., pp. 240-242; Vatican Council II: Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis humanae*: AAS 58 (1966) 929-941; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*: AAS 58 (1966) 1025-1115; *Documenta Synodi Episcoporum: De iustitia in mundo*: AAS 63 (1971) 923-941.
104. Cf. Pope John XXIII: Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961) 418ff.; Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963) 289ff.; Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* AAS 59 (1967) 257-299.
105. Cf. Lk. 16:19-31.

106. Cf. Pope John Paul II: Homily at Santo Domingo, January 25, 1979, 3: AAS 71 (1979) 157ff.; Address to
107. Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter Octogesima Adveniens, 42: AAS 63 (1971) 431.
108. Cf. Mt. 25:31-46.
109. Mt. 25:42, 43.
110. 2 Tm. 4:2.
111. Pope Pius XI: Encyclical Quadragesimo Anno: AAS 23 (1931) 213; Encyclical Non Abbiamo Bisogno: AAS 23 (1931) 285-312; Encyclical Divini Redemptoris: AAS 29 (1937) 65-106; Encyclical Mit brennender Sorge: AAS 29 (1937) 145-147; Pope Pius XII: Encyclical Summi Pontificatus: AAS 31 (1939) 413-453.
112. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:6.
113. Cf. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 31: AAS 58 (1966) 1050.
114. Cf. AAS 58 (1966) 929-946.
115. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 22: AAS 58 (1966) 1042.
116. Cf. 1 Cor. 6:15; 11:3; 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:15-16; 4:4-6; 5:30; Col. 1:18; 3:15; Rom. 12:4-5; Gal. 3:28.
117. 2 Pt. 1:4.
118. Cf. Eph. 2:10; Jn. 1:14, 16.
119. Jn. 1:12.
120. Cf. Jn. 4:14.
121. Gal. 4:4.
122. Jn. 11:25-26.
123. Preface of Christian Death, I.
124. Jn. 6:63.
125. Confessio, I, 1: CSEL 33, p. 1.
126. Mt. 12:30.
127. Cf. Jn. 1:12.
128. Gal. 4:5.
129. Gal. 4: 6; Rom. 8:15.
130. Cf. Rom. 15:13; 1 Cor. 1:24.
131. Cf. Ls. 11:2-3; Acts 2:38.
132. Cf. Gal. 5:22-23.
133. Sequence for Pentecost.
134. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 16: AAS 57 (1965) 20.
135. Ibid., 1: 1. c., p. 5.
136. Cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6.
137. Cf. Rom. 8:15.
138. Cf. Rom. 8:30.
139. Mt. 20:28.
140. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 31-36: AAS 57 (1965) 37-42.
141. Jn. 14:24.
142. Jn. 1:18.
143. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 5, 10, 21: AAS 58 (1966) 819, 822, 827-828.
144. Cf. Vatican Council I: Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith Dei Filius, Chap. 3: Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, Ed. Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, Bologna 1973 3, p. 807.
145. Cf. Vatican Council I: First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ Pastor Aeternus: 1. c., pp. 811-816; Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium, 25: AAS 57 (1965) pp. 30-31.
146. Cf. Mt. 28:19.
147. Cf. Vatican Council I: First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ Pastor Aeternus: 1. c., pp. 811-816.
148. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 18-27: AAS 57 (1965) 21-23.
149. Cf. Ibid., 12, 35: 1. c., pp. 16-17, 40-41.
150. Cf. St. Augustine: Sermo 43, 79: PL 38, 257-258.
151. Cf. Vatican Council II: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 44, 57, 59, 62: AAS 58 (1966) 1064f., 1077ff., 1079f., 1082ff.; Decree on Priestly Training Optatum Totius, 15: AAS 58 (1966) 722.
152. Jn. 14:24.
153. Jn. 20:21-22.
154. Cf. Vatican Council II: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10: AAS 56 (1964) 102.
155. Cf. Rom. 6:3-5.

156. Phil. 2:8.
 157. Cf. Jn. 5:26; 1 Jn. 5:11.
 158. Heb. 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1.
 159. 1 Cor. 6:20.
 160. Jn. 1:12.
 161. Cf. Rom. 8:23.
 162. Rv. 5:10; 1 Pt. 2:9.
 163. Cf. Jn. 1:1-4, 18; Mt. 3:17; 11:27; 17:5; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 1:32, 35; 3:22; Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Jn. 5:5, 20; 2 Pt. 1:17; Heb. 1:2.
 164. Cf. 1 Jn. 5:5-11.
 165. Cf. Rom. 5:10, 11; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:20, 22.
 166. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11: AAS 57 (1965) 15-16; Pope Paul VI, Talk on September 15, 1965: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, III (1965) 1036.
 167. Cf. Vatican Council II: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47: AAS 56 (1964) 113.
 168. Cf. Pope Paul VI: Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*: AAS 57 (1965) 553-574.
 169. Cf. Vatican Council II: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47: AAS 56 (1964) 113.
 170. Cf. Jn. 6:51, 57; 14:6; Gal. 2:20.
 171. 1 Cor. 11:28.
 172. Mk. 1:15.
 173. *Ibid.*
 174. Cf. 1 Pt. 2:5.
 175. Ps. 50 (51):6.
 176. Mk. 2:5.
 177. Jn. 8:11.
 178. Mt. 5:6.
 179. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Normae Pastorales circa Absolutionem Sacramentalem Generali Modo Impertiendam*: AAS 64 (1972) 510-514; Pope Paul VI: Address to a Group of Bishops from the United States of America on their "ad limina" Visit, April 20, 1978: AAS 70 (1978) 328-332; Pope John Paul II: Address to a Group of Canadian Bishops on their "ad limina" Visit, November 17, 1978: AAS 71 (1979) 32-36.
 180. Cf. AAS 58 (1966) 177-198.
 181. Mt. 20:28.
 182. Pope Pius XII: Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*: AAS 35 (1943) 193-248.
 183. Jn. 1:43.
 184. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1: AAS 57 (1965) 5.
 185. 1 Cor. 7:7; cf. 12:7, 27; Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:7.
 186. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 36: AAS 57 (1965) 41-42.
 187. Gal. 5:1; cf. 5:13.
 188. Cf. Jn. 10:10.
 189. Jn. 16:13.
 190. Cf. Rom. 5:5.
 191. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 63-64; AAS 57 (1965) 64.
 192. Cf. Chapter VIII, 52-69; AAS 57 (1965) 58-67.
 193. Pope Paul VI: Closing Address at the Third Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, November 21, 1964: AAS 56 (1964) 1015.
 194. Cf. Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 56: AAS 57 (1965) 60.
 195. *Ibid.*
 196. Heb. 2:10.
 197. Cf. Jn. 19:26.
 198. Cf. Acts 1:14; 2.
 199. Cf. Jn. 19:27.
 200. Jn. 3:16.
 201. Jn. 15:5.
 202. Cf. Acts 1:14.
 203. Cf. Acts 1:13.
 204. Cf. Acts 1:8.
 205. *Ibid.*

Post-Synodal
Apostolic Exhortation
Of His Holiness
Pope John Paul II
On The Bishop,
Servant Of The Gospel
Of Jesus Christ
For The Hope Of The World

INTRODUCTION

1. The shepherds of the Lord's flock know that they can count on a special divine grace as they carry out their ministry as Bishops. In the Roman Pontifical, during the solemn prayer of episcopal ordination, the principal ordaining Bishop, after invoking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who leads and guides, repeats a phrase already found in the ancient text of the Apostolic Tradition: "Grant, O Father, knower of all hearts, that this your servant, whom you have chosen for the office of Bishop, may shepherd your holy flock. May he fulfil before you without reproach the ministry of the High Priesthood."¹ In this way there continues to be carried out the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Shepherd, who sent the Apostles even as he himself was sent by the Father (cf. Jn 20:21), and who wishes that their successors, the Bishops, should remain shepherds in his Church until the end of time.²

The image of the Good Shepherd, so dear also to ancient Christian iconography, was very much present to the Bishops from throughout the world who gathered from 30 September to 27 October 2001 for the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. At the tomb of the Apostle Peter, they joined me in reflecting on the figure of The Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World. We were all agreed that the figure of Jesus the Good Shepherd represents the primary image to which we must constantly refer. No one, in fact, can be considered a pastor worthy of the name, nisi per caritate efficiatur unum cum Christo.³ This is the fundamental reason why "the ideal figure of the Bishop, on which the Church continues to count, is that of the pastor who, configured to Christ by his holiness of life, expends himself generously for the Church entrusted to him, while at the same time bearing in his heart a concern for all the Churches throughout the world (cf. 2 Cor 11:28)".⁴

The Tenth Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

2. We give thanks to the Lord, then, for having granted us the gift of celebrating once more an assembly of the Synod of Bishops and thus having a truly profound experience of being Church. Held in the wake of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, at the beginning of the third Christian millennium, the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops followed a long series of assemblies: both the Special Assemblies, all of which were marked by a concern for evangelization on the different continents – from Africa to America, Asia, Oceania and Europe; and the Ordinary Assemblies, the last of which were devoted to a reflection on the rich treasure which the Church possesses in the variety of vocations raised up by the Holy Spirit among the People of God. In this context, the attention devoted to the specific ministry of Bishops completed the picture of that ecclesiology of communion and mission which must always be our fundamental point of reference.

Consequently, the work of the Synod made constant reference to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the episcopate and the ministry of Bishops, especially as set forth in the third chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and in the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops *Christus Dominus*. Of this luminous teaching, which repeats and develops traditional theological and juridical themes, my predecessor of venerable memory Pope Paul VI, could rightly say: "It seems to us that episcopal authority emerges from the Council vindicated in its divine institution, confirmed in its irreplaceable function, renewed in its pastoral powers of teaching, sanctifying and governing, honoured in its extension to the universal Church by way of collegial communion, more clearly identified in its hierarchical aspect, strengthened in shared and fraternal responsibility with other Bishops for the universal and particular needs of the Church, and more strongly associated in a spirit of hierarchical union and joint cooperation with the head of the Church, the constitutive centre of the College of Bishops".⁵

At the same time, in keeping with the designated topic of the Synod, the Fathers reviewed their ministry in the light of the theological virtue of hope. This approach immediately appeared as especially pertinent to the mission of the pastor who, in the Church, is first and foremost to bear witness to the Paschal and eschatological mystery.

A hope founded on Christ

3. It is in fact the task of every Bishop to proclaim hope to the world, hope based on the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: a hope "which not only concerns penultimate matters but also and above all that eschatological hope which awaits the riches of the glory of God (cf. Eph 1:18), which surpasses anything that the human heart has ever conceived (cf. 1 Cor 2:9), and to which the sufferings of the present cannot be compared (cf. Rom 8:18)".⁶ A stance of theological hope, together with faith and love, must completely shape the Bishop's pastoral ministry.

The Bishop is called in a particular way to be a prophet, witness and servant of hope. He has the duty of instilling confidence and proclaiming before all people the basis of Christian hope (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). The Bishop is the prophet, witness and servant of this hope, especially where a culture of "the here and now" leaves no room for openness to transcendence. Where hope is absent, faith itself is called into question. Love too is weakened by the loss of this virtue. Especially in times of growing unbelief and indifference, hope is a stalwart support for faith and an effective incentive for love. It draws its strength from the certainty of God's desire for the salvation of all people (cf. 1 Tim 2:4) and from the constant presence of the Lord Jesus, the Emmanuel who remains with us always, until the end of the world (cf. Mt 28:20).

Only by the light and consolation born of the Gospel can a Bishop succeed in keeping his own hope alive (cf. Rom 15:4) and in nourishing the hope of those entrusted to his pastoral care. He must therefore model himself on the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Hope, who believed in the fulfilment of the Lord's words (cf. Lk 1:45). Relying on the word of God and holding firmly to hope, which like a sure and steadfast anchor reaches to the heavens (cf. Heb 6:18-20), the Bishop stands in the midst of the Church as a vigilant sentinel, a courageous prophet, a credible witness and a faithful servant of Christ, "our hope of glory" (cf. Col 1:27), thanks to whom "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain any more" (cf. Rev 21:4).

Hope, when hopes are dashed

4. Everyone will remember that the sessions of the Synod of Bishops took place at a dramatic time. The terrible events of 11 September 2001 were intensely felt by the Synod Fathers, with the dreadful fate of countless innocent victims and for the appearance in our world of grave new situations of uncertainty and fear, both for human civilization and the peaceful coexistence of nations. A new spectre of war and death appeared, which, when added to the already existing situations of conflict, made all the more evident the need to implore the Prince of Peace that human hearts might open once more to reconciliation, solidarity and peace.⁷

Together with its prayers, the Synodal assembly spoke out in condemnation of all forms of violence and identified their ultimate source in human sin. Acknowledging the failure of human hopes based on materialist, immanentist and market ideologies which claim to measure everything in terms of efficiency, relationships of power and market forces, the Synod Fathers reaffirmed their conviction that only the light of the Risen One and the guidance of the Holy Spirit can enable people to base their expectations on the hope that does not disappoint. Thus, they proclaimed: "We should not allow ourselves to be intimidated by those doctrines which deny the existence of the living God and which strive, more or less openly, to undermine, parody or deride Christian hope. In the joy of the Spirit we profess: 'Christ is truly risen!' In his glorified humanity he has opened up the prospect of eternal life for all those who accept the grace of conversion".⁸

The certainty of this profession of faith must be such that it daily strengthens a Bishop's hope and makes him increasingly confident of the unfailing power of God's merciful goodness to open up paths of salvation and propose them to the freedom of each person. Hope encourages a Bishop to discern, wherever he exercises his ministry, the signs of life which are able to uproot the seeds of destruction and death. Hope sustains him as he transforms conflicts themselves into an opportunity for growth and for reconciliation. Hope in Jesus the Good Shepherd will fill his heart with compassion, prompting him to draw near to the pain of every suffering man and woman and to soothe their wounds, ever confident that every lost sheep will be found. The Bishop will thus be an ever more luminous sign of Christ, the Shepherd and Spouse of the Church. Acting as father, brother and friend to all, he will stand beside everyone as the living image of Christ, our hope, in whom all God's promises are fulfilled and all the expectations of creation are brought to completion.⁹

Servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world

5. In issuing this Apostolic Exhortation, I now take up the reflections which developed during the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, from the first Lineamenta to the Instrumentum Laboris, from the interventions made in the Hall by the Synod Fathers to the two Relations that introduced and summarized these interventions, from the theoretical and practical pastoral insights that emerged from the small groups to the Propositiones presented to me at the conclusion of the Synod to assist me in preparing for the whole Church a document on the Synod's theme of The Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World.¹⁰ In doing so, I send my fraternal greetings and the kiss of peace to all the Bishops in communion with this See, first entrusted to Peter so that he might be a guarantee of unity and, as is recognized by all, preside in love.¹¹

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To you, venerable and dear Brothers, I repeat the invitation that I addressed to the whole Church at the beginning of the millennium: *Duc in altum!* It is Christ himself who repeats these words to the Successors of those Apostles who heard them from his lips and who, putting their trust in him, set forth on mission along the byways of the world: *Duc in altum* (Lk 5:4). In the light of this pressing command from the Lord, "we may reread the triple munus entrusted to us in the Church: *munus docendi, sanctificandi et regendi...* *Duc in docendo!* With the Apostle we will say: 'Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort – be unfailing in patience and in teaching' (2 Tim 4:2). *Duc in sanctificando!* The 'nets' we are called upon to cast among men are, first of all, the sacraments, of which we are the principal dispensers, moderators, guardians and promoters. They form a sort of saving 'net,' which sets free from evil and leads to the fullness of life. *Duc in regendo!* As pastors and true fathers, assisted by the priests and other helpers, we have the task of gathering together the family of the faithful and in it fostering charity and brotherly communion. As arduous and laborious a mission as this may be, we must not lose heart. With Peter and the first disciples we too with great confidence renew our heartfelt profession of faith: Lord, 'at your word I will lower the nets' (Lk 5:5)! At your word, O Christ, we wish to serve your Gospel for the hope of the world!"¹²

In this way, living as men of hope and reflecting in their ministry the ecclesiology of communion and mission, Bishops will truly be a source of hope for their flock. We know that the world needs the "hope that does not disappoint" (cf. Rom 5:5). We know that this hope is Christ. We know it and therefore we proclaim the hope that springs from the Cross.

Ave Crux, spes unica! May this acclamation, which echoed in the Synod Hall at the central moment of the work of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, remain ever on our lips, for the Cross is a mystery of life and death. The Cross has become for the Church a "tree of life". For this reason we proclaim that life has triumphed over death.

In making this Paschal proclamation we follow in the footsteps of a great multitude of holy pastors who have been eloquent images of the Good Shepherd in medio Ecclesiae. This prompts us always to praise and thank almighty and eternal God, for, as we sing in the sacred Liturgy, he strengthens us by their example, instructs us by their teaching and gives us protection through their intercession.¹³ As I said at the conclusion of the Synod's work, the face of each of these holy Bishops, from the beginning of the Church's life to our own day, is like a tile placed in a sort of mystical mosaic forming the face of Christ the Good Shepherd. It is he, then, that we contemplate, setting an example for the flock entrusted to us by the Pastor of Pastors, so that we can become ever more committed servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world.

As we gaze upon the face of our Master and Lord at that hour when he "loved his own to the end", all of us, like the Apostle Peter, allow our feet to be washed so that we might have a part in him (cf. Jn 13:1-9). And with the strength that comes to us from him in the Church, in the presence of our priests and deacons, before all men and women of the consecrated life and all our beloved lay people, we repeat aloud: "Whatever we may be, let not your hope be placed in us: if we are good, we are your servants; if we are bad, we are still your servants. But if we are good and faithful servants, it is then that we are truly your servants".¹⁴ Servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MYSTERY AND MINISTRY OF THE BISHOP

"... and he chose from them Twelve" (Lk 6:13)

6. The Lord Jesus, during his earthly pilgrimage, proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom and inaugurated it in his own person, revealing its mystery to all people.¹⁵ He called men and women to be his followers, and from his disciples he chose Twelve "to be with him" (Mk 3:14). The Gospel of Luke points out that Jesus made this choice after a night spent in prayer on the mountain (cf. 6:12). The Gospel of Mark, for its part, appears to see in this action of Jesus a sovereign act, a constitutive act which gives an identity to those whom he chose: "he appointed Twelve" (3:14). The mystery of the election of the Twelve is thus disclosed: it is an act of love, freely willed by Jesus in intimate union with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The mission entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles is to last until the end of time (cf. Mt 28:20), since the Gospel which they have been charged to hand down is the life of the Church in every age. It was precisely for this reason that the Apostles were concerned to appoint for themselves successors, so that, as Saint Irenaeus attests, the apostolic tradition might be manifested and preserved down the centuries.¹⁶

The special outpouring of the Holy Spirit with which the Risen Lord filled the Apostles (cf. Acts 1:5; 8; 2:4; Jn 20:22-23) was shared by them through the gesture of laying hands upon their co-workers (cf. 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6-7). These in turn transmitted it by the same gesture to others, and these to others still. In this way, the spiritual gift given in the beginning has come down to our own day through the imposition of hands, in other words, by episcopal consecration, which confers the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, the high priesthood and the totality of the sacred ministry. Thus,

through the Bishops and the priests, their co-workers, the Lord Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of God the Father, remains present in the midst of believers. In every time and place it is he who proclaims the word of God to all peoples, administers the sacraments of faith to believers and guides the people of the New Testament on their pilgrimage to eternal happiness. The Good Shepherd does not abandon his flock but preserves and protects it always through those who, by their ontological share in his life and mission, carry out in an eminent and visible way the role of teacher, shepherd and priest, who act in his name in exercising the functions associated with the pastoral ministry, and who are constituted his vicars and ambassadors.¹⁷

The Trinitarian foundation of the episcopal ministry

7. The Christological dimension of the pastoral ministry, considered in depth, leads to an understanding of the Trinitarian foundation of ministry itself. Christ's life is Trinitarian. He is the eternal and only-begotten Son of the Father and the anointed of the Holy Spirit, sent into the world; it is he who, together with the Father, pours out the Spirit upon the Church. This Trinitarian dimension, manifested in every aspect of Christ's life and activity, also shapes the life and activity of the Bishop. Rightly, then, the Synod Fathers chose explicitly to describe the life and ministry of the Bishop in the light of the Trinitarian ecclesiology contained in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

The tradition which sees the Bishop as an image of God the Father is quite ancient. As Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote, the Father is like an invisible Bishop, the Bishop of all. Every Bishop, therefore, stands in the place of the Father of Jesus Christ in such a way that, precisely because of this representation, he is to be revered by all.¹⁸ Consonant with this symbolism, the Bishop's chair, which especially in the tradition of the Eastern Churches evokes God's paternal authority, can only be occupied by the Bishop. This same symbolism is the source of every Bishop's duty to lead the holy people of God as a devoted father and to guide them – together with his priests, his co-workers in the episcopal ministry, and with his deacons – in the way of salvation.¹⁹ Conversely, as an ancient text exhorts, the faithful are to love their Bishops who are, after God, their fathers and mothers.²⁰ For this reason, in accordance with a custom widespread in certain cultures, one kisses the Bishop's hand as one would kiss the hand of the loving Father, the giver of life.

Christ is the primordial icon of the Father and the manifestation of his merciful presence among men and women. The Bishop, who acts in the person and in the name of Christ himself, becomes in the Church entrusted to him a living sign of the Lord Jesus, Shepherd and Spouse, Teacher and High Priest of the Church.²¹ Here we find the source of pastoral ministry, and the reason why, as the homily outline in the Roman Pontifical suggests, the three functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing the People of God are to be carried out in imitation of the Good Shepherd: with charity, knowledge of the flock, concern for all, mercy towards the poor, the stranger and those in need, and a willingness to seek out the lost sheep and to bring them back to the one sheepfold.

Finally, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, by configuring the Bishop to Christ, enables him to be a living continuation of the mystery of Christ for the Church. Because of this Trinitarian shaping of his existence, every Bishop in his ministry is committed to keeping watch over the whole flock with love, for he has been placed in their midst by the Spirit to govern the Church of God: in the name of the Father, whose image he represents; in the name of Jesus Christ his Son, by whom he has been established as teacher, priest and shepherd; in the name of the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the Church and by his power strengthens us in our human weakness.²²

The collegial nature of the episcopal ministry

8. "And he appointed Twelve" (Mk 3:14). The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* employs this Gospel text to introduce its teaching on the collegial nature of the group of the Twelve, formed "after the manner of a college or a fixed group, over which he placed Peter, chosen from among them".²³ Similarly, through the personal succession of the Bishop of Rome to Saint Peter and the succession of all the Bishops as a group to the Apostles, the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops are united among themselves as a College.²⁴

The collegial union between the Bishops is based on both episcopal ordination and hierarchical communion. It thus affects the inmost being of each Bishop and belongs to the structure of the Church as willed by Jesus Christ. One attains to the fullness of episcopal ministry by virtue of episcopal consecration and through hierarchical communion with the Head of the College and with its members, that is, with the College, which always includes its Head. This is how one becomes a member of the College of Bishops, ²⁵ and the reason why the three functions received in episcopal ordination – sanctifying, teaching and governing – must be exercised in hierarchical communion, even though, given their different immediate finalities, in a distinct way²⁶.

This constitutes what is called "the spirit of collegiality" (*affectus collegialis*), or "affective" collegiality, which is the basis of the Bishops' concern for the other particular Churches and for the universal Church.²⁷ Consequently, if we must say that a Bishop is never alone, inasmuch as he is always united to the Father though the Son in the Holy Spirit, we must also add that he is also never alone because he is always and continuously united with his brothers in the episcopate and with the one whom the Lord has chosen as the Successor of Peter.

The spirit of collegiality is realized and expressed in different degrees and in various modalities, including institutional forms such as, for example, the Synod of Bishops, Particular Councils, Episcopal Conferences, the Roman Curia, ad Limina visits, missionary cooperation, etc. In its full sense, however, the spirit of collegiality is realized and expressed only in collegial action in the strict sense, that is, in the action of all the Bishops together with their Head, with whom they exercise full and supreme power over the whole Church.²⁸

This collegial nature of the apostolic ministry is willed by Christ himself. Consequently, the spirit of collegiality, or affective collegiality (*collegialitas affectiva*), is always present among the Bishops as *communio episcoporum*, but only in certain acts does it find expression as effective collegiality (*collegialitas efectiva*). The various ways in which affective collegiality comes to be realized in effective collegiality belong to the human order, but in varying degrees they concretize the divine requirement that the episcopate should express itself in a collegial manner.²⁹ The College's supreme authority over the whole Church is solemnly exercised in Ecumenical Councils.³⁰

The collegial dimension gives the episcopate its character of universality. A parallelism can thus be established between the Church as one and universal, and therefore indivisible, and the episcopacy as one and indivisible, and therefore universal. The principle and foundation of this unity, be it that of the Church or of the Bishops, is the Roman Pontiff. Indeed, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, the College, "insofar as it is composed of many, expresses the variety and universality of the People of God, but insofar as it is assembled under one head, it expresses the unity of the flock of Christ".³¹ For this reason, "the unity of the episcopate is one of the constitutive elements of the unity of the Church".³²

The universal Church is not the sum of the particular Churches, or a federation of the latter, or even the result of their communion as such, since, in the expression of the early Fathers and the liturgy, in her essential mystery the Church precedes creation itself.³³ In the light of this teaching, we can add that the relationship of mutual interiority existing between the universal Church and each particular Church, whereby the particular Churches are "formed in the likeness of the universal Church, and in and from the particular Churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church", ³⁴ is reproduced in the relationship between the College of Bishops in its entirety and each Bishop as an individual. For this reason, "the College of Bishops is not to be understood as the aggregate of the Bishops who govern the particular Churches, nor as the result of their communion; rather, as an essential element of the universal Church, it is a reality which precedes the office of being the head of a particular Church".³⁵

We can better understand this parallelism between the universal Church and the College of Bishops in light of the Council's statement that "the Apostles were the first members of the new Israel, and at the same time the beginning of the sacred hierarchy".³⁶ In the Apostles, not considered individually but as a College, there was already contained the structure of the Church – which in them was established in her universality and unity – and the structure of the College of Bishops, their successors, the sign of this universality and unity.³⁷

It is thus that "the power of the College of Bishops over the whole Church is not the result of the sum of the powers of the individual Bishops over their particular Churches; it is a pre-existing reality in which individual Bishops participate. They have no competence to act over the whole Church except collegially".³⁸ Bishops share as a body in the power of teaching and governing, and they do so immediately by the very fact that they are members of the College of Bishops, in which the Apostolic College truly continues in being.³⁹

Just as the universal Church is one and indivisible, so too the College of Bishops is one "indivisible theological subject," and hence the supreme, full and universal power possessed by the College, and by the Roman Pontiff personally, is one and indivisible. Precisely because the College of Bishops is a reality prior to the office of heading a particular Church, there are many Bishops who, while carrying out tasks that are properly episcopal, are not heads of particular Churches.⁴⁰ Each Bishop, always in union with his brothers in the episcopate and with the Roman Pontiff, represents Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church: he does this not only in a proper and specific manner when he receives the office of pastor of a particular Church, but also when he cooperates with the Diocesan Bishop in the governance of his Church ⁴¹ or when he shares in the Roman Pontiff's office of universal pastor in the governance of the universal Church. In the course of her history the Church has also recognized, in addition to the specific form of presidency over a particular Church, other forms of exercising the episcopal ministry – such as that of an Auxiliary Bishop or a representative of the Roman Pontiff in the offices of the Holy See or in Papal Legations; today too, in accordance with the norms of law, she admits these other forms when they are needed.⁴²

The missionary character and the unitary nature of the episcopal ministry

9. The Gospel of Luke (cf. 6:13) tells us that Jesus named the Twelve "Apostles", which literally means "envoys", "those who are sent". In the Gospel of Mark we read that Jesus also appointed the Twelve "to be sent out to preach" (3:14). This means that both the election and the establishment of the Twelve as Apostles are directed towards mission. Their first sending (cf. Mt 10:5; Mk 6:7; Lk 9:1-2) comes to its fulfilment in the mission that Jesus entrusts to them after the Resurrection, at the moment of his Ascension into heaven. The Lord's words remain as timely as ever: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded

you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). This apostolic mission finds its solemn confirmation on the day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In the text of the Gospel of Matthew just quoted, the entire pastoral ministry can be seen as organized according to the threefold function of teaching, sanctifying and governing. We see here a reflection of the threefold dimension of Christ's service and mission. We, as Christians, and in a qualitatively new manner as priests, participate in the mission of our Master, who is Prophet, Priest and King, and we are called to bear special witness to him in the Church and before the world.

These three functions (*triplex munus*) and the powers that derive from them express on the level of action the pastoral ministry (*munus pastorale*) that every Bishop receives with episcopal consecration. It is a share in Christ's own love that is given in the consecration; this love is made concrete in the proclamation of the Gospel of hope to all peoples (cf. Lk 4:16-19), in the administration of the sacraments to those who embrace salvation and in the guidance of God's holy people towards eternal life. These three functions are, in fact, deeply interconnected; they explain, influence and clarify one another.⁴³

For this reason, then, when the Bishop teaches, he also sanctifies and governs the People of God; when he sanctifies, he also teaches and governs; when he governs, he teaches and sanctifies. Saint Augustine defines the entirety of this episcopal ministry as an office of love: *amoris officium*.⁴⁴ This gives us the certainty that the pastoral charity of Jesus Christ will never be lacking in the Church.

"He called to him those whom he desired" (Mk 3:13-14)

10. A great crowd was following Jesus when he decided to go up the mountain and call the Apostles. There were many disciples, but from them he chose Twelve alone for the specific role of Apostles (cf. Mk 3:13-19). In the Synod Hall the words of Saint Augustine were often heard: "For you I am a Bishop and with you I am a Christian".⁴⁵

As a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, the Bishop is above all else, like every other Christian, a son and member of the Church. From this holy Mother he has received the gift of divine life in the sacrament of Baptism and his first instruction in the faith. Together with all the faithful he shares in the incomparable dignity of the children of God, a dignity to be lived out in communion and in a spirit of gratitude and fraternity. On the other hand, by virtue of the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders, the Bishop is also the one who, before the faithful, is teacher, sanctifier and shepherd, charged with acting in the name and in the person of Christ.

These are obviously two relationships which do not simply stand side-by-side but are deeply interconnected; they are ordered to each other inasmuch as both draw upon the richness of Christ, the one High Priest. The Bishop becomes a "father" precisely because he is fully a "son" of the Church. This brings up once again the relationship between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood: two modes of participation in the one priesthood of Christ, which involves two dimensions which unite in the supreme act of the sacrifice of the Cross.

This is reflected in the relationship which exists in the Church between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood. The fact that for all their difference in essence each is ordered to the other⁴⁶ gives rise to an interplay that harmoniously structures the life of the Church as the place where the salvation brought about by Christ is made historically present. This interplay is present in the very person of the Bishop, who is and remains a baptized member of the Church, yet is incorporated into the high priesthood. This deeper reality of the Bishop is the foundation of his "being among" the other faithful and of his being placed "before" them.

The Second Vatican Council puts this nicely: "If therefore everyone in the Church does not walk along the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God (cf 2 Pet 1:1). And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, dispensers of mysteries, and shepherds on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ. For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God entails a unity, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a common bond. The Church's pastors, following the example of the Lord, should minister to one another and to the rest of the faithful. The faithful in their turn should cooperate gladly with their pastors and teachers".⁴⁷

The pastoral ministry received in episcopal consecration, which sets the Bishop "before" the other faithful, finds expression in his "being for" the other members of the faithful while not detracting from his "being with" them. This is true with regard both to the Bishop's personal sanctification, which must be pursued and realized in the exercise of his ministry, and to the "style" with which he carries out this ministry in all its respective functions.

The interplay between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood, present in the episcopal ministry itself, is manifested in a kind of "perichoresis" between the two forms of priesthood: a perichoresis between the common witness to the faith given by the faithful and the Bishop's authoritative witness to the faith through his magisterial acts; a perichoresis between the lived holiness of the faithful and the means of sanctification that the Bishop offers them; and finally, a perichoresis between the personal responsibility of the Bishop for the good of the Church entrusted to him and the shared responsibility of all the faithful for that same Church.

CHAPTER TWO - THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE BISHOP

"... he appointed Twelve that they might be with him" (Mk 3, 14)

11. In the same act of love by which he freely established the Twelve as Apostles, Jesus called them to share his own life. This sharing, which is a communion of mind and heart with him, also appears as an inner demand of their participation in Jesus' own mission. The functions of the Bishop must not be reduced to those of administration alone. Precisely in order to avoid this risk, both the preparatory documents of the Synod and many interventions by the Fathers in the Synod Hall dwelt at length on what the reality of the episcopate as the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders – in its theological, Christological and pneumatological foundations – entails for the personal life of the Bishop and for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to him.

Objective sanctification, which by Christ's work is present in the sacrament through the communication of the Holy Spirit, needs to coincide with subjective sanctification, in which the Bishop, by the help of grace, must continuously progress through the exercise of his ministry. The ontological transformation brought about by episcopal consecration, as a configuration to Christ, demands a lifestyle that manifests a "being with him". Consequently, during the Synod sessions, emphasis was laid on pastoral charity as being the fruit of the character bestowed by the sacrament and of its particular grace. Charity, it was said, is in a sense the heart of the ministry of the Bishop, who is drawn into a dynamic pastoral pro-existence whereby he is impelled to live, like Christ the Good Shepherd, for the Father and for others, in the daily gift of self.

It is above all in exercising his own ministry, inspired by imitation of the charity of the Good Shepherd, that the Bishop is called to be sanctified and to sanctify, taking as his unifying principle contemplation of the face of Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation.⁴⁸ His spirituality, therefore, draws direction and nourishment not only from the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation but also from his episcopal ordination, which commits him to living out in faith, hope and charity his ministry of evangelization, liturgical presidency and leadership in the community. The Bishop's spirituality will therefore be an ecclesial spirituality, since everything in his life is directed towards the building up of the Church in love.

This requires of the Bishop an attitude of service marked by personal strength, apostolic courage and trusting abandonment to the inner working of the Spirit. He will therefore strive to adopt a lifestyle which imitates the kenosis of Christ, the poor and humble servant, so that the exercise of his pastoral ministry will be a consistent reflection of Jesus, the Servant of God, and will help him to become, like Jesus, close to everyone, from the greatest to the least. Again, by a form of reciprocal interplay, the faithful and loving exercise of his ministry sanctifies the Bishop and on the subjective level configures him ever more closely to the ontological richness of sanctity which the sacrament has bestowed upon him.

The Bishop's personal holiness, however, is never limited to the purely subjective level, since in its efficacy it always proves beneficial to the faithful entrusted to his pastoral care. In the practice of charity, as the content of the pastoral ministry he has received, the Bishop becomes a sign of Christ and acquires that moral authority needed for the effective exercise of his juridical authority. Unless the episcopal office is based on the witness of a holiness manifested in pastoral charity, humility and simplicity of life, it ends up being reduced to a solely functional role and, tragically, it loses credibility before the clergy and the faithful.

The call to holiness in the Church in our time

12. There is a particularly apt Biblical image to describe the figure of the Bishop as the friend of God and the pastor and guide of his people. It is the figure of Moses. Looking to him, the Bishop can find inspiration for his life and activity as a pastor, for Moses was chosen and sent by the Lord, courageous in leading his people toward the Promised Land, a faithful interpreter of the word and law of the living God, a mediator of the Covenant, ardent and confident in his prayer on behalf of his people. Like Moses, who after his dialogue with the Lord on the holy mountain returned among his people with his face radiant (cf. Ex 34:29-30), so the Bishop will be able to show his brothers and sisters that he is their father, brother and friend only if he has entered the dark yet luminous cloud of the mystery of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Radiant with the light of the Trinity, he will be a sign of the merciful goodness of the Father, a living image of the love of the Son, and transparently a man of the Spirit, consecrated and sent forth to lead the People of God along the paths of history on their pilgrimage to eternity.

The Synod Fathers stressed the importance of spiritual commitment in the life, ministry and growth of the Bishop. I myself have spoken of its priority in conformity with the requirements of the Church's life and the call of the Holy Spirit, who in these years has made evident to everyone the primacy of grace, the widespread desire for spirituality and the urgent need for a witness of holiness.

The call for spirituality arises from a consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation history, where his presence is active and dynamic, prophetic and missionary. The gift of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which the Bishop receives at his episcopal ordination, is a precious and urgent call to cooperate with the Spirit's activity in ecclesial communion and in universal mission.

Held in the wake of the Great Jubilee of 2000, the Synodal Assembly made its own from the beginning the call to holiness of life which I set before the whole Church: "All pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness... Once the Jubilee is over, we resume our normal path, but knowing that, stressing holiness remains more than ever an urgent pastoral task".⁴⁹ An enthusiastic acceptance of my appeal to give first place to the call to holiness was the atmosphere in which the synodal labours took place and the environment which, in a certain sense, unified the Fathers' interventions and reflections. In their hearts they heard resound Saint Gregory Nazianzen's admonition: "First be purified and then purify others, first allow yourself to be instructed by wisdom and then instruct others, first become light and then enlighten others, first draw close to God and then guide others to him, first be holy yourself and then make others holy".⁵⁰

For this reason frequent appeals were heard during the Synodal Assembly for a clearer specification of the properly "episcopal" character of the Bishop's path to holiness. This will always be a holiness lived with his people and for his people, in a communion which becomes a stimulus to and a mutual building up in charity. These are not secondary or marginal demands. It is precisely the Bishop's own spiritual life which favours the fruitfulness of his pastoral activity. Is not the ultimate basis of all pastoral effectiveness constant meditation on the mystery of Christ, passionate contemplation of his Face and generous imitation of the life of the Good Shepherd? If ours is indeed a time of continual movement and even at times of frenzied "doing for the sake of doing", then the Bishop must be the first to show by the example of his own life the need to re-establish the primacy of "being" over "doing" and, more importantly, the primacy of grace, which, in the Christian vision of life, remains the essential principle for any "planning" of pastoral ministry.⁵¹

The Bishop's spiritual journey 13. A Bishop can be considered a genuine minister of communion and hope for God's holy people only when he walks in the presence of the Lord. It is not possible to be a servant of others unless one is first a "servant of God". And one can only be a servant of God if one is a "man of God". For this reason I stated in my homily at the beginning of the Synod: "The pastor must be a man of God; his existence and his ministry are entirely under his divine glory and from the supereminent mystery of God they derive their light and vigour".⁵²

For Bishops the call to holiness is inherent in the sacramental event that stands at the origin of their ministry, that is, their episcopal ordination. The ancient Euchology of Serapion formulates the ritual invocation of the consecration thus: "God of truth, make thy servant a living Bishop, a holy Bishop in the succession of the holy Apostles".⁵³ Since episcopal ordination does not infuse the perfection of the virtues, "the Bishop is called to pursue his path of perfection with greater intensity so as to attain to the stature of Christ, the perfect Man".⁵⁴

The Christological and Trinitarian character of his mystery and ministry demands of the Bishop a journey of holiness which consists in a progressive advance towards an ever more profound spiritual and apostolic maturity marked by the primacy of pastoral charity. This journey is obviously experienced together with his people, along a path which is at once personal and communitarian, like the life of the Church itself. Along this path, however, the Bishop becomes, in intimate communion with Christ and attentive docility to the Holy Spirit, a witness, a model, and a source of encouragement and help. This same idea is expressed by canon law: "Mindful that he is bound to give an example of holiness, charity, humility and simplicity of life, the Diocesan Bishop is to seek in every way to promote the holiness of Christ's faithful according to the special vocation of each. Since he is the principal dispenser of the mysteries of God, he is to strive constantly that the faithful entrusted to his care may grow in grace through the celebration of the sacraments, and may know and live the Paschal mystery".⁵⁵

The spiritual journey of the Bishop, like that of every Christian, is rooted in the sacramental grace of Baptism and Confirmation. He shares this grace in common with all the faithful since, as the Second Vatican Council notes, "all the faithful of whatever condition or rank are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity".⁵⁶ Here the celebrated expression of Saint Augustine, with its rich realism and supernatural wisdom, proves especially true: "If I am in fear because I am for you, I am consoled to be with you. Because for you I am a Bishop, with you I am a Christian. The first name is one of responsibility, the second, one of grace. The former is the name of a danger, the latter of salvation".⁵⁷ Thanks to pastoral charity, however, responsibility becomes a form of service and peril is transformed into an opportunity for growth and maturation. The episcopal ministry is not only a source of holiness for others, but is already a cause of sanctification for one who allows the charity of God to pass through his own heart and life.

The Synod Fathers presented in synthesis some of the demands of this journey. Above all they stressed the character given in Baptism and Confirmation, which from the beginning of our lives as Christians, through the theological virtues, makes us capable of believing in God, hoping in him and loving him. The Holy Spirit, in turn, infuses his gifts and fosters our growth in goodness through the exercise of the moral virtues that concretize, also on the human level, our spiritual life.⁵⁸ By means of the Baptism he has received, the Bishop shares, like every Christian, in that spirituality which is rooted in incorporation in Christ and is manifested in following Christ in accordance with the Gospel. For this reason the Bishop shares the call to holiness proper to all the faithful. He must therefore cultivate a life of prayer and profound faith, and put all his trust in God, offering his witness to the Gospel in docile obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and maintaining a particular filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the perfect teacher of the spiritual life.⁵⁹

The spirituality of the Bishop will thus be a spirituality of communion, lived in harmony with the other baptized faithful who with him are children of one Father in heaven and one Mother on earth, Holy Church. Like all believers in

Christ, he needs to nourish his spiritual life with the living and effective word of the Gospel and with the living bread of the Holy Eucharist, the food of eternal life. Because of his human frailty the Bishop is also called to have frequent and regular recourse to the sacrament of Penance, in order to obtain the gift of that mercy of which he himself has been made a minister. Mindful, therefore, of his human weaknesses and sins, each Bishop, along with his priests, personally experiences the sacrament of Reconciliation as a profound need and as a grace to be received ever anew, and thus renews his own commitment to holiness in the exercise of his ministry. In this way he also gives visible expression to the mystery of a Church which is constitutively holy, yet also made up of sinners in need of forgiveness.

Like all priests and, obviously, in special communion with the priests of his diocesan presbyterate, the Bishop will strive to progress along a specific path of holiness. He is also called to holiness by a new title arising from Holy Orders. The Bishop thus lives by faith, hope and love, inasmuch as he is a minister of the Lord's word and of the sanctification and spiritual advancement of the People of God. He must be holy because he must serve the Church as teacher, sanctifier and guide. As such, he must also love the Church deeply and fervently. Each Bishop is configured to Christ in order to love the Church with the love of Christ the Bridegroom, and in order to be in the Church a minister of her unity, enabling her to become "a people gathered by the unity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".⁶⁰

The specific spirituality of the Bishop, as the Synod Fathers repeatedly emphasized, is further enriched by the bestowal of that grace inherent in the fullness of the priesthood which is given to him at the moment of his ordination. As a pastor of the flock and servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in hope, the Bishop must become as it were a transparent reflection of the very person of Christ, the Supreme Pastor. In the Roman Pontifical this requirement is explicitly mentioned: "Receive the miter, and may the splendour of holiness shine forth in you, so that when the Chief Shepherd appears, you may deserve to receive from him an unfading crown of glory".⁶¹

Hence, the Bishop constantly needs the grace of God that strengthens and perfects his human nature. He can say with the Apostle Paul: "Our sole credit is from God who has made us qualified ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor 3:5-6). It needs to be emphasized that the apostolic ministry is a source of spirituality for the Bishop, who should derive from it all the spiritual resources which will make him grow in holiness and enable him to discover the workings of the Holy Spirit in the People of God entrusted to his pastoral care.⁶²

The spiritual journey of the Bishop coincides, from this perspective, with that pastoral charity which must rightly be considered the soul of his apostolate, as it is of the apostolate of priests and deacons. Here it is not only a matter of an *existentia* but indeed of a *pro-existentia*, that is to say, of a way of living inspired by the supreme model of Christ the Lord and which is spent totally in worship of the Father and in service of neighbour. The Second Vatican Council rightly states that pastors, in the image of Christ, must carry out their ministry with holiness and zeal, with humility and fortitude, "which, fulfilled in this way, will be for them an excellent means of sanctification".⁶³ No Bishop can fail to realize that the summit of Christian holiness is the crucified Christ in his supreme self-oblation to the Father and to his brothers and sisters in the Holy Spirit. For this reason configuration to Christ and a share in his sufferings (cf. 1 Pet 4:15) becomes the royal road of the Bishop's holiness in the midst of his people.

Mary, Mother of Hope and teacher of the spiritual life

14. The Bishop will also find support for his spiritual life in the maternal presence of the Virgin Mary, *Mater spei et spes nostra*, as the Church invokes her. The Bishop will therefore nourish an authentic and filial devotion to Mary, and feel himself called to make her *fiat* his own, re-experiencing and re-appropriating each day Jesus' entrusting of Mary at the foot of the Cross to the Beloved Disciple, and of the Beloved Disciple to Mary (cf. Jn 19:26-27). The Bishop is also called to reflect the unanimous and persevering prayer of Christ's disciples and Apostles with his Mother in preparation for Pentecost. This icon of the nascent Church manifests the indissoluble bond uniting Mary and the successors of the Apostles (cf. Acts 1:14).

The holy Mother of God will consequently be the Bishop's teacher in listening to the word of God and promptly putting it into practice, as a faithful disciple of the one Teacher, in firm faith, confident hope and ardent charity. As Mary was the "memory" of the incarnation of the Word in the first Christian community, so the Bishop must preserve and pass on the living Tradition of the Church, in communion with all the other Bishops, in union with, and under the authority of, the Successor of Peter.

The Bishop's solid Marian devotion will be constantly related to the liturgy, where the Blessed Virgin is particularly present in the celebration of the mysteries of salvation and serves as a model of docility and prayer, of spiritual oblation and motherhood for the whole Church. Indeed, it will be the Bishop's responsibility to ensure that the liturgy always appears "as an 'exemplary form', a source of inspiration, a constant point of reference and the ultimate goal" for the Marian piety of the People of God.⁶⁴ While holding to this principle, the Bishop will also nourish his personal and communitarian Marian devotion by devotional practices approved and recommended by the Church, especially by the recitation of that compendium of the Gospel which is the Holy Rosary. Being himself completely familiar with this prayer, completely centred as it is on the contemplation of the saving events of Christ's life with which his holy Mother was closely associated, every Bishop is also called to promote diligently its recitation.⁶⁵

Entrusting oneself to the word

15. The assembly of the Synod of Bishops indicated several indispensable means for the sustenance and progress of the spiritual life.⁶⁶ First among these is reading and meditating on the word of God. Every Bishop should always commend himself and feel commended "to the Lord and to the word of his grace, which is able to build up and give the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (cf. Acts 20:32). Before becoming one who hands on the word, the Bishop, together with his priests and indeed like every member of the faithful and like the Church herself, ⁶⁷ must be a hearer of the word. He should live "within" the word and allow himself to be protected and nourished by it, as if by a mother's womb. With Saint Ignatius of Antioch the Bishop must say: "I commend myself to the Gospel as to the flesh of Christ".⁶⁸ Each Bishop will thus take to heart the well-known admonition of Saint Jerome quoted by the Second Vatican Council: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ".⁶⁹ There can be no primacy of holiness without attentive listening to the Word of God, which is the guide and nourishment of all holiness.

To commend oneself to the word of God and to keep it, like the Virgin Mary, *Virgo audiens*, ⁷⁰ requires the practice of certain aids constantly proposed by the Church's tradition and spiritual experience. These include, first of all, frequent personal reading and regular study of Sacred Scripture. A Bishop would try in vain to preach the word to others if he did not first listen to it within himself.⁷¹ Without frequent contact with Sacred Scripture a Bishop would hardly be a credible minister of hope, since, as Saint Paul reminds us, it is "from the lessons of patience and the words of encouragement in the Scriptures that we can derive hope" (cf. Rom 15:4). The words of Origen remain ever applicable: "These are the two activities of the Bishop: learning from God by reading the divine Scriptures and meditating on them frequently, and teaching the people. But let him teach the things that he himself has learned from God".⁷²

The Synod recalled the importance of reading (*lectio*) and meditation (*meditatio*) on the word of God in the life of pastors and in their ministry of service to the community. As I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "it is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives".⁷³ In the realm of meditation and *lectio*, the heart which has already received the word opens itself to the contemplation of God's work and, consequently, to a conversion of thoughts and life to him, accompanied by a heartfelt request for his forgiveness and grace.

Drawing nourishment from the Eucharist

16. Just as the Paschal Mystery stands at the centre of the life and mission of the Good Shepherd, so too the Eucharist stands at the centre of the life and mission of the Bishop, as of every priest.

At the daily celebration of Holy Mass, the Bishop offers himself together with Christ. When this celebration takes place in the cathedral or in other churches, especially parish churches, with the presence and the active participation of the faithful, the Bishop stands before all as *Sacerdos et Pontifex*, since he acts in the person of Christ and in the power of his Spirit, and as *hieruus*, the holy priest, devoted to enacting the sacred mysteries of the altar, which he proclaims and explains by his preaching.⁷⁴

The Bishop's love of the Holy Eucharist is also expressed when in the course of the day he devotes a fair part of his time to adoration before the tabernacle. Here the Bishop opens his heart to the Lord, allowing it to be filled and shaped by the love poured forth from the Cross by the great Shepherd of the sheep, who shed his blood and gave his life for them. To him the Bishop raises his prayer in constant intercession for the sheep entrusted to his care.

Prayer and the Liturgy of the Hours

17. A second means (for the advancement of the Bishop's spiritual life) mentioned by the Synod Fathers is prayer, especially the prayer raised to the Lord in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, which remains the distinctive prayer of the Christian community, carried out in the name of Christ and under the guidance of the Spirit.

Prayer is itself a particular duty for a Bishop, and for all those who "have received the gift of a vocation to the specially consecrated life: of its nature, their consecration makes them more open to the experience of contemplation".⁷⁵ The Bishop himself cannot forget that he is a successor of those Apostles who were appointed by Christ above all "to be with him" (Mk 3:14), and who at the beginning of their mission made a solemn declaration which is a programme of life: "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). The Bishop will be a true teacher of prayer for the faithful only if he can draw upon his own personal experience of dialogue with God. He must be able to turn to God continually with the words of the Psalmist: "I hope in your word" (Ps 119:114). From prayer he will gain that hope which he must in turn pass on to the faithful. Prayer is the privileged forum where hope finds expression and nourishment, since it is, in the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the "interpreter of hope".⁷⁶

The Bishop's personal prayer will be particularly and typically "apostolic," in the sense that it is presented to the Father as intercession for all the needs of the people entrusted to his care. In the Roman Pontifical this is the final commitment demanded of the candidate elected to the episcopacy before the rite of the imposition of hands: "Are you resolved to pray without ceasing for the People of God, and to carry out the office of high priest without reproach?".⁷⁷ The Bishop

prays in a very special way for the holiness of his priests, for vocations to the ordained ministry and the consecrated life, so that missionary and apostolic commitment will be all the more ardent in the Church..

With regard to the Liturgy of the Hours, which is meant to consecrate and guide the course of the entire day through the praise of God, we cannot fail to recall the impressive statement of the Second Vatican Council: "When this wonderful song of praise is worthily rendered by priests and others who are deputed for this purpose by Church ordinance, or by the faithful praying together with the priest in an approved form, then it is truly the voice of the Bride addressing her Bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ himself, together with his Body, addresses to the Father. Hence, all who perform this service are not only fulfilling a duty of the Church, but also are sharing in the greatest honour accorded to Christ's Spouse, for by offering these praises to God they are standing before God's throne in the name of the Church, their Mother".⁷⁸ Writing on the prayer of the Divine Office, my predecessor of venerable memory Pope Paul VI, called it "the prayer of the local Church", which expresses "the true nature of the praying Church".⁷⁹ The consecratio temporis, effected by the Liturgy of the Hours, brings about that *laus perennis* which is an anticipation and prefiguration of the heavenly liturgy and a bond of union with the angels and saints who glorify God's name throughout eternity. The Bishop will become, and will appear, as a man of hope to the extent that he enters into the eschatological dynamism of praying the Psalter. The Psalms resound with the voice of the Bride (*vox sponsae*) as she calls upon her Bridegroom.

Every Bishop therefore prays with his people and for his people. He himself is supported and assisted by the prayer of his faithful: priests, deacons, consecrated persons and the lay people of all ages. In their midst the Bishop is a teacher and a promoter of prayer. He not only hands down what he himself has contemplated, but he opens to Christians the way of contemplation itself. The well-known motto *contemplata aliis tradere* thus becomes *contemplationem aliis tradere*.

The way of the evangelical counsels and the Beatitudes

18. To all his disciples, and especially to those who while still on this earth wish to follow him more closely like the Apostles, the Lord proposes the way of the evangelical counsels. In addition to being a gift of the Holy Trinity to the Church, the counsels are a reflection of the life of the Trinity in each believer.⁸⁰ This is especially the case in the Bishop, who, as a successor of the Apostles, is called to follow Christ along the path leading to the perfection of charity. For this reason he is consecrated, even as Jesus was consecrated. The Bishop's life is radically dependent on Christ and a completely transparent image of Christ before the Church and the world. The life of the Bishop must radiate the life of Christ and consequently Christ's own obedience to the Father, even unto death, death on a Cross (cf. Phil 2:8), his chaste and virginal love, and his poverty which is absolute detachment from all earthly goods.

In this way the Bishops can lead by their example not only those members of the Church who are called to follow Christ in the consecrated life but also priests, to whom the radicalism of holiness in accordance with the spirit of the evangelical counsels is also proposed. Indeed, this radicalism is incumbent on all the faithful, including lay people, for it is "a fundamental, undeniable demand flowing from the call of Christ to follow and imitate him by virtue of the intimate communion of life with him brought about by the Spirit".⁸¹

The faithful ought to be able to contemplate on the face of their Bishop the grace-given qualities which in the various Beatitudes make up the self-portrait of Christ: the face of poverty, meekness and the thirst for righteousness; the merciful face of the Father and of the peaceful and peacegiving man; the pure face of one who constantly looks to God alone. The faithful should also be able to see in their Bishop the face of one who relives Jesus' own compassion for the afflicted and, today as much as in the past, the face filled with strength and interior joy of one persecuted for the truth of the Gospel.

The virtue of obedience

19. By taking on these very human features of Jesus, the Bishop also becomes the model and promoter of a spirituality of communion, carefully and vigilantly working to build up the Church, so that all that he says and does will reflect a common filial submission in Christ and in the Spirit to the loving plan of the Father. As a teacher of holiness and minister of the sanctification of his people, the Bishop is called to carry out faithfully the will of the Father. The Bishop's obedience must be lived according to the example – for it could hardly be otherwise – of the obedience of Christ himself, who said that he came down from heaven not to do his own will, but rather the will of the One who sent him (cf. Jn 6:38; 8:29; Phil 2:7-8).

Walking in the footsteps of Christ, the Bishop is obedient to the Gospel and the Church's Tradition; he is able to read the signs of the times and to recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit in the Petrine ministry and in episcopal collegiality. In my Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* I stressed the apostolic, communitarian and pastoral character of priestly obedience.⁸² These hallmarks naturally appear even more markedly in the obedience of the Bishop. The fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders which he has received puts him in a special relationship with the Successor of Peter, with the members of the College of Bishops and with his own particular Church. He must feel committed to living intensely this relationship with the Pope and his brother Bishops in a close bond of unity and cooperation, and thus conforming to the divine plan which willed to unite the Apostles inseparably

around Peter. This hierarchical communion of the Bishop with the Supreme Pontiff strengthens his ability to make present, by virtue of the Order he has received, Jesus Christ, the invisible Head of the whole Church.

The apostolic aspect of obedience is necessarily linked also to its communitarian aspect, since the episcopate is by its nature "one and indivisible".⁸³ As a result of this communal dimension, the Bishop is called to live out his obedience by overcoming all temptations to individualism and by taking upon himself, within the wider context of the mission of the College of Bishops, concern for the good of the whole Church.

As a model of attentive listening, the Bishop will also strive to understand, through prayer and discernment, the will of God in what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Through the evangelical exercise of his authority, he will be ready to dialogue with his co-workers and the faithful in order to build effective mutual understanding.⁸⁴ This will enable him to show a pastoral appreciation of the dignity and responsibility of each member of the People of God, fostering in a balanced and serene way their spirit of initiative. The faithful should be helped to grow towards a responsible obedience which will enable them to be actively engaged on the pastoral plane.⁸⁵ Here the exhortation which Saint Ignatius of Antioch addressed to Polycarp remains timely: "Let nothing be done without your consent, but do nothing yourself without the consent of God".⁸⁶

The spirit and practice of poverty in Bishops

20. The Synod Fathers, as a sign of collegial unity, responded to the appeal which I made at the opening Mass of the Synod that the evangelical Beatitude of poverty should be considered an indispensable condition for a fruitful episcopal ministry in present-day circumstances. Here too, amid the assembly of Bishops there stood out the figure of Christ the Lord, "who carried out the work of redemption in poverty and under oppression", and who invites the Church, and above all her pastors, "to follow the same path in communicating to humanity the fruits of salvation".⁸⁷

Consequently, the Bishop who wishes to be an authentic witness and minister of the Gospel of hope must be a *vir pauper*. This is demanded by the witness he is called to bear to Christ, who was himself poor. It is also demanded by the Church's concern for the poor, who must be the object of a preferential option. The Bishop's decision to carry out his ministry in poverty contributes decisively to making the Church the "home of the poor".

This decision also provides the Bishop with inner freedom in the exercise of his ministry and enables him to communicate effectively the fruits of salvation. Episcopal authority must be exercised with untiring generosity and inexhaustible liberality. On the Bishop's part, this calls for complete trust in the providence of the heavenly Father, an open-hearted communion of goods, an austere way of life and continuous personal conversion. Only in this way will he be able to share in the struggles and sufferings of the People of God, whom he is called not only to lead and nourish but with whom he must show fraternal solidarity, sharing their problems and helping to build their hope.

He will carry out this service effectively if his own life is simple, sober and at the same time active and generous, and if it places those considered least important in our society not on the fringes but rather at the centre of the Christian community.⁸⁸ Almost without realizing it, he will foster a "creativity in charity" which will bear fruit not simply in the efficiency of the assistance offered but also in an ability to live in a spirit of fraternal sharing. In the Church of the Apostles, as the Book of Acts clearly witnesses, the poverty of some members of the community called forth the solidarity of others, with the amazing result that "there was not a needy person among them" (4:34). The Church needs to bear witness to this prophecy before a world assailed by the problems of hunger and inequality between peoples. In this perspective of sharing and of simplicity of life, the Bishop will administer the goods of the Church like the "good head of a household", and be careful to ensure that they are used for the Church's own specific ends: the worship of God, the support of her ministers, the works of the apostolate and initiatives of charity towards the poor.

The title *procurator pauperum* has always been applied to the Church's pastors. This must also be the case today, so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ can become present and be heard as a source of hope for all, but especially for those who can expect from God alone a more dignified life and a better future. Encouraged by the example of their pastors, the Church and the Churches must practise that "preferential option for the poor" which I have indicated as programmatic for the third millennium.⁸⁹

With chastity at the service of a Church which reflects the purity of Christ

21. "Receive this ring, the seal of fidelity: adorned with undefiled faith, preserve unblemished the Bride of God, the holy Church". These words of the Roman Pontiff⁹⁰ urge the Bishop to realize that he is committed to mirroring the virginal love of Christ for all his faithful ones. He is called above all to foster relationships inspired by the respect and esteem befitting a family where love flourishes, in accordance with the exhortation of the Apostle Peter: "Love one another deeply, from the heart, for you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God (1 Pet 1:22-23)".

While exhorting Christians by his example and words to offer their bodies as a living and holy sacrifice pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1), the Bishop must remind everyone that "the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31), and that it is our duty to "wait in joyful hope" for Christ's return in glory (cf. Tit 2:13). In his pastoral concern he should be especially close with paternal affection to all who have embraced the religious life in the profession of the evangelical

counsels and who offer their valuable service to the Church. He will support and encourage priests, who, called by God's grace, have freely assumed the commitment of celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven, and remind himself and them of the evangelical and spiritual grounds of this choice, so important for the service of the People of God. In the reality of the Church and the world today, the witness of chaste love is, on the one hand, a form of spiritual therapy for humanity and, on the other, a form of protest against the idolatry of instinct.

In the present social context, the Bishop needs to remain particularly close to his flock and above all to his priests, showing a father's concern for their ascetic and spiritual difficulties, and providing them with appropriate support to encourage them in fidelity to their vocation and to the requirements of an exemplary life in the exercise of the ministry. In cases of grave lapses, and even more of crimes which do damage to the very witness of the Gospel, especially when these involve the Church's ministers, the Bishop must be firm and decisive, just and impartial. He is bound to intervene in a timely manner, according to the established canonical norms, for the correction and spiritual good of the sacred minister, for the reparation of scandal and the restoration of justice, and for all that is required for the protection and assistance of victims.

By his words and example, and in his vigilance and paternal intervention, the Bishop fulfils his duty to offer the world the reality of a Church which is holy and chaste, in her ministers and in her faithful. When he does so, he walks as a pastor at the head of his flock, as did Christ the Bridegroom, who gave his life for us and who left to all the example of a love which is transparent and virginal, and therefore fruitful and universal.

The proponent of a spirituality of communion and mission

22. In my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I pointed out the need to "make the Church the home and the school of communion".⁹¹ This remark had a vast resonance and was taken up by the Synodal Assembly. Obviously the Bishop, in his own spiritual journey, has the primary duty of promoting and encouraging a spirituality of communion, and tirelessly working to make it a basic educational principle wherever human and Christian formation takes place: in parishes, Catholic associations, ecclesial movements, Catholic schools and youth groups. The Bishop will be particularly concerned to ensure that the spirituality of communion takes root and grows wherever future priests are trained, that is to say, in seminaries and in religious novitiates, in religious houses, in institutes and faculties of theology.

In that same Apostolic Letter I indicated the broad outlines of this promotion of a spirituality of communion. Here it will suffice to add that a Bishop must encourage this spirituality especially among his presbyterate, as well as among deacons and men and women religious. He will do so in personal dialogue and encounters, but also in community meetings. To this end he will make an effort to provide in his own particular Church special occasions which facilitate listening, especially to the Spirit "who speaks to the Churches" (Acts 2:7, 11 et al.). Examples of the latter would be retreats, spiritual exercises and days of spirituality, and also a prudent use of new communications media, should this prove useful and effective.

For a Bishop, fostering a spirituality of communion also means nurturing his communion with the Roman Pontiff and with his brother Bishops, especially within the same Episcopal Conference and Ecclesiastical Province. Here too, as an important means of overcoming the risk of a sense of isolation and discouragement in the face of the immensity of the problems and the time spent in dealing with them, the Bishop, in addition to prayer, should readily avail himself of the friendship and fraternal communion of his brother Bishops.

Communion, in its Trinitarian source and model, is always expressed in mission. Mission is the fruit and the logical consequence of communion. The dynamic process of communion is favoured by openness to the horizons and demands of mission, always ensuring the witness of unity so that the world may believe and making ever greater room for love, so that all people may attain to the Trinitarian unity from which they have come forth and to which they are destined. The more intense communion is, the more mission is fostered, especially when it is lived out in the poverty of love, which is the ability to go forth to meet any person or group or culture with the power of the Cross, our *spes unica* and the supreme witness to the love of God, which is also manifested as a universal love of our brothers and sisters.

A journey undertaken in everyday life

23. Spiritual realism enables us to see that the Bishop is called to live out his vocation to holiness in a context of difficulties within and without, amid his own weaknesses and those of others, in daily contingencies and personal and institutional problems. This is a constant feature of the life of pastors, as Saint Gregory the Great acknowledged when he admitted with regret: "After having laid upon my heart the burden of the pastoral office, my spirit has become incapable of frequent recollection, because it remains divided among many things. I am obliged to judge the cases of Churches and monasteries; often I am called to involve myself in the lives and actions of individuals... And so with my mind pulled and torn, forced to think of so many things, when can it recollect itself and concentrate totally on preaching, without withdrawing from the ministry of proclaiming the word?... The life of the watchman must always be on high and on guard".⁹²

In order to counterbalance the centrifugal impulses which would disperse his inner unity, the Bishop needs to cultivate a serene lifestyle capable of ensuring his mental, emotional and affective equilibrium and enabling him to be open to individuals and communities, and to their needs, as one who truly shares in their different situations, their joys and their sorrows. Caring for one's own health in its various aspects is also for the Bishop an act of love for his faithful and a pledge of greater openness and docility to the prompting of the Spirit. Hence, the advice which Saint Charles Borromeo, himself an outstanding pastor, proposed in the last of his Synods: "Do you have the care of souls? Do not on this account neglect the care of yourself, and do not give yourself to others in such a way that nothing of you remains for yourself. You must certainly keep in mind the souls of which you are pastor, but do not forget yourself".⁹³

The Bishop will therefore be concerned to have a balanced approach to his many commitments, maintaining a harmony between them: the celebration of the divine mysteries and personal prayer, private study and pastoral planning, recollection and necessary rest. Supported by these aids to the spiritual life, he will find peace of heart and experience profound communion with the Holy Trinity who chose and consecrated him. With God's unfailing grace, he will carry out his daily ministry as a witness to hope, attentive to the needs of the Church and the world.

The permanent formation of Bishops

24. The Bishop's untiring commitment to the pursuit of holiness through a Christocentric and ecclesial spirituality was closely linked in the Synodal Assembly to his urgent need for permanent formation. As was stressed in previous Synods and reaffirmed in the successive Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles Laici*,

Pastores Dabo Vobis and *Vita Consecrata*, permanent formation is necessary for all the faithful and should be considered particularly necessary for the Bishop, who bears personal responsibility for the harmonious progress of all in the Church.

For the Bishop, as for priests and religious, permanent formation is an intrinsic requirement of his vocation and mission. Through permanent formation he is able to discern the new calls by which God clarifies the initial call and applies it to different situations. The Apostle Peter, after hearing the words "follow me" at his first meeting with Christ (cf. Mt 4:19), heard this command again from the Risen One, who before leaving the earth foretold to him the trials and tribulations of his future ministry and then added: "You follow me" (cf. Jn 21:22). "Consequently, there is a 'follow me' which accompanies the Apostle's whole life and mission. It is a 'follow me' in line with the call and the demand of faithfulness unto death, a 'follow me' which can signify a sequela Christi to the point of total self-giving in martyrdom".⁹⁴ Clearly it is not simply a matter of setting up adequate programmes of continuing education aimed at providing a realistic acquaintance with the situation of the Church and the world, which would then enable pastors to deal with contemporary issues with an open mind and a compassionate heart. This is in itself a good reason for permanent formation, but there are also anthropological reasons, based on the fact that life itself is a continuing journey towards maturity, as well as theological reasons, deeply connected to the sacrament once received: the Bishop in fact must "safeguard with vigilant love the 'mystery' which he bears within his heart for the good of the Church and mankind".⁹⁵

Periodic updating, especially on certain more important subjects, calls for longer periods for listening, fellowship and dialogue with experts – Bishops, priests, religious men and women, and lay people – in an exchange of pastoral experiences, sound doctrine and spiritual resources which will ensure genuine personal enrichment. To this end the Synod Fathers emphasized the usefulness of special courses of formation for Bishops, like the annual sessions sponsored by the Congregation for Bishops or by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples for recently ordained Bishops. Likewise, there was a call to make available short courses of formation or days of study and updating, as well as programmes of spiritual exercises for Bishops, organized by Patriarchal Synods, Episcopal Conferences at the regional and national levels and also by the continental Assemblies of Bishops.

It would also be appropriate for the Officers of the Episcopal Conference to take on the responsibility of providing for the preparation and implementation of such programmes of permanent formation, and to encourage Bishops to take part in these courses, so as to build greater communion among them and to ensure more effective pastoral care in the individual Dioceses.⁹⁶

It is in any case evident that, like the life of the Church itself, pastoral styles and initiatives and forms of episcopal ministry are evolving. For this reason too, updating is needed, in conformity with the norms of the Code of Canon Law and in view of the new challenges and commitments of the Church in society. In this context the Synodal Assembly proposed a revision of the *Directory Ecclesiae Imago*, issued by the Congregation for Bishops on 22 February 1973, and its adaptation to the needs of the times and the changes which have taken place in the Church and pastoral life.⁹⁷

The example of sainted Bishops

25. In their life and ministry, in their spiritual journey and their efforts to carry out their pastoral activity, Bishops have always found encouragement in the lives of the saints who were themselves pastors. In my homily at the concluding Eucharistic celebration of the Synod, I held up the example of the holy pastors canonized during the last century as a testimony to a grace of the Holy Spirit which has never been lacking and will never be lacking in the Church.⁹⁸

Throughout the history of the Church, from the Apostles onwards, there has been an extraordinary number of pastors whose teaching and holiness are capable of giving light and direction for the spiritual journey of Bishops in the third millennium. The glorious witness of the great pastors of the early centuries of the Church, of the founders of particular Churches, of the confessors and martyrs who in times of persecution gave their life for Christ, remains as a beacon to which the Bishops of our time can refer and from which they can derive guidance and encouragement in their service to the Gospel.

Many of those Bishops were exemplary in the practice of the virtue of hope, when in difficult times they revived the spirits of their people, rebuilt churches after times of persecution or calamity, constructed hospices for pilgrims and the poor, and opened hospitals to care for the sick and the elderly. Many others were enlightened leaders who blazed new trails for their people. In times of difficulty, with their gaze firmly fixed on the crucified and risen Christ, our hope, they reacted positively and creatively to the challenges of the moment. At the beginning of the third millennium, some of those pastors are still among us, and they have a story to tell, a story of faith firmly anchored to the Cross. They are pastors who have a sense of people's aspirations and can take them up, purify them and interpret them in the light of the Gospel, and for this reason they too have a future to build, together with the people entrusted to their care.

Consequently, each particular Church should be concerned to celebrate its own saints who were Bishops and also to remember those pastors who by virtue of their holy lives and enlightened teachings handed down to their people a particular legacy of admiration and affection. They are the spiritual sentinels who from heaven guide the way of the pilgrim Church through time. In order to keep ever alive the memory of those faithful Bishops who were outstanding in the exercise of their ministry, the Synodal Assembly recommended that particular Churches or, when suitable, the Bishops' Conferences, should make the lives of these Bishops known to the faithful through updated biographies and, when the case warrants, consider the possibility of introducing their cause for canonization.⁹⁹

Today too, the testimony of a fully realized spiritual and apostolic life remains the greatest proof of the power of the Gospel to transform individuals and communities, thus enabling God's own holiness to break into the world and history. Here we find yet another reason for hope, especially for the younger generation, which looks to the Church for exciting ideas and a vision capable of inspiring their efforts to renew in Christ the society of our time.

CHAPTER THREE - TEACHER OF THE FAITH AND HERALD OF THE WORD

"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel..." (Mk 16, 15)

26. The risen Jesus entrusted to his Apostles the mission of "making disciples" of all nations, teaching them to observe all that he himself had commanded. The task of proclaiming the Gospel to the whole world has thus been solemnly entrusted to the Church, the community of the disciples of the crucified and risen Lord.

It is a task which will continue until the end of time. From the beginning, this mission of evangelization has been an integral part of the Church's identity. The Apostle Paul was well aware of this when he wrote: "If I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! (1 Cor 9:16).

If the duty of proclaiming the Gospel is incumbent upon the whole Church and each of her children, it is particularly so upon Bishops, who on the day of their sacred ordination, which places them in apostolic succession, assume as one of their principal responsibilities the proclamation of the Gospel; "with the courage imparted by the Spirit, they are to call people to faith and strengthen them in living faith".¹⁰⁰

The Bishop's work of evangelization, aimed at leading men and women to faith or to strengthening the faith within them, is an outstanding manifestation of his spiritual fatherhood. He can thus repeat with Paul: "Though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (1 Cor 4:15). Precisely because of this constant process of begetting new life in the Spirit, the episcopal ministry appears in the world as a sign of hope for every individual and people.

The Synod Fathers rightly stated that the proclamation of Christ always takes first place and that the Bishop is the first preacher of the Gospel by his words and by the witness of his life. He must be aware of the challenges of the present hour and have the courage to face them. All Bishops, as ministers of truth, will carry out this task with strength and trust.¹⁰¹

Christ at the heart of the Gospel and of humanity

27. The proclamation of the Gospel emerged as a prominent theme in the interventions of the Synod Fathers, who on several occasions and in a wide variety of ways stated that the living centre of the preaching of the Gospel is Christ, crucified and risen for the salvation of all peoples.¹⁰²

Christ is in fact the heart of evangelization and, as I myself have often insisted, is the very programme of the new evangelization, which "ultimately has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and

culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium".103

From Christ, the heart of the Gospel, all the other truths of faith are derived, and hope shines forth for all humanity. Christ is the light which enlightens everyone, and all those reborn in him receive the first fruits of the Spirit, which enable them to fulfil the new law of love.104

By virtue of his apostolic mission the Bishop is enabled to lead his people to the heart of the mystery of faith, where they will be able to encounter the living person of Jesus Christ. In this way they will come to understand that all Christian experience has its source and its unfailing point of reference in the Paschal mystery of Jesus, the victor over sin and death.105

The proclamation of the Lord's death and Resurrection thus includes "the prophetic proclamation of a hereafter, which is man's deepest and definitive calling, in continuity and discontinuity with his present situation: beyond time and history, beyond the reality of this world, which is passing away...

Evangelization thus includes the preaching of hope in the promises made by God in the new Covenant in Jesus Christ".106

The Bishop, hearer and guardian of the word

28. The Second Vatican Council, advancing along the path indicated by the Church's tradition, explains that the mission of teaching proper to Bishops consists in reverently safeguarding and courageously proclaiming the faith.107

Here we see all the rich meaning of the gesture found in the Roman rite of episcopal ordination, when the open Book of the Gospels is placed on the head of the Bishop-elect. This gesture indicates, on the one hand, that the word embraces and watches over the Bishop's ministry and, on the other, that the Bishop's life is to be completely submitted to the word of God in his daily commitment of preaching the Gospel in all patience and sound doctrine (cf. 2 Tim 4). The Synod Fathers often stated that the Bishop is one who keeps the word of God with love and courageously defends it as he testifies to its message of salvation. The meaning of the episcopal munus docendi is rooted in the very nature of what must be preserved, that is, the deposit of faith.

Christ our Lord in the sacred Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and in Tradition has entrusted to his Church the one deposit of divine revelation, which is like a mirror in which the Church during her pilgrim journey here on earth "contemplates God, from whom she receives everything, until such time as she is brought home to see him face to face as he really is".108 This has happened down the centuries until our own day: the different communities, in welcoming the word, ever new and effective in the course of time, have listened with docility to the voice of the Holy Spirit, pledging themselves to make it alive, applicable and effective in different times of history. In this way the word handed down – Tradition – has become ever more consciously a word of life, and at the same time the task of proclaiming and preserving it has progressively continued under the guidance and assistance of the Spirit of Truth, as a continuous passing on of all that the Church herself is and all that she believes.109

This Tradition, which comes from the Apostles, makes progress in the life of the Church, as the Second Vatican Council has taught. There is likewise growth and development in the understanding of the realities and words handed down, so that in holding, practising and professing the faith that has been handed on, there comes about a unique harmony between the Bishops and the faithful.110 In striving to remain faithful to the Spirit who speaks within the Church, the faithful and the Bishops converge and create those profound bonds of faith which represent as it were the first stage of the *sensus fidei*. Here it is helpful to listen once more to the words of the Council: "The whole body of the faithful, who have an anointing that comes from the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27), cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when, 'from the bishops to the last of the faithful' they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals".111

Consequently, for every Bishop the life of the Church and life in the Church is the condition for exercising his mission to teach. A Bishop finds his identity and place amid the community of the Lord's disciples where he received the gift of divine life and his first instruction in the faith. Every Bishop, especially when he is seated in his cathedral before the faithful and exercising his role as a teacher in the Church, must be able to repeat with Saint Augustine: "With respect to the place which we occupy, we are your teachers; with respect to the one Master, we are fellow disciples with you in the same school".112 In the Church, the school of the living God, Bishops and the faithful are all fellow disciples, and all need to be taught by the Spirit.

Many indeed are the places from which the Spirit imparts his inner teaching: first of all, in the heart of every person, and then in the life of the various particular Churches, where the various needs of individuals and the various ecclesial communities emerge and make themselves heard, not only in languages that are known but also in those that are new and different.

The Spirit also makes himself heard as he awakens in the Church different forms of charisms and services. For this reason too, there were frequent calls during the Synod for Bishops to have direct and personal contact with the faithful living in the communities entrusted to their pastoral care, following the example of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and calls each by name. Indeed, frequent meetings of the Bishop with his priests, in the first place, and then with

the deacons, consecrated persons and their communities, and with the laity, individually and in their various forms of association, are of great importance for the exercise of effective ministry among the People of God.

Authentic and authoritative service of the word

29. At his episcopal ordination, each Bishop received the fundamental mission of authoritatively proclaiming the word of God. Indeed, every Bishop, by virtue of sacred ordination, is an authentic teacher who preaches to the people entrusted to his care the faith to be believed and to be put into practice in the moral life. This means that Bishops are endowed with the authority of Christ himself, and for this fundamental reason when they "teach in communion with the Roman Pontiff they are to be revered by all as witnesses of divine and catholic truth; the faithful, for their part, are obliged to submit to their Bishop's decision, made in the name of Christ, in matters of faith and morals, and to adhere to it with a religious assent of the mind".¹¹³ In this service of the truth, every Bishop is placed before the community, inasmuch as he is for the community, which is the object of his proper pastoral concern and for which he insistently lifts up his prayer to God.

That which every Bishop has heard and received from the heart of the Church he must then give back to his brothers and sisters, whom he must care for like the Good Shepherd. In him the *sensus fidei* attains completeness. As the Second Vatican Council teaches: "By the sense of the faith, which is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, under the guidance of the magisterium to which it is faithfully obedient, receives no longer the words of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Th 2:13), it adheres 'indefectibly to the faith once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3). It penetrates more deeply into that same faith through right judgment, and applies it more fully to life".¹¹⁴ The word of the Bishop is thus, within the community and before it, no longer simply his private word, but rather the word of a pastor who strengthens the community in faith, gathers it around the mystery of God and gives it life.

The faithful need the word of their Bishop, they need to have their faith confirmed and purified. The Synodal Assembly for its part emphasized this need and drew attention to several specific areas in which it is particularly felt. One of these areas is that of the initial proclamation of the word, the *kerygma*, which is always needed for bringing about the obedience of faith, but is all the more urgent today, in times marked by indifference and by religious ignorance on the part of many Christians.¹¹⁵ In the area of catechesis too, the Bishop is clearly the pre-eminent catechist of his people. The decisive role in this area played by so many great and saintly Bishops, whose catechetical writings are still read with profit today, makes it clear that it remains the Bishop's duty to be ultimately in charge of the catechesis imparted in his Diocese. In carrying out this duty he will not fail to refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The words which I addressed to Bishops in my Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* remain valid: "You have a special mission within your Churches, you are before all others the ones primarily responsible for catechesis".¹¹⁶ It is therefore the duty of every Bishop to give real priority in his particular Church to active and effective catechesis. He must demonstrate his personal concern through direct interventions aimed at promoting and preserving an authentic passion for catechesis.¹¹⁷

Conscious, then, of his responsibility in the area of transmitting and teaching the faith, every Bishop must ensure that a corresponding concern is shown by all those who by their vocation and mission are called to hand down the faith. This means priests and deacons, the faithful who have embraced the consecrated life, fathers and mothers of families, pastoral workers and in a special way catechists, as well as teachers of theology and teachers of the ecclesiastical sciences and religious education.¹¹⁸ The Bishop will thus take care to provide them with both initial and ongoing training.

In carrying out this duty Bishops will derive particular benefit from open dialogue and cooperation with theologians, whose task it is to employ an appropriate methodology in the quest for deeper knowledge of the unfathomable richness of the mystery of Christ. Bishops will not fail to encourage and support them and the schools or academic institutions where they work, so that they can carry out their service to the People of God in fidelity to Tradition and with attentiveness to changing historical circumstances.¹¹⁹ Whenever appropriate, Bishops must firmly defend the unity and integrity of the faith, judging with authority what is or is not in conformity with the word of God.¹²⁰

The Synod Fathers also called the Bishops' attention to their magisterial responsibilities in the area of morality. The rules that the Church sets forth reflect the divine commandments, which find their crown and synthesis in the Gospel command of love. The end to which every divine rule tends is the greater good of human beings. The exhortation of the Book of Deuteronomy is still valid today: "Walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you" (5:33). Nor must we forget that the Ten Commandments have a firm foundation in human nature itself, and thus the values which they defend have universal validity. This is particularly true of values such as human life, which must be defended from conception until its end in natural death; the freedom of individuals and of nations, social justice and the structures needed to achieve it.¹²¹

Episcopal ministry for the inculturation of the Gospel

30. The evangelization of culture and the inculturation of the Gospel are an integral part of the new evangelization and thus a specific concern of the episcopal office. Echoing in this regard several of my own statements, the Synod

repeated: "A faith which does not become culture is not a faith which is fully accepted, integrated and faithfully translated into life".¹²²

This is, in fact, a task which is ancient yet ever new, a task which has its origin in the mystery of the Incarnation itself and its motivation in the innate ability of the Gospel to take root in every culture, shaping and developing it, purifying it and opening it to the fullness of truth and life which is realized in Jesus Christ. Great attention was paid to this theme in the course of the continental Synods and many valuable insights emerged. I myself have dealt with this subject on a number of occasions.

Consequently, every Bishop, taking into consideration the cultural values present in the territory of his particular Church, should strive to ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed in its integrity, so as to shape the hearts of men and women and the customs of peoples. In this work of evangelization a valuable contribution can be made by theologians and those expert in drawing upon the cultural, artistic and historical patrimony of the Diocese: this is true for both first evangelization and the new evangelization, and represents an effective pastoral tool.¹²³

Of equal importance for the proclamation of the Gospel in "new Areopagi" and for the handing down of the faith are the communications media. In considering these media the Synod Fathers encouraged Bishops to promote greater cooperation between Episcopal Conferences, on both the national and international levels, in order to ensure a high level of quality in the work being carried out in this sensitive and important area of social life.¹²⁴

Where the preaching of the Gospel is concerned, care must not only be shown for the orthodoxy of its presentation but also for its incisiveness and its ability to be heard and accepted. This, obviously, involves a commitment to setting aside, especially in seminaries, sufficient time for training candidates to the priesthood in the use of the communications media, so that evangelizers will be good proclaimers and good communicators.

Preaching by word and example

31. No full treatment of the ministry of the Bishop, as the preacher of the Gospel and guardian of the faith among the People of God, can fail to mention the duty of personal integrity: the Bishop's teaching is prolonged in his witness and his example of an authentic life of faith. He teaches with an authority exercised in the name of Jesus Christ ¹²⁵ the word which is heard in the community; were he not to live what he teaches, he would be giving the community a contradictory message.

It is clear, then, that all the activities of the Bishop must be directed towards the proclamation of the Gospel, "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom 1:16). His essential task is to help the People of God to give to the word of revelation the obedience of faith (cf. Rom 1:5) and to embrace fully the teachings of Christ. One could say that, in a Bishop, mission and life are united in such a way that they can no longer be thought of as two separate things: we Bishops are our mission. If we do not carry out that mission, we will no longer be ourselves. It is in the transmission of our faith that our lives become a visible sign of Christ's presence in our communities.

The witness of his life becomes for a Bishop a new basis for authority alongside the objective basis received in episcopal consecration. "Authority" is thus joined by "authoritativeness". Both are necessary. The former, in fact, gives rise to the objective requirement that the faithful should assent to the authentic teaching of the Bishop; the latter helps them to put their trust in his message. Here I would like to quote the words of a great Bishop of the ancient Church, Saint Hilary of Poitiers: "The blessed Apostle Paul, wishing to describe the ideal Bishop and to form by his teachings a completely new man of the Church, explained what was, so to speak, his highest perfection. He stated that a Bishop must profess sure doctrine, in accordance with what has been taught, and thus be able to exhort others to sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it... On the one hand, a minister of irreproachable life, if he is not learned, will only manage to help himself; on the other, a learned minister will lose the authority which comes from his learning, unless his life is irreproachable".¹²⁶

Once again it is the Apostle Paul who defines in these words our rule of conduct: "Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity and sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us" (Tit 2:7-8).

CHAPTER FOUR - MINISTER OF THE GRACE OF THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD

"Sanctified in Jesus Christ, called to be saints" (1 Cor 1:2)

32. As I prepare to deal with one of the prime and fundamental functions of the Bishop, the ministry of sanctification, my thoughts turn to the words addressed by the Apostle Paul to the faithful of Corinth, to remind them of the mystery of their vocation: "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:2). The sanctification of the Christian takes place in the waters of Baptism, is consolidated by the sacraments of Confirmation and Reconciliation, and is nourished by the Eucharist, the Church's greatest treasure, the sacrament by which the Church is constantly built up as the People of God, the Body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁷

This sanctification permeates the whole life of the Church, and the Bishop is its minister, above all through the sacred liturgy. The liturgy, and the Eucharistic celebration in particular, has been called "the source and summit of the Church's life".¹²⁸ This statement is in a way reflected in the Bishop's own liturgical ministry, which is the centre of his activity aimed at the sanctification of the People of God.

Hence the importance of liturgical life in the particular Church, where the Bishop exercises his ministry of sanctification, proclaiming and preaching the word of God, guiding prayer for his people and with his people, and presiding over the celebration of the sacraments. For this reason the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* gives the Bishop a striking title, taken from the prayer of episcopal consecration in the Byzantine rite: he is the "steward of the grace of the high priesthood, especially in the Eucharist, which he offers himself or which he ensures is offered, and by which the Church continually lives and grows".¹²⁹

Between the ministry of sanctification and the other two ministries of teaching and governance there is a profound and close correspondence. Preaching is in fact ordered to our sharing in the divine life, which we receive from the double table of the word and the Eucharist. This life develops and is made manifest in the daily life of the faithful, since all are called to express in their lives what they have received in faith.¹³⁰ The ministry of governance, like that of Jesus the Good Shepherd, is also expressed in functions and activities aimed at developing in the community of the faithful the fullness of life in charity, to the glory of the Holy Trinity and in testimony to its loving presence in the world.

Consequently, each Bishop, in exercising his ministry of sanctification (*munus sanctificandi*), effectively brings about all that his ministry of teaching (*munus docendi*) aims to achieve, while at the same time receiving grace for his ministry of governance (*munus regendi*) as he shapes his way of thinking according to the image of Christ the High Priest, so that all is ordered to the building up of the Church and to the glory of the Holy Trinity.

The source and summit of the life of the particular Church

33. The Bishop carries out his ministry of sanctification by celebrating the Eucharist and the other sacraments, by praising God in the Liturgy of the Hours, by presiding over the other sacred rites and by promoting liturgical life and authentic popular piety. Of all the celebrations at which the Bishop presides, special importance attaches to those which manifest the specific nature of the episcopal ministry as the fullness of the priesthood. These include especially the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation, sacred ordinations, the solemn celebration of the Eucharist at which the Bishop is surrounded by his presbyterate and the other ministers – as for example in the Mass of Chrism – the dedication of churches and altars, the consecration of virgins and other rites of importance for the life of the particular Church. In these celebrations, the Bishop visibly appears as the father and the pastor of the faithful, the "great priest" of his people (cf. Heb 10:21), the one who prays and serves as a model of prayer, the one who intercedes for his brothers and sisters and in the assembly beseeches and gives thanks to the Lord, making manifest God's primacy and glory. In these various moments there springs up, as if from a fountain, the divine grace which permeates the whole life of the children of God during their earthly pilgrimage and which guides that life towards its culmination and fullness in the heavenly homeland. The ministry of sanctification is thus a fundamental moment in the building of Christian hope. By preaching the word, the Bishop not only proclaims God's promises and opens up paths for the future, but he also encourages the People of God on their earthly pilgrimage; and in the celebration of the sacraments, the pledge of future glory, he gives them a foretaste of their final destiny in communion with the Virgin Mary and the saints, in the unwavering certainty of Christ's definitive victory over sin and death and of his coming in glory.

The importance of the Cathedral Church

34. The Bishop, while carrying out his ministry of sanctification in the whole Diocese, has as his focal point the Cathedral Church, which is as it were the Mother Church and the centre of convergence for the particular Church. The Cathedral is the place where the Bishop has his Chair, from which he teaches his people and helps them to grow through his preaching, and from which he presides at the principal celebrations of the liturgical year and in the celebration of the sacraments. Precisely when he occupies his Chair, the Bishop is seen by the assembly of the faithful as the one who presides in *loco Dei Patris*; and it is for this reason, as I mentioned earlier, that, according to an ancient tradition of both East and West, only the Bishop may sit on the episcopal Chair. It is the presence of this Chair which in fact makes the Cathedral Church the physical and spiritual centre of unity and communion for the diocesan presbyterate and for all the holy People of God.

In this regard, we should recall the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that "everyone should regard the liturgical life of the diocese centring on the Bishop, above all in the Cathedral Church, as of the highest importance. They should be convinced that the Church is displayed with special clarity when the holy People of God, all of them, are actively and lawfully sharing in the same liturgical celebrations – especially when it is the same Eucharist – sharing one prayer at one altar at which the Bishop is presiding, surrounded by his presbyterate and his ministers".¹³¹ Consequently, the Cathedral, where the supreme moment of the Church's life takes place, is also the setting for the most exalted and sacred act of the Bishop's *munus sanctificandi*, which involves, like the very liturgy at which he presides, both the sanctification of the people and the worship and glorification of God.

The special occasions for this manifestation of the mystery of the Church include certain particular celebrations. Among these, I would mention the annual liturgy of the Chrism Mass, which must be considered "one of the principal expressions of the fullness of the Bishop's priesthood and signifies the close unity of the priests with him".¹³² At this celebration, there is the blessing of the Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Catechumens, and the blessing of the sacred Chrism, the sacramental sign of salvation and perfect life for all those reborn of water and the Holy Spirit. The most solemn liturgies must certainly include those for conferring of Holy Orders: these rites properly and normally take place in the Cathedral church.¹³³ Other occasions can be added, such as the celebration of the anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral and the feasts of the patron saints of the Diocese.

These and other occasions, in accordance with the liturgical calendar of each Diocese, are valuable occasions for strengthening the bonds of communion with the presbyters, consecrated persons and the lay faithful, and for encouraging a commitment to mission in all the members of the particular Church. For this reason the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* highlights the importance of the Cathedral Church and of the celebrations held therein, as a source of enrichment and an example to the whole particular Church.¹³⁴

The Bishop, moderator of the liturgy as a paedagogy of faith

35. The Synod Fathers wished in the present circumstances to call attention to the importance of the ministry of sanctification exercised in the liturgy, which must be celebrated in such a way as to enhance its didactic and educational effectiveness.¹³⁵ This calls for making liturgical celebrations truly an epiphany of the mystery. They should thus express with clarity the nature of divine worship, reflecting the genuine sense of the Church which prays and which celebrates the divine mysteries. If liturgical celebrations allow for the suitable participation of all in accordance with their various ministries, they will not fail to be resplendent in their dignity and beauty.

I myself, in the exercise of my ministry, have sought to give priority to liturgical celebrations, both in Rome itself and in my Pastoral Visits to the various continents and nations. By making the beauty and the dignity of the Christian liturgy shine forth in all its expressions, I have tried to promote the genuine meaning of the sanctification of God's name in order to form the religious sentiment of the faithful and open it to the transcendent.

I therefore encourage my Brother Bishops, who are teachers of the faith and sharers in Christ's supreme priesthood, to work tirelessly for the authentic promotion of the liturgy. In the manner of its celebration the liturgy demands that revealed truth be clearly proclaimed, the divine life be faithfully handed down, and the genuine nature of the Church be unambiguously expressed. Everyone should be conscious of the importance of the sacred celebrations of the mysteries of the Catholic faith. The truth of the faith and of Christian life is not handed down by words alone, but also by sacramental signs and the liturgical rites as a whole. Well known in this regard is the ancient dictum which closely links the *lex credendi* to the *lex orandi*.¹³⁶

Every Bishop should therefore be exemplary in the art of presiding, conscious that he is called to *tractare mysteria*. His life should be profoundly shaped by the theological virtues, which will inspire his conduct in all his dealings with God's holy people. He should be capable of transmitting the supernatural meaning of the words, prayers and rites, in a way that enables everyone to share in the sacred mysteries. Through the practical and suitable promotion of the liturgical apostolate in the Diocese, the Bishop should also ensure that the ministers and the people gain an authentic understanding and experience of the liturgy, so that the faithful can attain that full, conscious, active and fruitful participation in the holy mysteries called for by the Second Vatican Council.¹³⁷

In this way liturgical celebrations, especially those celebrated by the Bishop in his Cathedral, will be clear proclamations of the Church's faith, privileged occasions when the pastor presents the mystery of Christ to the faithful and helps them to enter progressively into it, experiencing it with joy and then testifying to it by works of charity (cf. Gal 5:6).

Given the importance of the proper transmission of the faith in the Church's sacred liturgy, the Bishop will not fail to be vigilant and careful, for the good of the faithful, to ensure that existing liturgical norms are observed always and everywhere. This also calls for the firm and timely correction of abuses and the elimination of arbitrary liturgical changes. The Bishop himself should also be attentive, to the extent that it depends on him, in cooperation with the Episcopal Conferences and their respective liturgical commissions, to ensure that the dignity and authenticity of liturgical celebrations are maintained in radio and television broadcasts.

The centrality of the Lord's Day and the liturgical year

36. The Bishop's life and ministry must be permeated by the presence of the Lord in his mystery. The growth throughout the Diocese of a conviction of the spiritual, catechetical and pastoral centrality of the liturgy greatly depends on the example of the Bishop.

At the centre of this ministry is the celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ held on Sunday, the Lord's Day. As I have often repeated, including recently, in order to give a strong sign of Christian identity in our time it is necessary to restore the centrality of the celebration of the Lord's Day and, on that day, of the celebration of the Eucharist. Sunday is a day which should be experienced as "a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter".¹³⁸

The presence of the Bishop, who on Sunday – which is also the Church's Day – presides at the Eucharist in his Cathedral or in the parishes of the Diocese, can be an exemplary sign of fidelity to the mystery of the Resurrection and a reason for hope for God's People as they make their pilgrim way, Sunday after Sunday, towards the unending eighth day of the eternal Easter.¹³⁹

In the course of the liturgical year the Church relives the whole Christian mystery, from the Lord's Incarnation and Nativity to his Ascension, to the day of Pentecost and the hope-filled expectation of his glorious return.¹⁴⁰ The Bishop will naturally devote particular attention to the preparation and celebration of the Paschal Triduum, the heart of the whole liturgical year, with the solemn Easter Vigil and its prolongation in the fifty-day Easter season.

The liturgical year with its cycle of celebrations can suitably serve as the basis for the pastoral planning of the life of the Diocese around the mystery of Christ. In this journey of faith, the Church is sustained by the “memory of the Virgin Mary, who, already glorified in body and soul in heaven... shines forth as a sign of sure hope and comfort for the pilgrim People of God”.¹⁴¹ It is a hope which is likewise nourished by the commemoration of the martyrs and the other saints, who, “having attained perfection through the manifold grace of God and now possess eternal salvation, sing perfect praise to God in heaven and make intercession for us”.¹⁴²

The Bishop as minister of the Eucharistic celebration

37. At the heart of the Bishop's *munus sanctificandi* is the Eucharist, which he himself offers or which he ensures is offered, and which particularly manifests his office as steward or minister of the grace of the supreme priesthood.¹⁴³

It is above all by presiding at the Eucharistic assembly that the Bishop contributes to the building up of the Church as a mystery of communion and mission. For the Eucharist is the essential principle of the life not only of the simple faithful but of the community itself in Christ. The faithful, gathered by the preaching of the Gospel, form communities in which the Church of Christ is truly present, and this becomes especially clear in the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.¹⁴⁴ Well-known is the teaching of the Council in this regard: “In any community of the altar, under the sacred ministry of the Bishop, there is made manifest the symbol of that charity and ‘unity of the mystical body without which there can be no salvation’. In these communities, though often small and poor, or scattered, Christ is present and by his power the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is gathered together. For ‘sharing in the body and blood of Christ has no other effect than to make us become what we consume’”.¹⁴⁵

The Eucharistic celebration, then, which is the “source and summit of all evangelization”,¹⁴⁶ is also the source of the Church's whole missionary commitment, which is aimed at manifesting to others, through the witness of our lives, the mystery which we live in faith.

Among all the responsibilities of the Bishop's pastoral ministry, that of celebrating the Eucharist is the most compelling and important. The Bishop also has the duty, as one of his principal tasks, of ensuring that the faithful are able to approach the Lord's table, especially on Sunday, which, as I just mentioned, is the day on which the Church, the community and family of the children of God, rediscovers her specific Christian identity around her own priests.¹⁴⁷

It can happen, however, that in certain places, whether due to a lack of priests or to other grave and persistent reasons, it is not possible to ensure the celebration of the Eucharist on a regular basis. This increases the duty of the Bishop, as the father of the family and minister of grace, to be constantly attentive to discerning real needs and the seriousness of different situations. It will be necessary to ensure a prudent distribution of the members of the presbyterate, so that, also in other emergencies, the community is not deprived of the Eucharistic celebration for long periods.

In cases where the celebration of Holy Mass cannot be provided for, the Bishop will ensure that the community, while continuing to await the encounter with Christ in the celebration of his Paschal Mystery, will be able to have, at least on Sundays and feast days, a special celebration. In this case the faithful, led by responsible ministers, will be able to benefit from the gift of the word proclaimed and from communion in the Eucharist, thanks to the proper planning of Sunday gatherings in the absence of a priest.¹⁴⁸

The Bishop's responsibility for Christian initiation

38. In the present circumstances of the Church and the world, both in the young Churches and in the countries where Christianity has been established for centuries, the restoration, especially for adults, of the great tradition of the discipline of Christian initiation has proved providential. This was a far-sighted decision of the Second Vatican Council,¹⁴⁹ which wished in this way to provide the means for an encounter with Christ and the Church to the many men and women touched by the grace of the Spirit and wishing to enter into communion with the mystery of salvation in Christ who died and rose for us.

Through the process of Christian initiation, catechumens are gradually introduced into knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church by analogy with the origin, development and growth of natural life. The faithful, reborn in Baptism and made sharers in the royal priesthood, are strengthened in Confirmation, of which the Bishop is the original minister, and thus receive a special outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit. Then by sharing in the Eucharist they are nourished with the food of eternal life and made full members of the Church, Christ's Mystical Body. In this way, the faithful, “by the effects of these sacraments of Christian initiation, are enabled to taste ever more fully and better the treasures of the divine life and to progress to the attainment of the perfection of charity”.¹⁵⁰

With due regard for present-day circumstances, Bishops will observe the prescriptions of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. They will see to it that every Diocese has the structures and the pastoral workers necessary to ensure in the most dignified and effective way the implementation of the regulations and of the liturgical, catechetical and pastoral discipline of Christian initiation, duly adapted to the needs of our times.

By its very nature as a progressive insertion into the mystery of Christ and the Church, a mystery alive and at work in each particular Church, the itinerary of Christian initiation demands the presence and ministry of the Diocesan Bishop, especially at the culminating phase of the journey, namely, in the administration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, which ordinarily takes place at the Easter Vigil.

It is also the Bishop's task to regulate, in accordance with Church law, all matters involving the Christian initiation of children and young people, and to lay down norms concerning their proper catechetical preparation and gradual involvement in the life of the community. The Bishop should also be vigilant that programmes for the catechumenate, or for the continuance or renewal of the process of Christian initiation, or for reaching out to members of the faithful who have fallen away from the normal and community life of faith, operate in accordance with the Church's laws and in full harmony with the life of parish communities in the Diocese.

Finally, with regard to Confirmation, the Bishop, as the ordinary minister of this sacrament, will ensure that he himself is its usual celebrant. His presence in the midst of the parish community which, by virtue of the baptismal font and the table of the Eucharist, is the natural and normal place for the process of Christian initiation, effectively evokes the mystery of Pentecost and proves most beneficial in consolidating the bonds of ecclesial communion between the pastor and the faithful.

The Bishop's responsibilities in the discipline of Penance

39. The Synod Fathers in their interventions paid particular attention to the Church's penitential discipline; they stressed its importance and recalled the special care which, as successors of the Apostles, Bishops must show for the pastoral practice and the discipline of the sacrament of Penance. I was glad to hear them reaffirm my own profound conviction that the greatest pastoral concern must be shown for this sacrament of the Church, the source of reconciliation, of peace and of joy for all of us who stand in need of the Lord's mercy and of healing from the wounds of sin.

The Bishop, as the one primarily responsible for penitential discipline in his particular Church, is particularly charged with offering a kerygmatic invitation to conversion and penance. It is his duty to proclaim with evangelical freedom the sad and destructive presence of sin in the lives of individuals and in the history of communities. At the same time, he must proclaim the boundless mystery of the mercy which God has bestowed on us in the Cross and Resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ, and in the outpouring of the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. This proclamation, which is also an invitation to reconciliation and a call to hope, is the very heart of the Gospel. It was the first thing which the Apostles proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, a proclamation which reveals the very meaning of the grace of salvation communicated in the sacraments.

The Bishop should be, in suitable ways, an exemplary minister of the sacrament of Penance, and he himself will have regular and faithful recourse to that sacrament. He will not cease to exhort his priests to hold in high esteem the ministry of reconciliation which they received at their priestly ordination, and he should encourage them to exercise that ministry with generosity and supernatural tact, in imitation of the Father who welcomes those who have come home, and of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who carries on his shoulders the lost sheep.¹⁵¹

The Bishop's responsibility extends also to the duty of exercising vigilance that recourse to general absolution does not take place outside the norms of law. In this regard, in my Apostolic Letter *Misericordia Dei* I stressed that Bishops have the duty to enforce the existing discipline whereby individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary means by which members of the faithful conscious of grave sin are reconciled with God and with the Church. Only physical or moral impossibility dispenses from this ordinary means, in which case reconciliation can be obtained by other means. The Bishop will not fail to remind all those who by virtue of office are charged with the care of souls that they have the duty to provide the faithful with the opportunity of making an individual confession.¹⁵² He himself will make certain that the faithful are in fact being assisted in every way possible to make their confession.

When one considers in the light of Tradition and the Church's Magisterium the close connection between the sacrament of Reconciliation and participation in the Eucharist, one sees how necessary it is today to form the consciences of the faithful so that they may partake worthily and fruitfully of the Eucharistic Banquet, and approach it in a state of grace.¹⁵³

It is also useful to mention that it is the Bishop's responsibility to regulate in a suitable way and through the careful choice of suitable ministers the discipline governing the practice of exorcism and the celebration of prayers to obtain healings, with due respect for recent documents of the Holy See.¹⁵⁴

Attention to popular piety

40. The Synod Fathers reaffirmed the importance of popular piety in the handing on and the growth of faith. As my predecessor of venerable memory Pope Paul VI once said, popular piety is rich in values both in reference to God and to our brothers and sisters, 155 and thus constitutes an authentic treasury of spirituality in the life of the Christian community.

In our time too, marked as it is by a widespread yearning for spirituality which often draws many to follow religious sects or other forms of vague spiritualism, Bishops are called to discern and to foster the values and forms of true popular piety.

The words of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* remain timely: "Pastoral charity must dictate to all those whom the Lord has placed as leaders of the ecclesial communities the proper attitude in regard to this reality, which is at the same time so rich and so vulnerable. Above all one must be sensitive to it, know how to perceive its interior dimensions and undeniable values, be ready to help it to overcome its risks of deviation. When it is well oriented, this popular religiosity can be more and more for multitudes of our people a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ". 156

The forms in which popular piety is expressed should be shaped and, when necessary, purified in accordance with the principles of Christian faith and life. The faithful, through popular piety, should be led to a personal encounter with Christ and to fellowship with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, especially through hearing the word of God, recourse to prayer, participation in the Church's sacramental life, and the witness of charity and the works of mercy. 157 For a fuller consideration of this matter and for a valuable series of theological, pastoral and spiritual suggestions, I am pleased to refer to the documents issued by this Apostolic See, which state that all manifestations of popular piety fall under the responsibility of the Bishop in his Diocese. It is the Bishop's duty to regulate them, to encourage them as an aid to the faithful for Christian living, to purify them where necessary and to evangelize them. 158

Promoting holiness for all the faithful

41. The holiness of the People of God, to which the Bishop's ministry of sanctification is ordered, is a gift of divine grace and a manifestation of the primacy of God in the life of the Church. In his ministry, then, the Bishop must tirelessly promote a genuine pastoral and educational programme of holiness, in order to carry out the one set forth in the fifth chapter of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* on the universal call to holiness.

I myself wished to propose this programme to the whole Church at the beginning of the third millennium, as a pastoral priority and as a fruit of the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation. 159 Today too, holiness is a sign of the times and a proof of the truth of Christianity as it shines forth in its noblest representatives, both those who have been enrolled among the saints and the even greater numbers of those who have quietly enriched and continue to enrich human history with the humble and joyful holiness of daily life. Our own time too is not lacking in the precious witness of forms of holiness, personal and communal, which are a sign of hope to all, including the younger generation.

As a means of highlighting the witness of holiness, I urge my Brother Bishops to recognize and to call attention to the signs of holiness and heroic virtue which are also appearing in our own days, especially where these concern members of the lay faithful in their own Dioceses, above all Christian married couples. In appropriate cases, I encourage them to promote the relative processes of canonization. 160 This will prove a sign of hope for everyone and a source of encouragement for the pilgrim People of God in its witness before the world to the permanent presence of grace in the fabric of human history.

CHAPTER FIVE - THE PASTORAL GOVERNANCE OF THE BISHOP

"I have given you an example" (Jn 13:15).

42. In its treatment of the duty of governing the family of God and accepting the habitual and daily care of the Lord Jesus' flock, the Second Vatican Council explains that Bishops, in the exercise of their ministry as fathers and shepherds in the midst of their faithful, must act as "those who serve", keeping always before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for the sheep (cf. Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; Lk 22:26-27; Jn 10:11). 161

This image of Jesus, the supreme model of the Bishop, finds one of its most eloquent expressions in the act of the washing of the feet, as recounted in the Gospel according to John: "Before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper... he rose from the table, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them: 'I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you' " (13:1-15).

Let us then contemplate Jesus as he performs this gesture that seems to provide us with a key for understanding his very being and mission, his life and death. Let us contemplate also the love of Jesus, which translates into action, into concrete acts. Let us contemplate Jesus who takes on completely, in an absolutely radical way, the form of a servant

(cf. Phil 2:7). He, our Teacher and Lord, who received everything from the hands of the Father, loved us to the end, to the point of putting himself totally in the hands of men and accepting all that they would do to him. Jesus' gesture is an act of love carried out in the context of the institution of the Eucharist and in the clear prospect of his Passion and Death. It is a gesture which reveals the meaning of the Incarnation but, even more, that of the very being of God. God is love, and for this reason he took on the form of a servant: God put himself at the service of mankind in order to bring mankind into full communion with himself.

If such is our Teacher and Lord, then the meaning of the ministry and the very being of those who, like the Twelve, are called to draw most closely to Jesus can only consist in complete and unconditional availability to others, both to those who are already part of the fold and to those who are not yet members (cf. Jn 10:16).

The Bishop's authority as pastoral service

43. The Bishop is sent in Christ's name as a pastor for the care of a particular portion of the People of God. Through the Gospel and the Eucharist, he is to help his people to grow as a reality of communion in the Holy Spirit.¹⁶² This is the source of the Bishop's role of representing the Church entrusted to him and of governing it by the power needed for the exercise of the pastoral ministry sacramentally received (*munus pastorale*) as a sharing in the consecration and mission of Christ himself.¹⁶³ As a consequence, Bishops "govern the particular Churches entrusted to them as the vicars and ambassadors of Christ. This they do by their counsel, exhortation and example, as well, indeed, as by their authority and sacred power. This power they use only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness, remembering that he who is greater should become as the lesser and he who is the more distinguished, as the servant (cf. Lk 22:26- 27)".¹⁶⁴ This text of the Council is a marvellous synthesis of Catholic doctrine on the pastoral governance of the Bishop and is echoed in the Rite of Episcopal Ordination: "The title of Bishop is one of service, not of honour, and therefore a Bishop should strive to benefit others rather than to lord it over them. Such is the precept of the Master".¹⁶⁵ Here we find the fundamental principle that, as Saint Paul states, authority in the Church is meant for the building up of the People of God, not for their destruction (cf. 2 Cor 10:8). The building up of the flock of Christ in truth and in holiness demands of the Bishop, as was repeatedly stated in the Synod Hall, certain characteristics which include an exemplary life, the ability to enter into authentic and constructive relationships with others, an aptitude for encouraging and developing cooperation, an innate goodness and patience, an understanding of and compassion for those suffering in body and spirit, a spirit of tolerance and forgiveness. What is needed is in fact an ability to emulate as well as possible the supreme model, which is Jesus the Good Shepherd.

The power of the Bishop is true power, but a power which radiates the light of the Good Shepherd and is modelled after him. Exercised in the name of Christ, it is "proper, ordinary and immediate, although its exercise is ultimately regulated by the supreme authority of the Church, and can be circumscribed by certain limits, for the advantage of the Church or of the faithful. In virtue of this power, Bishops have the sacred right and the duty before the Lord to make laws for their subjects, to pass judgment on them, and to moderate everything pertaining to the ordering of worship and the apostolate".¹⁶⁶ The Bishop, by virtue of the office that he has received, is thus invested with an objective juridical power meant to be expressed in authoritative acts whereby he carries out the ministry of governance (*munus pastorale*) received in the sacrament.

The Bishop's governance, nonetheless, will be pastorally effective – once again this must be recalled – only if it rests on a moral authority bestowed by his life of holiness. This is what will dispose hearts to accept the Gospel that the Bishop proclaims in his Church, as well as the rules which he lays down for the good of the People of God. Hence Saint Ambrose's admonishment: "Let nothing vulgar be sought in priests, nothing in common with the desires, the habits, the customs of the vulgar crowd. The priestly dignity demands a gravity which keeps apart from tumults, an austere life and a singular authority".¹⁶⁷

The exercise of authority in the Church cannot be understood as something impersonal or bureaucratic, precisely because it is an authority born of witness. All that the Bishop says and does must reveal the authority of Christ's word and his way of acting. Without the authoritative nature of his lived holiness – his personal witness of faith, hope and love – only with difficulty could a Bishop's governance be accepted by the People of God as a manifestation of the active presence of Christ in his Church.

As ministers by the Lord's will of the Church's apostolicity, endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit who leads and guides (*Spiritus principalis*), Bishops are successors of the Apostles not only in authority and sacred power but also in the form of apostolic life, in apostolic sufferings endured for the proclamation and spread of the Gospel, in their gentle and merciful care of the faithful entrusted to them, in their defence of the weak, and in their unremitting concern for the People of God.

In the Synod Hall it was observed that since the Second Vatican Council the exercise of authority in the Church has often proved taxing. Even though some of the more acute difficulties seem to have been overcome, this continues to be the case. The problem is therefore how the necessary service of authority can better be understood, accepted and carried out. A preliminary answer derives from the very nature of ecclesial authority: it is – and needs to be perceived as such in the clearest possible terms – a participation in the mission of Christ, to be lived and exercised in humility, dedication and service.

A renewed appreciation of the Bishop's authority will not find expression in outward signs but in a deeper understanding of the theological, spiritual and moral significance of his ministry, founded on the charism of apostolicity. All that was said in the Synod Hall about the image of the washing of feet, and the connection made in that context between the figure of the servant and that of the shepherd, helps us to understand that the episcopacy is truly an honour when it is a form of service. Every Bishop must apply to himself the words of Jesus: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you: whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:42-45). Mindful of these words of the Lord, the Bishop governs with the heart of a humble servant and a caring shepherd, who guides his flock as he seeks the glory of God and the salvation of souls (cf. Lk 22:26-27). When exercised in this way, the Bishop's manner of governance is completely unique.

We have already mentioned the text of *Lumen Gentium* which states that Bishops rule the particular Churches entrusted to their care as vicars and legates of Christ, "by their counsel, exhortations and example".¹⁶⁸ There is no contradiction here with the words that follow, when the Council adds that the Bishops do in fact govern "by counsel, exhortations and example, but also by their authority and sacred power".¹⁶⁹ This "sacred power" is one which is rooted in the moral authority which the Bishop enjoys by virtue of his holiness of life. It is this which facilitates the acceptance of his every act of governance and makes it effective.

Pastoral style of governance and diocesan communion

44. A lived ecclesial communion will lead the Bishop to a pastoral style which is ever more open to collaboration with all. There is a type of reciprocal interplay between what a Bishop is called to decide with personal responsibility for the good of the Church entrusted to his care and the contribution that the faithful can offer him through consultative bodies such as the Diocesan Synod, the Presbyteral Council, the Episcopal Council and the Pastoral Council.¹⁷⁰

The Synod Fathers made clear reference to these means by which episcopal governance is exercised and through which the pastoral care of the Diocese is organized.¹⁷¹ The particular Church involves not only the threefold episcopal ministry (*munus episcopale*), but also the threefold prophetic, priestly and kingly function of the entire People of God. All the faithful, by virtue of their Baptism, share in a proper way in the threefold *munus* of Christ. Their real equality in dignity and in acting is such that all are called to cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ, and thus to carry out the mission which God has entrusted to the Church in the world, each according to his or her respective state and duties.¹⁷²

Every sort of differentiation between the faithful, based on the variety of their charisms, functions and ministries, is ordered to the service of the other members of the People of God. The ontological and functional differentiation that sets the Bishop before the other faithful based on his reception of the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders, is a manner of being for the other members of faithful which in no way removes him from being with them.

The Church is an organically structured community which finds expression in the coordination of different charisms, ministries and services for the sake of attaining the common end, which is salvation. The Bishop is responsible for bringing about this unity in diversity by promoting, as was stated in the Synodal Assembly, a collaborative effort which makes it possible for all to journey together along the common path of faith and mission.¹⁷³

This said, however, it must be added that the ministry of the Bishop absolutely cannot be reduced to the function of a simple coordinator. By its very nature, the *munus episcopale* entails a clear and unequivocal right and duty of governance, which also includes the element of jurisdiction. Pastors are public witnesses, and their *potestas testandi fidem* attains its fullness in the *potestas iudicandi*: the Bishop is not only called to bear witness to the faith, but also to evaluate and discipline its outward expression by the believers entrusted to his pastoral care. In carrying out this task he will do everything possible to win the consent of his faithful, but in the end he will have to take personal responsibility for decisions which he as their pastor considers in conscience to be necessary, concerned as he is above all for the future judgment of God.

Ecclesial communion in its organic structure calls for personal responsibility on the part of the Bishop, but it also presupposes the participation of every category of the faithful, inasmuch as they share responsibility for the good of the particular Church which they themselves form. What guarantees the authenticity of this organic communion is the working of the Spirit, who is at work both in the Bishop's personal responsibility and in the sharing of the faithful in that responsibility. It is the Spirit who, as the basis of both the baptismal equality of all the faithful and the diversity in charism and mission of each believer, is capable of effectively bringing about communion. These are the principles which govern Diocesan Synods, whose canonical profile, laid down in canons 460-468 of the Code of Canon Law, was specified by the Interdicasterial Instruction of 19 March 1997.¹⁷⁴ These norms must also be substantially followed by other Diocesan assemblies at which the Bishop presides; he may never abdicate his specific responsibility.

Although every Christian receives the love of God in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, the Bishop – as the Synodal Assembly appropriately recalled – receives in his heart through the sacrament of Holy Orders the pastoral charity of Christ. The purpose of this pastoral charity is to create communion.¹⁷⁵ Before translating this love-

communion into plans of action, the Bishop must commit himself to making it present in his own heart and in the heart of the Church by means of an authentically spiritual life.

If communion expresses the Church's essence, then it is normal that the spirituality of communion will tend to manifest itself in both the personal and community spheres, awakening ever new forms of participation and shared responsibility in the faithful of every category. Consequently, the Bishop will make every effort to develop, within his particular Church, structures of communion and participation which make it possible to listen to the Spirit who lives and speaks in the faithful, in order to guide them in carrying out whatever the same Spirit suggests for the true good of the Church.

The elements of the particular Church

45. Many of the interventions of the Synod Fathers referred to various aspects and moments of Diocesan life. Due attention was thus given to the Diocesan Curia as the structure employed by the Bishop to express his pastoral charity in its different aspects.¹⁷⁶ Particular mention was made of the appropriateness of entrusting the financial administration of the Diocese to individuals who are competent as well as honest, so that it can become an example of transparency for other similar Church institutions. If a spirituality of communion is lived out in the Diocese, special concern will certainly be shown for poorer parishes and communities, and every possible effort will be made to set aside a part of the Diocese's financial resources for the needier Churches, especially those in mission lands and areas affected by migration.¹⁷⁷

It was upon the parish, however, that the Synod Fathers felt it proper to focus their attention, realizing that it is this community, pre-eminent among all the other communities present in his Diocese, for which the Bishop has primary responsibility: it is with the parishes above all that he must be concerned.¹⁷⁸ The parish, it was frequently stated, remains the fundamental unit in the daily life of the Diocese.

The Pastoral Visit

46. It is precisely in this perspective that the importance of Pastoral Visits can be seen. These are an authentic time of grace and a special, indeed unique, moment for encounter and dialogue between the Bishop and the faithful.¹⁷⁹ Bishop Bartolomeu dos Mártires, whom I beatified a few days after the conclusion of the Synod, in his classic work *Stimulus Pastorum*, a work greatly esteemed by Saint Charles Borromeo, defines the Pastoral Visit as *quasi anima episcopalis regiminis* and describes it effectively as an extension of the spiritual presence of the Bishop among his people.¹⁸⁰

In making his Pastoral Visit to the parish, the Bishop should delegate to others the study of administrative questions and give first place to personal meetings, beginning with the parish priest and the other priests. This is the time when he is closest to his people in carrying out the ministry of the word, of sanctification and of pastoral leadership, when he most directly encounters their anxieties and cares, their joys and their expectations, and is able to address to all an invitation to hope. Here above all the Bishop comes into direct contact with the poor, the elderly and the infirm. When it is carried out in this way, the Pastoral Visit appears for what is truly is: a sign of the presence of the Lord who visits his people in peace.

The Bishop with his presbyterate

47. With good reason the conciliar Decree *Christus Dominus*, in describing the particular Church, defines it as a community of faithful entrusted to the pastoral care of a Bishop *cum cooperatione presbyterii*.¹⁸¹ Indeed, between the Bishop and his presbyters there exists a *communio sacramentalis* by virtue of the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, which is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ, and consequently, albeit in a different degree, in virtue of the one ordained ministry and the one apostolic mission.

The presbyters, and among them parish priests in particular, are therefore the closest cooperators in the Bishop's ministry. The Synod Fathers renewed the recommendations and exhortations already present in the Council documents and reiterated more recently by the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* ¹⁸²

about the special quality of the relationship between the Bishop and his presbyters. The Bishop will always strive to relate to his priests as a father and brother who loves them, listens to them, welcomes them, corrects them, supports them, seeks their cooperation and, as much as possible, is concerned for their human, spiritual, ministerial and financial well-being.¹⁸³

The Bishop's special affection for his priests is demonstrated by his accompanying them as a father and brother in the fundamental stages of their ministerial life, starting with their first steps in the pastoral ministry. The permanent formation of priests remains essential and represents for all a kind of "vocation within a vocation", since in its different and complementary aspects it is aimed at helping priests to live and minister after the example of Jesus.

Each Diocesan Bishop has as one of his primary duties the spiritual care of his presbyterate: "The action of the priest who places his hands in the hands of the Bishop on the day of his priestly ordination, as he professes to him 'filial respect and obedience', can at first sight seem a one-way gesture. In reality, the gesture commits them both: priest and

Bishop. The young presbyter chooses to entrust himself to the Bishop and the Bishop for his part obliges himself to look after those hands".184

In two other moments, I would like to add, the presbyter can rightly expect his Bishop to show a particular closeness to him. The first is when the Bishop entrusts him with a pastoral mission, either for the first time, as in the case of a recently-ordained priest, or later for a change of assignment or the conferring of a new pastoral mandate. For the Bishop himself, conferring a pastoral mission is a significant moment of paternal responsibility towards one of his priests. The words of Saint Jerome are quite applicable to this circumstance: "We know that the same relationship that Aaron had with his sons is also present in a Bishop and his priests. One alone is the Lord, one is the temple: let there also be oneness in the ministry... Is not the glory of a father a wise son? Let the Bishop congratulate himself for having wisely chosen such priests for Christ".185

The other moment is when a priest, because of advanced age, resigns the actual pastoral leadership of a community or other positions of direct responsibility. In these and similar circumstances, the Bishop has the duty of ensuring that the priest is made aware both of the gratitude of the particular Church for his past apostolic labours and of the new role which he now plays within the Diocesan presbyterate: he still contributes, and can now contribute even more fully, to the building up of the Church by his exemplary witness of assiduous prayer and his willingness to share his past experience as a way of helping his younger confreres. The Bishop will also show his fraternal closeness to priests in a similar situation because of grave illness or some other form of persistent disability, helping them to keep alive the conviction that "they continue to be active members for the building up of the Church, especially by virtue of their union with the suffering Christ and with so many other brothers and sisters in the Church who are sharing in the Lord's Passion".186

The Bishop will also follow with prayer and genuine compassion priests who for whatever reason are questioning their vocation and their fidelity to the Lord's call and have in some way failed in the performance of their duties.187

Finally, he will not fail to examine the possible evidence of heroic virtue shown by diocesan priests and, when he deems it appropriate, to proceed to their public recognition, taking the required steps for the opening of a cause of Canonization.188

The formation of candidates for the priesthood

48. Reflecting more deeply on the theme of priestly ministry, the Synod Fathers paid particular attention to the training of candidates for the priesthood which takes place in the seminary.189 Since it involves much prayer, commitment and effort, the training of priests is one of the primary concerns of the Bishop. In this regard, the Synod Fathers, fully conscious that the seminary is one of the most precious treasures of any Diocese, gave it careful attention and reaffirmed the undeniable need of major seminaries, without however neglecting the significance of minor seminaries, for handing on Christian values directed to the following of Christ.190

Consequently, each Bishop will show his concern above all by selecting with great care those charged with the training of future priests and by establishing the most suitable and appropriate means of preparing them to exercise their ministry in a setting so fundamental for the life of the Christian community. The Bishop will not fail to visit the seminary frequently, even when particular circumstances have caused him to join other Bishops in making the at times necessary and even preferable choice of an interdiocesan seminary.191 A genuine personal knowledge of the candidates for the priesthood in his particular Church is indispensable for the Bishop. On the basis of these direct contacts he will ensure that the seminaries form mature and balanced personalities, men capable of establishing sound human and pastoral relationships, knowledgeable in theology, solid in the spiritual life, and in love with the Church. Similarly he will make every effort to provide financial support and assistance for young candidates for the priesthood.

It is clear, nonetheless, that the force which inspires and forms vocations is primarily prayer. Vocations need a vast network of people who pray fervently to "the Lord of the harvest". The more the problem of vocations is confronted in the context of prayer, the more prayer will help those whom God has called to hear his voice.

When the time comes to confer Holy Orders, each Bishop will carry out the necessary investigation.192 In this regard, conscious of his grave responsibility for the conferring of priestly Orders, only after careful inquiry and ample consultation according to the norms of law will the Bishop receive into his Diocese candidates coming from other Dioceses or from a Religious Institute.193

The Bishop and permanent deacons

49. As ministers of Holy Orders, Bishops also have direct responsibility for permanent deacons, in whom the Synodal Assembly saw authentic gifts of God for proclaiming the Gospel, instructing Christian communities and promoting the service of charity within God's family.194

Each Bishop will therefore show great care for these vocations, for the discernment and formation of which he is ultimately responsible. Although he must normally exercise this responsibility through trusted collaborators committed to acting in conformity with the prescriptions of the Holy See, 195 the Bishop will seek in every way possible to know personally all the candidates for the diaconate. After their ordination he will continue to be a true father for them,

encouraging them to love the Body and Blood of Christ whose ministers they are, and Holy Church which they have committed themselves to serve; he will also exhort married deacons to lead an exemplary family life.

The Bishop's concern for persons of consecrated life

50. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* emphasized the importance of the consecrated life in the ministry of the Bishop. Appealing to that text during this last Synod, the Fathers stated that in the Church as communion the Bishop must esteem and promote the specific vocation and mission of the consecrated life, which belongs stably and solidly to the Church's life and sanctity.¹⁹⁶ In the particular Churches too, the consecrated life fulfils its duty of exemplary presence and charismatic mission. The Bishop will therefore examine carefully whether, among the consecrated persons who have lived in the Diocese, there were testimonies of a heroic exercise of the virtues and then, if he considers it appropriate, take steps to begin the process of Canonization.

In his careful concern for all forms of consecrated life, a concern which finds expression in both encouragement and vigilance, the Bishop should reserve a special place for the contemplative life. Consecrated persons, for their part, will heartily welcome the pastoral directions of the Bishop and strive for full communion in the life and mission of the particular Church in which they live. The Bishop is in fact the one responsible for apostolic activity in the Diocese: consecrated men and women must cooperate with him so as to enrich ecclesial communion by their presence and ministry. In this regard, due attention must be paid to the document *Mutuae Relationes* and all that concerns existing canon law.

A special concern was recommended for Institutes of diocesan right, and especially for those experiencing serious difficulties: the Bishop will show a special fatherly care for them. Finally, in the process of approving new Institutes founded in his Diocese the Bishop will take care to act in accordance with the indications and prescriptions found in the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* and in the other instructions issued by the competent offices of the Holy See.¹⁹⁷

The lay faithful in the pastoral care of the Bishop

51. In the lay faithful, who are the majority of the People of God, the missionary power of Baptism must be clearly evident. To this end, lay people need the support, encouragement and help of their Bishops, who can guide them in developing their apostolate in accordance with their specific secular character, drawing on the grace of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. It will consequently be necessary to set in place specific programmes of formation which will enable the laity to take on responsibilities in the Church within diocesan and parochial participatory structures, as well as in the different services of liturgical planning, catechesis, the teaching of the Catholic religion in schools, etc.

The laity have special responsibility – and here they need encouragement – for evangelizing culture, making the power of the Gospel part of the life of the family, the workplace, the mass media, sports and leisure, and for promoting Christian values in society and public life, both national and international. By the fact that they are in the world, the lay faithful are in a position to exercise great influence on their environment and to offer great numbers of men and women broader horizons of hope. On the other hand, committed as they are by their vocation to living amid temporal realities, the lay faithful are called, in accordance with their specific secular character, to give an account of their hope (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) wherever they work and to cultivate in their hearts "the expectation of a new earth".¹⁹⁸ Bishops, for their part, should be close to the lay faithful who, since they are immersed in the complex problems of today's world, are particularly exposed to bewilderment and suffering; they should help them to be Christians of firm hope, solidly anchored in the certitude that the Lord is ever at his children's side.

Consideration must also be given to the lay apostolate in the form of associations, both the more traditional groupings and those represented by the new ecclesial movements. All these forms of association enrich the Church, yet they are always in need of the service of discernment proper to the Bishops. It is part of the Bishop's pastoral mission to foster complementarity between movements of diverse inspiration and to exercise vigilance over their development, the theological and spiritual formation of their leaders, and their adaptation to diocesan and parochial communities, from which they must not be separated.¹⁹⁹ The Bishop will also seek to ensure that associations of the laity support the pastoral work of promoting vocations in the Dioceses and foster an acceptance of all vocations, especially those to the ordained ministry, the consecrated life and missionary work.²⁰⁰

The Bishop's concern for the family

52. The Synod Fathers frequently spoke up in favour of the family, which is rightly called a "domestic Church", a space open to the presence of the Lord Jesus and a sanctuary of life. Founded on the sacrament of Matrimony, the family is seen to be a community of primary importance, since in the family both the spouses and their children live out their proper vocation and are perfected in charity. The Christian family – as was emphasized in the Synod – is an apostolic community open to mission.²⁰¹

It is the Bishop's particular task to ensure that within civil society the values of marriage are supported and defended by means of correct political and economic decisions. Within the Christian community he will not fail to encourage the

preparation of engaged couples for marriage, the pastoral accompaniment of young couples and the formation of groups of families who can support the family apostolate and, not least, be in a position to assist families in trouble. The closeness of the Bishop to married couples and their children, expressed also by various initiatives on the Diocesan level, will prove a source of encouragement to them.

In considering the family's responsibilities in the area of education, the Synod Fathers unanimously acknowledged the value of Catholic schools for the integral formation of the younger generation, for the inculturation of the faith and for dialogue between different cultures. Bishops need to support and enhance the work of Catholic schools, seeking to establish them where they do not yet exist and, to the extent of his ability, calling upon civil institutions to favour effective freedom of instruction within the country.²⁰²

Young people, a pastoral priority for the future

53. The Bishop, as pastor and father of the Christian community, will be particularly concerned for the evangelization and spiritual accompaniment of young people. A minister of hope can hardly fail to build the future together with those to whom the future is entrusted, that is, with young people. Like "sentinels of the morning", young people are awaiting the dawn of a new world. The experience of the World Youth Days, which the Bishops heartily encourage, shows how many young people are ready to commit themselves in the Church and in the world, if only they are offered real responsibility and an integral Christian formation.

Here, voicing the thought of the Synod Fathers, I make a special appeal to persons of consecrated life from the many Institutes engaged in the area of educating and training children, adolescents and young people. They should not yield to discouragement because of the difficulties of the moment or give up their commendable work, but rather intensify their efforts and aim at ever better results.²⁰³

Young people, through personal relationships with their pastors and teachers, must be encouraged to grow in charity and be trained for a life of generosity and availability for the service of others, especially the needy and the infirm. In this way it will be easier to speak with them about the other Christian virtues, especially chastity. By taking this path they will come to know that life is "something beautiful" when it is given to others, following the example of Jesus. Thus, they will be able to make responsible and binding decisions, whether about marriage, the sacred ministry or the consecrated life.

The promotion of vocations

54. It is essential to promote a vocational culture in the broadest sense: young people, in other words, need to be helped to discover that life itself is a vocation. The Bishop would do well, then, to appeal to families, parish communities and educational institutes to assist boys and girls in discovering God's plan in their lives and in embracing the call to holiness which God from the beginning addresses to each person.²⁰⁴

It is very important in this regard to reinforce the vocational dimension of all pastoral activity. The Bishop must ensure that the pastoral care of young people and the promotion of vocations is entrusted to priests and to persons capable of passing on their love for Jesus by their enthusiasm and the example of their lives. It will be their responsibility to accompany young people personally, by their friendship and, when possible, by spiritual direction, in order to help them to grasp the signs of God's call and to discover the strength to respond to it in the grace of the sacraments and in the life of prayer, which is above all an attentive listening to God who speaks.

These are a few of the spheres in which every Bishop exercises his ministry of governance and manifests to the portion of the People of God entrusted to his care the pastoral charity which impels him. One of the characteristic forms of this charity is compassion, like that of Christ, our High Priest, who was able to sympathize with our human weaknesses because he himself, like us, was tempted in every respect yet, unlike us, without sin (cf. Heb 4:15). This compassion is always linked to the responsibility which the Bishop has accepted before God and the Church. It is in this way that he fulfils the promises and carries out the commitments made on the day of his episcopal ordination, when he freely assented to the Church's charge to care for the holy People of God as a devoted father and to guide them in the way of salvation; to be always welcoming and merciful, in the name of the Lord, to the poor, the sick and all those in need of comfort and help; and, like a good shepherd, to go in search of the sheep who stray, in order to bring them back to the fold of Christ.²⁰⁵

CHAPTER SIX - IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCHES

"Anxiety for all the Churches" (2 Cor 11:28)

55. Writing to the Christians of Corinth, the Apostle Paul recalls everything he suffered for the Gospel: "frequent journeys, danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the

daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the Churches" (2 Cor 11:26-28). Paul concludes with an impassioned question: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?" (2 Cor 11:29). This same question is asked of the conscience of every Bishop, as a member of the College of Bishops.

The Second Vatican Council mentions this expressly when it states that all Bishops, as members of the College of Bishops and legitimate successors of the Apostles by Christ's institution and command, are obliged to extend their concern to the entire Church. "All the Bishops, in fact, have a duty to promote and defend the unity of faith and discipline common to the whole Church, to instruct the faithful in the love of the whole mystical body of Christ – especially those members who are poor and suffering and those who are undergoing persecution for righteousness' sake (cf. Mt 5:10) – and finally to promote every activity that is common to the whole Church, especially that which is aimed at the spread of the faith and the rising of the light of full truth over all people. For the rest, it is a holy truth that by governing well their own Church as a portion of the universal Church, they themselves make an effective contribution to the whole mystical body, which is also a body of Churches".²⁰⁶

As a consequence, each Bishop is simultaneously in relation with his particular Church and with the universal Church. The Bishop, who himself is the visible principle and foundation of unity in his own particular Church, is also the visible bond of ecclesiastical communion between his particular Church and the universal Church. All the Bishops, residing in their particular Churches throughout the world, yet always preserving hierarchical communion with the Head of the College of Bishops and the College itself, thus give consistency and expression to the Church's catholicity, while at the same time conferring this mark of catholicity upon their own particular Church. Each Bishop is consequently a kind of meeting-point between his particular Church and the universal Church, and a visible witness of the presence of the one Church of Christ within his particular Church. In the communion of the Churches the Bishop thus represents his particular Church and in it he represents the communion of the Churches. Through the episcopal ministry the portions Ecclesiae participate in the totality of the Una Sancta, while the latter, again through their ministry, is made present in each individual Ecclesiae portio.²⁰⁷

The universal dimension of the episcopal ministry is fully manifested and realized when all the Bishops, in hierarchical communion with the Roman Pontiff, act as a College. Solemnly gathered in Ecumenical Council or dispersed throughout the world yet always in hierarchical communion with the Roman Pontiff, they are the continuation of the College of the Apostles.²⁰⁸ In other forms too, all the Bishops cooperate among themselves and with the Roman Pontiff in bonum totius Ecclesiae; this happens primarily so that the Gospel will be proclaimed to all the world and also to confront the various problems faced by the different particular Churches. At the same time, the exercise of the ministry of the Successor of Peter for the good of the whole Church and of every particular Church, and the action of the College as such, help greatly to ensure that the unity of faith and discipline common to the entire Church will be preserved in the particular Churches entrusted to the pastoral care of individual Diocesan Bishops. In the Chair of Peter the Bishops, both as individuals and united among themselves as a College, find the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity in faith and of communion.²⁰⁹

The Diocesan Bishop in relation to the Church's supreme authority

56. The Second Vatican Council teaches that, "as successors of the Apostles, the Bishops in the Dioceses entrusted to them possess per se all ordinary, proper and immediate power needed for the exercise of their pastoral office (munus pastorale), with no prejudice whatsoever to the power which, by virtue of his office, the Roman Pontiff possesses of reserving cases to himself or to some other authority".²¹⁰

In the Synod Hall the question was raised whether the relationship between the Bishop and the Church's supreme authority could be treated in the light of the principle of subsidiarity, especially with regard to relations between individual Bishops and the Roman Curia. Hope was expressed that this relationship, in accordance with an ecclesiology of communion, could be characterized by respect for the competence of each and thus contribute to a greater decentralization. It was also asked that a study be made of the possibility of applying this principle to the life of the Church, without prejudice however to the fact that a constitutive principle for the exercise of episcopal authority is the hierarchical communion of the individual Bishops with the Roman Pontiff and the College of Bishops.

As we know, the principle of subsidiarity was formulated by my venerable predecessor Pope Pius XI with reference to civil society.²¹¹ The Second Vatican Council, while never employing the term "subsidiarity", did encourage a sharing between Church structures and opened the way for new reflection on the theology of the episcopate, and this is bearing fruit in the concrete application of the principle of collegiality to ecclesial communion. All the same, the Synod Fathers considered that, as far as the exercise of episcopal authority is concerned, the concept of subsidiarity has proved ambiguous, and they called for a deeper theological investigation of the nature of episcopal authority in the light of the principle of communion.²¹²

In the Synodal Assembly there was considerable discussion of the principle of communion.²¹³ This is an organic communion inspired by the image of the Body of Christ which the Apostle Paul uses in order to emphasize the functions of complementarity and mutual help between the different members of the one body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-31).

If recourse to the principle of communion is to be made correctly and effectively, certain points of reference must always be kept in mind. Account will first have to be made of the fact that within his particular Church the Diocesan

Bishop possesses all ordinary, proper and immediate power needed for carrying out his pastoral ministry. He therefore has a proper sphere for the independent exercise of this authority, a sphere recognized and protected by universal law.²¹⁴ On the other hand, the Bishop's power coexists with the supreme power of the Roman Pontiff, which is itself episcopal, ordinary and immediate over all the individual Churches and their groupings, and over all the pastors and faithful.²¹⁵

Another firmly established point to be kept in mind is that the unity of the Church is grounded in the unity of the episcopate, which, in order to be one, requires that there be a Head of the College. Analogously, the Church, in order to be one, calls for a Church that is Head of the Churches, the Church of Rome, whose Bishop, the Successor of Peter, is the Head of the College.²¹⁶ Consequently, "for each particular Church to be fully Church, that is, the particular presence of the universal Church, with all its essential elements, and hence constituted after the model of the universal Church, there must be present in it, as a proper element, the supreme authority of the Church [...] The primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the Episcopal College are proper elements of the universal Church that are 'not derived from the particularity of the Churches', but are nevertheless interior to each particular Church [...] The ministry of the Successor of Peter as something interior to each particular Church is a necessary expression of that fundamental mutual interiority between universal Church and particular Church".²¹⁷

The Church of Christ, in her mark of catholicity, is fully realized in each particular Church, which receives all the natural and supernatural means needed to carry out the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to accomplish in the world. Among these means there is also the ordinary, proper and immediate power of the Bishop, required for the exercise of his pastoral ministry (*munus pastorale*), but whose exercise is subject to universal laws and to cases established by law or by a decree of the Supreme Pontiff where it is reserved to the supreme authority or to some other ecclesiastical authority.²¹⁸

The capacity of proper governance, including the exercise of the authentic magisterium, ²¹⁹ which of its nature pertains to the Bishop in his Diocese, is an inherent part of the mysterious reality of the Church, whereby the universal Church is immanent within the particular Church together with her supreme authority, that is, the Roman Pontiff and the College of Bishops, who possess supreme, full, ordinary and immediate power over all the faithful and their pastors.²²⁰

In accordance with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, it must be stated that the functions of teaching (*munus docendi*) and governing (*munus regendi*) – and hence the corresponding power of magisterium and of governance – are by their nature to be exercised in the particular Church by each Diocesan Bishop in hierarchical communion with the Head of the College and the College itself.²²¹ This does not weaken episcopal authority, but reinforces it, for the bonds of hierarchical communion linking the Bishops to the Apostolic See necessarily demand a coordination of responsibilities on the part of Diocesan Bishops and the supreme authority which is dictated by the nature of the Church herself. It is the same divine law which limits the exercise of both. Consequently, the power of Bishops "is not diminished by the supreme and universal power, but on the contrary it is affirmed, strengthened and vindicated by it, since the Holy Spirit unfailingly preserves the form of government established in his Church by Christ the Lord".²²²

Pope Paul VI expressed this well at the opening of the third session of the Second Vatican Council: "Just as you, venerable Brothers in the episcopate, spread throughout the world, in order to bring about and demonstrate the Church's true catholicity, have need of a center, of a principle of unity in faith and communion, such as you find in this Chair of Peter; so too We need you to be closely associated with Us, in order to enable the Apostolic See always to reflect its eminence and its human and historical significance, and, indeed, so that its faith will be harmoniously preserved, its duties carried out in exemplary manner and comfort given to it in its tribulations".²²³

The reality of communion, which is the basis of all intraecclesial relationships ²²⁴ and which was also emphasized in the Synod discussions, is a relation of reciprocity between the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops. Indeed, if on the one hand the Bishop, in order to express fully his own office and to establish the catholicity of his Church, must exercise the power of governance proper to him (*munus regendi*) in hierarchical communion with the Roman Pontiff and with the College of Bishops, on the other hand the Roman Pontiff, the Head of the College, in the exercise of his ministry as Supreme Pastor of the Church (*munus supremi Ecclesiae pastoris*) must always act in communion with all the other Bishops and indeed with the whole Church.²²⁵ Consequently, in the communion of the Church, just as the Bishop is never alone but always related to the College and its Head and sustained by them, so also the Roman Pontiff is never alone but is always related to the Bishops and sustained by them. This is yet another reason why the exercise of the supreme power of the Roman Pontiff does not destroy, but affirms, strengthens and vindicates the ordinary, proper and immediate power of each Bishop in his particular Church.

Visits "ad Limina Apostolorum"

57. A manifestation and means of communion between the Bishops and the Chair of Peter is the visit ad Limina Apostolorum.²²⁶ This event has three principal moments, each with its own proper meaning.²²⁷ The first is the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles Peter and Paul, which evokes that one faith to which they bore witness in Rome by their martyrdom.

Closely linked to this moment is the meeting with the Successor of Peter. On the occasion of their visit ad Limina, the Bishops gather round him and bring about, in accordance with the principle of catholicity, a sharing of gifts between all those goods which the Spirit makes present in the Church on both the particular and local level and on the universal level.²²⁸ What then takes place is not simply an exchange of information but primarily the affirmation and the consolidation of collegiality (*collegialis confirmatio*) in the body of the Church, which gives rise to unity in diversity and generates a kind of "perichoresis" between the universal Church and the particular Churches which can be compared to the movement whereby the blood sets out from the heart for the extremities of the body and from them returns to the heart.²²⁹ The vital lymph which comes from Christ unites all the parts like the sap of the vine which goes out to the branches (cf. Jn 15:5). This is made particularly clear in the Eucharist which the Bishops celebrate with the Pope. Every Eucharist is celebrated in communion with one's own Bishop, with the Roman Pontiff and with the College of Bishops, and through them with the faithful of the particular Church and of the whole Church, so that the universal Church is present in the particular Church and the particular Church becomes part, together with the other particular Churches, of the communion of the universal Church.

From the earliest centuries the ultimate reference of communion is to the Church of Rome, where Peter and Paul gave their testimony of faith. Indeed, by virtue of her pre-eminent position, every Church has to agree with this Church, for she is the ultimate guarantee of the integrity of the tradition handed down by the Apostles.²³⁰ The Church of Rome presides over the universal communion of charity, ²³¹ safeguards legitimate differences and yet is vigilant to ensure that particularity not only does not harm unity but serves it.²³² All this involves the need for communion on the part of the various Churches with the Church of Rome, so that all may remain in the integrity of the Apostolic Tradition and in the unity of canonical discipline for the safeguarding of the faith, the sacraments and the concrete life of holiness. This communion of the Churches is expressed by the hierarchical communion of the individual Bishops and the Roman Pontiff.²³³ From the communion *cum Petro et sub Petro* of all the Bishops, brought about in charity, there emerges the duty for all to cooperate with the Successor of Peter for the good of the whole Church and therefore of every particular Church. The visit ad Limina is directed precisely to this end.

The third moment of the visit ad Limina is the meeting with those in charge of the offices of the Roman Curia: in these discussions the Bishops have direct access to the individual offices responsible for handling certain issues and problems, and thus are introduced to various aspects of common pastoral concern. In this regard, the Synod Fathers asked that, as a sign of mutual knowledge and trust, there be more frequent contacts between the Bishops, individually or assembled in Episcopal Conferences, and the offices of the Roman Curia, ²³⁴ so that the latter, by being directly informed about the concrete problems of the Churches, will be better able to carry out their universal service.

It cannot be doubted that the visits ad Limina, together with the quinquennial report on the state of the Dioceses, ²³⁵ are an effective way of meeting the need for shared knowledge which is part of the reality of communion between the Bishops and the Roman Pontiff. The presence of Bishops in Rome for this visit can be a fitting occasion for them to obtain a quick reply to questions which they have presented to the various offices and, on the other hand, in response to a desire which they themselves have expressed, an opportunity for an individual or collective consultation about the preparation of documents of general importance. On occasion the Bishops can be appropriately informed, prior to publication, of documents which the Holy See intends to issue for the Church as a whole or specifically for their particular Churches.

The Synod of Bishops

58. In accordance with a now consolidated experience, every General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which is in some way expressive of the episcopate, demonstrates in a particular manner the spirit of communion uniting the Bishops with the Roman Pontiff, and the Bishops among themselves, by making a solid ecclesial judgment, through the working of the Spirit, concerning various problems affecting the life of the Church.²³⁶

As we know, during the Second Vatican Council the need was felt for the Bishops to be able to assist the Roman Pontiff more effectively in the exercise of his office. It was precisely in view of this that my venerable predecessor Pope Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops.²³⁷ Through this body concrete expression is given to the spirit of collegiality and the solicitude of the Bishops for the good of the whole Church.

The passage of the years has demonstrated how the Bishops, in union of faith and charity, can by their counsel offer significant assistance to the Roman Pontiff in the exercise of his apostolic ministry, both for the preservation of faith and morals and for the observance of ecclesiastical discipline. The exchange of information about particular Churches, also by facilitating a convergence of judgments on questions of doctrine, is a valuable means of reinforcing communion.²³⁸

Every General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is a powerful ecclesial experience, even if some of its practical procedures can always be perfected.²³⁹ The Bishops assembled in Synod represent in the first place their own Churches, but they are also attentive to the contributions of the Episcopal Conferences which selected them and whose views about questions under discussion they then communicate. They thus express the recommendation of the entire hierarchical body of the Church and finally, in a certain sense, the whole Christian people, whose pastors they are.

The Synod is an event which makes it particularly evident that the Successor of Peter, in carrying out his office, is always closely joined in communion with the other Bishops and with the whole Church.²⁴⁰ In this regard, the Code of Canon Law states: "It is the role of the Synod of Bishops to discuss the questions on their agenda and to express their desires about them but not to resolve them or issue decrees about them, unless the Roman Pontiff in certain cases has endowed the Synod with deliberative power, and, in this event, it is his role to ratify its decision".²⁴¹ The fact that the Synod ordinarily has only a consultative role does not diminish its importance. In the Church the purpose of any collegial body, whether consultative or deliberative, is always the search for truth or the good of the Church. When it is therefore a question involving the faith itself, the consensus ecclesiae is not determined by the tallying of votes, but is the outcome of the working of the Spirit, the soul of the one Church of Christ.

Precisely because the Synod is at the service of truth and the Church, as an expression of true co-responsibility by the whole episcopate in union with its Head for the good of the Church, when the Bishops give their vote, be it consultative or deliberative, together with the other members of the Synod who are not Bishops, they express their participation in the governance of the universal Church. Like my venerable predecessor Paul VI, I have always valued the proposals and views expressed by the Synod Fathers, and have included them in the process of drawing up the document which presents the results of the Synod and which, precisely for this reason, I like to describe as "post-synodal".

Communion between the Bishops and the Churches at the local level

59. In addition to the universal level, there are many different forms which can and do express episcopal communion and therefore solicitude for all the sister Churches. The relationships of exchange between Bishops thus go well beyond their institutional meetings. A lively awareness of the collegial dimension of the ministry bestowed on them should impel them to bring about among themselves, especially within the same Episcopal Conference, on both the provincial and regional levels, a variety of expressions of sacramental fraternity, ranging from mutual acceptance and esteem to the various manifestations of charity and practical cooperation.

As I have written, "Much has been done since the Second Vatican Council for the reform of the Roman Curia, the organization of Synods and the functioning of Episcopal Conferences. But there is certainly much more to be done, in order to realize all the potential of these instruments of communion, which are especially appropriate today in view of the need to respond promptly and effectively to the issues which the Church must face in these rapidly changing times".²⁴² The new century must find us more committed than ever to improving and developing ways and means of ensuring and guaranteeing communion between the Bishops and between the Churches.

Every action of the Bishop carried out in the exercise of his proper pastoral ministry is always an action carried out in the College. Whether it is an exercise of the ministry of the word or of governance in his particular Church, or a decision made with his brother Bishops regarding other particular Churches within the same Episcopal Conference in the area of the province or region, it always remains an action in the College, since it is carried out while preserving communion with other Bishops and with the Head of the College, as well as engaging the Bishop's own pastoral responsibility. All this takes place not just for the sake of humanly convenient coordination, but rather out of a concern for the other Churches, based on the fact that each Bishop is part of and assembled in a Body or College. Every Bishop is at once responsible, albeit in different ways, for his particular Church, the neighbouring sister Churches and the universal Church.

The Synod Fathers rightly reaffirmed that: "Living in episcopal communion, the individual Bishops should sense as their own the difficulties and sufferings of their brother Bishops. In order to reinforce and strengthen this episcopal communion, individual Bishops and individual Episcopal Conferences should carefully consider the means that their own Churches have for helping their poorer counterparts".²⁴³ We know that such poverty can consist in a severe shortage of priests or other pastoral workers, or in a serious lack of material resources. In both cases it is the proclamation of the Gospel which suffers. For this reason, following the exhortation of the Second Vatican Council,²⁴⁴ I endorse the thinking of the Synod Fathers, who expressed the hope that relations of fraternal solidarity will be promoted between the Churches of ancient evangelization and the so-called "young Churches", also by setting up forms of "twinning" which find concrete expression in the sharing of experiences and pastoral workers, and financial aid. This will confirm the image of the Church as "God's family," in which the stronger support the weaker for the benefit of all.²⁴⁵

In this way the communion of the Bishops finds embodiment within the communion of the Church. Their communion is also expressed in loving concern for those pastors who, more than their brother Bishops, and for reasons primarily linked to local situations, have endured or sadly continue to endure sufferings, most often in union with the sufferings of their faithful. One category of pastors worthy of particular attention, due to the growing numbers of its members, is that of Bishops Emeritus. To them, in the concluding liturgy of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly, together with the Synod Fathers, I often turned my thoughts. The whole Church has great respect for these our dear Brothers who are still important members of the College of Bishops, and is grateful for the pastoral service which they rendered and continue to render by putting their wisdom and experience at the disposal of the community. Competent authority will not fail to make good use of their personal spiritual patrimony, which also includes a valuable part of the historical memory of the Churches which they led for many years. It is our duty to see that they are ensured conditions of

spiritual and financial security in the humane conditions which they reasonably desire. Study should also be given to the possibility of continuing to make use of their skills in the various agencies of the Episcopal Conferences.²⁴⁶

The Eastern Catholic Churches

60. In the same context of communion between the Bishops and the Churches, the Synod Fathers paid particular attention to the Eastern Catholic Churches, and once again considered the richness of their venerable and ancient traditions, which constitute a living treasure which coexists with comparable expressions in the Latin Church. Together they shed greater light on the Catholic unity of God's holy people.²⁴⁷

There can be no doubt that the Catholic Churches of the East, due to their spiritual, historical, theological, liturgical and disciplinary closeness to the Orthodox Churches and the other Eastern Churches not yet fully in communion with the Catholic Church, are especially entitled to contribute to the promotion of Christian unity, especially in the East. Like all the Churches, they are called to do this through prayer and an exemplary Christian life; moreover, as their own specific contribution, they are called to unite their religious fidelity to the ancient Eastern traditions.²⁴⁸

The Patriarchal Churches and their Synods

61. Among the institutions characteristic of the Eastern Catholic Churches are the Patriarchal Churches. These belong to those groupings of Churches which, as the Second Vatican Council states, ²⁴⁹ by God's Providence, were organically constituted with the passage of time and enjoy both proper discipline and liturgical usages, and a common theological and spiritual heritage, even as they continue to preserve the unity of faith and the one divine constitution of the universal Church. Their particular dignity comes from the fact that they, somewhat like mothers of faith, have given birth to other Churches which are in some sense their daughters, and have remained linked to them by a close bond of charity in the sacramental life and in mutual respect for rights and duties.

In the Church the institution of the Patriarchate is truly ancient. Already attested to at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, it was recognized by the first ecumenical Councils and remains the traditional form of governance in the Eastern Churches.²⁵⁰ In its origin and particular structure, however, it is of ecclesiastical institution. For this reason the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council expresses the desire that: "Where there is a need, new patriarchates [are] to be set up. This is reserved to an ecumenical council or to the Roman Pontiff".²⁵¹ Those in the Eastern Church who exercise supra-episcopal and supralocal power – such as the Patriarchs and the Synod of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches – participate in the Church's supreme authority which the Successor of Peter has over the entire Church and they exercise this power with respect not only to that of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, ²⁵² but also to that of the office of the individual Bishops, without intruding into their areas of competence or limiting the free exercise of the functions proper to them.

Relations between the Bishops of a Patriarchal Church and the Patriarch, who for his part is Bishop of the Patriarchal Eparchy, develop on the foundation already laid down in antiquity in the Canons of the Apostles: "The Bishops of each nation should know who among them is the first and should consider him as their head and do nothing of importance without his assent. Each should be concerned only with what regards his own district and its dependent territories; but at the same time he should do nothing without the assent of all. In this way concord will reign and God will be glorified through Christ in the Holy Spirit".²⁵³ This canon expresses the Eastern Churches' ancient practice of synodality, while presenting its theological basis and its doxological significance, for it clearly affirms that the synodal action of the Bishops in concord gives worship and glory to the Triune God.

The synodal life of the Patriarchal Churches must therefore be acknowledged as an effective implementation of the collegial dimension of the episcopal ministry. All legitimately consecrated Bishops take part in the Synod of their Patriarchal Church as the pastors of a portion of the People of God. Nonetheless, the role of the "primus," that is, the Patriarch, is acknowledged as an element which in its own way is constitutive of the collegial action. There can be no collegial action without a "primus" who is recognized as such. Synodality does not destroy or diminish the legitimate autonomy of each Bishop in the governance of his own Church; rather it affirms the spirit of collegiality of the Bishops who are coresponsible for all the particular Churches within the Patriarchate.

The Patriarchal Synod is recognized as possessing true power of governance. It elects the Patriarch and the Bishops for offices within the territory of the Patriarchal Church, and chooses candidates for the episcopacy for offices beyond the confines of the Patriarchal Church who are then proposed to the Roman Pontiff for appointment.²⁵⁴ In addition to the consent or consultation needed for the validity of determined acts within the competence of the Patriarch, the Synod can also issue laws which are binding within – and in the case of liturgical laws even beyond – the confines of the Patriarchal Church.²⁵⁵ The Synod is also, without prejudice to the competence of the Apostolic See, the superior tribunal within the confines of the Patriarchal Church.²⁵⁶ For the handling of more important affairs, especially those regarding the updating of the forms and modalities of the apostolate and ecclesiastical discipline, the Patriarch and the Patriarchal Synod will make use of the consultative collaboration of the Patriarchal Assembly, which the Patriarch convenes at least once every five years.²⁵⁷

The organization of the Metropolitan See and of Ecclesiastical Provinces

62. One concrete way of fostering communion between the Bishops and solidarity between Churches is to restore vitality to the ancient institution of Ecclesiastical Provinces, in which the Metropolitan is an instrument and sign both of fraternity between the Bishops of the Province and of their communion with the Roman Pontiff.²⁵⁸ Given the similarity of the problems encountered by individual Bishops and the fact that their limited number can enable greater understanding, common pastoral undertakings will certainly be better planned in meetings of Bishops from the same Province and especially in Provincial Councils.

Wherever it is considered appropriate for the common good to erect Ecclesiastical Regions, a similar function can be carried out by meetings of Bishops of the same Region or by Plenary Councils. Here it is necessary to reaffirm what was stated by the Second Vatican Council: "The venerable institutions of Synods and Councils should flourish with renewed vigour, so that by this means more suitable and effective provision may be made for the increase of faith and the maintenance of discipline in the different Churches as required by the circumstances of the times".²⁵⁹ In these assemblies the Bishops will be able to act in expressing their communion not only with one another but with all the components of that portion of the People of God entrusted to them; in Councils these components are represented by the norm of law.

Particular Councils, precisely because they involve the participation of priests, deacons, men and women religious and lay persons, albeit with a consultative vote only, are an immediate expression not only of communion between the Bishops but also of communion between the Churches. As a solemn ecclesial occasion, Particular Councils also demand careful thought in their preparation, which involves all the categories of the faithful, so that they can be a fitting place for decisions of greater importance, especially regarding the faith. The place of Particular Councils cannot therefore be taken by Episcopal Conferences, as the Second Vatican Council made clear when it expressed the hope that Particular Councils would take on renewed vigour. Episcopal Conferences can however be most helpful for the preparation of Plenary Councils.²⁶⁰

Episcopal Conferences

63. The foregoing is in no way meant to play down the importance and usefulness of Conferences of Bishops, which were given an institutional configuration by the Council and more precisely determined by the Code of Canon Law and the recent *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos*.²⁶¹ In the Eastern Catholic Churches, comparable institutions are the assemblies of hierarchs of the different Churches *sui iuris* provided for by the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. In these assemblies, "by sharing the insights of wisdom born of experience and by the exchange of views, the pooling of resources is achieved for the common good of the Churches, so that unity of action is fostered, common works are facilitated, the good of religion is more readily promoted and ecclesiastical discipline is preserved more effectively".²⁶²

Today, as the Synod Fathers observed, these assemblies are a valuable means for giving expression and practical implementation to the Bishops' collegial spirit. Episcopal Conferences should therefore be used to their full potential.²⁶³ Indeed, "they have developed significantly and have become the preferred means for the Bishops of a country or a specific territory to exchange views, consult with one another and cooperate in promoting the common good of the Church; 'in recent years they have become a concrete, living and efficient reality throughout the world.' Their importance is seen in the fact that they contribute effectively to unity between the Bishops, and thus to the unity of the Church, since they are a most helpful means of strengthening ecclesial communion".²⁶⁴

Since membership in Episcopal Conferences is limited to Bishops and all those equivalent in law to Diocesan Bishops, even if not possessing the episcopal character, ²⁶⁵ the immediate theological foundation of Episcopal Conferences, unlike that of Particular Councils, is the collegial dimension of responsibility for episcopal governance. Only indirectly is it communion between the Churches.

In any event, since Episcopal Conferences are permanent bodies which meet periodically, they will be effective if their role is considered auxiliary vis-à-vis the role which the individual Bishops carry out by divine law in their Church. On the level of the individual Church, the Diocesan Bishop, in the Lord's name, shepherds the flock entrusted to him as a proper, ordinary and immediate pastor, and his acts are strictly personal, not collegial, albeit prompted by a spirit of communion. Consequently, on the level of groupings of particular Churches by geographical areas (nations, regions, etc.), the Bishops set over the individual Churches do not jointly exercise their pastoral care through collegial acts comparable to those of the College of Bishops, which as a theological subject is indivisible.²⁶⁶ The Bishops of the same Episcopal Conference, assembled at their meetings, exercise jointly, for the good of their faithful and within the limits of the areas of competence granted them by law or by mandate of the Apostolic See, only some of the functions deriving from their pastoral ministry (*munus pastorale*).²⁶⁷

Certainly the more numerous Episcopal Conferences, in order to carry out their service to the individual Bishops who are members, and consequently to the individual Churches, require a complex organization. Even so, "an excessively bureaucratic development of offices and commissions operating between plenary sessions" ²⁶⁸ is to be avoided. "Episcopal Conferences with their commissions and offices exist to be of help to the Bishops and not to substitute for

them", 269 and even less to create an intermediate structure between the Apostolic See and individual Bishops. Episcopal Conferences can provide valuable assistance to the Apostolic See by expressing their views with regard to specific problems of a more general nature.²⁷⁰

Episcopal Conferences also express and encourage the collegial spirit of union between Bishops and, consequently, communion between the different Churches; they establish between Churches, especially neighbouring ones, close relations in the pursuit of a greater good.²⁷¹ This can be done in various ways, through councils, symposia and federations. Of particular importance are continental Bishops' meetings, which nonetheless never assume the areas of competence belonging to Episcopal Conferences. Such meetings are of great help in fostering between the Episcopal Conferences of different nations that cooperation which in this time of "globalization" is particularly necessary for meeting challenges and for bringing about a true "globalization of solidarity".²⁷²

The Church's unity and ecumenical dialogue

64. The Lord Jesus' prayer for unity between his disciples (ut unum sint: Jn 17:21) is for every Bishop a pressing summons to a specific apostolic duty. This unity is not to be looked for as the fruit of our own efforts; it is first and foremost a gift of the Holy Trinity to the Church. This however does not dispense Christians from making every effort, beginning with prayer itself, to hasten the journey towards full unity. In response to the Lord's prayers and his will and to the offering he made on the Cross in order to gather together the scattered children of God (cf. Jn 11:52), the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the ecumenical dialogue, which is crucial for the effectiveness of her witness before the world. It is essential to persevere on the path of the dialogue of truth and love.

Many Synod Fathers mentioned the specific vocation of each Bishop to promote this dialogue in his Diocese and develop it in veritate et caritate (cf. Eph 4:15). The scandal of division between Christians is felt by all to be a sign which contradicts Christian hope. The practical means for promoting ecumenical dialogue have been shown to consist in a better mutual understanding between the Catholic Church and the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities which are not in full communion with her, in suitable meetings and initiatives, and above all in the witness of charity. Indeed, there exists an ecumenism of daily life, made up of mutual acceptance, listening and cooperation, the last of which is singularly effective.

On the other hand, the Synod Fathers also noted the danger of ill-considered gestures, signs of an "impatient ecumenism" which can do harm to the journey being made towards full unity. For this reason it is most important that the correct principles of ecumenical dialogue be accepted and practised by all, and emphasized in the seminary training of candidates for the sacred ministry, in parishes and in other ecclesial structures. The inner life of the Church must offer a witness of unity in respect and a greater openness to the acceptance and growth of the great treasure represented by the different theological, spiritual, liturgical and disciplinary traditions.²⁷³

Missionary spirit in the episcopal ministry

65. As members of the Episcopal College, Bishops are consecrated not just for a single Diocese but for the salvation of all mankind.²⁷⁴ This teaching of the Second Vatican Council was recalled by the Synod Fathers in order to emphasize the fact that each Bishop needs to be conscious of the missionary character of his pastoral ministry. All his pastoral activity should be marked by a missionary spirit capable of awakening and maintaining among the faithful a zeal for the spread of the Gospel. It is the duty of the Bishop to bring about, promote and direct missionary activities and initiatives in his Diocese, including the provision of financial support.²⁷⁵

As was stated in the Synod Hall, it is no less important for him to encourage the missionary dimension in his own particular Church by promoting, in accordance with different situations, fundamental values such as the acknowledgement of one's neighbour, respect for cultural diversity and a healthy interaction between different cultures. On the other hand, the increasingly multicultural character of cities and societies, especially as a result of international migration, is creating new situations which present a particular missionary challenge.

During the Synod there were also interventions which raised certain issues about the relationship between Diocesan Bishops and missionary Religious Congregations, and which stressed the need for deeper reflection in this regard. At the same time, there was an acknowledgement of the wealth of experience which a particular Church can receive from Congregations of consecrated life, as a means of keeping the missionary dimension alive among the faithful.

In his zeal for mission, the Bishop should be seen as the servant and witness of hope. Mission is the sure index of our faith in Christ and his love for us: 276 men and women of all times are thereby inspired to a new life motivated by hope. In proclaiming the Risen Lord, Christians present the One who inaugurates a new era of history and announce to the world the good news of a complete and universal salvation which contains in itself the pledge of a new world in which pain and injustice will give way to joy and beauty. At the beginning of a new millennium marked by a clearer awareness of the universality of salvation and a realization that the Gospel daily needs to be proclaimed anew, the Synodal Assembly raised an appeal that our commitment to mission should not be lessened but rather expanded, through ever more profound missionary cooperation.

CHAPTER SEVEN - THE BISHOP BEFORE THE CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT

"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!" (Jn 16:33)

66. In sacred Scripture the Church is compared to a flock "which God himself foretold that he would shepherd, and whose sheep, even though governed by human shepherds, are continuously led and nourished by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and the Prince of Shepherds".²⁷⁷ Does not Jesus himself call his disciples a *pusillus grex* and exhort them not to fear but to have hope (cf. Lk 12:32)? Jesus often repeated this exhortation to his disciples: "In the world you will have fear; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!" (Jn 16:33). As he was about to return to the Father, he washed the feet of the Apostles and said to them: "Let not your hearts be troubled, " and added: "I am the way... No one comes to the Father, but by me" (cf. Jn 14:1-6). On this "way" which is Christ, the little flock, the Church, has set out, and is led by him, the Good Shepherd, who, "when he has brought out all his own, goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice" (Jn 10:4).

In the image of Jesus Christ, and following in his footsteps, the Bishop also goes forth to proclaim him before the world as the Saviour of mankind, the Saviour of every man and woman. As a missionary of the Gospel, he acts in the name of the Church, which is an expert in humanity and close to the men and women of our time. Consequently, the Bishop, with the strength which comes from the radicalism of the Gospel, also has the duty to unmask false conceptions of man, to defend values being threatened by ideological movements and to discern the truth. With the Apostle he can repeat: "We toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim 4:10).

The Bishop's activity should thus be marked by that *parrhesía* which is the fruit of the working of the Spirit (cf. Acts 4:31). Leaving behind his very self in order to proclaim Jesus Christ, the Bishop takes up his mission with confidence and courage, *factus pontifex*, becoming in truth a "bridge" which leads to every man and woman. With the burning love of a shepherd he goes out in search of the sheep, following in the footsteps of Jesus who says: "I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also and they will hear my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10:16).

The Bishop, promoter of justice and peace

67. Within this missionary context, the Synod Fathers described the Bishop as a prophet of justice. The war of the powerful against the weak has, today more than ever before, created profound divisions between rich and poor. The poor are legion! Within an unjust economic system marked by significant structural inequities, the situation of the marginalized is daily becoming worse. Today, in many parts of the world, people are starving, while in other places there is opulence. It is above all the poor, the young and refugees who are the victims of these dramatic cases of inequality. In addition, women in many places are demeaned in their dignity as persons, victims of a hedonistic and materialistic culture.

In the face of, and often in the midst of these situations of injustice which inevitably open the door to conflicts and death, the Bishop is the defender of human rights, the rights of human beings made in the image and likeness of God. He proclaims the Church's moral teaching by defending life from conception to its natural end. He likewise proclaims the Church's social teaching, based on the Gospel, and he shows profound concern for the defence of all who are poor, raising his voice on behalf of the voiceless in order to defend their rights. The Church's social teaching is able to offer hope even in the worst of situations, because, if there is no hope for the poor, there will be no hope for anyone, not even for the so-called rich.

The Bishops vigorously condemned terrorism and genocide, and raised their voice on behalf of those who cry out because of injustice, those who are being persecuted and those who are unemployed, as well as children who are being abused in various and increasingly serious ways. Like holy Church herself, which is in the world the sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, ²⁷⁸ the Bishop is the defender and the father of the poor, concerned for justice and human rights, and one who brings hope.²⁷⁹

The words of the Synod Fathers, and my own, were explicit and forceful. "During this Synod, we could not close our eyes to many other collective tragedies... A drastic moral change is needed... Some endemic evils, when they are too long ignored, can produce despair in entire populations. How can we keep silent when confronted by the enduring drama of hunger and extreme poverty, in an age where humanity, more than ever, has the capacity for a just sharing of resources? We must also express our solidarity with the flood of refugees and immigrants, who, because of war, political oppression or economic discrimination, are forced to flee their homeland in search of employment or in the hope of finding peace. The ravages of malaria, the spread of AIDS, illiteracy, the hopelessness of so many children and youth abandoned to life on the streets, the exploitation of women, pornography, intolerance and the unacceptable exploitation of religion for violent purposes, drug trafficking and the sale of arms: the list is not exhaustive! Still, in the midst of all this distress, the humble take new heart. The Lord looks at them and strengthens them. 'Because they rob the afflicted, and the needy sigh, now I will arise, ' says the Lord" (Ps 12:5).²⁸⁰

The dramatic picture just painted can only evoke an urgent appeal for peace and a commitment to building peace. The hotbeds of conflict inherited from the past century and from the whole past millennium continue to smoulder. Numerous local conflicts are creating profound wounds between different cultures and nationalities. And how can we fail to mention forms of religious fundamentalism, a constant enemy of dialogue and peace? In many areas the world resembles a powder-keg ready to explode and shower immense suffering upon the human family.

In this situation the Church continues to proclaim the peace of Christ who in the Sermon on the Mount proclaimed blessed those who are peacemakers (cf. Mt 5:9). Peace is everyone's responsibility, a responsibility which passes through the thousand little acts which make up everyday life. It awaits its prophets and builders, who should be found especially in the ecclesial communities of which the Bishop is the pastor. Following the example of Jesus, who came to announce freedom to the oppressed and to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord (cf. Lk 4:16-21), the Bishop will be ever ready to show that, as the Church's social teaching makes clear, Christian hope is deeply linked to zeal for the integral promotion of individuals and society.

In the midst of tragically frequent situations of armed conflict, the Bishop, even as he exhorts people to assert their rights, must always remind them that Christians are obliged in all cases to reject vengeance and to be prepared to forgive and to love their enemies.²⁸¹ There can be no justice without forgiveness. Hard as it may be to accept, for any sensible person the matter seems obvious: true peace is possible only through forgiveness.²⁸²

Interreligious dialogue, especially on behalf of world peace

68. As I have insisted on various occasions, dialogue between the religions must be put at the service of peace between peoples. The different religious traditions possess the resources needed to overcome divisions and to build reciprocal friendship and respect. The Synod appealed to Bishops to promote meetings with the representatives of the world's peoples, in order to reflect carefully on the conflicts and wars which are tearing our world apart, and to identify the paths which can be taken towards a common commitment of justice, concord and peace.

The Synod Fathers strongly emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue for peace, and asked the Bishops to commit themselves to engage in this important activity in their respective Dioceses. New paths to peace can be blazed by defending religious freedom, which the Second Vatican Council discussed in the Decree *Dignitatis Humanae*, and by working for the education of the younger generation and the proper use of the communications media.²⁸³

The horizons of interreligious dialogue, however, are surely wider, and so the Synod Fathers stated once more that such dialogue belongs to the new evangelization, especially in these times when people belonging to different religions are increasingly living together in the same areas, in the same cities and their daily workplaces. Interreligious dialogue thus has a place in the daily life of many Christian families; for this reason too the Bishops, as teachers of the faith and shepherds of the People of God, must give it proper attention.

When Christians live side-by-side with persons of other religions, they have a particular obligation to testify to the oneness and universality of the saving mystery of Jesus Christ and to the consequent necessity of the Church as the means of salvation for all humanity. "This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that 'one religion is as good as another' ".²⁸⁴ It is clear, then, that interreligious dialogue can never be a substitute for the proclamation and propagation of the faith, which constitute the primary goal of the Church's preaching, catechesis and mission.

A frank and unambiguous affirmation that human salvation depends on the redemption accomplished by Christ is not an obstacle to dialogue with other religions. In the context of our profession of Christian hope, it cannot be forgotten that it is precisely this hope which is the basis of interreligious dialogue. As the conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* states: "All nations are one community and have one origin, because God caused the whole human race to dwell on the whole face of the earth. They also have one final end, God, whose providence, manifest goodness and plan of salvation extend to all, until the elect be gathered together in the holy city which the glory of God will illuminate and where the peoples will walk in his light".²⁸⁵

Civil, social and economic life

69. The pastoral activity of the Bishop cannot fail to manifest particular concern for the demands of love and justice arising from the social and economic situation of the poor, the abandoned and the mistreated. In every poor person believers see a special image of Jesus. Their presence within the ecclesial and civil communities is a litmus test of the authenticity of our Christian faith.

I would also like to mention briefly the complex phenomenon of globalization, which is one of the features of our world today. Certainly there exists a "globalization" of the economy, finances and culture which is expanding as a result of the rapid progress of information technology. As I have observed on other occasions, this phenomenon calls for careful discernment in order to identify its positive and negative aspects and their consequences for the Church and the whole human race. Bishops can make an important contribution to this discernment by insisting on the urgent need for a globalization in charity, without marginalization. In this regard, the Synod Fathers spoke of the duty of promoting a

"globalization of charity" and considered issues associated with the cancellation of foreign debt, which compromises the economies of entire peoples, holding back their social and political progress.²⁸⁶

Without entering into the details of this serious problem, I would only repeat several fundamental points already indicated elsewhere. The Church's vision in this area has three essential and concomitant points of reference: the dignity of the human person, solidarity and subsidiarity. It follows that "the globalized economy must be analyzed in the light of the principles of social justice, respecting the preferential option for the poor who must be allowed to take their place in such an economy, and the requirements of the international common good".²⁸⁷ When globalization is joined to the dynamism of solidarity, it is no longer a source of marginalization. Indeed, the globalization of solidarity is a direct consequence of that universal charity which is the heart of the Gospel.

Respect for the environment and the protection of creation

70. The Synod Fathers also addressed the ethical dimension of the ecological question.²⁸⁸ In the deepest sense, a call for the globalization of solidarity also involves the urgent question of the protection of creation and the earth's resources. The "crying out of all creation" spoken of by the Apostle (cf. Rom 8:22) seems today to occur in a reversal of perspectives, since it is no longer a matter of an eschatological tension which awaits the revelation of the sons of God (cf. Rom 8:19), but rather of a paroxysm of death which strives to grip humanity itself in order to destroy it.

Here in fact we encounter the ecological question in its most insidious and perverse form. In effect, "the most profound and serious indication of the moral implications underlying the ecological problem is the lack of respect for life evident in many of the patterns of environmental pollution. Often, the interests of production prevail over the dignity of workers, while economic interests take priority over the good of individuals and even entire peoples. In these cases, pollution or environmental destruction is the result of an unnatural and reductive vision which at times leads to a genuine contempt for man".²⁸⁹

Clearly, what is called for is not simply a physical ecology, concerned with protecting the habitat of the various living beings, but a human ecology, capable of protecting the radical good of life in all its manifestations and of leaving behind for future generations an environment which conforms as closely as possible to the Creator's plan. There is a need for an ecological conversion, to which Bishops themselves can contribute by their teaching about the correct relationship of human beings with nature. Seen in the light of the doctrine of God the Father, the maker of heaven and earth, this relationship is one of "stewardship:" human beings are set at the centre of creation as stewards of the Creator.

The Bishop's ministry in the field of health

71. Human concern leads the Bishop to imitate Jesus, the true "Good Samaritan", filled with compassion and mercy, who cares for others without discrimination. Health care represents one of the outstanding challenges of the present time. Tragically, many forms of sickness still persist in different parts of the world, and although science is making tremendous strides in the search for new solutions and better treatments, there are always new situations which pose a threat to physical and mental health.

Within his own Diocese each Bishop, with the help of qualified persons, is called to work for an integral proclamation of the "Gospel of life". When Christians try to humanize medicine and the care of the sick by showing personal concern and closeness to the suffering, they become for everyone a powerful image of Jesus himself, the healer of bodies and souls. Among the instructions which he gave to his Apostles, the Lord included an exhortation to heal the sick (cf. Mt 10:8).²⁹⁰ The organization and promotion of adequate pastoral care for health-care workers should thus be a priority close to the heart of every Bishop.

In a special way, the Synod Fathers felt the need to give forceful expression to their concern for the promotion of an authentic "culture of life" in contemporary society: "Perhaps what most upsets us as pastors is the contempt for human life, from conception to death, as well as the breakdown of the family. The Church's 'No' to abortion and euthanasia is a 'Yes' to life, a 'Yes' to the fundamental goodness of creation, a 'Yes' which can move every person in the depths of his conscience, a 'Yes' to the family, the most basic community of hope, which so pleases God that he calls it to become a domestic Church".²⁹¹

The Bishop's pastoral care of migrants

72. The movement of peoples has assumed unprecedented proportions in our day and takes the form of mass movements involving an enormous number of persons. Many of them have fled their countries or been forced to leave them as a result of armed conflicts, unstable economic conditions, political, ethnic and social conflicts, and natural disasters. Despite their differences, all these migrations pose serious questions to our communities about pastoral issues such as evangelization and interreligious dialogue.

Dioceses should make suitable provision for the establishment of pastoral structures capable of receiving these persons and providing them with appropriate pastoral care adapted to their different situations. There is also a need for greater cooperation between neighbouring Dioceses in offering efficient and competent services and in training priests and lay

workers who are particularly generous and open to this demanding work, above all when it involves legal problems associated with enabling these persons to fit into a new social structure.²⁹²

In this context, the Synod Fathers from the Eastern Catholic Churches once again raised the issue, in some ways new and fraught with serious practical consequences, of the emigration of members of their communities. It is now a fact that a significant number of the faithful of the Eastern Catholic Churches reside habitually and stably outside their countries of origin and the Sees of the Eastern Hierarchies. Understandably, this is an issue which presents daily challenges to the pastoral responsibility of the latter.

The Synod of Bishops consequently called for a deeper study of the ways in which the Catholic Churches of both East and West can establish suitable pastoral structures to meet the needs of members of the faithful living in a state of "diaspora".²⁹³ In any case, it remains the duty of the local Bishops, their differing rites notwithstanding, to act as true fathers to these faithful of the Eastern Rite, and to ensure that they are given pastoral care which respects the specific religious and cultural values which they received at birth and in their earliest Christian formation.

These are only some of the situations which present an especially urgent challenge to Christian witness and to the ministry of Bishops. Accepting responsibility for the world, its problems, its challenges and its hopes is part of our commitment to proclaiming the Gospel of hope. What is at stake is always the future of man, as a "being of hope".

It is understandable that all these new challenges to hope can lead to a temptation to scepticism and loss of confidence. But Christians are capable of facing even the most troubling situations, for the basis of their hope is found in the mystery of the Lord's Cross and Resurrection. This alone is the source from which they draw the strength to take heart and persevere in the service of God, who wills the salvation and integral liberation of all humanity.

CONCLUSION

73. The sheer human complexity of the settings in which the Gospel must be proclaimed today brings spontaneously to mind the Gospel account of the multiplication of the loaves. The disciples are worried about the crowds who, hungering for Jesus' word, have followed him even into the desert. They bring their worries before Jesus and they tell him: "Dimitte turbas... Send the crowd away..." (Lk 9:12). Perhaps they were afraid, genuinely not knowing how to satisfy the hunger of so many people.

Our own hearts might be similarly troubled by the enormity of the problems confronting the Churches and ourselves personally as Bishops. In that case, we should respond with a new creativity in charity which is shown not only in more efficient forms of charitable assistance, but even more in an ability to be close to those in need and to make the poor feel that every Christian community is truly their home.²⁹⁴

Jesus, however, has his own way of solving our problems. As if to challenge the Apostles, he tells them: "Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?" (Lk 9:13). We know how the story ended: "All ate and were satisfied. And they took up what was left over, twelve baskets of broken pieces" (Lk 9:17). That residual abundance is still present today in the life of the Church!

The Bishops of the third millennium are called to do what was done by so many saintly Bishops throughout history, up to our own time. Like Saint Basil, for example, who even built at the gates of Caesarea a large hospice for those in need, a true citadel of charity, which was called after him the Basiliad: this clearly demonstrates that "the charity of works ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words".²⁹⁵ This is the path that we too must walk: the Good Shepherd has entrusted his flock to each Bishop to feed it with his word and to form it by his example.

Where then will we Bishops get the "bread" needed to respond to the many requests which come to us from within and without the Churches and the Church? We could easily complain, as the Apostles did to Jesus: "Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" (Mt 15:33). Where can we find the resources we need? We can at least point to a few fundamental answers.

Our first, transcendent resource is the love of God poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (cf. Rom 5:5). The love with which God has loved us is so great that it can always sustain us in finding the right ways to touch the hearts of men and women today. At every moment the Lord gives us, by the power of his Spirit, an ability to love and to find the best and most beautiful ways to express that love. We are called to be servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world, yet we know that this hope does not come from us, but from the Holy Spirit, who "does not cease to be the guardian of hope in the human heart: the hope of all human creatures, and especially of those who 'have the first fruits of the Spirit' and 'wait for the redemption of their bodies' ".²⁹⁶

Our second resource is the Church, whose members we have become through Baptism, together with countless other brothers and sisters with whom we confess one heavenly Father and drink of the one Spirit of holiness.²⁹⁷ The present situation urges us to make the Church "the home and the school of communion, " if we truly wish to respond to the expectations of the world.²⁹⁸

Our communion in the body of Bishops, of which we became members by our consecration, is itself a remarkable resource, since it provides us with valuable support in our efforts to read carefully the sign of the times and to discern clearly what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. At the heart of the College of Bishops there is the support and the solidarity of the Successor of the Apostle Peter, whose supreme and universal power does not destroy but rather affirms, strengthens and vindicates the power of the Bishops, the successors of the Apostles. Here we will need to make

the most of the means of building communion which are to be found in the great directives of the Second Vatican Council. Certainly there are circumstances – and today they are not rare – in which an individual Church or a number of neighbouring Churches find it difficult or practically impossible to provide an adequate response to major problems. It is above all in these cases that recourse to the means of building episcopal communion can provide genuine help.

A final, immediate recourse for a Bishop in search of "bread" to satisfy the hunger of his brothers and sisters is his own particular Church, when the spirituality of communion has taken root as an educative principle "wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are built up".²⁹⁹ It is here that we see once more the connection between the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the three General Assemblies which immediately preceded it. For a Bishop is never alone: he is not alone in the universal Church and he is not alone in his particular Church.

74. The duty of Bishops at the beginning of a new millennium is thus clearly marked out. It is the same duty as ever: to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, the salvation of the world. But it is a duty which has a new urgency and which calls for cooperation and commitment on the part of the whole People of God. The Bishop needs to be able to count on the members of his diocesan presbyterate and on his deacons, the ministers of the Blood of Christ and of charity; he needs to be able to count on his consecrated sisters and brothers, called to be for the Church and the world eloquent witnesses of the primacy of God in the Christian life and the power of his love amid the frailty of the human condition; and he needs to be able to count on the lay faithful, whose greater scope for the apostolate represents for their pastors a source of particular support and a reason for special comfort.

At the conclusion of these reflections, we appreciate how the theme of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops leads each of us Bishops back to all our brothers and sisters in the Church and to all the men and women of the world. Christ sends us to them, even as he once he sent the Apostles (cf. Mt 28:19-20). We need to become, for each and every person, in an outstanding and visible way, a living sign of Jesus Christ, Teacher, Priest and Pastor.³⁰⁰

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, Jesus Christ is the icon to which we look as we carry out our ministry as heralds of hope. Like him, we must be ready to offer our own lives for the salvation of those entrusted to our care, as we proclaim and celebrate the triumph of God's merciful love over sin and death.

Let us implore for this great undertaking the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Apostles. May she, who in the Upper Room supported the prayers of the Apostolic College, obtain for us the grace never to fail in the task of love which Christ has entrusted to us. As a witness to true life, Mary "shines forth for the pilgrim people of God" – and in a particular way for us, their pastors – "as a sign of sure hope and comfort, until the day of the Lord arrives".³⁰¹

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 16 October 2003, the twenty-fifth anniversary of my election to the Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

1Rite of Ordination of a Bishop: Prayer of Ordination.

2Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Lumen Gentium*, 18.

3Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 3, a. 2, ad 3.

4John Paul II, Homily at the Conclusion of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 27 October 2001, 3: AAS 94 (2002), 114.

5Paul VI, Address to the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of Italy (6 December 1965): AAS 58 (1966), 68.

6Propositio 3.

7Cf. John Paul II, Prayer in Commemoration of 11 September 2001: *L'Osservatore Romano* (12 October 2001), p. 1.

8Synod of Bishops, Tenth Ordinary General assembly, Message (25 October 2001), 8: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27 October 2001, p. 5; cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (14 May 1971), 41: AAS 63 (1971), 429-430.

9Cf. Propositio 6.

10Cf. Propositio 1.

11Cf. Optatus of Milevis, *Contra Parmenianum Donat.*, 2, 2: PL 11, 947; Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, 1, 1: PG 5, 685.

12John Paul II, Homily at the Opening of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (30 September 2001), 6: AAS 94 (2002), 111-112.

13Cf. Roman Missal, Preface of Pastors.

14Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 340/A, 9: PLS 2, 644.

15Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

16Cf. *Adv. Haer.* III, 2, 2; 3, 1: PG 7: 847-848; Propositio 2.

17Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 27.
18Cf. *Ad Magnes.*, 6, 1: PG 5, 764; *Ad Trall.*, 3, 1: PG 5, 780; *Ad Smyrn.*, 8:1: PG 5, 852.
19Roman Pontifical, Rite of Ordination of a Bishop: Promise of the Elect.
20Cf. *Didascalia Apostolorum* II, 33, 1, ed. F.X. Funk, I, 115.
21Cf. *Propositio* 6.
22Cf. Roman Pontifical, Rite of Ordination of a Bishop: Homily.
23No. 19.
24Cf. *ibid.*, 22; Code of Canon Law, c. 330; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 42.
25Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22; Code of Canon Law, c. 336; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 49.
26Cf. *Propositio* 20; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 21; Code of Canon Law, c. 375 § 2.
27Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 3; 5; 6; John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 13: AAS 90 (1998), 650-651.
28Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (28 June 1988), Appendix I, 4: AAS 80 (1988), 914-915; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22; Code of Canon Law, c. 337 §§ 1, 2; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 50 §§ 1, 2.
29Cf. John Paul II, Address at the Conclusion of the Seventh Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (29 October 1987), 4: AAS 80 (1988), 610; Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (28 June 1988), Appendix I: AAS 80 (1988), 915-916; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22.
30Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22.
31*Ibid.*
32John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 8: AAS 90 (1998), 647.
33Cf. Angoulême Sacramentary: In dedicatione basilicae novae: “Dirige, Domine, ecclesiam tuam dispensatione caelesti, ut, quae ante mundi principium in tua semper est praesentia praeparata, usque ad plenitudinem gloriamque promissam te moderante perveniat”: CCSL 159 C, rubr. 1851; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 758-760; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Communio Notio* (28 May 1992), 9: AAS 85 (1993), 843.
34Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.
35John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 12: AAS 90 (1998), 649-650.
36Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 5.
37Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22.
38John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 12: AAS 90 (1998), 650.
39Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22.
40Cf. John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 12: AAS 90 (1998), 649-650.
41Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 25-26.
42Cf. *Propositio* 33.
43Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 21, 27; John Paul II, Letter to Priests (8 April 1979), 3: AAS 71 (1979), 397.
44Cf. In *Io. Ev. tract.* 123, 5: PL 35, 1967.
45Sermo 340, 1: PL 38, 1483: “Vobis enim sum episcopus; vobiscum sum christianus”.
46Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10.
47*Ibid.*, 32.
48Cf. *Propositio* 8.
49Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 30: AAS 93 (2001), 287.
50Oratio II, No. 71: PG 35, 479.
51Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 15, 31: AAS 93 (2001), 276, 288.
52No. 5: AAS 94 (2002), 111.
53Sacramentarium Serapionis, 28: ed. F.X. Funk, II, 191.
54John Paul II, Homily for the Opening of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (30 September 2001), 5: AAS 94 (2002), 111.
55Code of Canon Law, c. 387; cf. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 197.
56Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 40.
57Sermo 340, 1: PL 38, 1483.
58Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 1804, 1839.
59Cf. *Propositio* 7.
60Saint Cyprian, *De Oratione Dominica*, 23: PL 4: 553; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 4.
61Rite of Ordination of a Bishop: Investiture with the Miter.

62Cf. Propositio 7.
63Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 41.
64Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. Principles and Guidelines (17 December 2001), 184: Vatican City, 2002.
65Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (16 October 2002), 43: AAS 95 (2003), 35-36.
66Cf. Propositio 8.
67Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 59: AAS 68 (1976), 50.
68Ad *Philadel.* 5: PG 5, 700.
69Comm. in *Is.*, Prol.: PL 24, 17; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 25.
70Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 17: AAS 66 (1974), 128.
71Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 179, 1: PL 38, 966.
72In *Lev. Hom.*, VI: PG 12, 474 C.
73No. 39: AAS 93 (2001), 294.
74Cf. Ps.-Dionysius the Aeropagite, *De Hier. Eccl.*, III: PG 3, 512; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* II-II, q. 184, a. 5.
75John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 34: AAS 93 (2001), 290.
76Saint Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* II-II, q. 17, a. 2.
77Rite of Ordination of a Bishop: Promise of the Elect.
78Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 84-85.
79Apostolic Constitution *Laudis Canticum* (1 November 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 532.
80Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 20-21: AAS 88 (1996), 393-395.
81John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 27: AAS 84 (1992), 701.
82Cf. No. 28: AAS 84 (1992), 701-703.
83Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 18.
84Cf. *ibid.*, 27, 37.
85Cf. Propositio 10.
86Ad *Polyc.*, IV: PG 5, 721.
87Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
88Cf. Propositio 9.
89Cf. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 49: AAS 93 (2001), 302.
90Rite of Ordination of a Bishop: Bestowal of the Ring.
91No. 43: AAS 93 (2001), 296.
92Saint Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Ez.* 1, 11: PL 76, 908.
93Acta *Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, Milan, 1599, p. 1178.
94John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 70: AAS 84 (1992), 781.
95Ibid. 72: loc. cit., 787.
96Cf. Propositio 12.
97Cf. Propositio 13.
98Cf. No. 6: AAS 94 (2002), 116.
99Cf. Propositio 11.
100Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 12; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.
101Cf. Propositiones 14; 15.
102Cf. Propositio 14.
103John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 29: AAS 93 (2001), 285-286.
104Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
105Cf. Propositio 15.
106Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 28: AAS 68 (1976), 24.
107Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* 25; Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 10; Code of Canon Law, c. 747 §1.; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 595 § 1.
108Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 7.
109Cf. *ibid.*, 8.
110Cf. *ibid.*, 10.
111Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 12.
112En. in *Ps.* 126, 3: PL 37, 1669.

113Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25.
114Ibid., 12.
115Cf. *Propositio* 15.
116No. 63: AAS 71 (1979), 1329.
117Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, General Directory for Catechesis (15 August 1997), 233: *Ench. Vat.* 16, 1065.
118Cf. *Propositio* 15.
119Cf. *Propositio* 47.
120Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Veritatis* (24 May 1990), 19: AAS 82 (1990), 1558; Code of Canon Law, c. 386 § 2; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 196 § 2.
121Cf. *Propositio* 16.
122Address to those taking part in the Italian National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement of Cultural Engagement (16 January 1982), 2: *Insegnamenti V/1* (1982), 131; *Propositio* 64.
123Cf. *Propositio* 65.
124Cf. *Propositio* 66.
125Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 10.
126De Trinitate, VIII, 1: PL 10, 236.
127Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 22-24: AAS 95 (2003), 448-449.
128Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.
129No. 26.
130Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.
131Ibid., 41.
132Roman Pontifical, Blessing of Oils: Introduction, 1.
133Cf. Roman Pontifical, Rite of Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests and of Deacons: Foreword, 21, 120, 202.
134Cf. Nos. 42-54.
135Cf. *Propositio* 17.
136“*Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*”: Saint Celestine, *Ad Galliarum Episcopos*, PL 45, 1759.
137Cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11, 14.
138John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 35: AAS 93 (2001), 291.
139Cf. *Propositio* 17.
140Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 102.
141Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68.
142Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 104.
143Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 26.
144Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 21: AAS 95 (2003), 447-448.
145Ibid.
146Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.
147Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 28; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 41-42: AAS 95 (2003), 460-461.
148Cf. Congregation for the Clergy (et al.), Interdicasterial Instruction *Ecclesiae de Mysterio* on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful with the Ministry of Priests (15 August 1997), “Practical Provisions”, Art. 7: AAS 89 (1997), 869-870.
149Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 64.
150Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Divinae Consortium Naturae* (15 August 1971): AAS 63 (1971), 657.
151Cf. *Propositio* 18.
152Cf. *Motu Proprio Misericordia Dei* (7 April 2002), 1: AAS 94 (2002), 453-454.
153Cf. *Propositio* 18.
154Cf. Roman Ritual, Rite of Exorcisms (22 November 1998), Vatican City, 1999; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Prayers for Healing (14 September 2000): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 November 2000, p. 6.
155Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 48: AAS 68 (1976), 37-38.
156Ibid.
157Cf. *Propositio* 19.
158Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy (17 December 2001), 21: Vatican City, 2002, 28-29.
159Cf. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 29-41: AAS 93 (2001), 285-295.
160Cf. *Propositio* 48.
161Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 27; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 16.
162Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 11; Code of Canon Law, c. 369; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 177 § 1.

163Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 27; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 8; Code of Canon Law, c. 381 § 1; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 178.

164Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 27.

165Roman Pontifical, Rite of Ordination of a Bishop: Homily.

166Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 27; cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 381 § 1; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 178.

167Ad Irenaeum, *Epistulae*, Bk. I, Ep. VI: *Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolanensis Opera*, Milano-Roma 1988 19, p. 66.

168No. 27.

169Ibid.

170Cf. Code of Canon Law, cc. 204 § 1; 208; 212 §§ 2, 3; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, cc. 7 § 1; 11; 15 §§ 2, 3.

171Cf. *Propositio* 35.

172Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 32; Code of Canon Law, cc. 204 § 1; 208. 173Cf. *Propositio* 35. 174Cf. AAS 89 (1997), 706-727. An analogous point must be made for the Eparchal Assemblies, which are dealt with in cc. 235-242 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.

175Cf. *Propositio* 35.

176Cf. *Propositio* 36.

177Cf. *Propositio* 39.

178Cf. *Propositio* 37.

179Cf. *ibid.*

180Romae, 1572, cf. 52 v.

181No. 11.

182Cf. Nos. 16-17: AAS 84 (1992), 681-684.

183Cf. *Propositio* 40.

184John Paul II, Address to a group of newly-appointed Bishops (23 September 2002), 4: *L'Osservatore Romano* (23-24 September 2002), p. 5.

185Ep. *Ad Nepotianum presb.*, LII, 7: PL 22, 534.

186John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 77: AAS 84 (1992), 795.

187Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 16.

188Cf. *Propositio* 40.

189Cf. *Propositio* 41.

190Cf. *ibid.*, John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 60-63: AAS 84 (1992), 762-769.

191Cf. *ibid.*, 65: AAS 84 (1992), 771-772.

192Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 1051.

193Cf. *Propositio* 41.

194Cf. *Propositio* 42.

195Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio Fundamental Institutionis Diaconorum Permanentium* (22 February 1998): AAS 90 (1998), 843-879; Congregation for the Clergy, *Directorium pro Ministerio et Vita Diaconorum Permanentium* (22 February 1998): AAS 90 (1998), 879-926.

196Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

197Cf. *Propositio* 43.

198Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Council on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

199Cf. Propositiones 45, 46 and 49.

200Cf. *Propositio* 52.

201Cf. *Propositio* 51.

202Cf. *ibid.*

203Cf. *Propositio* 53.

204Cf. *Propositio* 52.

205Cf. Roman Pontifical, Rite of Ordination of a Bishop: Promise of the Elect.

206Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

207Cf. Paul VI, Address for the Opening of the Third Session of the Council (14 September 1964): AAS 56 (1964), 813; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter Communionis Notio* (28 May 1992), 9, 11-14: AAS 85 (1993), 843-845.

208Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22; Code of Canon Law, cc. 337, 749 § 2; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, cc. 50, 597 § 2. 209Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

210Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 8.

211Cf. Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (15 May 1931): AAS 23 (1931), 203.

212Cf. *Propositio* 20.

213Cf. *Relatio post disceptationem*, 15-17: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 14 October 2001, p. 4; *Propositio* 20.

214Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 381 § 1; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 178.

215Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22; Code of Canon Law, cc. 331 and 333; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, cc. 43 and 45 § 1.

216Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Communio Notio* (28 May 1992), 12: AAS 85 (1993), 845-846.

217Ibid., 13: loc. cit., 846.

218Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 27; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 8; Code of Canon Law, c. 381 § 1; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 178.

219Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 753; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 600.

220Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22; Code of Canon Law, cc. 333 § 1, 336; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, cc. 43, 45 § 1, 49.

221Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 21; Code of Canon Law, c. 375 § 2.

222Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 27; cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 333 § 1; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 45 § 1.

223Cf. Paul VI, Address for the Opening of the Third Session of the Council (14 September 1964): AAS 56 (1964), 813.

224Cf. Synod of Bishops, Second Extraordinary General Assembly, Final Report *Exeunte Coetu* (7 December 1985), C.1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1985), 7.

225Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 333 § 2; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 45 § 2.

226Cf. *Propositio* 27.

227Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (28 June 1988), Art. 31: AAS 80 (1988), 868; *Adnexum I*, 6: *ibid.*, 916-917; Code of Canon Law, c. 400 § 1; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 208.

228Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

229Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, *Adnexum I*, 2; I, 5: AAS 80 (1989), 913, 915.

230Cf. Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3, 3, 2: PG 7, 848.

231Cf. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, 1:1: PG 5:685.

232Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

233Cf. *ibid.*, 21-22; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 4.

234Cf. *Propositiones* 26 and 27.

235Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 399; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 206.

236Cf. *Propositio* 25.

237Cf. *Motu Proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo* (15 September 1965): AAS 57 (1965), 775-780; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 5.

238Cf. Paul VI, *Motu Proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo* (15 September 1965), II: AAS 57 (1965), 776-777; Address to the Synod Fathers (30 September 1967): AAS 59 (1967), 970-971.

239Cf. *Propositio* 25.

240Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 333 § 2; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 45 § 2.

241c. 343.

242Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 44: AAS 93 (2003), 298.

243*Propositio* 31; Cf. John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 13: AAS 90 (1998), 650-651.

244Cf. Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops *Christus Dominus*, 6.

245Cf. *Propositio* 32.

246Cf. *Propositio* 33.

247Cf. *Propositio* 21.

248Cf. *Propositio* 22.

249Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23; Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 11.

250Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones* (18 October 1990): AAS 82 (1990), 1037.

251Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 11.

252Cf. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, cc. 76 and 77.

253Cf. *Canones Apostolorum*, VIII, 47, 34: ed. F.X. Funk, I, 572-574.

254Cf. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, cc. 110 § 3 and 149.
255Cf. *ibid.*, cc. 110 § 1 and 150 §§ 2, 3.
256Cf. *ibid.*, cc. 110 § 2 and 1062.
257Cf. *ibid.*, cc. 140-143.
258Cf. Propositio 28; Code of Canon Law, c. 437 § 1; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 156 § 1.
259Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 36.
260Cf. Code of Canon Law, cc. 441, 443.
261Cf. AAS 90 (1998), 641-658.
262c. 322.
263Cf. Propositiones 29 and 30.
264John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 6: AAS 90 (1998), 645-646.
265Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 450.
266Cf. John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 10, 12: AAS 90 (1998), 648-650.
267Cf. *ibid.*, Nos. 12, 13, 19: *loc. cit.*, 649-651, 653-654; Code of Canon Law, c. 381 § 1; 447; 455 § 1.
268John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Apostolos Suos* (21 May 1998), 18: AAS 90 (1998), 653.
269*Ibid.*
270Cf. Propositio 25.
271Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 459 § 1.
272Cf. Propositio 30.
273Cf. Propositio 60.
274Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 38.
275Cf. Propositio 63.
276Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 11: AAS 83 (1991), 256-260.
277Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 6.
278Cf. *ibid.*, 1.
279Cf. Propositiones 54-55.
280Synod of Bishops, Tenth Ordinary General assembly, Message (25 October 2001), 10-11: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27 October 2001, p. 5.
281Cf. Propositio 55.
282Cf. John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace 2002 (8 December 2001), 8: AAS 94 (2002), 137.
283Cf. Propositiones 61 and 62.
284Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Christus Dominus* (6 August 2000), 22: AAS 92 (2000), 763.
285No. 1.
286Cf. Propositio 56.
287John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (22 January 1999), 55: AAS 91 (1999), 790-791.
288Cf. Propositio 56.
289John Paul II, Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace (8 December 1989), 7: AAS 82 (1990), 150.
290Cf. Propositio 57.
291Synod of Bishops, Tenth Ordinary General assembly, Message (25 October 2001), 12: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27 October 2001, p. 5.
292Cf. Propositio 58.
293Cf. Propositio 23.
294Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 50: AAS 93 (2001), 303.
295Cf. *ibid.*
296John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 67: AAS 78 (1986), 898.
297Cf. Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 39, 9: CCL 1, 151.
298Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 43: AAS 93 (2001), 296.
299*Ibid.*
300Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 21.
301*Ibid.*, 68.

Apostolic Letter
 Of The Supreme Pontiff
 John Paul II
 To The Bishops, Clergy
 And Faithful
 On The Most Holy Rosary

INTRODUCTION

1. The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God, is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness. It blends easily into the spiritual journey of the Christian life, which, after two thousand years, has lost none of the freshness of its beginnings and feels drawn by the Spirit of God to “set out into the deep” (*duc in altum!*) in order once more to proclaim, and even cry out, before the world that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour, “the way, and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6), “the goal of human history and the point on which the desires of history and civilization turn”.(1)

The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium.(2) It is an echo of the prayer of Mary, her perennial Magnificat for the work of the redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb. With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.

The Popes and the Rosary

2. Numerous predecessors of mine attributed great importance to this prayer. Worthy of special note in this regard is Pope Leo XIII who on 1 September 1883 promulgated the Encyclical *Supremi Apostolatus Officio*, (3) a document of great worth, the first of his many statements about this prayer, in which he proposed the Rosary as an effective spiritual weapon against the evils afflicting society. Among the more recent Popes who, from the time of the Second Vatican Council, have distinguished themselves in promoting the Rosary I would mention Blessed John XXIII(4) and above all Pope Paul VI, who in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* emphasized, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the Rosary's evangelical character and its Christocentric inspiration. I myself have often encouraged the frequent recitation of the Rosary. From my youthful years this prayer has held an important place in my spiritual life. I was powerfully reminded of this during my recent visit to Poland, and in particular at the Shrine of Kalwaria. The Rosary has accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty. To it I have entrusted any number of concerns; in it I have always found comfort. Twenty-four years ago, on 29 October 1978, scarcely two weeks after my election to the See of Peter, I frankly admitted: “The Rosary is my favourite prayer. A marvellous prayer! Marvellous in its simplicity and its depth. [...]. It can be said that the Rosary is, in some sense, a prayer-commentary on the final chapter of the Vatican II Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, a chapter which discusses the wondrous presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Against the background of the words *Ave Maria* the principal events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the soul. They take shape in the complete series of the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries, and they put us in living communion with Jesus through – we might say – the heart of his Mother. At the same time our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all mankind. Our personal concerns and those of our neighbour, especially those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us. Thus the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life”.(5)

With these words, dear brothers and sisters, I set the first year of my Pontificate within the daily rhythm of the Rosary. Today, as I begin the twenty-fifth year of my service as the Successor of Peter, I wish to do the same. How many graces have I received in these years from the Blessed Virgin through the Rosary: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum!* I wish to lift up my thanks to the Lord in the words of his Most Holy Mother, under whose protection I have placed my Petrine ministry: *Totus Tuus!*

October 2002 – October 2003: The Year of the Rosary

3. Therefore, in continuity with my reflection in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in which, after the experience of the Jubilee, I invited the people of God to “start afresh from Christ”, (6) I have felt drawn to offer a reflection on the Rosary, as a kind of Marian complement to that Letter and an exhortation to contemplate the face of

Christ in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother. To recite the Rosary is nothing other than to contemplate with Mary the face of Christ. As a way of highlighting this invitation, prompted by the forthcoming 120th anniversary of the aforementioned Encyclical of Leo XIII, I desire that during the course of this year the Rosary should be especially emphasized and promoted in the various Christian communities. I therefore proclaim the year from October 2002 to October 2003 the Year of the Rosary.

I leave this pastoral proposal to the initiative of each ecclesial community. It is not my intention to encumber but rather to complete and consolidate pastoral programmes of the Particular Churches. I am confident that the proposal will find a ready and generous reception. The Rosary, reclaimed in its full meaning, goes to the very heart of Christian life; it offers a familiar yet fruitful spiritual and educational opportunity for personal contemplation, the formation of the People of God, and the new evangelization. I am pleased to reaffirm this also in the joyful remembrance of another anniversary: the fortieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on October 11, 1962, the "great grace" disposed by the Spirit of God for the Church in our time.(7)

Objections to the Rosary

4. The timeliness of this proposal is evident from a number of considerations. First, the urgent need to counter a certain crisis of the Rosary, which in the present historical and theological context can risk being wrongly devalued, and therefore no longer taught to the younger generation. There are some who think that the centrality of the Liturgy, rightly stressed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, necessarily entails giving lesser importance to the Rosary. Yet, as Pope Paul VI made clear, not only does this prayer not conflict with the Liturgy, it sustains it, since it serves as an excellent introduction and a faithful echo of the Liturgy, enabling people to participate fully and interiorly in it and to reap its fruits in their daily lives.

Perhaps too, there are some who fear that the Rosary is somehow unecumenical because of its distinctly Marian character. Yet the Rosary clearly belongs to the kind of veneration of the Mother of God described by the Council: a devotion directed to the Christological centre of the Christian faith, in such a way that "when the Mother is honoured, the Son... is duly known, loved and glorified".(8) If properly revitalized, the Rosary is an aid and certainly not a hindrance to ecumenism!

A path of contemplation

5. But the most important reason for strongly encouraging the practice of the Rosary is that it represents a most effective means of fostering among the faithful that commitment to the contemplation of the Christian mystery which I have proposed in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* as a genuine "training in holiness": "What is needed is a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer".(9) Inasmuch as contemporary culture, even amid so many indications to the contrary, has witnessed the flowering of a new call for spirituality, due also to the influence of other religions, it is more urgent than ever that our Christian communities should become "genuine schools of prayer".(10)

The Rosary belongs among the finest and most praiseworthy traditions of Christian contemplation. Developed in the West, it is a typically meditative prayer, corresponding in some way to the "prayer of the heart" or "Jesus prayer" which took root in the soil of the Christian East.

Prayer for peace and for the family

6. A number of historical circumstances also make a revival of the Rosary quite timely. First of all, the need to implore from God the gift of peace. The Rosary has many times been proposed by my predecessors and myself as a prayer for peace. At the start of a millennium which began with the terrifying attacks of 11 September 2001, a millennium which witnesses every day innumerable parts of the world fresh scenes of bloodshed and violence, to rediscover the Rosary means to immerse oneself in contemplation of the mystery of Christ who "is our peace", since he made "the two of us one, and broke down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). Consequently, one cannot recite the Rosary without feeling caught up in a clear commitment to advancing peace, especially in the land of Jesus, still so sorely afflicted and so close to the heart of every Christian.

A similar need for commitment and prayer arises in relation to another critical contemporary issue: the family, the primary cell of society, increasingly menaced by forces of disintegration on both the ideological and practical planes, so as to make us fear for the future of this fundamental and indispensable institution and, with it, for the future of society as a whole. The revival of the Rosary in Christian families, within the context of a broader pastoral ministry to the family, will be an effective aid to countering the devastating effects of this crisis typical of our age.

"Behold, your Mother!" (Jn 19:27)

7. Many signs indicate that still today the Blessed Virgin desires to exercise through this same prayer that maternal concern to which the dying Redeemer entrusted, in the person of the beloved disciple, all the sons and daughters of the

Church: "Woman, behold your son!" (Jn19:26). Well-known are the occasions in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries on which the Mother of Christ made her presence felt and her voice heard, in order to exhort the People of God to this form of contemplative prayer. I would mention in particular, on account of their great influence on the lives of Christians and the authoritative recognition they have received from the Church, the apparitions of Lourdes and of Fatima;(11) these shrines continue to be visited by great numbers of pilgrims seeking comfort and hope.

Following the witnesses

8. It would be impossible to name all the many Saints who discovered in the Rosary a genuine path to growth in holiness. We need but mention Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, the author of an excellent work on the Rosary, (12) and, closer to ourselves, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, whom I recently had the joy of canonizing. As a true apostle of the Rosary, Blessed Bartolo Longo had a special charism. His path to holiness rested on an inspiration heard in the depths of his heart: "Whoever spreads the Rosary is saved!"

(13) As a result, he felt called to build a Church dedicated to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Pompei, against the background of the ruins of the ancient city, which scarcely heard the proclamation of Christ before being buried in 79 A.D. during an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, only to emerge centuries later from its ashes as a witness to the lights and shadows of classical civilization. By his whole life's work and especially by the practice of the "Fifteen Saturdays", Bartolo Longo promoted the Christocentric and contemplative heart of the Rosary, and received great encouragement and support from Leo XIII, the "Pope of the Rosary".

CHAPTER I - CONTEMPLATING CHRIST WITH MARY

A face radiant as the sun

9. "And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun" (Mt 17:2). The Gospel scene of Christ's transfiguration, in which the three Apostles Peter, James and John appear entranced by the beauty of the Redeemer, can be seen as an icon of Christian contemplation. To look upon the face of Christ, to recognize its mystery amid the daily events and the sufferings of his human life, and then to grasp the divine splendour definitively revealed in the Risen Lord, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father: this is the task of every follower of Christ and therefore the task of each one of us. In contemplating Christ's face we become open to receiving the mystery of Trinitarian life, experiencing ever anew the love of the Father and delighting in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul's words can then be applied to us: "Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2Cor 3:18).

Mary, model of contemplation

10. The contemplation of Christ has an incomparable model in Mary. In a unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary. It was in her womb that Christ was formed, receiving from her a human resemblance which points to an even greater spiritual closeness. No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary. The eyes of her heart already turned to him at the Annunciation, when she conceived him by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the months that followed she began to sense his presence and to picture his features. When at last she gave birth to him in Bethlehem, her eyes were able to gaze tenderly on the face of her Son, as she "wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger" (Lk2:7).

Thereafter Mary's gaze, ever filled with adoration and wonder, would never leave him. At times it would be a questioning look, as in the episode of the finding in the Temple: "Son, why have you treated us so?" (Lk 2:48); it would always be a penetrating gaze, one capable of deeply understanding Jesus, even to the point of perceiving his hidden feelings and anticipating his decisions, as at Cana (cf. Jn 2:5). At other times it would be a look of sorrow, especially beneath the Cross, where her vision would still be that of a mother giving birth, for Mary not only shared the passion and death of her Son, she also received the new son given to her in the beloved disciple (cf. Jn 19:26-27). On the morning of Easter hers would be a gaze radiant with the joy of the Resurrection, and finally, on the day of Pentecost, a gaze afire with the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14).

Mary's memories

11. Mary lived with her eyes fixed on Christ, treasuring his every word: "She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51). The memories of Jesus, impressed upon her heart, were always with her, leading her to reflect on the various moments of her life at her Son's side. In a way those memories were to be the "rosary" which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her earthly life.

Even now, amid the joyful songs of the heavenly Jerusalem, the reasons for her thanksgiving and praise remain unchanged. They inspire her maternal concern for the pilgrim Church, in which she continues to relate her personal

account of the Gospel. Mary constantly sets before the faithful the “mysteries” of her Son, with the desire that the contemplation of those mysteries will release all their saving power. In the recitation of the Rosary, the Christian community enters into contact with the memories and the contemplative gaze of Mary.

The Rosary, a contemplative prayer

12. The Rosary, precisely because it starts with Mary's own experience, is an exquisitely contemplative prayer. Without this contemplative dimension, it would lose its meaning, as Pope Paul VI clearly pointed out: “Without contemplation, the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation runs the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas, in violation of the admonition of Christ: 'In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words' (Mt 6:7). By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are disclosed”.(14)

It is worth pausing to consider this profound insight of Paul VI, in order to bring out certain aspects of the Rosary which show that it is really a form of Christocentric contemplation.

Remembering Christ with Mary

13. Mary's contemplation is above all a remembering. We need to understand this word in the biblical sense of remembrance (*zakar*) as a making present of the works brought about by God in the history of salvation. The Bible is an account of saving events culminating in Christ himself. These events not only belong to “yesterday”; they are also part of the “today” of salvation. This making present comes about above all in the Liturgy: what God accomplished centuries ago did not only affect the direct witnesses of those events; it continues to affect people in every age with its gift of grace. To some extent this is also true of every other devout approach to those events: to “remember” them in a spirit of faith and love is to be open to the grace which Christ won for us by the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection.

Consequently, while it must be reaffirmed with the Second Vatican Council that the Liturgy, as the exercise of the priestly office of Christ and an act of public worship, is “the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed and the font from which all its power flows”, (15) it is also necessary to recall that the spiritual life “is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians, while they are called to prayer in common, must also go to their own rooms to pray to their Father in secret (cf. Mt 6:6); indeed, according to the teaching of the Apostle, they must pray without ceasing (cf. 1Thes 5:17)”.(16) The Rosary, in its own particular way, is part of this varied panorama of “ceaseless” prayer. If the Liturgy, as the activity of Christ and the Church, is a saving action par excellence, the Rosary too, as a “meditation” with Mary on Christ, is a salutary contemplation. By immersing us in the mysteries of the Redeemer's life, it ensures that what he has done and what the liturgy makes present is profoundly assimilated and shapes our existence.

Learning Christ from Mary

14. Christ is the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of “learning him”. In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary? From the divine standpoint, the Spirit is the interior teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). But among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother. The first of the “signs” worked by Jesus – the changing of water into wine at the marriage in Cana – clearly presents Mary in the guise of a teacher, as she urges the servants to do what Jesus commands (cf. Jn 2:5). We can imagine that she would have done likewise for the disciples after Jesus' Ascension, when she joined them in awaiting the Holy Spirit and supported them in their first mission. Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to “read” Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message.

This school of Mary is all the more effective if we consider that she teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own “pilgrimage of faith”.(17) As we contemplate each mystery of her Son's life, she invites us to do as she did at the Annunciation: to ask humbly the questions which open us to the light, in order to end with the obedience of faith: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Being conformed to Christ with Mary

15. Christian spirituality is distinguished by the disciple's commitment to become conformed ever more fully to his Master (cf. Rom 8:29; Phil 3:10, 12). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism grafts the believer like a branch onto the vine which is Christ (cf. Jn 15:5) and makes him a member of Christ's mystical Body (cf. 1Cor 12:12; Rom 12:5). This initial unity, however, calls for a growing assimilation which will increasingly shape the conduct of the

disciple in accordance with the “mind” of Christ: “Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). In the words of the Apostle, we are called “to put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27).

In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation – in Mary’s company – of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ’s life and as it were to share his deepest feelings. In this regard Blessed Bartolo Longo has written: “Just as two friends, frequently in each other’s company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection”.(18)

In this process of being conformed to Christ in the Rosary, we entrust ourselves in a special way to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin. She who is both the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church, indeed her “pre-eminent and altogether singular member”, (19) is at the same time the “Mother of the Church”. As such, she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son. She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the inexhaustible outpouring of the Spirit. Mary is the perfect icon of the motherhood of the Church.

The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary’s side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her to train us and to mold us with the same care, until Christ is “fully formed” in us (cf. Gal 4:19). This role of Mary, totally grounded in that of Christ and radically subordinated to it, “in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power”.(20) This is the luminous principle expressed by the Second Vatican Council which I have so powerfully experienced in my own life and have made the basis of my episcopal motto: *Totus Tuus*.(21) The motto is of course inspired by the teaching of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, who explained in the following words Mary’s role in the process of our configuration to Christ: “Our entire perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ. Hence the most perfect of all devotions is undoubtedly that which conforms, unites and consecrates us most perfectly to Jesus Christ.

Now, since Mary is of all creatures the one most conformed to Jesus Christ, it follows that among all devotions that which most consecrates and conforms a soul to our Lord is devotion to Mary, his Holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to her the more will it be consecrated to Jesus Christ”.(22)

Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined. Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ!

Praying to Christ with Mary

16. Jesus invited us to turn to God with insistence and the confidence that we will be heard: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). The basis for this power of prayer is the goodness of the Father, but also the mediation of Christ himself (cf. 1Jn 2:1) and the working of the Holy Spirit who “intercedes for us” according to the will of God (cf. Rom 8:26-27). For “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Rom 8:26), and at times we are not heard “because we ask wrongly” (cf. Jas 4:2-3).

In support of the prayer which Christ and the Spirit cause to rise in our hearts, Mary intervenes with her maternal intercession. “The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary”.(23) If Jesus, the one Mediator, is the Way of our prayer, then Mary, his purest and most transparent reflection, shows us the Way. “Beginning with Mary’s unique cooperation with the working of the Holy Spirit, the Churches developed their prayer to the Holy Mother of God, centering it on the person of Christ manifested in his mysteries”.(24) At the wedding of Cana the Gospel clearly shows the power of Mary’s intercession as she makes known to Jesus the needs of others: “They have no wine” (Jn 2:3).

The Rosary is both meditation and supplication. Insistent prayer to the Mother of God is based on confidence that her maternal intercession can obtain all things from the heart of her Son. She is “all-powerful by grace”, to use the bold expression, which needs to be properly understood, of Blessed Bartolo Longo in his *Supplication to Our Lady*.(25) This is a conviction which, beginning with the Gospel, has grown ever more firm in the experience of the Christian people. The supreme poet Dante expresses it marvellously in the lines sung by Saint Bernard: “Lady, thou art so great and so powerful, that whoever desires grace yet does not turn to thee, would have his desire fly without wings”.(26) When in the Rosary we plead with Mary, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35), she intercedes for us before the Father who filled her with grace and before the Son born of her womb, praying with us and for us.

Proclaiming Christ with Mary

17. The Rosary is also a path of proclamation and increasing knowledge, in which the mystery of Christ is presented again and again at different levels of the Christian experience. Its form is that of a prayerful and contemplative presentation, capable of forming Christians according to the heart of Christ. When the recitation of the Rosary combines all the elements needed for an effective meditation, especially in its communal celebration in parishes and shrines, it can present a significant catechetical opportunity which pastors should use to advantage. In this way too Our Lady of the Rosary continues her work of proclaiming Christ. The history of the Rosary shows how this prayer was used in particular by the Dominicans at a difficult time for the Church due to the spread of heresy. Today we are facing

new challenges. Why should we not once more have recourse to the Rosary, with the same faith as those who have gone before us? The Rosary retains all its power and continues to be a valuable pastoral resource for every good evangelizer.

CHAPTER II - MYSTERIES OF CHRIST – MYSTERIES OF HIS MOTHER

The Rosary, “a compendium of the Gospel”

18. The only way to approach the contemplation of Christ's face is by listening in the Spirit to the Father's voice, since “no one knows the Son except the Father” (Mt 11:27). In the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus responded to Peter's confession of faith by indicating the source of that clear intuition of his identity: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:17). What is needed, then, is a revelation from above. In order to receive that revelation, attentive listening is indispensable: “Only the experience of silence and prayer offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery”.(27)

The Rosary is one of the traditional paths of Christian prayer directed to the contemplation of Christ's face. Pope Paul VI described it in these words: “As a Gospel prayer, centred on the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, the Rosary is a prayer with a clearly Christological orientation. Its most characteristic element, in fact, the litany- like succession of Hail Marys, becomes in itself an unceasing praise of Christ, who is the ultimate object both of the Angel's announcement and of the greeting of the Mother of John the Baptist: 'Blessed is the fruit of your womb' (Lk 1:42). We would go further and say that the succession of Hail Marys constitutes the warp on which is woven the contemplation of the mysteries. The Jesus that each Hail Mary recalls is the same Jesus whom the succession of mysteries proposes to us now as the Son of God, now as the Son of the Virgin”.(28)

A proposed addition to the traditional pattern

19. Of the many mysteries of Christ's life, only a few are indicated by the Rosary in the form that has become generally established with the seal of the Church's approval. The selection was determined by the origin of the prayer, which was based on the number 150, the number of the Psalms in the Psalter.

I believe, however, that to bring out fully the Christological depth of the Rosary it would be suitable to make an addition to the traditional pattern which, while left to the freedom of individuals and communities, could broaden it to include the mysteries of Christ's public ministry between his Baptism and his Passion. In the course of those mysteries we contemplate important aspects of the person of Christ as the definitive revelation of God. Declared the beloved Son of the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan, Christ is the one who announces the coming of the Kingdom, bears witness to it in his works and proclaims its demands. It is during the years of his public ministry that the mystery of Christ is most evidently a mystery of light: “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn 9:5).

Consequently, for the Rosary to become more fully a “compendium of the Gospel”, it is fitting to add, following reflection on the Incarnation and the hidden life of Christ (the joyful mysteries) and before focusing on the sufferings of his Passion (the sorrowful mysteries) and the triumph of his Resurrection (the glorious mysteries), a meditation on certain particularly significant moments in his public ministry (the mysteries of light). This addition of these new mysteries, without prejudice to any essential aspect of the prayer's traditional format, is meant to give it fresh life and to enkindle renewed interest in the Rosary's place within Christian spirituality as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory.

The Joyful Mysteries

20. The first five decades, the “joyful mysteries”, are marked by the joy radiating from the event of the Incarnation. This is clear from the very first mystery, the Annunciation, where Gabriel's greeting to the Virgin of Nazareth is linked to an invitation to messianic joy: “Rejoice, Mary”. The whole of salvation history, in some sense the entire history of the world, has led up to this greeting. If it is the Father's plan to unite all things in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10), then the whole of the universe is in some way touched by the divine favour with which the Father looks upon Mary and makes her the Mother of his Son. The whole of humanity, in turn, is embraced by the fiat with which she readily agrees to the will of God.

Exultation is the keynote of the encounter with Elizabeth, where the sound of Mary's voice and the presence of Christ in her womb cause John to “leap for joy” (cf. Lk 1:44). Gladness also fills the scene in Bethlehem, when the birth of the divine Child, the Saviour of the world, is announced by the song of the angels and proclaimed to the shepherds as “news of great joy” (Lk 2:10).

The final two mysteries, while preserving this climate of joy, already point to the drama yet to come. The Presentation in the Temple not only expresses the joy of the Child's consecration and the ecstasy of the aged Simeon; it also records the prophecy that Christ will be a “sign of contradiction” for Israel and that a sword will pierce his mother's heart (cf. Lk 2:34-35). Joy mixed with drama marks the fifth mystery, the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. Here

he appears in his divine wisdom as he listens and raises questions, already in effect one who “teaches”. The revelation of his mystery as the Son wholly dedicated to his Father's affairs proclaims the radical nature of the Gospel, in which even the closest of human relationships are challenged by the absolute demands of the Kingdom. Mary and Joseph, fearful and anxious, “did not understand” his words (Lk 2:50).

To meditate upon the “joyful” mysteries, then, is to enter into the ultimate causes and the deepest meaning of Christian joy. It is to focus on the realism of the mystery of the Incarnation and on the obscure foreshadowing of the mystery of the saving Passion. Mary leads us to discover the secret of Christian joy, reminding us that Christianity is, first and foremost, euangelion, “good news”, which has as its heart and its whole content the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the one Saviour of the world.

The Mysteries of Light

21. Moving on from the infancy and the hidden life in Nazareth to the public life of Jesus, our contemplation brings us to those mysteries which may be called in a special way “mysteries of light”. Certainly the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of light. He is the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12). Yet this truth emerges in a special way during the years of his public life, when he proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom. In proposing to the Christian community five significant moments – “luminous” mysteries – during this phase of Christ's life, I think that the following can be fittingly singled out: (1) his Baptism in the Jordan, (2) his self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana, (3) his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with his call to conversion, (4) his Transfiguration, and finally, (5) his institution of the Eucharist, as the sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery.

Each of these mysteries is a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus. The Baptism in the Jordan is first of all a mystery of light. Here, as Christ descends into the waters, the innocent one who became “sin” for our sake (cf. 2Cor 5:21), the heavens open wide and the voice of the Father declares him the beloved Son (cf. Mt 3:17 and parallels), while the Spirit descends on him to invest him with the mission which he is to carry out. Another mystery of light is the first of the signs, given at Cana (cf. Jn 2:1- 12), when Christ changes water into wine and opens the hearts of the disciples to faith, thanks to the intervention of Mary, the first among believers. Another mystery of light is the preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion (cf. Mk 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust (cf. Mk 2:3-13; Lk 7:47- 48): the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church (cf. Jn 20:22-23). The mystery of light par excellence is the Transfiguration, traditionally believed to have taken place on Mount Tabor. The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ as the Father commands the astonished Apostles to “listen to him” (cf. Lk 9:35 and parallels) and to prepare to experience with him the agony of the Passion, so as to come with him to the joy of the Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit. A final mystery of light is the institution of the Eucharist, in which Christ offers his body and blood as food under the signs of bread and wine, and testifies “to the end” his love for humanity (Jn 13:1), for whose salvation he will offer himself in sacrifice.

In these mysteries, apart from the miracle at Cana, the presence of Mary remains in the background. The Gospels make only the briefest reference to her occasional presence at one moment or other during the preaching of Jesus (cf. Mk 3:31-5; Jn 2:12), and they give no indication that she was present at the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. Yet the role she assumed at Cana in some way accompanies Christ throughout his ministry. The revelation made directly by the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan and echoed by John the Baptist is placed upon Mary's lips at Cana, and it becomes the great maternal counsel which Mary addresses to the Church of every age: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). This counsel is a fitting introduction to the words and signs of Christ's public ministry and it forms the Marian foundation of all the “mysteries of light”.

The Sorrowful Mysteries

22. The Gospels give great prominence to the sorrowful mysteries of Christ. From the beginning Christian piety, especially during the Lenten devotion of the Way of the Cross, has focused on the individual moments of the Passion, realizing that here is found the culmination of the revelation of God's love and the source of our salvation. The Rosary selects certain moments from the Passion, inviting the faithful to contemplate them in their hearts and to relive them. The sequence of meditations begins with Gethsemane, where Christ experiences a moment of great anguish before the will of the Father, against which the weakness of the flesh would be tempted to rebel. There Jesus encounters all the temptations and confronts all the sins of humanity, in order to say to the Father: “Not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42 and parallels). This “Yes” of Christ reverses the “No” of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. And the cost of this faithfulness to the Father's will is made clear in the following mysteries; by his scourging, his crowning with thorns, his carrying the Cross and his death on the Cross, the Lord is cast into the most abject suffering: Ecce homo! This abject suffering reveals not only the love of God but also the meaning of man himself.

Ecce homo: the meaning, origin and fulfilment of man is to be found in Christ, the God who humbles himself out of love “even unto death, death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). The sorrowful mysteries help the believer to relive the death of

Jesus, to stand at the foot of the Cross beside Mary, to enter with her into the depths of God's love for man and to experience all its life-giving power.

The Glorious Mysteries

23. "The contemplation of Christ's face cannot stop at the image of the Crucified One. He is the Risen One!"(29) The Rosary has always expressed this knowledge born of faith and invited the believer to pass beyond the darkness of the Passion in order to gaze upon Christ's glory in the Resurrection and Ascension. Contemplating the Risen One, Christians rediscover the reasons for their own faith (cf. 1Cor 15:14) and relive the joy not only of those to whom Christ appeared – the Apostles, Mary Magdalene and the disciples on the road to Emmaus – but also the joy of Mary, who must have had an equally intense experience of the new life of her glorified Son. In the Ascension, Christ was raised in glory to the right hand of the Father, while Mary herself would be raised to that same glory in the Assumption, enjoying beforehand, by a unique privilege, the destiny reserved for all the just at the resurrection of the dead. Crowned in glory – as she appears in the last glorious mystery – Mary shines forth as Queen of the Angels and Saints, the anticipation and the supreme realization of the eschatological state of the Church.

At the centre of this unfolding sequence of the glory of the Son and the Mother, the Rosary sets before us the third glorious mystery, Pentecost, which reveals the face of the Church as a family gathered together with Mary, enlivened by the powerful outpouring of the Spirit and ready for the mission of evangelization. The contemplation of this scene, like that of the other glorious mysteries, ought to lead the faithful to an ever greater appreciation of their new life in Christ, lived in the heart of the Church, a life of which the scene of Pentecost itself is the great "icon". The glorious mysteries thus lead the faithful to greater hope for the eschatological goal towards which they journey as members of the pilgrim People of God in history. This can only impel them to bear courageous witness to that "good news" which gives meaning to their entire existence.

From "mysteries" to the "Mystery": Mary's way

24. The cycles of meditation proposed by the Holy Rosary are by no means exhaustive, but they do bring to mind what is essential and they awaken in the soul a thirst for a knowledge of Christ continually nourished by the pure source of the Gospel. Every individual event in the life of Christ, as narrated by the Evangelists, is resplendent with the Mystery that surpasses all understanding (cf. Eph 3:19): the Mystery of the Word made flesh, in whom "all the fullness of God dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). For this reason the Catechism of the Catholic Church places great emphasis on the mysteries of Christ, pointing out that "everything in the life of Jesus is a sign of his Mystery".(30) The "duc in altum" of the Church of the third millennium will be determined by the ability of Christians to enter into the "perfect knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2-3). The Letter to the Ephesians makes this heartfelt prayer for all the baptized: "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, so that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power... to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:17-19).

The Rosary is at the service of this ideal; it offers the "secret" which leads easily to a profound and inward knowledge of Christ. We might call it Mary's way. It is the way of the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, a woman of faith, of silence, of attentive listening. It is also the way of a Marian devotion inspired by knowledge of the inseparable bond between Christ and his Blessed Mother: the mysteries of Christ are also in some sense the mysteries of his Mother, even when they do not involve her directly, for she lives from him and through him. By making our own the words of the Angel Gabriel and Saint Elizabeth contained in the Hail Mary, we find ourselves constantly drawn to seek out afresh in Mary, in her arms and in her heart, the "blessed fruit of her womb" (cf Lk 1:42).

Mystery of Christ, mystery of man

25. In my testimony of 1978 mentioned above, where I described the Rosary as my favourite prayer, I used an idea to which I would like to return. I said then that "the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life".(31)

In the light of what has been said so far on the mysteries of Christ, it is not difficult to go deeper into this anthropological significance of the Rosary, which is far deeper than may appear at first sight. Anyone who contemplates Christ through the various stages of his life cannot fail to perceive in him the truth about man. This is the great affirmation of the Second Vatican Council which I have so often discussed in my own teaching since the Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*: "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man is seen in its true light".(32) The Rosary helps to open up the way to this light. Following in the path of Christ, in whom man's path is "recapitulated", (33) revealed and redeemed, believers come face to face with the image of the true man. Contemplating Christ's birth, they learn of the sanctity of life; seeing the household of Nazareth, they learn the original truth of the family according to God's plan; listening to the Master in the mysteries of his public ministry, they find the light which leads them to enter the Kingdom of God; and following him on the way to Calvary, they learn the meaning of salvific suffering. Finally, contemplating Christ and his Blessed Mother in glory, they see the goal towards which

each of us is called, if we allow ourselves to be healed and transformed by the Holy Spirit. It could be said that each mystery of the Rosary, carefully meditated, sheds light on the mystery of man.

At the same time, it becomes natural to bring to this encounter with the sacred humanity of the Redeemer all the problems, anxieties, labours and endeavours which go to make up our lives. "Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you" (Ps 55:23). To pray the Rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and his Mother. Twenty-five years later, thinking back over the difficulties which have also been part of my exercise of the Petrine ministry, I feel the need to say once more, as a warm invitation to everyone to experience it personally: the Rosary does indeed "mark the rhythm of human life", bringing it into harmony with the "rhythm" of God's own life, in the joyful communion of the Holy Trinity, our life's destiny and deepest longing.

CHAPTER III - "FOR ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST"

The Rosary, a way of assimilating the mystery

26. Meditation on the mysteries of Christ is proposed in the Rosary by means of a method designed to assist in their assimilation. It is a method based on repetition. This applies above all to the Hail Mary, repeated ten times in each mystery. If this repetition is considered superficially, there could be a temptation to see the Rosary as a dry and boring exercise. It is quite another thing, however, when the Rosary is thought of as an outpouring of that love which tirelessly returns to the person loved with expressions similar in their content but ever fresh in terms of the feeling pervading them.

In Christ, God has truly assumed a "heart of flesh". Not only does God have a divine heart, rich in mercy and in forgiveness, but also a human heart, capable of all the stirrings of affection. If we needed evidence for this from the Gospel, we could easily find it in the touching dialogue between Christ and Peter after the Resurrection: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Three times this question is put to Peter, and three times he gives the reply: "Lord, you know that I love you" (cf. Jn 21:15-17). Over and above the specific meaning of this passage, so important for Peter's mission, none can fail to recognize the beauty of this triple repetition, in which the insistent request and the corresponding reply are expressed in terms familiar from the universal experience of human love. To understand the Rosary, one has to enter into the psychological dynamic proper to love.

One thing is clear: although the repeated Hail Mary is addressed directly to Mary, it is to Jesus that the act of love is ultimately directed, with her and through her. The repetition is nourished by the desire to be conformed ever more completely to Christ, the true programme of the Christian life. Saint Paul expressed this project with words of fire: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). And again: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The Rosary helps us to be conformed ever more closely to Christ until we attain true holiness.

A valid method...

27. We should not be surprised that our relationship with Christ makes use of a method. God communicates himself to us respecting our human nature and its vital rhythms. Hence, while Christian spirituality is familiar with the most sublime forms of mystical silence in which images, words and gestures are all, so to speak, superseded by an intense and ineffable union with God, it normally engages the whole person in all his complex psychological, physical and relational reality.

This becomes apparent in the Liturgy. Sacraments and sacramentals are structured as a series of rites which bring into play all the dimensions of the person. The same applies to non-liturgical prayer. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the East, the most characteristic prayer of Christological meditation, centred on the words "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"⁽³⁴⁾ is traditionally linked to the rhythm of breathing; while this practice favours perseverance in the prayer, it also in some way embodies the desire for Christ to become the breath, the soul and the "all" of one's life.

... which can nevertheless be improved

28. I mentioned in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* that the West is now experiencing a renewed demand for meditation, which at times leads to a keen interest in aspects of other religions.⁽³⁵⁾ Some Christians, limited in their knowledge of the Christian contemplative tradition, are attracted by those forms of prayer. While the latter contain many elements which are positive and at times compatible with Christian experience, they are often based on ultimately unacceptable premises. Much in vogue among these approaches are methods aimed at attaining a high level of spiritual concentration by using techniques of a psychophysical, repetitive and symbolic nature. The Rosary is situated within this broad gamut of religious phenomena, but it is distinguished by characteristics of its own which correspond to specifically Christian requirements.

In effect, the Rosary is simply a method of contemplation. As a method, it serves as a means to an end and cannot become an end in itself. All the same, as the fruit of centuries of experience, this method should not be undervalued. In

its favour one could cite the experience of countless Saints. This is not to say, however, that the method cannot be improved. Such is the intent of the addition of the new series of *mysteria lucis* to the overall cycle of mysteries and of the few suggestions which I am proposing in this Letter regarding its manner of recitation. These suggestions, while respecting the well-established structure of this prayer, are intended to help the faithful to understand it in the richness of its symbolism and in harmony with the demands of daily life. Otherwise there is a risk that the Rosary would not only fail to produce the intended spiritual effects, but even that the beads, with which it is usually said, could come to be regarded as some kind of amulet or magic object, thereby radically distorting their meaning and function.

Announcing each mystery

29. Announcing each mystery, and perhaps even using a suitable icon to portray it, is as it were to open up a scenario on which to focus our attention. The words direct the imagination and the mind towards a particular episode or moment in the life of Christ. In the Church's traditional spirituality, the veneration of icons and the many devotions appealing to the senses, as well as the method of prayer proposed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*, make use of visual and imaginative elements (the *compositio loci*), judged to be of great help in concentrating the mind on the particular mystery. This is a methodology, moreover, which corresponds to the inner logic of the Incarnation: in Jesus, God wanted to take on human features. It is through his bodily reality that we are led into contact with the mystery of his divinity.

This need for concreteness finds further expression in the announcement of the various mysteries of the Rosary. Obviously these mysteries neither replace the Gospel nor exhaust its content. The Rosary, therefore, is no substitute for *lectio divina*; on the contrary, it presupposes and promotes it. Yet, even though the mysteries contemplated in the Rosary, even with the addition of the *mysteria lucis*, do no more than outline the fundamental elements of the life of Christ, they easily draw the mind to a more expansive reflection on the rest of the Gospel, especially when the Rosary is prayed in a setting of prolonged recollection.

Listening to the word of God

30. In order to supply a Biblical foundation and greater depth to our meditation, it is helpful to follow the announcement of the mystery with the proclamation of a related Biblical passage, long or short, depending on the circumstances. No other words can ever match the efficacy of the inspired word. As we listen, we are certain that this is the word of God, spoken for today and spoken "for me".

If received in this way, the word of God can become part of the Rosary's methodology of repetition without giving rise to the ennui derived from the simple recollection of something already well known. It is not a matter of recalling information but of allowing God to speak. In certain solemn communal celebrations, this word can be appropriately illustrated by a brief commentary.

Silence

31. Listening and meditation are nourished by silence. After the announcement of the mystery and the proclamation of the word, it is fitting to pause and focus one's attention for a suitable period of time on the mystery concerned, before moving into vocal prayer. A discovery of the importance of silence is one of the secrets of practicing contemplation and meditation. One drawback of a society dominated by technology and the mass media is the fact that silence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. Just as moments of silence are recommended in the Liturgy, so too in the recitation of the Rosary it is fitting to pause briefly after listening to the word of God, while the mind focuses on the content of a particular mystery.

The "Our Father"

32. After listening to the word and focusing on the mystery, it is natural for the mind to be lifted up towards the Father. In each of his mysteries, Jesus always leads us to the Father, for as he rests in the Father's bosom (cf. Jn 1:18) he is continually turned towards him. He wants us to share in his intimacy with the Father, so that we can say with him: "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). By virtue of his relationship to the Father he makes us brothers and sisters of himself and of one another, communicating to us the Spirit which is both his and the Father's. Acting as a kind of foundation for the Christological and Marian meditation which unfolds in the repetition of the Hail Mary, the Our Father makes meditation upon the mystery, even when carried out in solitude, an ecclesial experience.

The ten "Hail Marys"

33. This is the most substantial element in the Rosary and also the one which makes it a Marian prayer par excellence. Yet when the Hail Mary is properly understood, we come to see clearly that its Marian character is not opposed to its

Christological character, but that it actually emphasizes and increases it. The first part of the Hail Mary, drawn from the words spoken to Mary by the Angel Gabriel and by Saint Elizabeth, is a contemplation in adoration of the mystery accomplished in the Virgin of Nazareth. These words express, so to speak, the wonder of heaven and earth; they could be said to give us a glimpse of God's own wonderment as he contemplates his "masterpiece" – the Incarnation of the Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary. If we recall how, in the Book of Genesis, God "saw all that he had made" (Gen 1:31), we can find here an echo of that "pathos with which God, at the dawn of creation, looked upon the work of his hands".(36) The repetition of the Hail Mary in the Rosary gives us a share in God's own wonder and pleasure: in jubilant amazement we acknowledge the greatest miracle of history. Mary's prophecy here finds its fulfilment: "Henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48).

The centre of gravity in the Hail Mary, the hinge as it were which joins its two parts, is the name of Jesus. Sometimes, in hurried recitation, this centre of gravity can be overlooked, and with it the connection to the mystery of Christ being contemplated. Yet it is precisely the emphasis given to the name of Jesus and to his mystery that is the sign of a meaningful and fruitful recitation of the Rosary. Pope Paul VI drew attention, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, to the custom in certain regions of highlighting the name of Christ by the addition of a clause referring to the mystery being contemplated.(37) This is a praiseworthy custom, especially during public recitation. It gives forceful expression to our faith in Christ, directed to the different moments of the Redeemer's life. It is at once a profession of faith and an aid in concentrating our meditation, since it facilitates the process of assimilation to the mystery of Christ inherent in the repetition of the Hail Mary. When we repeat the name of Jesus – the only name given to us by which we may hope for salvation (cf. Acts 4:12) – in close association with the name of his Blessed Mother, almost as if it were done at her suggestion, we set out on a path of assimilation meant to help us enter more deeply into the life of Christ. From Mary's uniquely privileged relationship with Christ, which makes her the Mother of God, *Theotókos*, derives the forcefulness of the appeal we make to her in the second half of the prayer, as we entrust to her maternal intercession our lives and the hour of our death.

The "Gloria"

34. Trinitarian doxology is the goal of all Christian contemplation. For Christ is the way that leads us to the Father in the Spirit. If we travel this way to the end, we repeatedly encounter the mystery of the three divine Persons, to whom all praise, worship and thanksgiving are due. It is important that the Gloria, the high-point of contemplation, be given due prominence in the Rosary. In public recitation it could be sung, as a way of giving proper emphasis to the essentially Trinitarian structure of all Christian prayer.

To the extent that meditation on the mystery is attentive and profound, and to the extent that it is enlivened – from one Hail Mary to another – by love for Christ and for Mary, the glorification of the Trinity at the end of each decade, far from being a perfunctory conclusion, takes on its proper contemplative tone, raising the mind as it were to the heights of heaven and enabling us in some way to relive the experience of Tabor, a foretaste of the contemplation yet to come: "It is good for us to be here!" (Lk 9:33).

The concluding short prayer

35. In current practice, the Trinitarian doxology is followed by a brief concluding prayer which varies according to local custom. Without in any way diminishing the value of such invocations, it is worthwhile to note that the contemplation of the mysteries could better express their full spiritual fruitfulness if an effort were made to conclude each mystery with a prayer for the fruits specific to that particular mystery. In this way the Rosary would better express its connection with the Christian life. One fine liturgical prayer suggests as much, inviting us to pray that, by meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, we may come to "imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise".(38) Such a final prayer could take on a legitimate variety of forms, as indeed it already does. In this way the Rosary can be better adapted to different spiritual traditions and different Christian communities. It is to be hoped, then, that appropriate formulas will be widely circulated, after due pastoral discernment and possibly after experimental use in centres and shrines particularly devoted to the Rosary, so that the People of God may benefit from an abundance of authentic spiritual riches and find nourishment for their personal contemplation.

The Rosary beads

36. The traditional aid used for the recitation of the Rosary is the set of beads. At the most superficial level, the beads often become a simple counting mechanism to mark the succession of Hail Marys. Yet they can also take on a symbolism which can give added depth to contemplation.

Here the first thing to note is the way the beads converge upon the Crucifix, which both opens and closes the unfolding sequence of prayer. The life and prayer of believers is centred upon Christ. Everything begins from him, everything leads towards him, everything, through him, in the Holy Spirit, attains to the Father.

As a counting mechanism, marking the progress of the prayer, the beads evoke the unending path of contemplation and of Christian perfection. Blessed Bartolo Longo saw them also as a “chain” which links us to God. A chain, yes, but a sweet chain; for sweet indeed is the bond to God who is also our Father. A “filial” chain which puts us in tune with Mary, the “handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38) and, most of all, with Christ himself, who, though he was in the form of God, made himself a “servant” out of love for us (Phil 2:7).

A fine way to expand the symbolism of the beads is to let them remind us of our many relationships, of the bond of communion and fraternity which unites us all in Christ.

The opening and closing

37. At present, in different parts of the Church, there are many ways to introduce the Rosary. In some places, it is customary to begin with the opening words of Psalm 70: “O God, come to my aid; O Lord, make haste to help me”, as if to nourish in those who are praying a humble awareness of their own insufficiency. In other places, the Rosary begins with the recitation of the Creed, as if to make the profession of faith the basis of the contemplative journey about to be undertaken. These and similar customs, to the extent that they prepare the mind for contemplation, are all equally legitimate. The Rosary is then ended with a prayer for the intentions of the Pope, as if to expand the vision of the one praying to embrace all the needs of the Church. It is precisely in order to encourage this ecclesial dimension of the Rosary that the Church has seen fit to grant indulgences to those who recite it with the required dispositions.

If prayed in this way, the Rosary truly becomes a spiritual itinerary in which Mary acts as Mother, Teacher and Guide, sustaining the faithful by her powerful intercession. Is it any wonder, then, that the soul feels the need, after saying this prayer and experiencing so profoundly the motherhood of Mary, to burst forth in praise of the Blessed Virgin, either in that splendid prayer the *Salve Regina* or in the *Litany of Loreto*? This is the crowning moment of an inner journey which has brought the faithful into living contact with the mystery of Christ and his Blessed Mother.

Distribution over time

38. The Rosary can be recited in full every day, and there are those who most laudably do so. In this way it fills with prayer the days of many a contemplative, or keeps company with the sick and the elderly who have abundant time at their disposal. Yet it is clear – and this applies all the more if the new series of *mysteria lucis* is included – that many people will not be able to recite more than a part of the Rosary, according to a certain weekly pattern. This weekly distribution has the effect of giving the different days of the week a certain spiritual “colour”, by analogy with the way in which the Liturgy colours the different seasons of the liturgical year.

According to current practice, Monday and Thursday are dedicated to the “joyful mysteries”, Tuesday and Friday to the “sorrowful mysteries”, and Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday to the “glorious mysteries”. Where might the “mysteries of light” be inserted? If we consider that the “glorious mysteries” are said on both Saturday and Sunday, and that Saturday has always had a special Marian flavour, the second weekly meditation on the “joyful mysteries”, mysteries in which Mary's presence is especially pronounced, could be moved to Saturday. Thursday would then be free for meditating on the “mysteries of light”.

This indication is not intended to limit a rightful freedom in personal and community prayer, where account needs to be taken of spiritual and pastoral needs and of the occurrence of particular liturgical celebrations which might call for suitable adaptations. What is really important is that the Rosary should always be seen and experienced as a path of contemplation. In the Rosary, in a way similar to what takes place in the Liturgy, the Christian week, centred on Sunday, the day of Resurrection, becomes a journey through the mysteries of the life of Christ, and he is revealed in the lives of his disciples as the Lord of time and of history.

CONCLUSION

“Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain linking us to God”

39. What has been said so far makes abundantly clear the richness of this traditional prayer, which has the simplicity of a popular devotion but also the theological depth of a prayer suited to those who feel the need for deeper contemplation.

The Church has always attributed particular efficacy to this prayer, entrusting to the Rosary, to its choral recitation and to its constant practice, the most difficult problems. At times when Christianity itself seemed under threat, its deliverance was attributed to the power of this prayer, and Our Lady of the Rosary was acclaimed as the one whose intercession brought salvation.

Today I willingly entrust to the power of this prayer – as I mentioned at the beginning – the cause of peace in the world and the cause of the family.

Peace

40. The grave challenges confronting the world at the start of this new Millennium lead us to think that only an intervention from on high, capable of guiding the hearts of those living in situations of conflict and those governing the destinies of nations, can give reason to hope for a brighter future.

The Rosary is by its nature a prayer for peace, since it consists in the contemplation of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the one who is “our peace” (Eph 2:14). Anyone who assimilates the mystery of Christ – and this is clearly the goal of the Rosary – learns the secret of peace and makes it his life's project. Moreover, by virtue of its meditative character, with the tranquil succession of Hail Marys, the Rosary has a peaceful effect on those who pray it, disposing them to receive and experience in their innermost depths, and to spread around them, that true peace which is the special gift of the Risen Lord (cf. Jn 14:27; 20:21).

The Rosary is also a prayer for peace because of the fruits of charity which it produces. When prayed well in a truly meditative way, the Rosary leads to an encounter with Christ in his mysteries and so cannot fail to draw attention to the face of Christ in others, especially in the most afflicted. How could one possibly contemplate the mystery of the Child of Bethlehem, in the joyful mysteries, without experiencing the desire to welcome, defend and promote life, and to shoulder the burdens of suffering children all over the world? How could one possibly follow in the footsteps of Christ the Revealer, in the mysteries of light, without resolving to bear witness to his “Beatitudes” in daily life? And how could one contemplate Christ carrying the Cross and Christ Crucified, without feeling the need to act as a “Simon of Cyrene” for our brothers and sisters weighed down by grief or crushed by despair? Finally, how could one possibly gaze upon the glory of the Risen Christ or of Mary Queen of Heaven, without yearning to make this world more beautiful, more just, more closely conformed to God's plan?

In a word, by focusing our eyes on Christ, the Rosary also makes us peacemakers in the world. By its nature as an insistent choral petition in harmony with Christ's invitation to “pray ceaselessly” (Lk 18:1), the Rosary allows us to hope that, even today, the difficult “battle” for peace can be won. Far from offering an escape from the problems of the world, the Rosary obliges us to see them with responsible and generous eyes, and obtains for us the strength to face them with the certainty of God's help and the firm intention of bearing witness in every situation to “love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14).

The family: parents...

41. As a prayer for peace, the Rosary is also, and always has been, a prayer of and for the family. At one time this prayer was particularly dear to Christian families, and it certainly brought them closer together. It is important not to lose this precious inheritance. We need to return to the practice of family prayer and prayer for families, continuing to use the Rosary.

In my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I encouraged the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours by the lay faithful in the ordinary life of parish communities and Christian groups;(39) I now wish to do the same for the Rosary. These two paths of Christian contemplation are not mutually exclusive; they complement one another. I would therefore ask those who devote themselves to the pastoral care of families to recommend heartily the recitation of the Rosary.

The family that prays together stays together. The Holy Rosary, by age-old tradition, has shown itself particularly effective as a prayer which brings the family together. Individual family members, in turning their eyes towards Jesus, also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Spirit of God.

Many of the problems facing contemporary families, especially in economically developed societies, result from their increasing difficulty in communicating. Families seldom manage to come together, and the rare occasions when they do are often taken up with watching television. To return to the recitation of the family Rosary means filling daily life with very different images, images of the mystery of salvation: the image of the Redeemer, the image of his most Blessed Mother. The family that recites the Rosary together reproduces something of the atmosphere of the household of Nazareth: its members place Jesus at the centre, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on.

... and children

42. It is also beautiful and fruitful to entrust to this prayer the growth and development of children. Does the Rosary not follow the life of Christ, from his conception to his death, and then to his Resurrection and his glory? Parents are finding it ever more difficult to follow the lives of their children as they grow to maturity. In a society of advanced technology, of mass communications and globalization, everything has become hurried, and the cultural distance between generations is growing ever greater. The most diverse messages and the most unpredictable experiences rapidly make their way into the lives of children and adolescents, and parents can become quite anxious about the dangers their children face. At times parents suffer acute disappointment at the failure of their children to resist the

seductions of the drug culture, the lure of an unbridled hedonism, the temptation to violence, and the manifold expressions of meaninglessness and despair.

To pray the Rosary for children, and even more, with children, training them from their earliest years to experience this daily “pause for prayer” with the family, is admittedly not the solution to every problem, but it is a spiritual aid which should not be underestimated. It could be objected that the Rosary seems hardly suited to the taste of children and young people of today. But perhaps the objection is directed to an impoverished method of praying it. Furthermore, without prejudice to the Rosary's basic structure, there is nothing to stop children and young people from praying it – either within the family or in groups – with appropriate symbolic and practical aids to understanding and appreciation. Why not try it? With God's help, a pastoral approach to youth which is positive, impassioned and creative – as shown by the World Youth Days! – is capable of achieving quite remarkable results. If the Rosary is well presented, I am sure that young people will once more surprise adults by the way they make this prayer their own and recite it with the enthusiasm typical of their age group.

The Rosary, a treasure to be rediscovered

43. Dear brothers and sisters! A prayer so easy and yet so rich truly deserves to be rediscovered by the Christian community. Let us do so, especially this year, as a means of confirming the direction outlined in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, from which the pastoral plans of so many particular Churches have drawn inspiration as they look to the immediate future.

I turn particularly to you, my dear Brother Bishops, priests and deacons, and to you, pastoral agents in your different ministries: through your own personal experience of the beauty of the Rosary, may you come to promote it with conviction.

I also place my trust in you, theologians: by your sage and rigorous reflection, rooted in the word of God and sensitive to the lived experience of the Christian people, may you help them to discover the Biblical foundations, the spiritual riches and the pastoral value of this traditional prayer.

I count on you, consecrated men and women, called in a particular way to contemplate the face of Christ at the school of Mary.

I look to all of you, brothers and sisters of every state of life, to you, Christian families, to you, the sick and elderly, and to you, young people: confidently take up the Rosary once again. Rediscover the Rosary in the light of Scripture, in harmony with the Liturgy, and in the context of your daily lives.

May this appeal of mine not go unheard! At the start of the twenty-fifth year of my Pontificate, I entrust this Apostolic Letter to the loving hands of the Virgin Mary, prostrating myself in spirit before her image in the splendid Shrine built for her by Blessed Bartolo Longo, the apostle of the Rosary. I willingly make my own the touching words with which he concluded his well-known Supplication to the Queen of the Holy Rosary: “O Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain which unites us to God, bond of love which unites us to the angels, tower of salvation against the assaults of Hell, safe port in our universal shipwreck, we will never abandon you. You will be our comfort in the hour of death: yours our final kiss as life ebbs away. And the last word from our lips will be your sweet name, O Queen of the Rosary of Pompei, O dearest Mother, O Refuge of Sinners, O Sovereign Consoler of the Afflicted. May you be everywhere blessed, today and always, on earth and in heaven”.

From the Vatican, on the 16th day of October in the year 2002, the beginning of the twenty- fifth year of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

(1) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

(2) Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 42: AAS 66 (1974), 153.

(3) Cf. *Acta Leonis XIII*, 3 (1884), 280-289.

(4) Particularly worthy of note is his Apostolic Epistle on the Rosary *Il religioso convegno* (29 September 1961): AAS 53 (1961), 641-647.

(5) *Angelus: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, I (1978): 75-76.

(6) AAS 93 (2001), 285.

(7) During the years of preparation for the Council, Pope John XXIII did not fail to encourage the Christian community to recite the Rosary for the success of this ecclesial event: cf. Letter to the Cardinal Vicar (28 September 1960): AAS 52 (1960), 814-816.

(8) Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 66.

(9) No. 32: AAS 93 (2001), 288.

(10) *Ibid.*, 33: loc. cit., 289.

- (11) It is well-known and bears repeating that private revelations are not the same as public revelation, which is binding on the whole Church. It is the task of the Magisterium to discern and recognize the authenticity and value of private revelations for the piety of the faithful.
- (12) *The Secret of the Rosary*.
- (13) Blessed Bartolo Longo, *Storia del Santuario di Pompei*, Pompei, 1990, 59. (21 of 23)2006-10-03 17:25:57
- (14) *Apostolic Exhortation Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 47: AAS (1974), 156.
- (15) *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.
- (16) *Ibid.*, 12.
- (17) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, 58.
- (18) *I Quindici Sabati del Santissimo Rosario*, 27th ed., Pompei, 1916, 27.
- (19) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, 53.
- (20) *Ibid.*, 60.
- (21) Cf. First Radio Address *Urbi et Orbi* (17 October 1978): AAS 70 (1978), 927.
- (22) *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*.
- (23) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2679.
- (24) *Ibid.*, 2675.
- (25) The *Supplication to the Queen of the Holy Rosary* was composed by Blessed Bartolo Longo in 1883 in response to the appeal of Pope Leo XIII, made in his first Encyclical on the Rosary, for the spiritual commitment of all Catholics in combating social ills. It is solemnly recited twice yearly, in May and October.
- (26) *Divina Commedia, Paradiso XXXIII*, 13-15.
- (27) John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 20: AAS 93 (2001), 279.
- (28) *Apostolic Exhortation Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 46: AAS 6 (1974), 155.
- (29) John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 28: AAS 93 (2001), 284.
- (30) No. 515.
- (31) *Angelus Message of 29 October 1978: Insegnamenti, I* (1978), 76.
- (32) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- (33) Cf. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 18, 1: PG 7, 932.
- (34) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2616.
- (35) Cf. No. 33: AAS 93 (2001), 289.
- (36) John Paul II, *Letter to Artists* (4 April 1999), 1: AAS 91 (1999), 1155.
- (37) Cf. No. 46: AAS 66 (1974), 155. This custom has also been recently praised by the Congregation for Divine Worship and for the Discipline of the Sacraments in its *Direttorio su pietà popolare e liturgia. Principi e orientamenti* (17 December 2001), 201, Vatican City, 2002, 165.
- (38) "...concede, quaesumus, ut haec mysteria sacratissimo beatae Mariae Virginis Rosario recolentes, et imitemur quod continent, et quod promittunt assequamur". *Missale Romanum* 1960, in festo B.M. Virginis a Rosario.
- (39) Cf. No. 34: AAS 93 (2001), 290.

Apostolic Letter
 In The Form Of Motu Proprio
 Misericordia Dei
 On Certain Aspects
 Of The Celebration
 Of The Sacrament Of Penance

By the mercy of God, the Father who reconciles us to himself, the Word took flesh in the spotless womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary to save "his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21) and to open for them "the way of eternal salvation".(1) By identifying Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), Saint John the Baptist confirms this mission. In all his deeds and preaching, the Precursor issues a fervent and energetic summons to repentance and conversion, the sign of which is the baptism administered in the waters of the Jordan. Jesus himself underwent this penitential rite (cf. Mt 3:13-17), not because he had sinned, but because "he allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (Jn 1:29); already he is anticipating the 'baptism' of his bloody death". (2)

Salvation is therefore and above all redemption from sin, which hinders friendship with God, a liberation from the state of slavery in which man finds himself ever since he succumbed to the temptation of the Evil One and lost the freedom of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:21).

Christ entrusts to the Apostles the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and preaching the Gospel of conversion (cf. Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20). On the evening of the day of his Resurrection, as the apostolic mission is about to begin, Jesus grants the Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the authority to reconcile repentant sinners with God and the Church: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:22-23).(3)

Down through history in the constant practice of the Church, the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18), conferred through the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance, has always been seen as an essential and highly esteemed pastoral duty of the priestly ministry, performed in obedience to the command of Jesus. Through the centuries, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance has developed in different forms, but it has always kept the same basic structure: it necessarily entails not only the action of the minister – only a Bishop or priest, who judges and absolves, tends and heals in the name of Christ – but also the actions of the penitent: contrition, confession and satisfaction.

I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: "I am asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you will recall, in 1984 I dealt with this subject in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, which synthesized the results of a General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted to this question. My invitation then was to make every effort to face the crisis of 'the sense of sin' apparent in today's culture. But I was even more insistent in calling for a rediscovery of Christ as *mysterium pietatis*, the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance, which for the faithful is 'the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after Baptism'. When the Synod addressed the problem, the crisis of the Sacrament was there for all to see, especially in some parts of the world. The causes of the crisis have not disappeared in the brief span of time since then. But the Jubilee Year, which has been particularly marked by a return to the Sacrament of Penance, has given us an encouraging message, which should not be ignored: if many people, and among them also many young people, have benefited from approaching this Sacrament, it is probably necessary that Pastors should arm themselves with more confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate it".(4)

With these words, I intended, as I do now, to encourage my Brother Bishops and earnestly appeal to them – and, through them, to all priests – to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a requirement of genuine charity and true pastoral justice, (5) and we should remember that the faithful, when they have the proper interior dispositions, have the right to receive personally the sacramental gift.

In order that the minister of the Sacrament may know the dispositions of penitents with a view to granting or withholding absolution and imposing a suitable penance, it is necessary that the faithful, as well as being aware of the sins they have committed, of being sorry for them and resolved not to fall into them again, (6) should also confess their sins. In this sense, the Council of Trent declared that it is necessary "by divine decree to confess each and every mortal sin".(7) The Church has always seen an essential link between the judgement entrusted to the priest in the Sacrament and the need for penitents to name their own sins, (8) except where this is not possible. Since, therefore, the integral confession of serious sins is by divine decree a constitutive part of the Sacrament, it is in no way subject to the discretion of pastors (dispensation, interpretation, local customs, etc.). In the relevant disciplinary norms, the competent ecclesiastical authority merely indicates the criteria for distinguishing a real impossibility of confessing one's sins from other situations in which the impossibility is only apparent or can be surmounted.

In the present circumstances of the care of souls and responding to the concerned requests of many Brothers in the Episcopate, I consider it useful to recall some of the canonical laws in force regarding the celebration of this Sacrament and clarify certain aspects of them – in a spirit of communion with the responsibility proper to the entire Episcopate(9) with a view to a better administration of the Sacrament. It is a question of ensuring an ever more faithful, and thus more fruitful, celebration of the gift entrusted to the Church by the Lord Jesus after his Resurrection (cf. Jn 20:19-23). This seems especially necessary, given that in some places there has been a tendency to abandon individual confession and wrongly to resort to “general” or “communal” absolution. In this case general absolution is no longer seen as an extraordinary means to be used in wholly exceptional situations. On the basis of an arbitrary extension of the conditions required for grave necessity, (10) in practice there is a lessening of fidelity to the divine configuration of the Sacrament, and specifically regarding the need for individual confession, with consequent serious harm to the spiritual life of the faithful and to the holiness of the Church.

Thus, after consultation with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, and after hearing the views of venerable Brother Cardinals in charge of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and reaffirming Catholic doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation as summarized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, (11) conscious of my pastoral responsibility and fully aware of the need for this Sacrament and of its enduring efficacy, I decree the following:

1. Ordinaries are to remind all the ministers of the Sacrament of Penance that the universal law of the Church, applying Catholic doctrine in this area, has established that:

a) “Individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses from such confession, in which case reconciliation can be obtained in other ways”.(12)

b) Therefore, “all those of whom it is required by virtue of their ministry in the care of souls are obliged to ensure that the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them are heard when they reasonably ask, and that they are given the opportunity to approach individual confession, on days and at times set down for their convenience”.(13)

Moreover, all priests with faculties to administer the Sacrament of Penance are always to show themselves wholeheartedly disposed to administer it whenever the faithful make a reasonable request.(14) An unwillingness to welcome the wounded sheep, and even to go out to them in order to bring them back into the fold, would be a sad sign of a lack of pastoral sensibility in those who, by priestly Ordination, must reflect the image of the Good Shepherd.

2. Local Ordinaries, and parish priests and rectors of churches and shrines, should periodically verify that the greatest possible provision is in fact being made for the faithful to confess their sins. It is particularly recommended that in places of worship confessors be visibly present at the advertized times, that these times be adapted to the real circumstances of penitents, and that confessions be especially available before Masses, and even during Mass if there are other priests available, in order to meet the needs of the faithful. (15)

3. Since “the faithful are obliged to confess, according to kind and number, all grave sins committed after Baptism of which they are conscious after careful examination and which have not yet been directly remitted by the Church's power of the keys, nor acknowledged in individual confession”, (16) any practice which restricts confession to a generic accusation of sin or of only one or two sins judged to be more important is to be reprobated. Indeed, in view of the fact that all the faithful are called to holiness, it is recommended that they confess venial sins also.(17)

4. In the light of and within the framework of the above norms, the absolution of a number of penitents at once without previous confession, as envisaged by Can. 961 of the Code of Canon Law, is to be correctly understood and administered. Such absolution is in fact “exceptional in character”(18) and “cannot be imparted in a general manner unless:

1. the danger of death is imminent and there is not time for the priest or priests to hear the confessions of the individual penitents;

2. a grave necessity exists, that is, when in light of the number of penitents a supply of confessors is not readily available to hear the confessions of individuals in an appropriate way within an appropriate time, so that the penitents would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time through no fault of their own; it is not considered sufficient necessity if confessors cannot be readily available only because of the great number of penitents, as can occur on the occasion of some great feast or pilgrimage”. (19)

With reference to the case of grave necessity, the following clarification is made:

a) It refers to situations which are objectively exceptional, such as can occur in mission territories or in isolated communities of the faithful, where the priest can visit only once or very few times a year, or when war or weather conditions or similar factors permit.

b) The two conditions set down in the Canon to determine grave necessity are inseparable. Therefore, it is never just a question of whether individuals can have their confession heard “in an appropriate way” and “within an appropriate time” because of the shortage of priests; this must be combined with the fact that penitents would otherwise be forced to remain deprived of sacramental grace “for a long time”, through no fault of their own. Therefore, account must be

taken of the overall circumstances of the penitents and of the Diocese, in what refers to its pastoral organization and the possibility of the faithful having access to the Sacrament of Penance.

c) The first condition, the impossibility of hearing confessions “in an appropriate way” “within an appropriate time”, refers only to the time reasonably required for the elements of a valid and worthy celebration of the Sacrament. It is not a question here of a more extended pastoral conversation, which can be left to more favourable circumstances. The reasonable and appropriate time within which confessions can be heard will depend upon the real possibilities of the confessor or confessors, and of the penitents themselves.

d) The second condition calls for a prudential judgement in order to assess how long penitents can be deprived of sacramental grace for there to be a true impossibility as described in Can. 960, presuming that there is no imminent danger of death. Such a judgement is not prudential if it distorts the sense of physical or moral impossibility, as would be the case, for example, if it was thought that a period of less than a month means remaining “for a long time” in such a state of privation.

e) It is not acceptable to contrive or to allow the contrivance of situations of apparent grave necessity, resulting from not administering the Sacrament in the ordinary way through a failure to implement the above mentioned norms, (20) and still less because of penitents' preference for general absolution, as if this were a normal option equivalent to the two ordinary forms set out in the Ritual.

f) The large number of penitents gathered on the occasion of a great feast or pilgrimage, or for reasons of tourism or because of today's increased mobility of people, does not in itself constitute sufficient necessity.

5. Judgement as to whether there exist the conditions required by Can. 961 §1, 2 is not a matter for the confessor but for “the diocesan Bishop who can determine cases of such necessity in the light of criteria agreed upon with other members of the Episcopal Conference”.(21) These pastoral criteria must embody the pursuit of total fidelity, in the circumstances of their respective territories, to the fundamental criteria found in the universal discipline of the Church, which are themselves based upon the requirements deriving from the Sacrament of Penance itself as a divine institution.

6. Given the fundamental importance of full harmony among the Bishops' Conferences of the world in a matter so essential to the life of the Church, the various Conferences, observing Can. 455 § 2 of the Code of Canon Law, shall send as soon as possible to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments the text of the norms which they intend to issue or update in the light of this Motu Proprio on the application of Can. 961. This will help to foster an ever greater communion among the Bishops of the Church as they encourage the faithful everywhere to draw abundantly from the founts of divine mercy which flow unceasingly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In this perspective of communion it will also be appropriate for Diocesan Bishops to inform their respective Bishops' Conferences whether or not cases of grave necessity have occurred in their jurisdictions. It will then be the task of each Conference to inform the above-mentioned Congregation about the real situation in their regions and about any changes subsequently taking place.

7. As regards the personal disposition of penitents, it should be reiterated that:

a) “For the faithful to avail themselves

validly of sacramental absolution given to many at one time, it is required that they not only be suitably disposed but also at the same time intend to confess individually the serious sins which at present cannot be so confessed”.(22)

b) As far as possible, including cases of imminent danger of death, there should be a preliminary exhortation to the faithful “that each person take care to make an act of contrition”.(23)

c) It is clear that penitents living in a habitual state of serious sin and who do not intend to change their situation cannot validly receive absolution.

8. The obligation “to confess serious sins at least once a year”(24) remains, and therefore “a person who has had serious sins remitted by general absolution is to approach individual confession as soon as there is an opportunity to do so before receiving another general absolution, unless a just cause intervenes”.(25)

9. Concerning the place and confessional for the celebration of the Sacrament, it should be remembered that:

a) “the proper place to hear sacramental confessions is a church or an oratory”, (26) though it remains clear that pastoral reasons can justify celebrating the Sacrament in other places.(27)

b) confessionals are regulated by the norms issued by the respective Episcopal Conferences, who shall ensure that confessionals are located “in an open area” and have “a fixed grille”, so as to permit the faithful and confessors themselves who may wish to make use of them to do so freely.(28)

I decree that everything I have set down in this Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio shall have full and lasting force and be observed from this day forth, notwithstanding any provisions to the contrary. All that I have decreed in this Letter is, by its nature, valid for the venerable Oriental Catholic Churches in conformity with the respective Canons of their own Code.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 7 April, the Second Sunday of Easter, the Feast of Divine Mercy, in the year of our Lord 2002, the twenty-fourth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

- (1) Roman Missal, Advent Preface I.
- (2) Catechism of the Catholic Church, 536.
- (3) Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XIV, De Sacramento Paenitentiae, Can. 3: DS 1703.
- (4) No. 37: AAS 93 (2001) 292.
- (5) Cf. Code of Canon Law, Cans. 213 and 843 § 1.
- (6) Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XIV, Doctrina de Sacramento Paenitentiae, Chap. 4: DS 1676.
- (7) Ibid., Can. 7: DS 1707.
- (8) Ibid., Chap. 5: DS 1679; Ecumenical Council of Florence, Decree for the Armenians (22 November 1439): DS 1323.
- (9) Cf. Can. 392; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, Nos. 23, 27; Decree on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Christus Dominus*, No. 16.
- (10) Cf. Can. 961, § 1, 2.
- (11) Cf. Nos. 980-987; 1114-1134; 1420-1498.
- (12) Can. 960.
- (13) Can. 986, § 1.
- (14) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 13; *Ordo Paenitentiae*, editio typica, 1974, *Praenotanda*, No. 10, b.
- (15) Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Responsa ad dubia proposita: Notitiae*, 37 (2001) 259-260 (16) Can. 988, § 1.
- (17) Cf. Can. 988, § 2: John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984), 32: AAS 77 (1985) 267; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1458.
- (18) John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984), 32: AAS 77 (1985) 267.
- (19) Can. 961, § 1.
- (20) Cf. above Nos. 1 and 2.
- (21) Can. 961, § 2.
- (22) Can. 962, § 1.
- (23) Can. 962, § 2.
- (24) Can. 989.
- (25) Can. 963.
- (26) Can. 964, § 1.
- (27) Cf. Can. 964 § 3.
- (28) Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, *Responsa ad propositum dubium: de loco excipiendi sacramentales confessiones* (7 July 1998): AAS 90 (1998) 711.

Apostolic Letter
 Novo Millennio Ineunte
 Of His Holiness
 Pope John Paul II
 To The Bishops
 Clergy And Lay Faithful
 At The Close
 Of The Great Jubilee Of The Year 2000

To my Brother Bishops, To Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful.

1. At the beginning of the new millennium, and at the close of the Great Jubilee during which we celebrated the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus and a new stage of the Church's journey begins, our hearts ring out with the words of Jesus when one day, after speaking to the crowds from Simon's boat, he invited the Apostle to "put out into the deep" for a catch: "Duc in altum" (Lk 5:4). Peter and his first companions trusted Christ's words, and cast the nets. "When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish" (Lk 5:6).

Duc in altum! These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8).

The Church's joy was great this year, as she devoted herself to contemplating the face of her Bridegroom and Lord. She became more than ever a pilgrim people, led by him who is the "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb 13:20). With extraordinary energy, involving so many of her members, the People of God here in Rome, as well as in Jerusalem and in all the individual local churches, went through the "Holy Door" that is Christ. To him who is the goal of history and the one Saviour of the world, the Church and the Spirit cried out: "Marana tha - Come, Lord Jesus" (cf. Rev 22:17, 20; 1 Cor 16:22).

It is impossible to take the measure of this event of grace which in the course of the year has touched people's hearts. But certainly, "a river of living water", the water that continually flows "from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (cf. Rev 22:1), has been poured out on the Church. This is the water of the Spirit which quenches thirst and brings new life (cf. Jn 4:14). This is the merciful love of the Father which has once again been made known and given to us in Christ. At the end of this year we can repeat with renewed jubilation the ancient words of thanksgiving: "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures for ever" (Ps 118:1).

2. For all this, I feel the need to write to you, dearly beloved, to share this song of praise with you. From the beginning of my Pontificate, my thoughts had been on this Holy Year 2000 as an important appointment. I thought of its celebration as a providential opportunity during which the Church, thirty-five years after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, would examine how far she had renewed herself, in order to be able to take up her evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm.

Has the Jubilee succeeded in this aim? Our commitment, with its generous efforts and inevitable failings, is under God's scrutiny. But we cannot fail to give thanks for the "marvels" the Lord has worked for us: "Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo" (Ps 89:2).

At the same time, what we have observed demands to be reconsidered, and in a sense "deciphered", in order to hear what the Spirit has been saying to the Church (cf. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, etc.) during this most intense year.

3. Dear Brothers and Sisters, it is especially necessary for us to direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us. Often during these months we have looked towards the new millennium which is beginning, as we lived this Jubilee not only as a remembrance of the past, but also as a prophecy of the future. We now need to profit from the grace received, by putting it into practice in resolutions and guidelines for action. This is a task I wish to invite all the local churches to undertake. In each of them, gathered around their Bishop, as they listen to the word and "break bread" in brotherhood (cf. Acts 2:42), the "one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative".¹ It is above all in the actual situation of each local church that the mystery of the one People of God takes the particular form that fits it to each individual context and culture.

In the final analysis, this rooting of the Church in time and space mirrors the movement of the Incarnation itself. Now is the time for each local Church to assess its fervour and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities, by reflecting on what the Spirit has been saying to the People of God in this special year of grace, and indeed in the longer span of time from the Second Vatican Council to the Great Jubilee. It is with this purpose in mind that I wish to offer in this Letter, at the conclusion of the Jubilee Year, the contribution of my Petrine ministry, so that the Church may shine ever more brightly in the variety of her gifts and in her unity as she journeys on.

I - MEETING CHRIST - THE LEGACY OF THE GREAT JUBILEE

4. "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty" (Rev 11:17). In the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee I expressed the hope that the bimillennial celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation would be lived as "one unceasing hymn of praise to the Trinity"² and also "as a journey of reconciliation and a sign of true hope for all who look to Christ and to his Church".³ And this Jubilee Year has been an experience of these essential aspects, reaching moments of intensity which have made us as it were touch with our hands the merciful presence of God, from whom comes "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (Jas 1:17).

My thoughts turn first to the duty of praise. This is the point of departure for every genuine response of faith to the revelation of God in Christ. Christianity is grace, it is the wonder of a God who is not satisfied with creating the world and man, but puts himself on the same level as the creature he has made and, after speaking on various occasions and in different ways through his prophets, "in these last days... has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2).

In these days! Yes, the Jubilee has made us realize that two thousand years of history have passed without diminishing the freshness of that "today", when the angels proclaimed to the shepherds the marvellous event of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem: "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:11). Two thousand years have gone by, but Jesus' proclamation of his mission, when he applied the prophecy of Isaiah to himself before his astonished fellow townspeople in the Synagogue of Nazareth, is as enduring as ever: "Today this scripture had been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). Two thousand years have gone by, but sinners in need of mercy - and who is not? - still experience the consolation of that "today" of salvation which on the Cross opened the gates of the Kingdom of God to the repentant thief: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43).

The fullness of time

5. The coincidence of this Jubilee with the opening of a new millennium has certainly helped people to become more aware of the mystery of Christ within the great horizon of the history of salvation, without any concession to millenarian fantasies. Christianity is a religion rooted in history! It was in the soil of history that God chose to establish a covenant with Israel and so prepare the birth of the Son from the womb of Mary "in the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4). Understood in his divine and human mystery, Christ is the foundation and centre of history, he is its meaning and ultimate goal. It is in fact through him, the Word and image of the Father, that "all things were made" (Jn 1:3; cf. Col 1:15). His incarnation, culminating in the Paschal Mystery and the gift of the Spirit, is the pulsating heart of time, the mysterious hour in which the Kingdom of God came to us (cf. Mk 1:15), indeed took root in our history, as the seed destined to become a great tree (cf. Mk 4:30-32).

"Glory to you, Jesus Christ, for you reign today and for ever". With this song repeated thousands of times, we have contemplated Christ this year as he is presented in the Book of Revelation: "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:13). And contemplating Christ, we have also adored the Father and the Spirit, the one and undivided Trinity, the ineffable mystery in which everything has its origin and its fulfilment.

The purification of memory

6. To purify our vision for the contemplation of the mystery, this Jubilee Year has been strongly marked by the request for forgiveness. This is true not only for individuals, who have examined their own lives in order to ask for mercy and gain the special gift of the indulgence, but for the entire Church, which has decided to recall the infidelities of so many of her children in the course of history, infidelities which have cast a shadow over her countenance as the Bride of Christ.

For a long time we had been preparing ourselves for this examination of conscience, aware that the Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, "is at once holy and always in need of being purified".⁴ Study congresses helped us to identify those aspects in which, during the course of the first two millennia, the Gospel spirit did not always shine forth. How could we forget the moving Liturgy of 12 March 2000 in Saint Peter's Basilica, at which, looking upon our Crucified Lord, I asked forgiveness in the name of the Church for the sins of all her children? This "purification of memory" has strengthened our steps for the journey towards the future and has made us more humble and vigilant in our acceptance of the Gospel.

Witnesses to the faith

7. This lively sense of repentance, however, has not prevented us from giving glory to the Lord for what he has done in every century, and in particular during the century which we have just left behind, by granting his Church a great host of saints and martyrs. For some of them the Jubilee year has been the year of their beatification or canonization. Holiness, whether ascribed to Popes well-known to history or to humble lay and religious figures, from one continent to another of the globe, has emerged more clearly as the dimension which expresses best the mystery of the Church. Holiness, a message that convinces without the need for words, is the living reflection of the face of Christ.

On the occasion of the Holy Year much has also been done to gather together the precious memories of the witnesses to the faith in the twentieth century. Together with the representatives of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, we commemorated them on 7 May 2000 in the evocative setting of the Colosseum, the symbol of the ancient persecutions. This is a heritage which must not be lost; we should always be thankful for it and we should renew our resolve to imitate it.

A pilgrim Church

8. As if following in the footsteps of the Saints, countless sons and daughters of the Church have come in successive waves to Rome, to the Tombs of the Apostles, wanting to profess their faith, confess their sins and receive the mercy that saves. I have been impressed this year by the crowds of people which have filled Saint Peter's Square at the many celebrations. I have often stopped to look at the long queues of pilgrims waiting patiently to go through the Holy Door. In each of them I tried to imagine the story of a life, made up of joys, worries, sufferings; the story of someone whom Christ had met and who, in dialogue with him, was setting out again on a journey of hope.

As I observed the continuous flow of pilgrims, I saw them as a kind of concrete image of the pilgrim Church, the Church placed, as Saint Augustine says, "amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God".⁵ We have only been able to observe the outer face of this unique event. Who can measure the marvels of grace wrought in human hearts? It is better to be silent and to adore, trusting humbly in the mysterious workings of God and singing his love without end: "Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo!".

Young people

9. The many Jubilee gatherings have brought together the most diverse groups of people, and the level of participation has been truly impressive - at times sorely trying the commitment of organizers and helpers, both ecclesiastical and civil. In this Letter I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone. But apart from the numbers, what has moved me so often was to note the intensity of prayer, reflection and spirit of communion which these meetings have generally showed.

And how could we fail to recall especially the joyful and inspiring gathering of young people? If there is an image of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 that more than any other will live on in memory, it is surely the streams of young people with whom I was able to engage in a sort of very special dialogue, filled with mutual affection and deep understanding. It was like this from the moment I welcomed them in the Square of Saint John Lateran and Saint Peter's Square. Then I saw them swarming through the city, happy as young people should be, but also thoughtful, eager to pray, seeking "meaning" and true friendship. Neither for them nor for those who saw them will it be easy to forget that week, during which Rome became "young with the young". It will not be possible to forget the Mass at Tor Vergata.

Yet again, the young have shown themselves to be for Rome and for the Church a special gift of the Spirit of God. Sometimes when we look at the young, with the problems and weaknesses that characterize them in contemporary society, we tend to be pessimistic. The Jubilee of Young People however changed that, telling us that young people, whatever their possible ambiguities, have a profound longing for those genuine values which find their fullness in Christ. Is not Christ the secret of true freedom and profound joy of heart? Is not Christ the supreme friend and the teacher of all genuine friendship? If Christ is presented to young people as he really is, they experience him as an answer that is convincing and they can accept his message, even when it is demanding and bears the mark of the Cross. For this reason, in response to their enthusiasm, I did not hesitate to ask them to make a radical choice of faith and life and present them with a stupendous task: to become "morning watchmen" (cf. Is 21:11-12) at the dawn of the new millennium.

The variety of the pilgrims

10. Obviously I cannot go into detail about each individual Jubilee event. Each one of them had its own character and has left its message, not only for those who took part directly but also for those who heard about them or took part from afar through the media. But how can we forget the mood of celebration of the first great gathering dedicated to children? In a way, to begin with them meant respecting Christ's command: "Let the children come to me" (Mk 10:14). Perhaps even more it meant doing what he did when he placed a child in the midst of the disciples and made it the very symbol of the attitude which we should have if we wish to enter the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 18:2-4).

Thus, in a sense, it was in the footsteps of children that all the different groups of adults came seeking the Jubilee grace: from old people to the sick and handicapped, from workers in factories and fields to sportspeople, from artists to university teachers, from Bishops and priests to people in consecrated life, from politicians to journalists, to the military personnel who came to confirm the meaning of their service as a service to peace.

One of the most notable events was the gathering of workers on 1 May, the day traditionally dedicated to the world of work. I asked them to live a spirituality of work in imitation of Saint Joseph and of Jesus himself. That Jubilee gathering also gave me the opportunity to voice a strong call to correct the economic and social imbalances present in

the world of work and to make decisive efforts to ensure that the processes of economic globalization give due attention to solidarity and the respect owed to every human person.

Children, with their irrepressible sense of celebration, were again present for the Jubilee of Families, when I held them up to the world as the "springtime of the family and of society". This was a truly significant gathering in which numberless families from different parts of the world came to draw fresh enthusiasm from the light that Christ sheds on God's original plan in their regard (cf. Mk 10:6-8; Mt 19:4-6) and to commit themselves to bringing that light to bear on a culture which, in an ever more disturbing way, is in danger of losing sight of the very meaning of marriage and the family as an institution.

For me one of the more moving meetings was the one with the prisoners at Regina Caeli. In their eyes I saw suffering, but also repentance and hope. For them in a special way the Jubilee was a "year of mercy".

Finally, in the last days of the year, an enjoyable occasion was the meeting with the world of entertainment, which exercises such a powerful influence on people. I was able to remind all involved of their great responsibility to use entertainment to offer a positive message, one that is morally healthy and able to communicate confidence and love.

The International Eucharistic Congress

11. In the spirit of this Jubilee Year the International Eucharistic Congress was intended to have special significance. And it did! Since the Eucharist is the sacrifice of Christ made present among us, how could his real presence not be at the centre of the Holy Year dedicated to the Incarnation of the Word? The year was intended, precisely for this reason, to be "intensely Eucharistic", 6 and that is how we tried to live it. At the same time, along with the memory of the birth of the Son, how could the memory of the Mother be missing? Mary was present in the Jubilee celebration not only as a theme of high-level academic gatherings, but above all in the great Act of Entrustment with which, in the presence of a large part of the world episcopate, I entrusted to her maternal care the lives of the men and women of the new millennium.

The ecumenical dimension

12. You will understand that I speak more readily of the Jubilee as seen from the See of Peter. However I am not forgetting that I myself wanted the Jubilee to be celebrated also in the particular churches, and it is there that the majority of the faithful were able to gain its special graces, and particularly the indulgence connected with the Jubilee Year. Nevertheless it is significant that many Dioceses wanted to be present, with large groups of the faithful, here in Rome too. The Eternal City has thus once again shown its providential role as the place where the resources and gifts of each individual church, and indeed of each individual nation and culture, find their "catholic" harmony, so that the one Church of Christ can show ever more clearly her mystery as the "sacrament of unity".⁷

I had also asked for special attention to be given in the programme of the Jubilee Year to the ecumenical aspect. What occasion could be more suitable for encouraging progress on the path towards full communion than the shared celebration of the birth of Christ? Much work was done with this in mind, and one of the highlights was the ecumenical meeting in Saint Paul's Basilica on 18 January 2000, when for the first time in history a Holy Door was opened jointly by the Successor of Peter, the Anglican Primate and a Metropolitan of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, in the presence of representatives of Churches and Ecclesial Communities from all over the world. There were also other important meetings with Orthodox Patriarchs and the heads of other Christian denominations. I recall in particular the recent visit of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. In addition, very many members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities took part in the Jubilee meetings organized for various groups. The ecumenical journey is certainly still difficult, and will perhaps be long, but we are encouraged by the hope that comes from being led by the presence of the Risen One and the inexhaustible power of his Spirit, always capable of new surprises.

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

13. And how can I not recall my personal Jubilee along the pathways of the Holy Land? I would have liked to begin that journey at Ur of the Chaldeans, in order to follow, tangibly as it were, in the footsteps of Abraham "our father in faith" (cf. Rom 4:11-16). However, I had to be content with a pilgrimage in spirit, on the occasion of the evocative Liturgy of the Word celebrated in the Paul VI Audience Hall on 23 February. The actual pilgrimage came almost immediately afterwards, following the stages of salvation history. Thus I had the joy of visiting Mount Sinai, where the gift of the Ten Commandments of the Covenant was given. I set out again a month later, when I reached Mount Nebo, and then went on to the very places where the Redeemer lived and which he made holy. It is difficult to express the emotion I felt in being able to venerate the places of his birth and life, Bethlehem and Nazareth, to celebrate the Eucharist in the Upper Room, in the very place of its institution, to meditate again on the mystery of the Cross at Golgotha, where he gave his life for us. In those places, still so troubled and again recently afflicted by violence, I received an extraordinary welcome not only from the members of the Church but also from the Israeli and Palestinian

communities. Intense emotion surrounded my prayer at the Western Wall and my visit to the Mausoleum of Yad Vashem, with its chilling reminder of the victims of the Nazi death camps.

My pilgrimage was a moment of brotherhood and peace, and I like to remember it as one of the most beautiful gifts of the whole Jubilee event. Thinking back to the mood of those days, I cannot but express my deeply felt desire for a prompt and just solution to the still unresolved problems of the Holy Places, cherished by Jews, Christians and Muslims together.

International debt

14. The Jubilee was also a great event of charity - and it could not be otherwise. Already in the years of preparation, I had called for greater and more incisive attention to the problems of poverty which still beset the world. The problem of the international debt of poor countries took on particular significance in this context. A gesture of generosity towards these countries was in the very spirit of the Jubilee, which in its original Biblical setting was precisely a time when the community committed itself to re-establishing justice and solidarity in interpersonal relations, including the return of whatever belonged to others. I am happy to note that recently the Parliaments of many creditor States have voted a substantial remission of the bilateral debt of the poorest and most indebted countries. I hope that the respective Governments will soon implement these parliamentary decisions. The question of multilateral debt contracted by poorer countries with international financial organizations has shown itself to be a rather more problematic issue. It is to be hoped that the member States of these organizations, especially those that have greater decisional powers, will succeed in reaching the necessary consensus in order to arrive at a rapid solution to this question on which the progress of many countries depends, with grave consequences for the economy and the living conditions of so many people.

New energies

15. These are only some of the elements of the Jubilee celebration. It has left us with many memories. But if we ask what is the core of the great legacy it leaves us, I would not hesitate to describe it as the contemplation of the face of Christ: Christ considered in his historical features and in his mystery, Christ known through his manifold presence in the Church and in the world, and confessed as the meaning of history and the light of life's journey.

Now we must look ahead, we must "put out into the deep", trusting in Christ's words: *Duc in altum!* What we have done this year cannot justify a sense of complacency, and still less should it lead us to relax our commitment. On the contrary, the experiences we have had should inspire in us new energy, and impel us to invest in concrete initiatives the enthusiasm which we have felt. Jesus himself warns us: "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62). In the cause of the Kingdom there is no time for looking back, even less for settling into laziness. Much awaits us, and for this reason we must set about drawing up an effective post-Jubilee pastoral plan. It is important however that what we propose, with the help of God, should be profoundly rooted in contemplation and prayer. Ours is a time of continual movement which often leads to restlessness, with the risk of "doing for the sake of doing". We must resist this temptation by trying "to be" before trying "to do". In this regard we should recall how Jesus reproved Martha: "You are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful" (Lk 10:41-42). In this spirit, before setting out a number of practical guidelines for your consideration, I wish to share with you some points of meditation on the mystery of Christ, the absolute foundation of all our pastoral activity.

II - A FACE TO CONTEMPLATE

16. "We wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21). This request, addressed to the Apostle Philip by some Greeks who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover, echoes spiritually in our ears too during this Jubilee Year. Like those pilgrims of two thousand years ago, the men and women of our own day - often perhaps unconsciously - ask believers not only to "speak" of Christ, but in a certain sense to "show" him to them. And is it not the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium?

Our witness, however, would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face. The Great Jubilee has certainly helped us to do this more deeply. At the end of the Jubilee, as we go back to our ordinary routine, storing in our hearts the treasures of this very special time, our gaze is more than ever firmly set on the face of the Lord.

The witness of the Gospels

17. The contemplation of Christ's face cannot fail to be inspired by all that we are told about him in Sacred Scripture, which from beginning to end is permeated by his mystery, prefigured in a veiled way in the Old Testament and revealed fully in the New, so that Saint Jerome can vigorously affirm: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ".⁸ Remaining firmly anchored in Scripture, we open ourselves to the action of the Spirit (cf. Jn 15:26) from whom the sacred texts derive their origin, as well as to the witness of the Apostles (cf. Jn 15:27), who had a first-hand experience of Christ, the Word of life: they saw him with their eyes, heard him with their ears, touched him with their hands (cf. 1 Jn 1:1).

What we receive from them is a vision of faith based on precise historical testimony: a true testimony which the Gospels, despite their complex redaction and primarily catechetical purpose, pass on to us in an entirely trustworthy way.⁹

18. The Gospels do not claim to be a complete biography of Jesus in accordance with the canons of modern historical science. From them, nevertheless, the face of the Nazarene emerges with a solid historical foundation. The Evangelists took pains to represent him on the basis of trustworthy testimonies which they gathered (cf. Lk 1:3) and working with documents which were subjected to careful ecclesial scrutiny. It was on the basis of such first-hand testimony that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit's action, they learnt the humanly perplexing fact of Jesus' virginal birth from Mary, wife of Joseph. From those who had known him during the almost thirty years spent in Nazareth (cf. Lk 3:23) they collected facts about the life of "the carpenter's son" (Mt 13:55) who was himself a "carpenter" and whose place within the context of his larger family was well established (cf. Mk 6:3). They recorded his religious fervour, which prompted him to make annual pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem with his family (cf. Lk 2:41), and made him a regular visitor to the synagogue of his own town (cf. Lk 4:16).

Without being complete and detailed, the reports of his public ministry become much fuller, starting at the moment of the young Galilean's baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan. Strengthened by the witness from on high and aware of being the "beloved son" (Lk 3:22), he begins his preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God, and explains its demands and its power by words and signs of grace and mercy. The Gospels present him to us as one who travels through towns and villages, accompanied by twelve Apostles whom he has chosen (cf. Mk 3:13-19), by a group of women who assist them (cf. Lk 8:2-3), by crowds that seek him out and follow him, by the sick who cry out for his healing power, by people who listen to him with varying degrees of acceptance of his words.

The Gospel narrative then converges on the growing tension which develops between Jesus and the dominant groups in the religious society of his time, until the final crisis with its dramatic climax on Golgotha. This is the hour of darkness, which is followed by a new, radiant and definitive dawn. The Gospel accounts conclude, in fact, by showing the Nazarene victorious over death. They point to the empty tomb and follow him in the cycle of apparitions in which the disciples - at first perplexed and bewildered, then filled with unspeakable joy - experience his living and glorious presence. From him they receive the gift of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:22) and the command to proclaim the Gospel to "all nations" (Mt 28:19).

The life of faith

19. "The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (Jn 20:20). The face which the Apostles contemplated after the Resurrection was the same face of the Jesus with whom they had lived for almost three years, and who now convinced them of the astonishing truth of his new life by showing them "his hands and his side" (ibid.). Of course it was not easy to believe. The disciples on their way to Emmaus believed only after a long spiritual journey (cf. Lk 24:13-35). The Apostle Thomas believed only after verifying for himself the marvellous event (cf. Jn 20:24-29). In fact, regardless of how much his body was seen or touched, only faith could fully enter the mystery of that face. This was an experience which the disciples must have already had during the historical life of Christ, in the questions which came to their minds whenever they felt challenged by his actions and his words. One can never really reach Jesus except by the path of faith, on a journey of which the stages seem to be indicated to us by the Gospel itself in the well known scene at Caesarea Philippi (cf. Mt 16:13-20). Engaging in a kind of first evaluation of his mission, Jesus asks his disciples what "people" think of him, and they answer him: "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Mt 16:14). A lofty response to be sure, but still a long way - by far - from the truth. The crowds are able to sense a definitely exceptional religious dimension to this rabbi who speaks in such a spellbinding way, but they are not able to put him above those men of God who had distinguished the history of Israel. Jesus is really far different! It is precisely this further step of awareness, concerning as it does the deeper level of his being, which he expects from those who are close to him: "But who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). Only the faith proclaimed by Peter, and with him by the Church in every age, truly goes to the heart, and touches the depth of the mystery: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16).

20. How had Peter come to this faith? And what is asked of us, if we wish to follow in his footsteps with ever greater conviction? Matthew gives us an enlightening insight in the words with which Jesus accepts Peter's confession: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (16:17). The expression "flesh and blood" is a reference to man and the common way of understanding things. In the case of Jesus, this common way is not enough. A grace of "revelation" is needed, which comes from the Father (cf. ibid.). Luke gives us an indication which points in the same direction when he notes that this dialogue with the disciples took place when Jesus "was praying alone" (Lk 9:18). Both indications converge to make it clear that we cannot come to the fullness of contemplation of the Lord's face by our own efforts alone, but by allowing grace to take us by the hand. Only the experience of silence and prayer offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery which finds its culminating expression in the solemn proclamation by the Evangelist Saint John: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (1:14).

The depth of the mystery

21. The Word and the flesh, the divine glory and his dwelling among us! It is in the intimate and inseparable union of these two aspects that Christ's identity is to be found, in accordance with the classic formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451): "one person in two natures". The person is that, and that alone, of the Eternal Word, the Son of the Father. The two natures, without any confusion whatsoever, but also without any possible separation, are the divine and the human.¹⁰

We know that our concepts and our words are limited. The formula, though always human, is nonetheless carefully measured in its doctrinal content, and it enables us, albeit with trepidation, to gaze in some way into the depths of the mystery. Yes, Jesus is true God and true man! Like the Apostle Thomas, the Church is constantly invited by Christ to touch his wounds, to recognize, that is, the fullness of his humanity taken from Mary, given up to death, transfigured by the Resurrection: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side" (Jn 20:27). Like Thomas, the Church bows down in adoration before the Risen One, clothed in the fullness of his divine splendour, and never ceases to exclaim: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

22. "The Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). This striking formulation by John of the mystery of Christ is confirmed by the entire New Testament. The Apostle Paul takes this same approach when he affirms that the Son of God was born "of the race of David, according to the flesh" (cf. Rom 1:3; cf. 9:5). If today, because of the rationalism found in so much of contemporary culture, it is above all faith in the divinity of Christ that has become problematic, in other historical and cultural contexts there was a tendency to diminish and do away with the historical concreteness of Jesus' humanity. But for the Church's faith it is essential and indispensable to affirm that the Word truly "became flesh" and took on every aspect of humanity, except sin (cf. Heb 4:15). From this perspective, the incarnation is truly a kenosis - a "self-emptying" - on the part of the Son of God of that glory which is his from all eternity (Phil 2:6-8; cf. 1 Pt 3:18).

On the other hand, this abasement of the Son of God is not an end in itself; it tends rather towards the full glorification of Christ, even in his humanity: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11).

23. "Your face, O Lord, I seek" (Ps 27:8). The ancient longing of the Psalmist could receive no fulfilment greater and more surprising than the contemplation of the face of Christ. God has truly blessed us in him and has made "his face to shine upon us" (Ps 67:1). At the same time, God and man that he is, he reveals to us also the true face of man, "fully revealing man to man himself".¹¹

Jesus is "the new man" (cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) who calls redeemed humanity to share in his divine life. The mystery of the Incarnation lays the foundations for an anthropology which, reaching beyond its own limitations and contradictions, moves towards God himself, indeed towards the goal of "divinization". This occurs through the grafting of the redeemed on to Christ and their admission into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life. The Fathers have laid great stress on this soteriological dimension of the mystery of the Incarnation: it is only because the Son of God truly became man that man, in him and through him, can truly become a child of God.¹²

The Son's face

24. This divine-human identity emerges forcefully from the Gospels, which offer us a range of elements that make it possible for us to enter that "frontier zone" of the mystery, represented by Christ's self-awareness. The Church has no doubt that the Evangelists in their accounts, and inspired from on high, have correctly understood in the words which Jesus spoke the truth about his person and his awareness of it. Is this not what Luke wishes to tell us when he recounts Jesus' first recorded words, spoken in the Temple in Jerusalem when he was barely twelve years old? Already at that time he shows that he is aware of a unique relationship with God, a relationship which properly belongs to a "son". When his mother tells him how anxiously she and Joseph had been searching for him, Jesus replies without hesitation: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's affairs?" (Lk 2:49). It is no wonder therefore that later as a grown man his language authoritatively expresses the depth of his own mystery, as is abundantly clear both in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mt 11:27; Lk 10:22) and above all in the Gospel of John. In his self-awareness, Jesus has no doubts: "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38).

However valid it may be to maintain that, because of the human condition which made him grow "in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:52), his human awareness of his own mystery would also have progressed to its fullest expression in his glorified humanity, there is no doubt that already in his historical existence Jesus was aware of his identity as the Son of God. John emphasizes this to the point of affirming that it was ultimately because of this awareness that Jesus was rejected and condemned: they sought to kill him "because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God" (Jn 5:18). In Gethsemane and on Golgotha Jesus' human awareness will be put to the supreme test. But not even the drama of his Passion and Death will be able to shake his serene certainty of being the Son of the heavenly Father.

A face of sorrow

25. In contemplating Christ's face, we confront the most paradoxical aspect of his mystery, as it emerges in his last hour, on the Cross. The mystery within the mystery, before which we cannot but prostrate ourselves in adoration.

The intensity of the episode of the agony in the Garden of Olives passes before our eyes. Oppressed by foreknowledge of the trials that await him, and alone before the Father, Jesus cries out to him in his habitual and affectionate expression of trust: "Abba, Father". He asks him to take away, if possible, the cup of suffering (cf. Mk 14:36). But the Father seems not to want to heed the Son's cry. In order to bring man back to the Father's face, Jesus not only had to take on the face of man, but he had to burden himself with the "face" of sin. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

We shall never exhaust the depths of this mystery. All the harshness of the paradox can be heard in Jesus' seemingly desperate cry of pain on the Cross: " 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' " (Mk 15:34). Is it possible to imagine a greater agony, a more impenetrable darkness? In reality, the anguished "why" addressed to the Father in the opening words of the Twenty-second Psalm expresses all the realism of unspeakable pain; but it is also illumined by the meaning of that entire prayer, in which the Psalmist brings together suffering and trust, in a moving blend of emotions. In fact the Psalm continues: "In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you set them free... Do not leave me alone in my distress, come close, there is none else to help" (Ps 22:5, 12).

26. Jesus' cry on the Cross, dear Brothers and Sisters, is not the cry of anguish of a man without hope, but the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father in love, for the salvation of all. At the very moment when he identifies with our sin, "abandoned" by the Father, he "abandons" himself into the hands of the Father. His eyes remain fixed on the Father. Precisely because of the knowledge and experience of the Father which he alone has, even at this moment of darkness he sees clearly the gravity of sin and suffers because of it. He alone, who sees the Father and rejoices fully in him, can understand completely what it means to resist the Father's love by sin. More than an experience of physical pain, his Passion is an agonizing suffering of the soul. Theological tradition has not failed to ask how Jesus could possibly experience at one and the same time his profound unity with the Father, by its very nature a source of joy and happiness, and an agony that goes all the way to his final cry of abandonment. The simultaneous presence of these two seemingly irreconcilable aspects is rooted in the fathomless depths of the hypostatic union.

27. Faced with this mystery, we are greatly helped not only by theological investigation but also by that great heritage which is the "lived theology" of the saints. The saints offer us precious insights which enable us to understand more easily the intuition of faith, thanks to the special enlightenment which some of them have received from the Holy Spirit, or even through their personal experience of those terrible states of trial which the mystical tradition describes as the "dark night". Not infrequently the saints have undergone something akin to Jesus' experience on the Cross in the paradoxical blending of bliss and pain. In the Dialogue of Divine Providence, God the Father shows Catherine of Siena how joy and suffering can be present together in holy souls: "Thus the soul is blissful and afflicted: afflicted on account of the sins of its neighbour, blissful on account of the union and the affection of charity which it has inwardly received. These souls imitate the spotless Lamb, my Only-begotten Son, who on the Cross was both blissful and afflicted".¹³ In the same way, Thérèse of Lisieux lived her agony in communion with the agony of Jesus, "experiencing" in herself the very paradox of Jesus's own bliss and anguish: "In the Garden of Olives our Lord was blessed with all the joys of the Trinity, yet his dying was no less harsh. It is a mystery, but I assure you that, on the basis of what I myself am feeling, I can understand something of it".¹⁴ What an illuminating testimony! Moreover, the accounts given by the Evangelists themselves provide a basis for this intuition on the part of the Church of Christ's consciousness when they record that, even in the depths of his pain, he died imploring forgiveness for his executioners (cf. Lk 23:34) and expressing to the Father his ultimate filial abandonment: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

The face of the One who is Risen

28. As on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the Church pauses in contemplation of this bleeding face, which conceals the life of God and offers salvation to the world. But her contemplation of Christ's face cannot stop at the image of the Crucified One. He is the Risen One! Were this not so, our preaching would be in vain and our faith empty (cf. 1 Cor 15:14). The Resurrection was the Father's response to Christ's obedience, as we learn from the Letter to the Hebrews: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Son though he was, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (5:7-9).

It is the Risen Christ to whom the Church now looks. And she does so in the footsteps of Peter, who wept for his denial and started out again by confessing, with understandable trepidation, his love of Christ: "You know that I love you" (Jn 21:15-17). She does so in the company of Paul, who encountered the Lord on the road to Damascus and was overwhelmed: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

Two thousand years after these events, the Church relives them as if they had happened today. Gazing on the face of Christ, the Bride contemplates her treasure and her joy. "Dulcis Iesus memoria, dans vera cordis gaudia": how sweet is the memory of Jesus, the source of the heart's true joy! Heartened by this experience, the Church today sets out once

more on her journey, in order to proclaim Christ to the world at the dawn of the Third Millennium: he "is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8).

III - STARTING AFRESH FROM CHRIST

29. "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). This assurance, dear brothers and sisters, has accompanied the Church for two thousand years, and has now been renewed in our hearts by the celebration of the Jubilee. From it we must gain new impetus in Christian living, making it the force which inspires our journey of faith. Conscious of the Risen Lord's presence among us, we ask ourselves today the same question put to Peter in Jerusalem immediately after his Pentecost speech: "What must we do?" (Acts 2:37).

We put the question with trusting optimism, but without underestimating the problems we face. We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you!

It is not therefore a matter of inventing a "new programme". The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium.

But it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community. The Jubilee has given us the extraordinary opportunity to travel together for a number of years on a journey common to the whole Church, a catechetical journey on the theme of the Trinity, accompanied by precise pastoral undertakings designed to ensure that the Jubilee would be a fruitful event. I am grateful for the sincere and widespread acceptance of what I proposed in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. But now it is no longer an immediate goal that we face, but the larger and more demanding challenge of normal pastoral activity. With its universal and indispensable provisions, the programme of the Gospel must continue to take root, as it has always done, in the life of the Church everywhere. It is in the local churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified - goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources - which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.

I therefore earnestly exhort the Pastors of the particular Churches, with the help of all sectors of God's People, confidently to plan the stages of the journey ahead, harmonizing the choices of each diocesan community with those of neighbouring Churches and of the universal Church.

This harmonization will certainly be facilitated by the collegial work which Bishops now regularly undertake in Episcopal Conferences and Synods. Was this not the point of the continental Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops which prepared for the Jubilee, and which forged important directives for the present-day proclamation of the Gospel in so many different settings and cultures? This rich legacy of reflection must not be allowed to disappear, but must be implemented in practical ways.

What awaits us therefore is an exciting work of pastoral revitalization - a work involving all of us. As guidance and encouragement to everyone, I wish to indicate certain pastoral priorities which the experience of the Great Jubilee has, in my view, brought to light.

Holiness

30. First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness. Was this not the ultimate meaning of the Jubilee indulgence, as a special grace offered by Christ so that the life of every baptized person could be purified and deeply renewed?

It is my hope that, among those who have taken part in the Jubilee, many will have benefited from this grace, in full awareness of its demands. Once the Jubilee is over, we resume our normal path, but knowing that stressing holiness remains more than ever an urgent pastoral task.

It is necessary therefore to rediscover the full practical significance of Chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, dedicated to the "universal call to holiness". The Council Fathers laid such stress on this point, not just to embellish ecclesiology with a kind of spiritual veneer, but to make the call to holiness an intrinsic and essential aspect of their teaching on the Church. The rediscovery of the Church as "mystery", or as a people "gathered together by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", 15 was bound to bring with it a rediscovery of the Church's "holiness", understood in the basic sense of belonging to him who is in essence the Holy One, the "thrice Holy" (cf. Is 6:3). To profess the Church as holy means to point to her as the Bride of Christ, for whom he gave himself precisely in order to make her holy (cf. Eph 5:25-26). This as it were objective gift of holiness is offered to all the baptized.

But the gift in turn becomes a task, which must shape the whole of Christian life: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Th 4:3). It is a duty which concerns not only certain Christians: "All the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity".¹⁶

31. At first glance, it might seem almost impractical to recall this elementary truth as the foundation of the pastoral planning in which we are involved at the start of the new millennium. Can holiness ever be "planned"? What might the word "holiness" mean in the context of a pastoral plan?

In fact, to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: "Do you wish to receive Baptism?" means at the same time to ask them: "Do you wish to become holy?" It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few "uncommon heroes" of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life. The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear however that the paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine "training in holiness", adapted to people's needs. This training must integrate the resources offered to everyone with both the traditional forms of individual and group assistance, as well as the more recent forms of support offered in associations and movements recognized by the Church.

Prayer

32. This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer. The Jubilee Year has been a year of more intense prayer, both personal and communal. But we well know that prayer cannot be taken for granted. We have to learn to pray: as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray!" (Lk 11:1). Prayer develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends: "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4). This reciprocity is the very substance and soul of the Christian life, and the condition of all true pastoral life. Wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, this reciprocity opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father's face. Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy, the summit and source of the Church's life,¹⁷ but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns continually to the sources and finds in them new life.

33. Is it not one of the "signs of the times" that in today's world, despite widespread secularization, there is a widespread demand for spirituality, a demand which expresses itself in large part as a renewed need for prayer? Other religions, which are now widely present in ancient Christian lands, offer their own responses to this need, and sometimes they do so in appealing ways. But we who have received the grace of believing in Christ, the revealer of the Father and the Saviour of the world, have a duty to show to what depths the relationship with Christ can lead.

The great mystical tradition of the Church of both East and West has much to say in this regard. It shows how prayer can progress, as a genuine dialogue of love, to the point of rendering the person wholly possessed by the divine Beloved, vibrating at the Spirit's touch, resting filially within the Father's heart. This is the lived experience of Christ's promise: "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14:21). It is a journey totally sustained by grace, which nonetheless demands an intense spiritual commitment and is no stranger to painful purifications (the "dark night"). But it leads, in various possible ways, to the ineffable joy experienced by the mystics as "nuptial union". How can we forget here, among the many shining examples, the teachings of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila?

Yes, dear brothers and sisters, our Christian communities must become genuine "schools" of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly "falls in love". Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God's plan.¹⁸

34. Christians who have received the gift of a vocation to the specially consecrated life are of course called to prayer in a particular way: of its nature, their consecration makes them more open to the experience of contemplation, and it is important that they should cultivate it with special care. But it would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but "Christians at risk". They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of "substitutes", accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions.

It is therefore essential that education in prayer should become in some way a key-point of all pastoral planning. I myself have decided to dedicate the forthcoming Wednesday catecheses to reflection upon the Psalms, beginning with the Psalms of Morning Prayer with which the public prayer of the Church invites us to consecrate and direct our day. How helpful it would be if not only in religious communities but also in parishes more were done to ensure an all-pervading climate of prayer. With proper discernment, this would require that popular piety be given its proper place, and that people be educated especially in liturgical prayer. Perhaps it is more thinkable than we usually presume for the average day of a Christian community to combine the many forms of pastoral life and witness in the world with the celebration of the Eucharist and even the recitation of Lauds and Vespers. The experience of many committed Christian groups, also those made up largely of lay people, is proof of this.

The Sunday Eucharist

35. It is therefore obvious that our principal attention must be given to the liturgy, "the summit towards which the Church's action tends and at the same time the source from which comes all her strength".¹⁹ In the twentieth century, especially since the Council, there has been a great development in the way the Christian community celebrates the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is necessary to continue in this direction, and to stress particularly the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter.²⁰ For two thousand years, Christian time has been measured by the memory of that "first day of the week" (Mk 16:2, 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1), when the Risen Christ gave the Apostles the gift of peace and of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23). The truth of Christ's Resurrection is the original fact upon which Christian faith is based (cf. 1 Cor 15:14), an event set at the centre of the mystery of time, prefiguring the last day when Christ will return in glory. We do not know what the new millennium has in store for us, but we are certain that it is safe in the hands of Christ, the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16); and precisely by celebrating his Passover not just once a year but every Sunday, the Church will continue to show to every generation "the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world's origin and its final destiny leads".²¹

36. Following *Dies Domini*, I therefore wish to insist that sharing in the Eucharist should really be the heart of Sunday for every baptized person. It is a fundamental duty, to be fulfilled not just in order to observe a precept but as something felt as essential to a truly informed and consistent Christian life. We are entering a millennium which already shows signs of being marked by a profound interweaving of cultures and religions, even in countries which have been Christian for many centuries. In many regions Christians are, or are becoming, a "little flock" (Lk 12:32). This presents them with the challenge, often in isolated and difficult situations, to bear stronger witness to the distinguishing elements of their own identity. The duty to take part in the Eucharist every Sunday is one of these. The Sunday Eucharist which every week gathers Christians together as God's family round the table of the Word and the Bread of Life, is also the most natural antidote to dispersion. It is the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, the Lord's Day also becomes the Day of the Church,²² when she can effectively exercise her role as the sacrament of unity.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

37. I am also asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you will recall, in 1984 I dealt with this subject in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, which synthesized the results of an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted to this question. My invitation then was to make every effort to face the crisis of "the sense of sin" apparent in today's culture.²³ But I was even more insistent in calling for a rediscovery of Christ as *mysterium pietatis*, the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance, which for the faithful is "the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after Baptism".²⁴ When the Synod addressed the problem, the crisis of the Sacrament was there for all to see, especially in some parts of the world. The causes of the crisis have not disappeared in the brief span of time since then. But the Jubilee Year, which has been particularly marked by a return to the Sacrament of Penance, has given us an encouraging message, which should not be ignored: if many people, and among them also many young people, have benefited from approaching this Sacrament, it is probably necessary that Pastors should arm themselves with more confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate it. Dear brothers in the priesthood, we must not give in to passing crises! The Lord's gifts - and the Sacraments are among the most precious - come from the One who well knows the human heart and is the Lord of history.

The primacy of grace

38. If in the planning that awaits us we commit ourselves more confidently to a pastoral activity that gives personal and communal prayer its proper place, we shall be observing an essential principle of the Christian view of life: the primacy

of grace. There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that "without Christ we can do nothing" (cf. Jn 15:5).

It is prayer which roots us in this truth. It constantly reminds us of the primacy of Christ and, in union with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness. When this principle is not respected, is it any wonder that pastoral plans come to nothing and leave us with a disheartening sense of frustration? We then share the experience of the disciples in the Gospel story of the miraculous catch of fish: "We have toiled all night and caught nothing" (Lk 5:5). This is the moment of faith, of prayer, of conversation with God, in order to open our hearts to the tide of grace and allow the word of Christ to pass through us in all its power: *Duc in altum!* On that occasion, it was Peter who spoke the word of faith: "At your word I will let down the nets" (ibid.). As this millennium begins, allow the Successor of Peter to invite the whole Church to make this act of faith, which expresses itself in a renewed commitment to prayer.

Listening to the Word

39. There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the word of God. Ever since the Second Vatican Council underlined the pre-eminent role of the word of God in the life of the Church, great progress has certainly been made in devout listening to Sacred Scripture and attentive study of it. Scripture has its rightful place of honour in the public prayer of the Church. Individuals and communities now make extensive use of the Bible, and among lay people there are many who devote themselves to Scripture with the valuable help of theological and biblical studies. But it is above all the work of evangelization and catechesis which is drawing new life from attentiveness to the word of God. Dear brothers and sisters, this development needs to be consolidated and deepened, also by making sure that every family has a Bible. It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.

Proclaiming the Word

40. To nourish ourselves with the word in order to be "servants of the word" in the work of evangelization: this is surely a priority for the Church at the dawn of the new millennium. Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a "Christian society" which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone. Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding, in the context of "globalization" and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures. Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the new evangelization. I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of "specialists" but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups. This should be done however with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with sensitivity to the diversity of cultures in which the Christian message must be planted, in such a way that the particular values of each people will not be rejected but purified and brought to their fullness.

In the Third Millennium, Christianity will have to respond ever more effectively to this need for inculturation. Christianity, while remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root. In this Jubilee Year, we have rejoiced in a special way in the beauty of the Church's varied face. This is perhaps only a beginning, a barely sketched image of the future which the Spirit of God is preparing for us.

Christ must be presented to all people with confidence. We shall address adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the Gospel message, but taking into account each person's needs in regard to their sensitivity and language, after the example of Paul who declared: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22). In making these recommendations, I am thinking especially of the pastoral care of young people. Precisely in regard to young people, as I said earlier, the Jubilee has given us an encouraging testimony of their generous availability. We must learn to interpret that heartening response, by investing that enthusiasm like a new talent (cf. Mt 25:15) which the Lord has put into our hands so that we can make it yield a rich return.

41. May the shining example of the many witnesses to the faith whom we have remembered during the Jubilee sustain and guide us in this confident, enterprising and creative sense of mission. For the Church, the martyrs have always been a seed of life. *Sanguis martyrum semen christianorum*:25 this famous "law" formulated by Tertullian has proved true in

all the trials of history. Will this not also be the case of the century and millennium now beginning? Perhaps we were too used to thinking of the martyrs in rather distant terms, as though they were a category of the past, associated especially with the first centuries of the Christian era. The Jubilee remembrance has presented us with a surprising vista, showing us that our own time is particularly prolific in witnesses, who in different ways were able to live the Gospel in the midst of hostility and persecution, often to the point of the supreme test of shedding their blood. In them the word of God, sown in good soil, yielded a hundred fold (cf. Mt 13:8, 23). By their example they have shown us, and made smooth for us, so to speak, the path to the future. All that remains for us is, with God's grace, to follow in their footsteps.

IV - WITNESSES TO LOVE

42. "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). If we have truly contemplated the face of Christ, dear Brothers and Sisters, our pastoral planning will necessarily be inspired by the "new commandment" which he gave us: "Love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34).

This is the other important area in which there has to be commitment and planning on the part of the universal Church and the particular Churches: the domain of communion (*koinonia*), which embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church. Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us (cf. Rom 5:5), to make us all "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). It is in building this communion of love that the Church appears as "sacrament", as the "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race".²⁶

The Lord's words on this point are too precise for us to diminish their import. Many things are necessary for the Church's journey through history, not least in this new century; but without charity (*agape*), all will be in vain. It is again the Apostle Paul who in the hymn to love reminds us: even if we speak the tongues of men and of angels, and if we have faith "to move mountains", but are without love, all will come to "nothing" (cf. 1 Cor 13:2). Love is truly the "heart" of the Church, as was well understood by Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, whom I proclaimed a Doctor of the Church precisely because she is an expert in the *scientia amoris*: "I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was aflame with Love. I understood that Love alone stirred the members of the Church to act... I understood that Love encompassed all vocations, that Love was everything".²⁷

A spirituality of communion

43. To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings.

But what does this mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.

44. Consequently, the new century will have to see us more than ever intent on valuing and developing the forums and structures which, in accordance with the Second Vatican Council's major directives, serve to ensure and safeguard communion. How can we forget in the first place those specific services to communion which are the Petrine ministry and, closely related to it, episcopal collegiality? These are realities which have their foundation and substance in Christ's own plan for the Church, ²⁸ but which need to be examined constantly in order to ensure that they follow their genuinely evangelical inspiration.

Much has also been done since the Second Vatican Council for the reform of the Roman Curia, the organization of Synods and the functioning of Episcopal Conferences. But there is certainly much more to be done, in order to realize all the potential of these instruments of communion, which are especially appropriate today in view of the need to respond promptly and effectively to the issues which the Church must face in these rapidly changing times.

45. Communion must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each Church's life. There, relations between Bishops, priests and deacons, between Pastors and the entire People of God, between clergy

and Religious, between associations and ecclesial movements must all be clearly characterized by communion. To this end, the structures of participation envisaged by Canon Law, such as the Council of Priests and the Pastoral Council, must be ever more highly valued. These of course are not governed by the rules of parliamentary democracy, because they are consultative rather than deliberative;²⁹ yet this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful: on the one hand uniting them a priori in all that is essential, and on the other leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion.

To this end, we need to make our own the ancient pastoral wisdom which, without prejudice to their authority, encouraged Pastors to listen more widely to the entire People of God. Significant is Saint Benedict's reminder to the Abbot of a monastery, inviting him to consult even the youngest members of the community: "By the Lord's inspiration, it is often a younger person who knows what is best".³⁰ And Saint Paulinus of Nola urges: "Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes".³¹

While the wisdom of the law, by providing precise rules for participation, attests to the hierarchical structure of the Church and averts any temptation to arbitrariness or unjustified claims, the spirituality of communion, by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul.

The diversity of vocations

46. Such a vision of communion is closely linked to the Christian community's ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit. The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12). Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works.

Certainly, a generous commitment is needed - above all through insistent prayer to the Lord of the harvest (cf. Mt 9:38) - in promoting vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. This is a question of great relevance for the life of the Church in every part of the world. In some traditionally Christian countries, the situation has become dramatic, due to changed social circumstances and a religious disinterest resulting from the consumer and secularist mentality. There is a pressing need to implement an extensive plan of vocational promotion, based on personal contact and involving parishes, schools and families in the effort to foster a more attentive reflection on life's essential values. These reach their fulfilment in the response which each person is invited to give to God's call, particularly when the call implies a total giving of self and of one's energies to the cause of the Kingdom.

It is in this perspective that we see the value of all other vocations, rooted as they are in the new life received in the Sacrament of Baptism. In a special way it will be necessary to discover ever more fully the specific vocation of the laity, called "to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God";³² they "have their own role to play in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world... by their work for the evangelization and the sanctification of people".³³

Along these same lines, another important aspect of communion is the promotion of forms of association, whether of the more traditional kind or the newer ecclesial movements, which continue to give the Church a vitality that is God's gift and a true "springtime of the Spirit". Obviously, associations and movements need to work in full harmony within both the universal Church and the particular Churches, and in obedience to the authoritative directives of the Pastors. But the Apostle's exacting and decisive warning applies to all: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything and hold fast what is good" (1 Th 5:19-21).

47. At a time in history like the present, special attention must also be given to the pastoral care of the family, particularly when this fundamental institution is experiencing a radical and widespread crisis. In the Christian view of marriage, the relationship between a man and a woman - a mutual and total bond, unique and indissoluble - is part of God's original plan, obscured throughout history by our "hardness of heart", but which Christ came to restore to its pristine splendour, disclosing what had been God's will "from the beginning" (Mt 19:8). Raised to the dignity of a Sacrament, marriage expresses the "great mystery" of Christ's nuptial love for his Church (cf. Eph 5:32).

On this point the Church cannot yield to cultural pressures, no matter how widespread and even militant they may be. Instead, it is necessary to ensure that through an ever more complete Gospel formation Christian families show convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God's plan and with the true good of the human person - of the spouses, and of the children who are more fragile. Families themselves must become increasingly conscious of the care due to children, and play an active role in the Church and in society in safeguarding their rights.

Ecumenical commitment

48. And what should we say of the urgent task of fostering communion in the delicate area of ecumenism? Unhappily, as we cross the threshold of the new millennium, we take with us the sad heritage of the past. The Jubilee has offered some truly moving and prophetic signs, but there is still a long way to go.

By fixing our gaze on Christ, the Great Jubilee has given us a more vivid sense of the Church as a mystery of unity. "I believe in the one Church": what we profess in the Creed has its ultimate foundation in Christ, in whom the Church is undivided (cf. 1 Cor 1:11-13). As his Body, in the unity which is the gift of the Spirit, she is indivisible. The reality of division among the Church's children appears at the level of history, as the result of human weakness in the way we accept the gift which flows endlessly from Christ the Head to his Mystical Body. The prayer of Jesus in the Upper Room - "as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us" (Jn 17:21) - is both revelation and invocation. It reveals to us the unity of Christ with the Father as the wellspring of the Church's unity and as the gift which in him she will constantly receive until its mysterious fulfilment at the end of time. This unity is concretely embodied in the Catholic Church, despite the human limitations of her members, and it is at work in varying degrees in all the elements of holiness and truth to be found in the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. As gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, these elements lead them continuously towards full unity.³⁴

Christ's prayer reminds us that this gift needs to be received and developed ever more profoundly. The invocation "ut unum sint" is, at one and the same time, a binding imperative, the strength that sustains us, and a salutary rebuke for our slowness and closed-heartedness. It is on Jesus's prayer and not on our own strength that we base the hope that even within history we shall be able to reach full and visible communion with all Christians.

In the perspective of our renewed post-Jubilee pilgrimage, I look with great hope to the Eastern Churches, and I pray for a full return to that exchange of gifts which enriched the Church of the first millennium. May the memory of the time when the Church breathed with "both lungs" spur Christians of East and West to walk together in unity of faith and with respect for legitimate diversity, accepting and sustaining each other as members of the one Body of Christ.

A similar commitment should lead to the fostering of ecumenical dialogue with our brothers and sisters belonging to the Anglican Communion and the Ecclesial Communities born of the Reformation. Theological discussion on essential points of faith and Christian morality, cooperation in works of charity, and above all the great ecumenism of holiness will not fail, with God's help, to bring results. In the meantime we confidently continue our pilgrimage, longing for the time when, together with each and every one of Christ's followers, we shall be able to join wholeheartedly in singing: "How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers live in unity!" (Ps 133:1).

Stake everything on charity

49. Beginning with intra-ecclesial communion, charity of its nature opens out into a service that is universal; it inspires in us a commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being. This too is an aspect which must clearly mark the Christian life, the Church's whole activity and her pastoral planning. The century and the millennium now beginning will need to see, and hopefully with still greater clarity, to what length of dedication the Christian community can go in charity towards the poorest. If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-37). This Gospel text is not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ. By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ.

Certainly we need to remember that no one can be excluded from our love, since "through his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person".³⁵ Yet, as the unequivocal words of the Gospel remind us, there is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them. This option is a testimony to the nature of God's love, to his providence and mercy; and in some way history is still filled with the seeds of the Kingdom of God which Jesus himself sowed during his earthly life whenever he responded to those who came to him with their spiritual and material needs.

50. In our own time, there are so many needs which demand a compassionate response from Christians. Our world is entering the new millennium burdened by the contradictions of an economic, cultural and technological progress which offers immense possibilities to a fortunate few, while leaving millions of others not only on the margins of progress but in living conditions far below the minimum demanded by human dignity. How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads?

The scenario of poverty can extend indefinitely, if in addition to its traditional forms we think of its newer patterns. These latter often affect financially affluent sectors and groups which are nevertheless threatened by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, by marginalization or social discrimination. In this context Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning his voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty. This means carrying on the tradition of charity which has expressed itself in so many different ways in the past two millennia, but which today calls for even greater resourcefulness. Now is the time for a new "creativity" in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by "getting close" to

those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters.

We must therefore ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel at home. Would not this approach be the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the Kingdom? Without this form of evangelization through charity and without the witness of Christian poverty the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today's society of mass communications. The charity of works ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words.

Today's challenges

51. And how can we remain indifferent to the prospect of an ecological crisis which is making vast areas of our planet uninhabitable and hostile to humanity? Or by the problems of peace, so often threatened by the spectre of catastrophic wars? Or by contempt for the fundamental human rights of so many people, especially children? Countless are the emergencies to which every Christian heart must be sensitive.

A special commitment is needed with regard to certain aspects of the Gospel's radical message which are often less well understood, even to the point of making the Church's presence unpopular, but which nevertheless must be a part of her mission of charity. I am speaking of the duty to be committed to respect for the life of every human being, from conception until natural death. Likewise, the service of humanity leads us to insist, in season and out of season, that those using the latest advances of science, especially in the field of biotechnology, must never disregard fundamental ethical requirements by invoking a questionable solidarity which eventually leads to discriminating between one life and another and ignoring the dignity which belongs to every human being.

For Christian witness to be effective, especially in these delicate and controversial areas, it is important that special efforts be made to explain properly the reasons for the Church's position, stressing that it is not a case of imposing on non-believers a vision based on faith, but of interpreting and defending the values rooted in the very nature of the human person. In this way charity will necessarily become service to culture, politics, the economy and the family, so that the fundamental principles upon which depend the destiny of human beings and the future of civilization will be everywhere respected.

52. Clearly, all this must be done in a specifically Christian way: the laity especially must be present in these areas in fulfilment of their lay vocation, without ever yielding to the temptation to turn Christian communities into mere social agencies. In particular, the Church's relationship with civil society should respect the latter's autonomy and areas of competence, in accordance with the teachings of the Church's social doctrine.

Well known are the efforts made by the Church's teaching authority, especially in the twentieth century, to interpret social realities in the light of the Gospel and to offer in a timely and systematic way its contribution to the social question, which has now assumed a global dimension.

The ethical and social aspect of the question is an essential element of Christian witness: we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the Incarnation and, in the last analysis, of Christianity's eschatological tension. While that tension makes us aware of the relative character of history, it in no way implies that we withdraw from "building" history. Here the teaching of the Second Vatican Council is more timely than ever: "The Christian message does not inhibit men and women from building up the world, or make them disinterested in the welfare of their fellow human beings: on the contrary it obliges them more fully to do these very things".³⁶

A practical sign

53. In order to give a sign of this commitment to charity and human promotion, rooted in the most basic demands of the Gospel, I have resolved that the Jubilee year, in addition to the great harvest of charity which it has already yielded - here I am thinking in particular of the help given to so many of our poorer brothers and sisters to enable them to take part in the Jubilee - should leave an endowment which would in some way be the fruit and seal of the love sparked by the Jubilee. Many pilgrims have made an offering and many leaders in the financial sector have joined in providing generous assistance which has helped to ensure a fitting celebration of the Jubilee. Once the expenses of this year have been covered, the money saved will be dedicated to charitable purposes. It is important that such a major religious event should be completely dissociated from any semblance of financial gain. Whatever money remains will be used to continue the experience so often repeated since the very beginning of the Church, when the Jerusalem community offered non-Christians the moving sight of a spontaneous exchange of gifts, even to the point of holding all things in common, for the sake of the poor (cf. Acts 2:44-45).

The endowment to be established will be but a small stream flowing into the great river of Christian charity that courses through history. A small but significant stream: because of the Jubilee the world has looked to Rome, the Church "which presides in charity"³⁷ and has brought its gifts to Peter. Now the charity displayed at the centre of Catholicism will in some way flow back to the world through this sign, which is meant to be an enduring legacy and remembrance of the communion experienced during the Jubilee.

Dialogue and mission

54. A new century, a new millennium are opening in the light of Christ. But not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its "reflection". This is the *mysterium lunae*, which was so much a part of the contemplation of the Fathers of the Church, who employed this image to show the Church's dependence on Christ, the Sun whose light she reflects.³⁸ It was a way of expressing what Christ himself said when he called himself the "light of the world" (Jn 8:12) and asked his disciples to be "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14).

This is a daunting task if we consider our human weakness, which so often renders us opaque and full of shadows. But it is a task which we can accomplish if we turn to the light of Christ and open ourselves to the grace which makes us a new creation.

55. It is in this context also that we should consider the great challenge of inter-religious dialogue to which we shall still be committed in the new millennium, in fidelity to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.³⁹ In the years of preparation for the Great Jubilee the Church has sought to build, not least through a series of highly symbolic meetings, a relationship of openness and dialogue with the followers of other religions. This dialogue must continue. In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace.

56. Dialogue, however, cannot be based on religious indifferentism, and we Christians are in duty bound, while engaging in dialogue, to bear clear witness to the hope that is within us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). We should not fear that it will be considered an offence to the identity of others what is rather the joyful proclamation of a gift meant for all, and to be offered to all with the greatest respect for the freedom of each one: the gift of the revelation of the God who is Love, the God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). As the recent Declaration *Dominus Iesus* stressed, this cannot be the subject of a dialogue understood as negotiation, as if we considered it a matter of mere opinion: rather, it is a grace which fills us with joy, a message which we have a duty to proclaim.

The Church therefore cannot forgo her missionary activity among the peoples of the world. It is the primary task of the *missio ad gentes* to announce that it is in Christ, "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6), that people find salvation. Interreligious dialogue "cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented towards proclamation".⁴⁰ This missionary duty, moreover, does not prevent us from approaching dialogue with an attitude of profound willingness to listen. We know in fact that, in the presence of the mystery of grace, infinitely full of possibilities and implications for human life and history, the Church herself will never cease putting questions, trusting in the help of the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth (cf. Jn 14:17), whose task it is to guide her "into all the truth" (Jn 16:13).

This is a fundamental principle not only for the endless theological investigation of Christian truth, but also for Christian dialogue with other philosophies, cultures and religions. In the common experience of humanity, for all its contradictions, the Spirit of God, who "blows where he wills" (Jn 3:8), not infrequently reveals signs of his presence which help Christ's followers to understand more deeply the message which they bear. Was it not with this humble and trust-filled openness that the Second Vatican Council sought to read "the signs of the times"?⁴¹ Even as she engages in an active and watchful discernment aimed at understanding the "genuine signs of the presence or the purpose of God",⁴² the Church acknowledges that she has not only given, but has also "received from the history and from the development of the human race".⁴³ This attitude of openness, combined with careful discernment, was adopted by the Council also in relation to other religions. It is our task to follow with great fidelity the Council's teaching and the path which it has traced.

In the light of the Council

57. What a treasure there is, dear brothers and sisters, in the guidelines offered to us by the Second Vatican Council! For this reason I asked the Church, as a way of preparing for the Great Jubilee, to examine herself on the reception given to the Council.⁴⁴ Has this been done? The Congress held here in the Vatican was such a moment of reflection, and I hope that similar efforts have been made in various ways in all the particular Churches. With the passing of the years, the Council documents have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church's Tradition. Now that the Jubilee has ended, I feel more than ever in duty bound to point to the Council as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.

CONCLUSION

DUC IN ALTUM!

58. Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work. Did we not celebrate the Jubilee Year in order to refresh our contact with this living source of our hope? Now, the Christ whom we have contemplated and loved bids us to set out once more on our journey: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). The missionary mandate accompanies us into the Third Millennium and urges us to share the enthusiasm of the very first Christians: we can count on the power of the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost and who impels us still today to start out anew, sustained by the hope "which does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5).

At the beginning of this new century, our steps must quicken as we travel the highways of the world. Many are the paths on which each one of us and each of our Churches must travel, but there is no distance between those who are united in the same communion, the communion which is daily nourished at the table of the Eucharistic Bread and the Word of Life. Every Sunday, the Risen Christ asks us to meet him as it were once more in the Upper Room where, on the evening of "the first day of the week" (Jn 20:19) he appeared to his disciples in order to "breathe" on them his life-giving Spirit and launch them on the great adventure of proclaiming the Gospel.

On this journey we are accompanied by the Blessed Virgin Mary to whom, a few months ago, in the presence of a great number of Bishops assembled in Rome from all parts of the world, I entrusted the Third Millennium. During this year I have often invoked her as the "Star of the New Evangelization". Now I point to Mary once again as the radiant dawn and sure guide for our steps. Once more, echoing the words of Jesus himself and giving voice to the filial affection of the whole Church, I say to her: "Woman, behold your children"(cf. Jn 19:26).

59. Dear brothers and sisters! The symbol of the Holy Door now closes behind us, but only in order to leave more fully open the living door which is Christ. After the enthusiasm of the Jubilee, it is not to a dull everyday routine that we return. On the contrary, if ours has been a genuine pilgrimage, it will have as it were stretched our legs for the journey still ahead. We need to imitate the zeal of the Apostle Paul: "Straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14). Together, we must all imitate the contemplation of Mary, who returned home to Nazareth from her pilgrimage to the Holy City of Jerusalem, treasuring in her heart the mystery of her Son (cf. Lk 2:51).

The Risen Jesus accompanies us on our way and enables us to recognize him, as the disciples of Emmaus did, "in the breaking of the bread" (Lk 24:35). May he find us watchful, ready to recognize his face and run to our brothers and sisters with the good news: "We have seen the Lord!" (Jn 20:25).

This will be the much desired fruit of the Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Jubilee which has vividly set before our eyes once more the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and the Redeemer of man.

As the Jubilee now comes to a close and points us to a future of hope, may the praise and thanksgiving of the whole Church rise to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

In pledge of this, I impart to all of you my heartfelt Blessing.

From the Vatican, on 6 January, the Solemnity of the Epiphany, in the year 2001, the twenty-third of my Pontificate.

NOTES

- (1) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 11.
- (2) Bull *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 3: AAS 91 (1999), 132.
- (3) *Ibid.*, 4: loc. cit., 133.
- (4) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
- (5) *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 51, 2: PL 41, 614; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
- (6) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 55: AAS 87 (1995), 38.
- (7) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
- (8) "Ignoratio enim Scripturarum ignoratio Christi est": *Commentarii in Isaiam*, Prologue: PL 24, 17.
- (9) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 19.
- (10) "Following the holy Fathers, unanimously, we teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, true God and true man... one and the same Christ the Lord, the only-begotten, to be recognized in two natures, without confusion, immutable, indivisible, inseparable... he is not divided or separated in two persons, but he is one and the same Son, the only-begotten, God, Word and Lord Jesus Christ": DS 301-302.
- (11) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- (12) Saint Athanasius observes in this regard: "Man could not become divine remaining united to a creature, if the Son were not true God": *Oratio II contra Arianos*, 70: PG 26, 425 B.
- (13) Cf. n. 78.
- (14) *Last Conversations*. Yellow Booklet (6 July 1897): *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1996), p. 1025.

- (15) Saint Cyprian, *De Oratione Dominica*, 23: PL 4, 553; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4.
- (16) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 40.
- (17) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.
- (18) Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter on Certain Aspects of Christian Meditation *Orationis Formas* (15 October 1989): AAS 82 (1990), 362-379.
- (19) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.
- (20) John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* (31 May 1998), 19: AAS 90 (1998), 724.
- (21) *Ibid.*, 2: loc. cit., 714.
- (22) Cf. *ibid.*, 35: loc. cit., 734.
- (23) Cf. No. 18: AAS 77 (1985), 224.
- (24) *Ibid.*, 31: loc. cit., 258.
- (25) Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 50, 13: PL 1, 534.
- (26) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
- (27) Manuscript B, 3vo: *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1996), p. 226.
- (28) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter III.
- (29) Cf. Congregation for the clergy et al., Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests *Ecclesiae de Mysterio* (15 August 1997): AAS 89 (1997), 852-877, especially Article 5: "The Structures of Collaboration in the Particular Church".
- (30) *Regula*, III, 3: "Ideo autem omnes ad consilium vocari diximus, quia saepe iuniori Dominus revelat quod melius est".
- (31) "De omnium fidelium ore pendeamus, quia in omnem fidelem Spiritus Dei spirat": *Epistola* 23, 36 to Sulpicius Severus: CSEL 29, 193.
- (32) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 31.
- (33) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2.
- (34) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
- (35) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- (36) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 34.
- (37) Cf. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans, Preface, ed. Funk, I, 252.
- (38) Thus, for example, SAINT AUGUSTINE: "Luna intellegitur Ecclesia, quod suum lumen non habeat, sed ab Unigenito Dei Filio, qui multis locis in Sanctis Scripturis allegorice sol appellatus est": *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 10, 3: CCL 38, 42.
- (39) Cf. Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*.
- (40) Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Instruction on the Proclamation of the Gospel and Interreligious Dialogue *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations* (19 May 1991), 82: AAS 84 (1992), 444.
- (41) Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.
- (42) *Ibid.*, 11.
- (43) *Ibid.*, 44.
- (44) Cf. Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 36: AAS 87 (1995), 28.

Apostolic Letter
 Of The Holy Father
 John Paul II
 For The Third Centenary Of The Union
 Of The Greek-Catholic Church Of Romania
 With The Church Of Rome

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania!

1. The third centenary of the Union of your Church with the Church of Rome occurs in the Easter season of this Jubilee of the Year 2000. The Jubilee Year is a year of grace in which the whole Church recalls that our Lord Jesus Christ became man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin 2,000 years ago. In joyfully commemorating this wonderful event, the Christian community feels encouraged again to proclaim the joyful message of salvation to the world with new energy. *Verbum caro factum est*: this is the reason for our continual gratitude, this is the grace recalled and celebrated in a special way during the Jubilee period. In this perspective, we can view the whole history of humanity with the eyes of hope.

Memory and presence

2. The 300 years that the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania has existed is an important part of this picture. Exactly one year ago we prayed together in your beloved homeland. During the Divine Liturgy celebrated with you at St Joseph's Cathedral in Bucharest, I said that "I consider it providential and highly significant that the celebrations of the third centenary will coincide with the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000" (Homily, 8 May 1999, n. 3).

The possibility of being with you last May was the Lord's special gift, which enabled me in a certain way to relive with you the experience of those disciples who were "on the way": to them "Jesus himself drew near and went with them", and "interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24: 13-15, 27). Enlightened by Christ's words, together we could contemplate his presence reflected in the face of your Church. Then he nourished us with his Body and his Blood, and our hearts burned within us (cf. Lk 24: 32).

3. Since then the beauty of your land and the faith of the people living there have remained in my heart. The memory of that meeting became even more vivid in the Easter season of this year, when the third centenary of your Church's Union with the Church of Rome is being celebrated. My heart longs to be united with you in that joyous hymn - *Hristos a înviat!* (Christ is risen!) - which during my visit filled me with emotion, leaving a deep echo in my heart. This proclamation goes far beyond words: it is filled with the victorious power of the Risen One, who walks with his Church through history. It is in the light of this presence that I address you who are joyfully celebrating the third centenary of the Union.

History and unity

4. The mystery of unity originates in the mystery of the Incarnation. For the Scriptures say that it is the Father's will to "unite all things in Christ" (Eph 1: 10). To fulfil this mystery is the mission of the Church, whose task is gradually to achieve unity with God and among men: "The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament - a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (Lumen gentium, n. 1). Unity and peace blossom in the Church: in this way the history of mankind can become a history of unity.

The mystery of unity particularly marks the Romanian people. We know, and I recall it here with profound reverence, that the risen Christ, through the apostolic preaching, was already joined to the historical progress of your people in ancient Christian times and entrusted to them a special commitment to the precious service of unity. The names of the Apostle Andrew, brother of Peter, Nicetas of Remesiana, John Cassian and Dionysius Exiguus are emblematic in this regard. At a time when Holy Church had not yet experienced the great schism within her, divine Providence determined that you should receive the heritage of Byzantium along with that of Rome.

5. While remaining a Latin people, Romanians were open, in fact, to receiving the treasures of Byzantine faith and culture. Despite the wound of division, this heritage continues to be shared by the Greek-Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Romania. This is the interpretive key to the history of your Church. She extricated herself from the tragic tensions that developed between the Christian East and West. The hearts of the sons and daughters of this ancient Church have always beaten with a passionate longing for the unity desired by Christ. I myself was deeply moved at witnessing this last year.

This longing for unity was felt in a particular way by the Romanian Church in Transylvania, especially after the tragedy of the division between Eastern and Western Christianity. In that land, many peoples -Romanians, Hungarians, Armenians and Saxons - shared a common and sometimes difficult history, which left its marks on the human and religious make-up of the inhabitants. Unfortunately, the unity which characterized the Church in the early centuries was never achieved again, and your history too was marked by division and tears with increasing intensity.

Against this background, the efforts of those who did resign themselves to the wound of schism but sought to heal it shine like bright lights of hope. In Transylvania a desire arose in the hearts of Romanian Christians and their Pastors, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries, to re-establish complete communion with the Apostolic See of Peter's Successor. These disciples of Christ, spurred by an ardent longing for the reform and the unity of the Church, sensing in the depths of their hearts an ancient bond with the Church and the city where the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul were martyred and buried, started a movement that led step by step to full union with Rome.

Worthy of mention among the decisive stages are the Synods held in Alba Iulia in 1697 and 1698 which were favourable to the Union: the official decision was reached on 7 October 1698 and solemnly ratified at the Synod of 7 May 1700.

6. Thanks to the work of distinguished Bishops such as Atanasie Anghel (+1713), Ioan Inochentie Micu-Klein (+1768) and Petru Pavel Aron (+1764) and other praiseworthy prelates, priests and lay people, the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania strengthened her identity and in a short time experienced significant development. In view of this, my venerable Predecessor Pius IX, with the Bull *Ecclesiam Christi* of 16 November 1853, established the Metropolitan See of Fagaras and Alba Iulia for the united Romanians.

How could we not acknowledge the precious services of the Greek-Catholic Church to all the Romanian people of Transylvania? She made a decisive contribution to their growth, symbolically represented by the "coryphaei" of the Transylvanian School of Blaj, but also by many figures - clergy and laity - who also left an indelible mark on the ecclesial, cultural and social life of Romanians. A particularly outstanding merit of your Church is to have mediated between the East and the West by adopting the values promoted by the Holy See in Transylvania and by communicating to the entire Catholic world the values of the Christian East, which were not very accessible due to the existing divisions. The Greek-Catholic Church thus became an eloquent witness to the unity of the whole Church, showing how she embodies the values of the institutions, liturgical rites and ecclesiastical traditions which in different ways derive from the same apostolic tradition (cf. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 1).

Witnesses and martyrs of unity

7. The way was never easy for the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania, as her suffering shows. She was asked to bear a painful and demanding witness of fidelity to the evangelical requirement of unity. Thus she became in a special way the Church of the witnesses to unity, truth and love.

Despite the many difficulties encountered, the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania increasingly appeared to the whole Christian world as an extraordinary witness to the indispensable value of ecclesial unity. But it was especially in the second half of the 20th century, in the age of communist totalitarianism, that your Church had to suffer a very harsh trial, rightly earning for herself the title: "Church of confessors and martyrs". It was then that the struggle between the *mysterium iniquitatis* (2 Thes 2: 7) and the *mysterium pietatis* (1 Tm 3: 16) at work in the world became even more apparent. It is also since that time that the glory of martyrdom has shone with greater brightness on the face of your Church, like a light reflected in Christian consciences throughout the world, prompting admiration and gratitude.

8. Moved by this awareness, I made the most of every opportunity to have news of you, dear brothers and sisters, and I would now like to offer you a further expression of my solidarity and support. When I was able to pray with you last year at the Catholic cemetery of Bucharest during my pilgrimage to your land, I did so bearing in my heart the entire Church of Christ and, with the whole Church, I knelt in silence at the tombs of your martyrs. We do not even know many of their burial places, because their persecutors deprived them of even this last mark of distinction and respect. But their names are inscribed in the Book of the Living, and each one has received "a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it" (Rv 2: 17). The blood of these martyrs is a leaven of Gospel life which is not only active in your land, but also in many other parts of the world.

This "great multitude" (Rv 7: 9) clothed in white (cf. Rv 7: 13) of your Church's martyrs and confessors, "who have come out of the great tribulation, have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rv 7: 14), and who stand "before the throne of God" (Rv 7: 15), is resplendent with the illustrious names of Bishops such as Vasile Aftenie, Ioan Balan, Valeriu Traian Frentiu, Ioan Suci, Tit Liviu Chinezu, Alexandru Rusu and Cardinal Iuliu Hossu. Like the men of prayer who "serve God day and night within his temple" (Rv 7: 15), they intercede for their people with the other martyrs and confessors, receiving from them true and deep veneration. May the witness of martyrdom and the profession of faith in Christ and in the unity of his Church rise like the incense of an evening sacrifice (cf. Ps 141: 2) to God's throne in the name of the whole Church, whose esteem and devotion they enjoy!

Revisiting the past: the purification of memory

9. The splendour of the witness to faith and the generous service to unity must always be accompanied in the Church by a tireless commitment to truth, in which the dynamism of hope is purified and strengthened. This is the climate of the

Jubilee of the Year 2000, in which the whole Church senses a duty to re-examine her past to recognize the inconsistencies committed by her children with regard to the teaching of the Gospel, and thus to be able to walk with a purified face towards the future desired by God.

The current difficulties that your Church is encountering in her recovery since her suppression, as well as the limited human and material resources which dampen her enthusiasm, could be demoralizing. But Christians know that the greater the obstacles to be overcome, the more confidently they can rely on the help of God, who is near and walks at their side. This is also recalled in your very beautiful hymn "Cu noi este Dumnezeu", so full of meaning and so deeply impressed on your people's hearts.

In this Jubilee your Church, along with the universal Church, has a duty to revisit her past, especially the period of persecution, in order to update her own "Martyrology". It is not an easy task due to the scarcity of sources and the time that has passed, a time too brief for making a sufficiently detached judgement, but long enough to expose regrettable omissions. Fortunately, many witnesses of the recent past are still alive. Therefore the necessary effort should be made to enrich the documentation of past events, so that future generations can know their history, after it has been critically weighed and is thus worthy of belief. In this perspective, it will be appropriate for the witness and martyrdom offered by your Church to be examined in the broader context of the suffering and persecution experienced by Christians in the 20th century.

In my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, I specifically referred to the martyrs of our century, "many of them nameless, 'unknown soldiers' as it were of God's great cause" (n. 37), and I said that "at the end of the second millennium, the Church has once again become a Church of martyrs.... The witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants.... This witness must not be forgotten" (ibid.). In the faith and martyrdom of these Christians the unity of the Church appears in a new light. Their blood, shed for Christ and with Christ, is a sure foundation for seeking the unity of the whole Christian ecumene.

In Bucharest I highlighted the fact that in Romania, too, you suffered together: "The communist regime suppressed the Church of the Byzantine-Romanian rite united with Rome and persecuted Bishops and priests, men and women religious and lay people, many of whom paid with blood for their fidelity to Christ.... I would also like to give due recognition to the members of the Romanian Orthodox Church and of other Churches and religious communities who suffered similar persecutions and grave restrictions. Death united our brothers and sisters in faith in the heroic witness of martyrdom: they have left us an unforgettable lesson of love for Christ and his Church" (Arrival address, Baneasa Airport, Bucharest, 7 May 1999, n. 4). In this regard, I also encourage you now, during the celebration of the Jubilee and the third centenary of your Union, to identify and appreciate the martyrs of the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania, recognizing their merit in having given a considerable impetus to the cause of Christian unity.

10. It will also be very useful to consider today's situation in the light of your history. For it seems necessary to make a thorough examination of the context, spirit and decisions of your Provincial Synods held in 1872, 1882 and 1900. The same revisiting of history should also concern other important events which have marked the history of the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania. The example of the distinguished scholars of the Transylvanian School of Blaj, who have made a close examination of events, guided by serious historical and linguistic analysis, can serve as an important reference-point for this research in order to obtain reliable results. With this kind of re-examination, fundamental aspects for the theological, liturgical and spiritual tradition of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania will certainly come to light. In this way, your Church's identity and her spiritual profile will appear with new vigour and thus contribute to the culture of Romania and of the whole Christian world. I wholeheartedly encourage and bless every effort made in this regard.

There should also be a special effort to address the problem of the reception of the Second Vatican Council on the part of the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania. Because of the persecutions at the time, your Church did not have the opportunity to participate fully in that historical event nor was the action of the Spirit clearly perceived. It was precisely that Council which devoted greater attention to the sensitive questions of the Eastern Catholic Churches, ecumenism and the Church in general. The Council's teaching was then continued by the subsequent Magisterium. I am pleased to see that the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania is currently involved in a long, laborious effort to accept fully all the Holy See's directives.

A sign of unity

11. Thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit pluralism in the Church can shine with ineffable beauty without jeopardizing her unity. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council spoke of the treasures of the Eastern Churches in communion with Rome: "For in those Churches, which are distinguished by their venerable antiquity, there is clearly evident the tradition which has come from the Apostles through the Fathers and which is part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the universal Church" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 1). Thus the entire Christian ecumene needs their voice and presence: "The holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government. They combine into different groups, which are held together by their hierarchy, and so form particular Churches or rites.

Between those Churches there is such a wonderful communion that this variety, so far from diminishing the Church's unity, rather serves to emphasize it" (ibid., n. 2).

The Catholic Church, supported by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, has committed herself with all determination, especially in recent decades, to the quest for unity among Christ's disciples. My immediate Predecessors, starting with John XXIII of venerable memory, increased their efforts for ecumenical reconciliation, especially with the Orthodox Churches, seeing this as a precise requirement of the Gospel and a response to the insistent promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Under the merciful gaze of her Lord, the Church remembers her past, acknowledges the errors of her children, confesses their lack of love for their brethren in Christ and consequently asks forgiveness and forgives, seeking to re-establish full unity among Christians.

12. The attempt to seek full communion is inevitably conditioned by the historical context, the political situation and the dominant mentality of any era. In this regard, the Transylvanian Union conformed to the model of unity which prevailed after the Councils of Florence and Trent. At that time, it was the ardent longing for unity which brought the Romanians of Transylvania to union with the Church of Rome, and we are all deeply grateful to God for this gift. However, since communion among the Churches can never be considered a goal definitively reached, the gift of unity offered by the Lord Jesus once and for all must be answered with a constant attitude of acceptance, the fruit of each one's inner conversion. The changed circumstances of the present time require, in fact, that unity be pursued within a broader ecumenical horizon, in which we must be willing to listen to the Spirit and courageously rethink our relationships with the other Churches and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, with the attitude of those who can "hope against all hope" (cf. Rom 4: 18). Precisely with regard to the gift of unity, in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* I noted: "We are asked to respond to this gift responsibly, without compromise in our witness to the truth" (n. 34). It will therefore be necessary to reconsider the three-centuries-old history of the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania with a new outlook, with a calm and serene approach to the events which have marked her way.

Just as I encouraged the process of reviewing the ways in which the Petrine service is exercised within the Christian *ecumene*, while preserving the requirements that stem from the will of Christ (cf. Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, n. 95), so I urge you to start examining and bringing up to date the specific vocation of the Eastern Churches in communion with Rome in the new context, calling on all the Churches for the contribution of their study and reflection. The Theological Commissions established by the Pastors of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches as a whole should endeavour to work in this complex perspective. Christians are currently faced with the problem of "receiving the results already achieved. These cannot remain the statements of bilateral commissions but must become a common heritage. For this to come about and for the bonds of communion to be strengthened, a serious examination needs to be made, which, by different ways and means and at various levels of responsibility, must involve the whole People of God" (ibid., n. 80). For "this process... to be successful, its results must be made known in appropriate ways" (ibid., n. 81).

The quest for Christian unity, in love and truth, is a fundamental element for a more effective evangelization. In fact, the Church is one and indivisible by Christ's will. An authentic return to the liturgical and patristic traditions, a treasure which you share with the Orthodox Church, will contribute to reconciliation with the other Churches present in Romania. In this spirit of reconciliation the continuation of the dialogue between your Church and the Orthodox Church should be warmly encouraged at both the national and local levels, in the hope that all the disputed points will soon be clarified in a spirit of justice and Christian charity.

At the same time, the spirit of dialogue requires that your Church should increasingly and gratefully discover the face of Christ Jesus traced by the Holy Spirit in her Sister Orthodox Church, and you should expect the same from her in your regard. Thus you will bear the witness that the Apostle Paul asks from the Christians of Rome (cf. Rom 12: 9-13).

Importance of prayer

13. For the Jubilee the Church seeks to renew herself in the joyful light of the risen Christ, inviting her children to respond to God's grace with a serious examination of conscience and the effort of purification and penance. It is a long process which began at the time of the Second Vatican Council and has not yet ended. We have rediscovered what has always been the holy root nourishing the Church: the Word of God, interpreted *factis et verbis* by the liturgy, the Councils, the Fathers and the saints. But we have also forcefully repeated that the principal source of unity in the Church is the Holy Trinity (cf. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 1-8).

The Greek-Catholic Church of Romania is also rooted in the Word of God, in the teaching of the Fathers and in the Byzantine tradition, but in addition finds her own particular expression in her union with the Apostolic See, in the mark of the 20th-century persecutions and in the Latin character of her people. All these elements form the identity of your Church, whose ultimate root is the Holy Trinity. These are her primary origin, the source "of living water" (Jn 7: 38), to which she should have constant recourse.

It is my firm conviction that the return to the well-springs of the Church's traditions must be accompanied by a constant and fervent return to the Trinitarian Source. This will only be possible if each of us recovers that deep intimacy which is expressed in prayer. Prayer gives man strength and illumines his way. In the deep silence of the prayer experience, we can recognize the true image of the Church in her authentic and eternal identity, and can also discover that name

known only to God which represents the truest identity of every Christian. For this reason the Jubilee of the Year 2000 and the third centenary of your Church's Union with Rome are a time of prayer to which God himself is inviting us. May the All-Holy Mother of God enlighten and accompany us, she who remains forever the perfect image of the Church and our advocate before God's throne.

With this wish, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to my Venerable Brother Cardinal Alexandru Todea, Metropolitan Archbishop emeritus of Fagaras and Alba Iulia, to the current Archbishop-Metropolitan, Lucian Muresan, to my other Brothers in the Episcopate, and to the priests, the religious and all of you, dear faithful of the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania.

From the Vatican, 7 May 2000, the twenty-second year of my Pontificate.

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Post-Synodal
Apostolic Exhortation
Ecclesia In Asia
Of The Holy Father
John Paul II
To The Bishops,
Priests And Deacons,
Men And Women
In The Consecrated Life
And All The Lay Faithful
On Jesus Christ The Saviour
And His Mission Of Love And Service
In Asia:
"...That They May Have Life,
And Have It Abundantly" (Jn 10:10)

INTRODUCTION

The Marvel of God's Plan in Asia

1. The Church in Asia sings the praises of the "God of salvation" (Ps 68:20) for choosing to initiate his saving plan on Asian soil, through men and women of that continent. It was in fact in Asia that God revealed and fulfilled his saving purpose from the beginning. He guided the patriarchs (cf. Gen 12) and called Moses to lead his people to freedom (cf. Ex 3:10). He spoke to his chosen people through many prophets, judges, kings and valiant women of faith. In "the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4), he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour, who took flesh as an Asian! Exulting in the goodness of the continent's peoples, cultures, and religious vitality, and conscious at the same time of the unique gift of faith which she has received for the good of all, the Church in Asia cannot cease to proclaim: "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love endures for ever" (Ps 118:1). Because Jesus was born, lived, died and rose from the dead in the Holy Land, that small portion of Western Asia became a land of promise and hope for all mankind. Jesus knew and loved this land. He made his own the history, the sufferings and the hopes of its people. He loved its people and embraced their Jewish traditions and heritage. God in fact had long before chosen this people and revealed himself to them in preparation for the Saviour's coming. And from this land, through the preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church went forth to make "disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). With the Church throughout the world, the Church in Asia will cross the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium marvelling at all that God has worked from those beginnings until now, and strong in the knowledge that "just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent".¹

Background to the Special Assembly

2. In my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, I set out a programme for the Church to welcome the Third Millennium of Christianity, a programme centred on the challenges of the new evangelization. An important feature of that plan was the holding of continental Synods so that Bishops could address the question of evangelization according to the particular situation and needs of each continent. This series of Synods, linked by the common theme of the new evangelization, has proved an important part of the Church's preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. In that same letter, referring to the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, I noted that in that part of the world "the issue of the encounter of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions is a pressing one. This is a great challenge for evangelization, since religious systems such as Buddhism or Hinduism have a clearly soteriological character".² It is indeed a mystery why the Saviour of the world, born in Asia, has until now remained largely unknown to the people of the continent. The Synod would be a providential opportunity for the Church in Asia to reflect further on this mystery and to make a renewed commitment to the mission of making Jesus Christ better known to all. Two months after the publication of *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, speaking to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, in Manila, the Philippines, during the memorable Tenth World Youth Day celebrations, I reminded the Bishops: "If the Church in Asia is to fulfil its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority".³

The positive response of the Bishops and of the particular Churches to the prospect of a Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops was evident throughout the preparatory phase. The Bishops communicated their desires and opinions at every stage with frankness and a penetrating knowledge of the continent. They did so in full awareness of the bond of communion which they share with the universal Church. In line with the original idea of Tertio Millennio Adveniente and following the proposals of the Pre-Synodal Council which evaluated the views of the Bishops and the particular Churches on the Asian continent, I chose as the Synod's theme: Jesus Christ the Saviour and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia: "That they may have Life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Through this particular formulation of the theme, I hoped that the Synod might "illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions".⁴ As we approach the Great Jubilee, the Church in Asia needs to be able to proclaim with renewed vigour: *Ecce natus est nobis Salvator mundi, "Behold the Saviour of the World is born to us", born in Asia!*

The Celebration of the Special Assembly

3. By the grace of God, the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops took place from 18 April to 14 May 1998 in the Vatican. It came after the Special Assemblies for Africa (1994) and America (1997), and was followed at the year's end by the Special Assembly for Oceania (1998). For almost a month, the Synod Fathers and other participants, gathered around the Successor of Peter and sharing in the gift of hierarchical communion, gave concrete voice and expression to the Church in Asia. It was indeed a moment of special grace! ⁵ Earlier meetings of Asian Bishops had contributed to preparing the Synod and making possible an atmosphere of intense ecclesial and fraternal communion. Of particular relevance in this respect were the past Plenary Assemblies and Seminars sponsored by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and its offices, which periodically brought together great numbers of Asian Bishops and fostered personal as well as ministerial bonds between them. I had the privilege of being able to make a visit to some of these meetings, at times presiding at the opening or closing Solemn Eucharistic Celebrations. On those occasions I was able to observe directly the encounter in dialogue of the particular Churches, including the Eastern Churches, in the person of their Pastors. These and other regional assemblies of Asia's Bishops served providentially as remote preparation for the Synod Assembly.

The actual celebration of the Synod itself confirmed the importance of dialogue as a characteristic mode of the Church's life in Asia. A sincere and honest sharing of experiences, ideas and proposals proved to be the way to a genuine meeting of spirits, a communion of minds and hearts which, in love, respects and transcends differences. Particularly moving was the encounter of the new Churches with the ancient Churches which trace their origins to the Apostles. We experienced the incomparable joy of seeing the Bishops of the particular Churches in Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia, Siberia and the new republics of Central Asia sitting beside their Brothers who had long desired to encounter them and to dialogue with them. Yet there was also a sense of sadness at the fact that Bishops from Mainland China could not be present. Their absence was a constant reminder of the heroic sacrifices and suffering which the Church continues to endure in many parts of Asia.

The encounter in dialogue of the Bishops and the Successor of Peter, entrusted with the task of strengthening his brothers (cf. Lk 22:32), was truly a confirmation in faith and mission. Day after day the Synod Hall and meeting rooms were filled with accounts of deep faith, self-sacrificing love, unwavering hope, long-suffering commitment, enduring courage and merciful forgiveness, all of which eloquently disclosed the truth of Jesus' words: "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20). The Synod was a moment of grace because it was an encounter with the Saviour who continues to be present in his Church through the power of the Holy Spirit, experienced in a fraternal dialogue of life, communion and mission.

Sharing the Fruits of the Special Assembly

4. Through this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, I wish to share with the Church in Asia and throughout the world the fruits of the Special Assembly. This document seeks to convey the wealth of that great spiritual event of communion and episcopal collegiality. The Synod was a celebratory remembering of the Asian roots of Christianity. The Synod Fathers remembered the first Christian community, the early Church, Jesus' little flock on this immense continent (cf. Lk 12:32). They remembered what the Church has received and heard from the beginning (cf. Rev 3:3), and, having remembered, they celebrated God's "abundant goodness" (Ps 145:7) which never fails. The Synod was also an occasion to recognize the ancient religious traditions and civilizations, the profound philosophies and the wisdom which have made Asia what it is today. Above all, the peoples of Asia themselves were remembered as the continent's true wealth and hope for the future. Throughout the Synod those of us present were witnesses of an extraordinarily fruitful meeting between the old and new cultures and civilizations of Asia, marvellous to behold in their diversity and convergence, especially when symbols, songs, dances and colours came together in harmonious accord around the one Table of the Lord in the opening and closing Eucharistic Liturgies.

This was not a celebration motivated by pride in human achievements, but one conscious of what the Almighty has done for the Church in Asia (cf. Lk 1:49). In recalling the Catholic community's humble condition, as well as the

weaknesses of its members, the Synod was also a call to conversion, so that the Church in Asia might become ever more worthy of the graces continually being offered by God.

As well as a remembrance and a celebration, the Synod was an ardent affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour. Grateful for the gift of faith, the Synod Fathers found no better way to celebrate the faith than to affirm it in its integrity, and to reflect on it in relation to the context in which it has to be proclaimed and professed in Asia today. They emphasized frequently that the faith is already being proclaimed with trust and courage on the continent, even amid great difficulties. In the name of so many millions of men and women in Asia who put their trust in no one other than the Lord, the Synod Fathers confessed: "We have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:69). In the face of the many painful questions posed by the suffering, violence, discrimination and poverty to which the majority of Asian peoples are subjected, they prayed: "I believe, help my unbelief" (Mk 9:24).

In 1995, I invited the Bishops of Asia gathered in Manila to "open wide to Christ the doors of Asia".⁶ Taking strength from the mystery of communion with the countless and often unheralded martyrs of the faith in Asia, and confirmed in hope by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, the Synod Fathers courageously called all Christ's disciples in Asia to a new commitment to mission. During the Synod Assembly, the Bishops and participants bore witness to the character, spiritual fire and zeal which will assuredly make Asia the land of a bountiful harvest in the coming millennium.

CHAPTER I - THE ASIAN CONTEXT

Asia, the Birthplace of Jesus and of the Church

5. The Incarnation of the Son of God, which the whole Church will solemnly commemorate in the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, took place in a definite historical and geographical context. That context exercised an important influence on the life and mission of the Redeemer as man. "In Jesus of Nazareth, God has assumed the features typical of human nature, including a person's belonging to a particular people and a particular land... The physical particularity of the land and its geographical determination are inseparable from the truth of the human flesh assumed by the Word".⁷ Consequently, knowledge of the world in which the Saviour "dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14) is an important key to a more precise understanding of the Eternal Father's design and of the immensity of his love for every creature: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Likewise, the Church lives and fulfils her mission in the actual circumstances of time and place. A critical awareness of the diverse and complex realities of Asia is essential if the People of God on the continent are to respond to God's will for them in the new evangelization. The Synod Fathers insisted that the Church's mission of love and service in Asia is conditioned by two factors: on the one hand, her self-understanding as a community of disciples of Jesus Christ gathered around her Pastors, and on the other hand, the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia.⁸ The situation of Asia was examined in detail during the Synod by those who have daily contact with the extremely diversified realities of such an immense continent. The following is, in synthesis, the result of the Synod Fathers' reflections.

Religious and Cultural Realities

6. Asia is the earth's largest continent and is home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population, with China and India accounting for almost half the total population of the globe. The most striking feature of the continent is the variety of its peoples who are "heirs to ancient cultures, religions and traditions".⁹ We cannot but be amazed at the sheer size of Asia's population and at the intricate mosaic of its many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions, which comprise such a substantial part of the history and patrimony of the human family.

Asia is also the cradle of the world's major religions-Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions, with varying degrees of structured ritual and formal religious teaching. The Church has the deepest respect for these traditions and seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers. The religious values they teach await their fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values, such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical enquiry.¹⁰ They hold dear the values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community.¹¹ In particular, they hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity.¹² Asian peoples are known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Without denying the existence of bitter tensions and violent conflicts, it can still be said that Asia has often demonstrated a remarkable capacity for accommodation and a natural openness to the mutual enrichment of peoples in the midst of a plurality of religions and cultures. Moreover, despite the influence of modernization and secularization, Asian religions are showing signs of great vitality and a capacity for renewal, as seen in reform movements within the various religious groups. Many

people, especially the young, experience a deep thirst for spiritual values, as the rise of new religious movements clearly demonstrates.

All of this indicates an innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul, and it is the core around which a growing sense of "being Asian" is built. This "being Asian" is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul.

Economic and Social Realities

7. On the subject of economic development, situations on the Asian continent are very diverse, defying any simple classification. Some countries are highly developed, others are developing through effective economic policies, and others still find themselves in abject poverty, indeed among the poorest nations on earth. In the process of development, materialism and secularism are also gaining ground, especially in urban areas. These ideologies, which undermine traditional, social and religious values, threaten Asia's cultures with incalculable damage.

The Synod Fathers spoke of the rapid changes taking place within Asian societies and of the positive and negative aspects of these changes. Among them are the phenomenon of urbanization and the emergence of huge urban conglomerations, often with large depressed areas where organized crime, terrorism, prostitution, and the exploitation of the weaker sectors of society thrive. Migration too is a major social phenomenon, exposing millions of people to situations which are difficult economically, culturally and morally. People migrate within Asia and from Asia to other continents for many reasons, among them poverty, war and ethnic conflicts, the denial of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The establishment of giant industrial complexes is another cause of internal and external migration, with accompanying destructive effects on family life and values. Mention was also made of the construction of nuclear power plants with an eye to cost and efficiency but with little regard for the safety of people and the integrity of the environment.

Tourism also warrants special attention. Though a legitimate industry with its own cultural and educational values, tourism has in some cases a devastating influence upon the moral and physical landscape of many Asian countries, manifested in the degradation of young women and even children through prostitution.¹³ The pastoral care of migrants, as well as that of tourists, is difficult and complex, especially in Asia where basic structures for this may not exist. Pastoral planning at all levels needs to take these realities into account. In this context we should not forget the migrants from Catholic Eastern Churches who need pastoral care according to their own ecclesiastical traditions.¹⁴

Several Asian countries face difficulties related to population growth, which is "not merely a demographic or economic problem but especially a moral one".¹⁵ Clearly, the question of population is closely linked to that of human promotion, but false solutions that threaten the dignity and inviolability of life abound and present a special challenge to the Church in Asia. It is perhaps appropriate at this point to recall the Church's contribution to the defence and promotion of life through health care, social development and education to benefit peoples, especially the poor. It is fitting that the Special Assembly for Asia paid tribute to the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "who was known all over the world for her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor".¹⁶ She remains an icon of the service to life which the Church is offering in Asia, in courageous contrast to the many dark forces at work in society.

A number of Synod Fathers underlined the external influences being brought to bear on Asian cultures. New forms of behaviour are emerging as a result of over-exposure to the mass media and the kinds of literature, music and films that are proliferating on the continent. Without denying that the means of social communication can be a great force for good, ¹⁷ we cannot disregard the negative impact which they often have. Their beneficial effects can at times be outweighed by the way in which they are controlled and used by those with questionable political, economic and ideological interests. As a result, the negative aspects of the media and entertainment industries are threatening traditional values, and in particular the sacredness of marriage and the stability of the family. The effect of images of violence, hedonism, unbridled individualism and materialism "is striking at the heart of Asian cultures, at the religious character of the people, families and whole societies".¹⁸ This is a situation which poses a great challenge to the Church and to the proclamation of her message.

The persistent reality of poverty and the exploitation of people are matters of the most urgent concern. In Asia there are millions of oppressed people who for centuries have been kept economically, culturally and politically on the margins of society.¹⁹ Reflecting upon the situation of women in Asian societies, the Synod Fathers noted that "though the awakening of women's consciousness to their dignity and rights is one of the most significant signs of the times, the poverty and exploitation of women remains a serious problem throughout Asia".²⁰ Female illiteracy is much higher than that of males; and female children are more likely to be aborted or even killed after birth. There are also millions of indigenous or tribal people throughout Asia living in social, cultural and political isolation from the dominant population.²¹ It was reassuring to hear the Bishops at the Synod mention that in some cases these matters are receiving greater attention at the national, regional and international levels, and that the Church is actively seeking to address this serious situation.

The Synod Fathers pointed out that this necessarily brief reflection upon the economic and social realities of Asia would be incomplete if recognition were not also given to the extensive economic growth of many Asian societies in

recent decades: a new generation of skilled workers, scientists and technicians is growing daily and their great number augurs well for Asia's development. Still, not all is stable and solid in this progress, as has been made evident by the most recent and far-reaching financial crisis suffered by a number of Asian countries. The future of Asia lies in cooperation, within Asia and with the nations of other continents, but building always on what Asian peoples themselves do with a view to their own development.

Political Realities

8. The Church always needs to have an exact understanding of the political situation in the different countries where she seeks to fulfil her mission. In Asia today the political panorama is highly complex, displaying an array of ideologies ranging from democratic forms of government to theocratic ones. Military dictatorships and atheistic ideologies are very much present. Some countries recognize an official state religion that allows little or no religious freedom to minorities and the followers of other religions. Other States, though not explicitly theocratic, reduce minorities to second-class citizens with little safeguard for their fundamental human rights. In some places Christians are not allowed to practise their faith freely and proclaim Jesus Christ to others.²² They are persecuted and denied their rightful place in society. The Synod Fathers remembered in a special way the people of China and expressed the fervent hope that all their Chinese Catholic brothers and sisters would one day be able to exercise their religion in freedom and visibly profess their full communion with the See of Peter.²³

While appreciating the progress which many Asian countries are making under their different forms of government, the Synod Fathers also drew attention to the widespread corruption existing at various levels of both government and society.²⁴ Too often, people seem helpless to defend themselves against corrupt politicians, judiciary officials, administrators and bureaucrats. However, there is a growing awareness throughout Asia of people's capacity to change unjust structures. There are new demands for greater social justice, for more participation in government and economic life, for equal opportunities in education and for a just share in the resources of the nation. People are becoming increasingly conscious of their human dignity and rights and more determined to safeguard them. Long dormant ethnic, social and cultural minority groups are seeking ways to become agents of their own social advancement. The Spirit of God helps and sustains people's efforts to transform society so that the human yearning for a more abundant life may be satisfied as God wills (cf. Jn 10:10).

The Church in Asia: Past and Present

9. The history of the Church in Asia is as old as the Church herself, for it was in Asia that Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon his disciples and sent them to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Good News and gather communities of believers. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21; see also Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8). Following the Lord's command, the Apostles preached the word and founded Churches. It may help to recall some elements of this fascinating and complex history.

From Jerusalem, the Church spread to Antioch, to Rome and beyond. It reached Ethiopia in the South, Scythia in the North and India in the East, where tradition has it that Saint Thomas the Apostle went in the year 52 A.D. and founded Churches in South India. The missionary spirit of the East Syrian community in the third and fourth centuries, with its centre at Edessa, was remarkable. The ascetic communities of Syria were a major force of evangelization in Asia from the third century onwards. They provided spiritual energy for the Church, especially during times of persecution. At the end of the third century, Armenia was the first nation as a whole to embrace Christianity, and is now preparing to celebrate the 1700th anniversary of its baptism. By the end of the fifth century, the Christian message had reached the Arab kingdoms, but for many reasons, including the divisions among Christians, the message failed to take root among these peoples.

Persian merchants took the Good News to China in the fifth century. The first Christian Church was built there at the beginning of the seventh century. During the T'ang dynasty (618-907 A.D.), the Church flourished for nearly two centuries. The decline of this vibrant Church in China by the end of the First Millennium is one of the sadder chapters in the history of God's People on the continent.

In the thirteenth century the Good News was announced to the Mongols and the Turks and to the Chinese once more. But Christianity almost vanished in these regions for a number of reasons, among them the rise of Islam, geographical isolation, the absence of an appropriate adaptation to local cultures, and perhaps above all a lack of preparedness to encounter the great religions of Asia. The end of the fourteenth century saw the drastic diminution of the Church in Asia, except for the isolated community in South India. The Church in Asia had to await a new era of missionary endeavour.

The apostolic labours of Saint Francis Xavier, the founding of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide by Pope Gregory XV, and the directives for missionaries to respect and appreciate local cultures all contributed to achieving more positive results in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Again in the nineteenth century there was a revival of missionary activity. Various religious congregations dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to this task. Propaganda Fide was reorganized. Greater emphasis was placed upon building up the local Churches. Educational and

charitable works went hand in hand with the preaching of the Gospel. Consequently, the Good News continued to reach more people, especially among the poor and the underprivileged, but also here and there among the social and intellectual elite. New attempts were made to inculcate the Good News, although they proved in no way sufficient. Despite her centuries-long presence and her many apostolic endeavours, the Church in many places was still considered as foreign to Asia, and indeed was often associated in people's minds with the colonial powers.

This was the situation on the eve of the Second Vatican Council; but thanks to the impetus provided by the Council, a new understanding of mission dawned and with it a great hope. The universality of God's plan of salvation, the missionary nature of the Church and the responsibility of everyone in the Church for this task, so strongly reaffirmed in the Council's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, became the framework of a new commitment. During the Special Assembly, the Synod Fathers testified to the recent growth of the ecclesial community among many different peoples in various parts of the continent, and they appealed for further missionary efforts in the years to come, especially as new possibilities for the proclamation of the Gospel emerge in the Siberian region and the Central Asian countries which have recently gained their independence, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.²⁵

A survey of the Catholic communities in Asia shows a splendid variety by reason of their origin and historical development, and the diverse spiritual and liturgical traditions of the various Rites. Yet all are united in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, through Christian witness, works of charity and human solidarity. While some particular Churches carry out their mission in peace and freedom, others find themselves in situations of violence and conflict, or feel threatened by other groups, for religious or other reasons. In the vastly diversified cultural world of Asia, the Church faces multiple philosophical, theological and pastoral challenges. Her task is made more difficult by the fact of her being a minority, with the only exception the Philippines, where Catholics are in the majority.

Whatever the circumstances, the Church in Asia finds herself among peoples who display an intense yearning for God. The Church knows that this yearning can only be fully satisfied by Jesus Christ, the Good News of God for all the nations. The Synod Fathers were very keen that this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation should focus attention on this yearning and encourage the Church in Asia to proclaim with vigour in word and deed that Jesus Christ is the Saviour.

The Spirit of God, always at work in the history of the Church in Asia, continues to guide her. The many positive elements found in the local Churches, frequently highlighted in the Synod, strengthen our expectation of a "new springtime of Christian life".²⁶ One solid cause of hope is the increasing number of better trained, enthusiastic and Spirit-filled lay people, who are more and more aware of their specific vocation within the ecclesial community. Among them the lay catechists deserve special recognition and praise.²⁷ The apostolic and charismatic movements too are a gift of the Spirit, bringing new life and vigour to the formation of lay men and women, families and the young.²⁸ Associations and ecclesial movements devoted to the promotion of human dignity and justice make accessible and tangible the universality of the evangelical message of our adoption as children of God (cf. Rom 8:15-16).

At the same time, there are Churches in very difficult circumstances, "experiencing intense trials in the practice of their faith".²⁹ The Synod Fathers were moved by reports of the heroic witness, unshaken perseverance and steady growth of the Catholic Church in China, by the efforts of the Church in South Korea to offer assistance to the people of North Korea, the humble steadfastness of the Catholic community in Vietnam, the isolation of Christians in such places as Laos and Myanmar, the difficult co-existence with the majority in some predominantly Islamic states.³⁰ The Synod paid special attention to the situation of the Church in the Holy Land and in the Holy City of Jerusalem, "the heart of Christianity",³¹ a city dear to all the children of Abraham. The Synod Fathers expressed the belief that the peace of the region, and even the world, depends in large measure on the peace and reconciliation which have eluded Jerusalem for so long.³²

I cannot bring to an end this brief survey of the situation of the Church in Asia, though far from complete, without mentioning the Saints and Martyrs of Asia, both those who have been recognized and those known only to God, whose example is a source of "spiritual richness and a great means of evangelization".³³ They speak silently but most powerfully of the importance of holiness of life and readiness to offer one's life for the Gospel. They are the teachers and the protectors, the glory of the Church in Asia in her work of evangelization. With the whole Church I pray to the Lord to send many more committed labourers to reap the harvest of souls which I see as ready and plentiful (cf. Mt 9:37-38). At this moment, I call to mind what I wrote in *Redemptoris Missio*: "God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel".³⁴ This vision of a new and promising horizon I see being fulfilled in Asia, where Jesus was born and where Christianity began.

CHAPTER II - JESUS THE SAVIOUR: A GIFT TO ASIA

The Gift of Faith

10. As the Synod discussion of the complex realities of Asia unfolded, it became increasingly obvious to all that the Church's unique contribution to the peoples of the continent is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the one and only Saviour for all peoples.³⁵ What distinguishes the Church from other religious communities is her faith in Jesus Christ; and she cannot keep this precious light of faith under a bushel (cf. Mt 5:15), for her mission is to share

that light with everyone. "[The Church] wants to offer the new life she has found in Jesus Christ to all the peoples of Asia as they search for the fullness of life, so that they can have the same fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit".³⁶ This faith in Jesus Christ is what inspires the Church's evangelizing work in Asia, often carried out in difficult and even dangerous circumstances. The Synod Fathers noted that proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour can present particular difficulties in their cultures, given that many Asian religions teach divine self-manifestations as mediating salvation. Far from discouraging the Synod Fathers, the challenges facing their evangelizing efforts were an even greater incentive in striving to transmit "the faith that the Church in Asia has inherited from the Apostles and holds with the Church of all generations and places".³⁷ Indeed they expressed the conviction that "the heart of the Church in Asia will be restless until the whole of Asia finds its rest in the peace of Christ, the Risen Lord".³⁸

The Church's faith in Jesus is a gift received and a gift to be shared; it is the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia. Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith. In my Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, I wrote that "the Church, and every individual Christian within her, may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God's bounty in order to be communicated to all mankind".³⁹ In the same Letter I wrote: "Those who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God".⁴⁰

Deeply convinced of this, the Synod Fathers were equally conscious of their personal responsibility to grasp through study, prayer and reflection the timeless truth of Jesus in order to bring its power and vitality to bear on the present and future challenges of evangelization in Asia.

Jesus Christ, the God-Man Who Saves

11. The Scriptures attest that Jesus lived an authentically human life. The Jesus whom we proclaim as the only Saviour walked the earth as the God-Man in full possession of a human nature. He was like us in all things except sin. Born of a Virgin Mother in humble surroundings at Bethlehem, he was as helpless as any other infant, and even suffered the fate of a refugee fleeing the wrath of a ruthless leader (cf. Mt 2:13-15). He was subject to human parents who did not always understand his ways, but in whom he trusted and whom he lovingly obeyed (cf. Lk 2:41-52). Constantly at prayer, he was in intimate relationship with God whom he addressed as *Abba*, "Father", to the dismay of his listeners (cf. Jn 8:34-59).

He was close to the poor, the forgotten and the lowly, declaring that they were truly blessed, for God was with them. He ate with sinners, assuring them that at the Father's table there was a place for them when they turned from their sinful ways and came back to him. Touching the unclean and allowing them to touch him, he let them know the nearness of God. He wept for a dead friend, he restored a dead son to his widowed mother, he welcomed children, and he washed the feet of his disciples. Divine compassion had never been so immediately accessible.

The sick, the lame, the blind, the deaf and the dumb all experienced healing and forgiveness at his touch. As his closest companions and co-workers he chose an unusual group in which fishermen mixed with tax collectors, Zealots with people untrained in the Law, and women also. A new family was being created under the Father's all-embracing and surprising love. Jesus preached simply, using examples from everyday life to speak of God's love and his Kingdom; and the people recognized that he spoke with authority.

Yet he was accused of being a blasphemer, a violator of the sacred Law, a public nuisance to be eliminated. After a trial based on false testimony (cf. Mk 14:56), he was sentenced to die as a criminal on the Cross and, forsaken and humiliated, he seemed a failure. He was hastily buried in a borrowed tomb. But on the third day after this death, and despite the vigilance of the guards, the tomb was found empty! Jesus, risen from the dead, then appeared to his disciples before returning to the Father from whom he had come.

With all Christians, we believe that this particular life, in one sense so ordinary and simple, in another sense so utterly wondrous and shrouded in mystery, ushered into human history the Kingdom of God and "brought its power to bear upon every facet of human life and society beset by sin and death".⁴¹ Through his words and actions, especially in his suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled the will of his Father to reconcile all humanity to himself, after original sin had created a rupture in the relationship between the Creator and his creation. On the Cross, he took upon himself the sins of the world-past, present and future. Saint Paul reminds us that we were dead as a result of our sins and his death has brought us to life again: "God made [us] alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-14). In this way, salvation was sealed once and for all. Jesus is our Saviour in the fullest sense of the word because his words and works, especially his resurrection from the dead, have revealed him to be the Son of God, the pre-existent Word, who reigns for ever as Lord and Messiah.

The Person and Mission of the Son of God

12. The "scandal" of Christianity is the belief that the all-holy, all-powerful and all-knowing God took upon himself our human nature and endured suffering and death to win salvation for all people (cf. 1 Cor 1:23). The faith we have received declares that Jesus Christ revealed and accomplished the Father's plan of saving the world and the whole of humanity because of "who he is" and "what he does because of who he is". "Who he is" and "what he does" acquire their full meaning only when set within the mystery of the Triune God. It has been a constant concern of my Pontificate to remind the faithful of the communion of life of the Blessed Trinity and the unity of the three Persons in the plan of creation and redemption. My Encyclical Letters *Redemptor Hominis*, *Dives in Misericordia* and *Dominum et Vivificantem* are reflections on the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit respectively and on their roles in the divine plan of salvation. We cannot however isolate or separate one Person from the others, since each is revealed only within the communion of life and action of the Trinity. The saving action of Jesus has its origin in the communion of the Godhead, and opens the way for all who believe in him to enter into intimate communion with the Trinity and with one another in the Trinity.

"He who has seen me has seen the Father", Jesus claims (Jn 14:9). In Jesus Christ alone dwells the fullness of God in bodily form (cf. Col 2:9), establishing him as the unique and absolute saving Word of God (cf. Heb 1:1-4). As the Father's definitive Word, Jesus makes God and his saving will known in the fullest way possible. "No one comes to the Father but by me", Jesus says (Jn 14:6). He is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6), because, as he himself says, "the Father who dwells in me does his works" (Jn 14:10). Only in the person of Jesus does God's word of salvation appear in all its fullness, ushering in the final age (cf. Heb 1:1-2). Thus, in the first days of the Church, Peter could proclaim: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The mission of the Saviour reached its culmination in the Paschal Mystery. On the Cross, when "he stretched out his arms between heaven and earth in the everlasting sign of [the Father's] covenant",⁴² Jesus uttered his final appeal to the Father to forgive the sins of humanity: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). Jesus destroyed sin by the power of his love for his Father and for all mankind. He took upon himself the wounds inflicted on humanity by sin, and he offered release through conversion. The first fruits of this are evident in the repentant thief hanging beside him on another cross (cf. Lk 23:43). His last utterance was the cry of the faithful Son: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). In this supreme expression of love he entrusted his whole life and mission into the hands of the Father who had sent him. Thus he handed over to the Father the whole of creation and all humanity, to be accepted finally by him in compassionate love.

Everything that the Son is and has accomplished is accepted by the Father, who then offers this gift to the world in the act of raising Jesus from the dead and setting him at his right hand, where sin and death have power no more. Through Jesus' Paschal Sacrifice the Father irrevocably offers reconciliation and fullness of life to the world. This extraordinary gift could only come through the beloved Son, who alone was capable of fully responding to the Father's love, rejected by sin. In Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we come to know that God is not distant, above and apart from man, but is very near, indeed united to every person and all humanity in all of life's situations. This is the message which Christianity offers to the world, and it is a source of incomparable comfort and hope for all believers.

Jesus Christ: the Truth of Humanity 13. How does the humanity of Jesus and the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of the Father shed light on the human condition? The Incarnate Son of God not only revealed completely the Father and his plan of salvation; he also "fully reveals man to himself".⁴³ His words and actions, and above all his Death and Resurrection, reveal the depths of what it means to be human. Through Jesus, man can finally know the truth of himself. Jesus' perfectly human life, devoted wholly to the love and service of the Father and of man, reveals that the vocation of every human being is to receive love and give love in return. In Jesus we marvel at the inexhaustible capacity of the human heart to love God and man, even when this entails great suffering. Above all, it is on the Cross that Jesus breaks the power of the self-destructive resistance to love which sin inflicts upon us. On his part, the Father responds by raising Jesus as the first-born of all those predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (cf. Rom 8:29). At that moment, Jesus became once and for all both the revelation and the accomplishment of a humanity re-created and renewed according to the plan of God. In Jesus then, we discover the greatness and dignity of each person in the heart of God who created man in his own image (cf. Gen 1:26), and we find the origin of the new creation which we have become through his grace.

The Second Vatican Council taught that "by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, in a certain way united himself with each individual".⁴⁴ In this profound insight the Synod Fathers saw the ultimate source of hope and strength for the people of Asia in their struggles and uncertainties. When men and women respond with a living faith to God's offer of love, his presence brings love and peace, transforming the human heart from within. In *Redemptor Hominis* I wrote that "the redemption of the world-this tremendous mystery of love in which creation is renewed-is, at its deepest root, the fullness of justice in a human Heart-the Heart of the First-born Son-in order that it may become justice in the hearts of many human beings, predestined from eternity in the First-born Son to be children of God and called to grace, called to love".⁴⁵

Thus, the mission of Jesus not only restored communion between God and humanity; it also established a new communion between human beings alienated from one another because of sin. Beyond all divisions, Jesus makes it possible for people to live as brothers and sisters, recognizing a single Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt 23:9). In him, a

new harmony has emerged, in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, ... neither slave nor free, ... neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Jesus is our peace, "who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). In all that he said and did, Jesus was the Father's voice, hands and arms, gathering all God's children into one family of love. He prayed that his disciples might live in communion just as he is in communion with the Father (cf. Jn 17:11). Among his last words we hear him say: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:9, 12). Sent by the God of communion and being truly God and truly man, Jesus established communion between heaven and earth in his very person. It is our faith that "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross" (Col 1:19-20). Salvation can be found in the person of the Son of God made man and the mission entrusted to him alone as the Son, a mission of service and love for the life of all. Together with the Church throughout the world, the Church in Asia proclaims the truth of faith: "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5-6).

The Uniqueness and Universality of Salvation in Jesus 14. The Synod Fathers recalled that the pre-existent Word, the eternally begotten Son of God, "was already present in creation, in history and in every human yearning for good".⁴⁶ Through the Word, present to the cosmos even before the Incarnation, the world came to be (cf. Jn 1:1-4, 10; Col 1:15-20). But as the incarnate Word who lived, died and rose from the dead, Jesus Christ is now proclaimed as the fulfilment of all creation, of all history, and of all human yearning for fullness of life.⁴⁷ Risen from the dead, Jesus Christ "is present to all and to the whole of creation in a new and mysterious way".⁴⁸ In him, "authentic values of all religious and cultural traditions, such as mercy and submission to the will of God, compassion and rectitude, non-violence and righteousness, filial piety and harmony with creation find their fullness and realization".⁴⁹ From the first moment of time to its end, Jesus is the one universal Mediator. Even for those who do not explicitly profess faith in him as the Saviour, salvation comes as a grace from Jesus Christ through the communication of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the one Saviour because he alone-the Son- accomplished the Father's universal plan of salvation. As the definitive manifestation of the mystery of the Father's love for all, Jesus is indeed unique, and "it is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's centre and goal".⁵⁰

No individual, no nation, no culture is impervious to the appeal of Jesus who speaks from the very heart of the human condition. "It is his life that speaks, his humanity, his fidelity to the truth, his all-embracing love. Furthermore, his death on the Cross speaks-that is to say the inscrutable depth of his suffering and abandonment".⁵¹ Contemplating Jesus in his human nature, the peoples of Asia find their deepest questions answered, their hopes fulfilled, their dignity uplifted and their despair conquered. Jesus is the Good News for the men and women of every time and place in their search for the meaning of existence and for the truth of their own humanity.

CHAPTER III - THE HOLY SPIRIT: LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE

The Spirit of God in Creation and His tory

15. If it is true that the saving significance of Jesus can be understood only in the context of his revelation of the Trinity's plan of salvation, then it follows that the Holy Spirit is an absolutely vital part of the mystery of Jesus and of the salvation which he brings. The Synod Fathers made frequent references to the role of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation, noting that a false separation between the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit would jeopardize the truth of Jesus as the one Saviour of all.

In Christian Tradition, the Holy Spirit has always been associated with life and the giving of life. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed calls the Holy Spirit "the Lord, the Giver of Life". It is not surprising, therefore, that many interpretations of the creation account in Genesis have seen the Holy Spirit in the mighty wind that swept over the waters (cf. Gen 1:2). The Holy Spirit is present from the first moment of creation, the first manifestation of the love of the Triune God, and is always present in the world as its life-giving force.⁵² Since creation is the beginning of history, the Spirit is in a certain sense a hidden power at work in history, guiding it in the ways of truth and goodness.

The revelation of the person of the Holy Spirit, the mutual love of the Father and the Son, is proper to the New Testament. In Christian thought he is seen as the wellspring of life for all creatures. Creation is God's free communication of love, a communication which, out of nothing, brings everything into being. There is nothing created that is not filled with the ceaseless exchange of love that marks the innermost life of the Trinity, filled that is with the Holy Spirit: "the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world" (Wis 1:7). The presence of the Spirit in creation generates order, harmony and interdependence in all that exists.

Created in the image of God, human beings become the dwelling-place of the Spirit in a new way when they are raised to the dignity of divine adoption (cf. Gal 4:5). Reborn in Baptism, they experience the presence and power of the Spirit, not just as the Author of Life but as the One who purifies and saves, producing fruits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). These fruits of the Spirit are the sign that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). When

accepted in freedom, this love makes men and women visible instruments of the unseen Spirit's ceaseless activity. It is above all this new capacity to give and receive love which testifies to the interior presence and power of the Holy Spirit. As a consequence of the transformation and re-creation which he produces in people's hearts and minds, the Spirit influences human societies and cultures.⁵³ "Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history. 'The Spirit of God with marvellous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth'".⁵⁴

Following the lead of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod Fathers drew attention to the multiple and diversified action of the Holy Spirit who continually sows the seeds of truth among all peoples, their religions, cultures and philosophies.⁵⁵ This means that these religions, cultures and philosophies are capable of helping people, individually and collectively, to work against evil and to serve life and everything that is good. The forces of death isolate people, societies and religious communities from one another, and generate the suspicion and rivalry that lead to conflict. The Holy Spirit, by contrast, sustains people in their search for mutual understanding and acceptance. The Synod was therefore right to see the Spirit of God as the prime agent of the Church's dialogue with all peoples, cultures and religions.

The Holy Spirit and the Incarnation of the Word

16. Under the Spirit's guidance, the history of salvation unfolds on the stage of the world, indeed of the cosmos, according to the Father's eternal plan. That plan, initiated by the Spirit at the very beginning of creation, is revealed in the Old Testament, is brought to fulfilment through the grace of Jesus Christ, and is carried on in the new creation by the same Spirit until the Lord comes again in glory at the end of time.⁵⁶ The Incarnation of the Son of God is the supreme work of the Holy Spirit: "The conception and birth of Jesus Christ are in fact the greatest work accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the history of creation and salvation: the supreme grace-'the grace of union', source of every other grace".⁵⁷ The Incarnation is the event in which God gathers into a new and definitive union with himself not only man but the whole of creation and all of history.⁵⁸

Having been conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Spirit's power (cf. Lk 1:35; Mt 1:20), Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah and only Saviour, was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descended upon him at his baptism (cf. Mk 1:10) and led him into the wilderness to be strengthened before his public ministry (cf. Mk 1:12; Lk 4:1; Mt 4:1). In the synagogue at Nazareth he began his prophetic ministry by applying to himself Isaiah's vision of the Spirit's anointing which leads to the preaching of good news to the poor, freedom to captives and a time acceptable to the Lord (cf. Lk 4:18-19). By the power of the Spirit, Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons as a sign that the Kingdom of God had come (cf. Mt 12:28). After rising from the dead, he imparted to the disciples the Holy Spirit whom he had promised to pour out on the Church when he returned to the Father (cf. Jn 20:22-23).

All of this shows how Jesus' saving mission bears the unmistakable mark of the Spirit's presence: life, new life. Between the sending of the Son from the Father and the sending of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, there is a close and vital link.⁵⁹ The action of the Spirit in creation and human history acquires an altogether new significance in his action in the life and mission of Jesus. The "seeds of the Word" sown by the Spirit prepare the whole of creation, history and man for full maturity in Christ.⁶⁰

The Synod Fathers expressed concern about the tendency to separate the activity of the Holy Spirit from that of Jesus the Saviour. Responding to their concern, I repeat here what I wrote in *Redemptoris Missio*: "[The Spirit] is... not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit 'so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things'".⁶¹

The universal presence of the Holy Spirit therefore cannot serve as an excuse for a failure to proclaim Jesus Christ explicitly as the one and only Saviour. On the contrary, the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from universal salvation in Jesus. The presence of the Spirit in creation and history points to Jesus Christ in whom creation and history are redeemed and fulfilled. The presence and action of the Spirit both before the Incarnation and in the climactic moment of Pentecost point always to Jesus and to the salvation he brings. So too the Holy Spirit's universal presence can never be separated from his activity within the Body of Christ, the Church.⁶²

The Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ

17. The Holy Spirit preserves unfailingly the bond of communion between Jesus and his Church. Dwelling in her as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16), the Spirit guides the Church, first of all, to the fullness of truth about Jesus. Then, it is the Spirit who empowers the Church to continue Jesus' mission, in the first place by witnessing to Jesus himself, thus fulfilling what he had promised before his death and resurrection, that he would send the Spirit to his disciples so that they might bear witness to him (cf. Jn 15:26-27). The work of the Spirit in the Church is also to testify that believers are the adopted children of God destined to inherit salvation, the promised fullness of communion with the Father (cf. Rom 8:15-17). Endowing the Church with different charisms and gifts, the Spirit makes the Church grow in

communion as one body made up of many different parts (cf. 1 Cor 12:4; Eph 4:11-16). The Spirit gathers into unity all kinds of people, with their different customs, resources and talents, making the Church a sign of the communion of all humanity under the headship of Christ.⁶³ The Spirit shapes the Church as a community of witnesses who, through his power, bear testimony to Jesus the Saviour (cf. Acts 1:8). In this sense, the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of evangelization. From this the Synod Fathers could conclude that, just as the earthly ministry of Jesus was accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit, "the same Spirit has been given to the Church by the Father and the Son at Pentecost to bring to completion Jesus' mission of love and service in Asia".⁶⁴

The Father's plan for the salvation of man does not end with the death and resurrection of Jesus. By the gift of Christ's Spirit, the fruits of his saving mission are offered through the Church to all peoples of all times through the proclamation of the Gospel and loving service of the human family. As the Second Vatican Council observed, "the Church is driven by the Holy Spirit to do her part for the full realization of the plan of God, who has constituted Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world".⁶⁵ Empowered by the Spirit to accomplish Christ's salvation on earth, the Church is the seed of the Kingdom of God and she looks eagerly for its final coming. Her identity and mission are inseparable from the Kingdom of God which Jesus announced and inaugurated in all that he said and did, above all in his death and resurrection. The Spirit reminds the Church that she is not an end unto herself: in all that she is and all that she does, she exists to serve Christ and the salvation of the world. In the present economy of salvation the workings of the Holy Spirit in creation, in history and in the Church are all part of the one eternal design of the Trinity over all that is.

The Holy Spirit and the Church's Mission in Asia

18. The Spirit who moved upon Asia in the time of the patriarchs and prophets, and still more powerfully in the time of Jesus Christ and the early Church, moves now among Asian Christians, strengthening the witness of their faith among the peoples, cultures and religions of the continent. Just as the great dialogue of love between God and man was prepared for by the Spirit and accomplished on Asian soil in the mystery of Christ, so the dialogue between the Saviour and the peoples of the continent continues today by the power of the same Holy Spirit at work in the Church. In this process, Bishops, priests, religious and lay men and women all have an essential role to play, remembering the words of Jesus, which are both a promise and a mandate: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Church is convinced that deep within the people, cultures and religions of Asia there is a thirst for "living water" (cf. Jn 4:10-15), a thirst which the Spirit himself has created and which Jesus the Saviour alone can fully satisfy. The Church looks to the Holy Spirit to continue to prepare the peoples of Asia for the saving dialogue with the Saviour of all. Led by the Spirit in her mission of service and love, the Church can offer an encounter between Jesus Christ and the peoples of Asia as they search for the fullness of life. In that encounter alone is to be found the living water which springs up to eternal life, namely, the knowledge of the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (cf. Jn 17:3).

The Church well knows that she can accomplish her mission only in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Committed to being a genuine sign and instrument of the Spirit's action in the complex realities of Asia, she must discern, in all the diverse circumstances of the continent, the Spirit's call to witness to Jesus the Saviour in new and effective ways. The full truth of Jesus and the salvation he has won is always a gift, never the result of human effort. "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:16-17). Therefore the Church ceaselessly cries out, "Come, Holy Spirit! Fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love!" This is the fire which Jesus casts upon the earth. The Church in Asia shares his zeal that this fire be re-kindled now (cf. Lk 12:49). With this ardent desire, the Synod Fathers sought to discern the principal areas of mission for the Church in Asia as she crosses the threshold of the new millennium.

CHAPTER IV - JESUS THE SAVIOUR: PROCLAIMING THE GIFT

The Primacy of Proclamation

19. On the eve of the Third Millennium, the voice of the Risen Christ echoes anew in the heart of every Christian: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). Certain of the unfailing help of Jesus himself and the presence and power of his Spirit, the Apostles set out immediately after Pentecost to fulfil this command: "they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them" (Mk 16:20). What they announced can be summed up in the words of Saint Paul: "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5). Blessed with the gift of faith, the Church, after two thousand years, continues to go out to meet the peoples of the world in order to share with them the Good News of Jesus Christ. She is a community aflame with missionary zeal to make Jesus known, loved and followed.

There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord. The Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium since then, responding to a certain confusion about the true nature of the Church's mission, have repeatedly stressed the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelizing work. Thus Pope Paul VI explicitly wrote that "there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed".⁶⁶ This is what generations of Christians have done down the centuries. With understandable pride the Synod Fathers recalled that "many Christian communities in Asia have preserved their faith down the centuries against great odds and have clung to this spiritual heritage with heroic perseverance. For them to share this immense treasure is a matter of great joy and urgency".⁶⁷

At the same time the participants in the Special Assembly testified over and over again to the need for a renewed commitment to the proclamation of Jesus Christ precisely on the continent which saw the beginning of that proclamation two thousand years ago. The words of the Apostle Paul become still more pointed, given the many people on that continent who have never encountered the person of Jesus in any clear and conscious way: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:13-14). The great question now facing the Church in Asia is how to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia

20. The Church in Asia is all the more eager for the task of proclamation knowing that "through the working of the Spirit, there already exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death".⁶⁸ This insistence on proclamation is prompted not by sectarian impulse nor the spirit of proselytism nor any sense of superiority. The Church evangelizes in obedience to Christ's command, in the knowledge that every person has the right to hear the Good News of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ.⁶⁹ To bear witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia, for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute, and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development.

Deeply aware of the complexity of so many different situations in Asia, and "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15), the Church proclaims the Good News with loving respect and esteem for her listeners. Proclamation which respects the rights of consciences does not violate freedom, since faith always demands a free response on the part of the individual.⁷⁰ Respect, however, does not eliminate the need for the explicit proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness. Especially in the context of the rich array of cultures and religions in Asia it must be pointed out that "neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised are an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ".⁷¹ While visiting India in 1986, I stated clearly that "the Church's approach to other religions is one of genuine respect... This respect is twofold: respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man".⁷² Indeed, the Synod Fathers readily recognized the Spirit's action in Asian societies, cultures and religions, through which the Father prepares the hearts of Asian peoples for the fullness of life in Christ.⁷³

Yet even during the consultations before the Synod many Asian Bishops referred to difficulties in proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour. During the Assembly, the situation was described in this way: "Some of the followers of the great religions of Asia have no problem in accepting Jesus as a manifestation of the Divine or the Absolute, or as an 'enlightened one'. But it is difficult for them to see Him as the only manifestation of the Divine".⁷⁴ In fact, the effort to share the gift of faith in Jesus as the only Saviour is fraught with philosophical, cultural and theological difficulties, especially in light of the beliefs of Asia's great religions, deeply intertwined with cultural values and specific world views.

In the opinion of the Synod Fathers, the difficulty is compounded by the fact that Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia. It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus-born on Asian soil-as a Western rather than an Asian figure. It was inevitable that the proclamation of the Gospel by Western missionaries would be influenced by the cultures from which they came. The Synod Fathers recognized this as an unavoidable fact in the history of evangelization. At the same time they took advantage of the occasion "to express in a very special way their gratitude to all the missionaries, men and women, religious and lay, foreign and local, who brought the message of Jesus Christ and the gift of faith. A special word of gratitude again must be expressed to all the particular Churches which have sent and still send missionaries to Asia".⁷⁵

Evangelizers can take heart from the experience of Saint Paul who engaged in dialogue with the philosophical, cultural and religious values of his listeners (cf. Acts 14:13-17; 17:22-31). Even the Ecumenical Councils of the Church which formulated doctrines binding on the Church had to use the linguistic, philosophical and cultural resources available to them. Thus these resources become a shared possession of the whole Church, capable of expressing her Christological doctrine in an appropriate and universal way. They are part of the heritage of faith which must be appropriated and shared again and again in the encounter with the various cultures.⁷⁶ Thus the task of proclaiming Jesus in a way which

enables the peoples of Asia to identify with him, while remaining faithful both to the Church's theological doctrine and to their own Asian origins is a paramount challenge.

The presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour needs to follow a pedagogy which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery. Clearly, the initial evangelization of non-Christians and the continuing proclamation of Jesus to believers will have to be different in their approach. In initial proclamation, for example, "the presentation of Jesus Christ could come as the fulfilment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples".⁷⁷ In general, narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms are to be preferred. In fact, the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do. The ontological notions involved, which must always be presupposed and expressed in presenting Jesus, can be complemented by more relational, historical and even cosmic perspectives. The Church, the Synod Fathers noted, must be open to the new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia.⁷⁸

The Synod recommended that subsequent catechesis should follow "an evocative pedagogy, using stories, parables and symbols so characteristic of Asian methodology in teaching".⁷⁹ The ministry of Jesus himself shows clearly the value of personal contact, which requires the evangelizer to take the situation of the listener to heart, so as to offer a proclamation adapted to the listener's level of maturity, and in an appropriate form and language. In this perspective, the Synod Fathers stressed many times the need to evangelize in a way that appeals to the sensibilities of Asian peoples, and they suggested images of Jesus which would be intelligible to Asian minds and cultures and, at the same time, faithful to Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Among them were "Jesus Christ as the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One".⁸⁰ Jesus could be presented as the Incarnate Wisdom of God whose grace brings to fruition the "seeds" of divine Wisdom already present in the lives, religions and peoples of Asia.⁸¹ In the midst of so much suffering among Asian peoples, he might best be proclaimed as the Saviour "who can provide meaning to those undergoing unexplainable pain and suffering".⁸²

The faith which the Church offers as a gift to her Asian sons and daughters cannot be confined within the limits of understanding and expression of any single human culture, for it transcends these limits and indeed challenges all cultures to rise to new heights of understanding and expression. Yet at the same time the Synod Fathers were well aware of the pressing need of the local Churches in Asia to present the mystery of Christ to their peoples according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking. They pointed out that such an inculturation of the faith on their continent involves rediscovering the Asian countenance of Jesus and identifying ways in which the cultures of Asia can grasp the universal saving significance of the mystery of Jesus and his Church.⁸³ The penetrating insight into peoples and their cultures, exemplified in such men as Giovanni da Montecorvino, Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili, to mention only a few, needs to be emulated at the present time.

The Challenge of Inculturation

21. Culture is the vital space within which the human person comes face to face with the Gospel. Just as a culture is the result of the life and activity of a human group, so the persons belonging to that group are shaped to a large extent by the culture in which they live. As persons and societies change, so too does the culture change with them. As a culture is transformed, so too are persons and societies transformed by it. From this perspective, it becomes clearer why evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. The Gospel and evangelization are certainly not identical with culture; they are independent of it. Yet the Kingdom of God comes to people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements from human cultures. Thus Paul VI called the split between the Gospel and culture the drama of our time, with a profound impact upon both evangelization and culture.⁸⁴

In the process of encountering the world's different cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them. This is the obligatory path for evangelizers in presenting the Christian faith and making it part of a people's cultural heritage. Conversely, the various cultures, when refined and renewed in the light of the Gospel, can become true expressions of the one Christian faith. "Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission".⁸⁵ This engagement with cultures has always been part of the Church's pilgrimage through history. But it has a special urgency today in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situation of Asia, where Christianity is still too often seen as foreign.

It is good to remember at this point what was said repeatedly during the Synod: that the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of the inculturation of the Christian faith in Asia.⁸⁶ The same Holy Spirit who leads us into the whole truth makes possible a fruitful dialogue with the cultural and religious values of different peoples, among whom he is present in some measure, giving men and women with a sincere heart the strength to overcome evil and the deceit of the Evil One, and indeed offering everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.⁸⁷ The Spirit's presence ensures that the dialogue unfolds in truth, honesty, humility and respect.⁸⁸ "In offering to others the Good News of the Redemption, the Church strives to understand their culture. She seeks to know the minds and hearts of her hearers, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and dreams. Once she knows and

understands these various aspects of culture, then she can begin the dialogue of salvation; she can offer, respectfully but with clarity and conviction, the Good News of the Redemption to all who freely wish to listen and to respond".⁸⁹ Therefore the people of Asia who, as Asians, wish to make the Christian faith their own, can rest assured that their hopes, expectations, anxieties and sufferings are not only embraced by Jesus, but become the very point at which the gift of faith and the power of the Spirit enter the innermost core of their lives.

It is the task of the Pastors, in virtue of their charism, to guide this dialogue with discernment. Likewise, experts in sacred and secular disciplines have important roles to play in the process of inculturation. But the process must involve the entire People of God, since the life of the Church as a whole must show forth the faith which is being proclaimed and appropriated. To ensure that this is done soundly, the Synod Fathers identified certain areas for particular attention-theological reflection, liturgy, the formation of priests and religious, catechesis and spirituality.⁹⁰

Key Areas of Inculturation

22. The Synod expressed encouragement to theologians in their delicate work of developing an inculturated theology, especially in the area of Christology.⁹¹ They noted that "this theologizing is to be carried out with courage, in faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Church's Tradition, in sincere adherence to the Magisterium and with an awareness of pastoral realities".⁹² I too urge theologians to work in a spirit of union with the Pastors and the people, who-in union with one another and never separated from one another-"reflect the authentic *sensus fidei* which must never be lost sight of".⁹³ Theological work must always be guided by respect for the sensibilities of Christians, so that by a gradual growth into inculturated forms of expressing the faith people are neither confused nor scandalized. In every case inculturation must be guided by compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the faith of the universal Church, in full compliance with the Church's Tradition and with a view to strengthening people's faith.⁹⁴ The test of true inculturation is whether people become more committed to their Christian faith because they perceive it more clearly with the eyes of their own culture.

The Liturgy is the source and summit of all Christian life and mission.⁹⁵ It is a decisive means of evangelization, especially in Asia, where the followers of different religions are so drawn to worship, religious festivals and popular devotions.⁹⁶ The liturgy of the Oriental Churches has for the most part been successfully inculturated through centuries of interaction with the surrounding culture, but the more recently established Churches need to ensure that the liturgy becomes an ever greater source of nourishment for their peoples through a wise and effective use of elements drawn from the local cultures. Yet liturgical inculturation requires more than a focus upon traditional cultural values, symbols and rituals. There is also a need to take account of the shifts in consciousness and attitudes caused by the emerging secularist and consumer cultures which are affecting the Asian sense of worship and prayer. Nor can the specific needs of the poor, migrants, refugees, youth and women be overlooked in any genuine liturgical inculturation in Asia.

The national and regional Bishops' Conferences need to work more closely with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in the search for effective ways of fostering appropriate forms of worship in the Asian context.⁹⁷ Such cooperation is essential because the Sacred Liturgy expresses and celebrates the one faith professed by all and, being the heritage of the whole Church, cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church.

The Synod Fathers stressed particularly the importance of the biblical word in passing on the message of salvation to the peoples of Asia, where the transmitted word is so important in preserving and communicating religious experience.⁹⁸ It follows that an effective biblical apostolate needs to be developed in order to ensure that the sacred text may be more widely diffused and more intensively and prayerfully used among the members of the Church in Asia. The Synod Fathers urged that it be made the basis for all missionary proclamation, catechesis, preaching and styles of spirituality.⁹⁹ Efforts to translate the Bible into local languages need to be encouraged and supported. Biblical formation should be considered an important means of educating people in the faith and equipping them for the task of proclamation. Pastorally oriented courses on the Bible, with due emphasis on applying its teachings to the complex realities of Asian life, ought to be incorporated into formation programmes for the clergy, for consecrated persons and for the laity. ¹⁰⁰ The Sacred Scriptures should also be made known among the followers of other religions; the word of God has an inherent power to touch the hearts of people, for through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit reveals God's plan of salvation for the world. Moreover, the narrative styles found in many books of the Bible has an affinity with the religious texts typical of Asia. ¹⁰¹

Another key aspect of inculturation upon which the future of the process in large part depends is the formation of evangelizers. In the past, formation often followed the style, methods and programmes imported from the West, and while appreciating the service rendered by that mode of formation, the Synod Fathers recognized as a positive development the efforts made in recent times to adapt the formation of evangelizers to the cultural contexts of Asia. As well as a solid grounding in biblical and patristic studies, seminarians should acquire a detailed and firm grasp of the Church's theological and philosophical patrimony, as I urged in my Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*. ¹⁰² On the basis of this preparation, they will

then benefit from contact with Asian philosophical and religious traditions. ¹⁰³ The Synod Fathers also encouraged seminary professors and staff to seek a profound understanding of the elements of spirituality and prayer akin to the

Asian soul, and to involve themselves more deeply in the Asian peoples' search for a fuller life. 104 To this end, emphasis was placed on the need to ensure the proper formation of seminary staff. 105 The Synod also expressed concern for the formation of men and women in the consecrated life, making it clear that the spirituality and lifestyle of consecrated persons needs to be sensitive to the religious and cultural heritage of the people among whom they live and whom they serve, always presupposing the necessary discernment of what conforms to the Gospel and what does not. 106 Moreover, since the inculturation of the Gospel involves the entire People of God, the role of the laity is of paramount importance. It is they above all who are called to transform society, in collaboration with the Bishops, clergy and religious, by infusing the "mind of Christ" into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the secular world in which they live. 107 A wider inculturation of the Gospel at every level of society in Asia will depend greatly on the appropriate formation which the local Churches succeed in giving to the laity

Christian Life as Proclamation

23. The more the Christian community is rooted in the experience of God which flows from a living faith, the more credibly it will be able to proclaim to others the fulfilment of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ. This will result from faithfully listening to the word of God, from prayer and contemplation, from celebrating the mystery of Jesus in the sacraments, above all in the Eucharist, and from giving example of true communion of life and integrity of love. The heart of the particular Church must be set on the contemplation of Jesus Christ, God-made-Man, and strive constantly for a more intimate union with him whose mission she continues. Mission is contemplative action and active contemplation. Therefore, a missionary who has no deep experience of God in prayer and contemplation will have little spiritual influence or missionary success. This is an insight drawn from my own priestly ministry and, as I have written elsewhere, my contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. 108 In Asia, home to great religions where individuals and entire peoples are thirsting for the divine, the Church is called to be a praying Church, deeply spiritual even as she engages in immediate human and social concerns. All Christians need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation.

A genuinely religious person readily wins respect and a following in Asia. Prayer, fasting and various forms of asceticism are held in high regard. Renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence are considered great values by the followers of all religions. Lest prayer be divorced from human promotion, the Synod Fathers insisted that "the work of justice, charity and compassion is interrelated with a genuine life of prayer and contemplation, and indeed it is this same spirituality that will be the wellspring of all our evangelizing work". 109 Fully convinced of the importance of authentic witnesses in the evangelization of Asia, the Synod Fathers stated: "The Good News of Jesus Christ can only be proclaimed by those who are taken up and inspired by the love of the Father for his children, manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. This proclamation is a mission needing holy men and women who will make the Saviour known and loved through their lives. A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire. So, too, successful proclamation in Asia of the Good News of salvation can only take place if Bishops, clergy, those in the consecrated life and the laity are themselves on fire with the love of Christ and burning with zeal to make him known more widely, loved more deeply and followed more closely". 110 Christians who speak of Christ must embody in their lives the message that they proclaim.

In this regard, however, a particular circumstance in the Asian context demands attention. The Church realizes that the silent witness of life still remains the only way of proclaiming God's Kingdom in many places in Asia where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted. The Church consciously lives this type of witness, seeing it as the "taking up of her cross" (cf. Lk 9:23), all the while calling upon and urging governments to recognize religious freedom as a fundamental human right. The words of the Second Vatican Council are worth repeating here: "the human person has a right to religious freedom. Such freedom consists in this, that all should have such immunity from coercion by individuals, or by social groups, or by any human power, that no one should be forced to act against his conscience in religious matters, nor prevented from acting according to his conscience, whether in private or in public, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits". 111 In some Asian countries, this statement still has to be acknowledged and put into effect.

Clearly, then, the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia presents many complex aspects, both in content and in method. The Synod Fathers were keenly aware of the legitimate variety of approaches to the proclamation of Jesus, provided that the faith itself is respected in all its integrity in the process of appropriating and sharing it. The Synod noted that "evangelization today is a reality that is both rich and dynamic. It has various aspects and elements: witness, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism, insertion into the ecclesial community, the implantation of the Church, inculturation and integral human promotion. Some of these elements proceed together, while some others are successive steps or phases of the entire process of evangelization". 112 In all evangelizing work, however, it is the complete truth of Jesus Christ which must be proclaimed. Emphasizing certain aspects of the inexhaustible mystery of Jesus is both legitimate and necessary in gradually introducing Christ to a person, but this cannot be allowed to compromise the integrity of the faith. In the end, a person's acceptance of the faith must be grounded on a sure

understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, as presented by the Church in every time and place, the Lord of all who is "the same yesterday, today and for ever" (Heb 13:8).

CHAPTER V - COMMUNION AND DIALOGUE FOR MISSION

Communion and Mission Go Hand in Hand

24. In accordance with the Father's eternal design, the Church, foreshadowed from the world's beginning, prepared for in the old Covenant, instituted by Christ Jesus and made present to the world by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, "progresses on her pilgrimage amid this world's persecutions and God's consolations", 113 as she strives towards her perfection in the glory of heaven. Since God desires "that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit", 114 the Church is in the world "the visible plan of God's love for humanity, the sacrament of salvation". 115 The Church cannot therefore be understood merely as a social organization or agency of human welfare. Despite having sinful men and women in her midst, the Church must be seen as the privileged place of encounter between God and man, in which God chooses to reveal the mystery of his inner life and carry out his plan of salvation for the world.

The mystery of God's loving design is made present and active in the community of the men and women who have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, they might walk in newness of life (cf. Rom 6:4). At the heart of the mystery of the Church is the bond of communion which unites Christ the Bridegroom to all the baptized. Through this living and life-giving communion, "Christians no longer belong to themselves but are the Lord's very own". 116 United to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father, and from this communion flows the communion which Christians share with one another through Christ in the Holy Spirit. 117 The Church's first purpose then is to be the sacrament of the inner union of the human person with God, and, because people's communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of the unity of the human race. 118 In her this unity is already begun; and at the same time she is the "sign and instrument" of the full realization of the unity yet to come. 119

It is an essential demand of life in Christ that whoever enters into communion with the Lord is expected to bear fruit: "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (Jn 15:5). So true is this that the person who does not bear fruit does not remain in communion: "Each branch of mine that bears no fruit [my Father] takes away" (Jn 15:2). Communion with Jesus, which gives rise to the communion of Christians among themselves, is the indispensable condition for bearing fruit; and communion with others, which is the gift of Christ and his Spirit, is the most magnificent fruit that the branches can give. In this sense, communion and mission are inseparably connected. They interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, so that "communion represents both the source and fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion". 120

Using the theology of communion, the Second Vatican Council could describe the Church as the pilgrim People of God to whom all peoples are in some way related. 121 On this basis the Synod Fathers stressed the mysterious link between the Church and the followers of other Asian religions, noting that they are "related to [the Church] in varying degrees and ways". 122 In the midst of so many different peoples, cultures and religions "the life of the Church as communion assumes greater importance". 123 In effect, the Church's service of unity has a specific relevance in Asia where there are so many tensions, divisions and conflicts, caused by ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, economic and religious differences. It is in this context that the local Churches in Asia, in communion with the Successor of Peter, need to foster greater communion of mind and heart through close cooperation among themselves. Vital also to their evangelizing mission are their relations with other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities, and with the followers of other religions. 124 The Synod therefore renewed the commitment of the Church in Asia to the task of improving both ecumenical relations and interreligious dialogue, recognizing that building unity, working for reconciliation, forging bonds of solidarity, promoting dialogue among religions and cultures, eradicating prejudices and engendering trust among peoples are all essential to the Church's evangelizing mission on the continent. All this demands of the Catholic community a sincere examination of conscience, the courage to seek reconciliation and a renewed commitment to dialogue. At the threshold of the Third Millennium it is clear that the Church's ability to evangelize requires that she strive earnestly to serve the cause of unity in all its dimensions. Communion and mission go hand in hand.

Communion within the Church

25. Gathered around the Successor of Peter, praying and working together, the Bishops of the Special Assembly for Asia personified as it were the communion of the Church in all the rich diversity of the particular Churches over which they preside in charity. My own presence at the Synod's General Sessions was both a welcome opportunity to share the joys and hopes, the difficulties and anxieties of the Bishops, and an intense and deeply-felt exercise of my own ministry. It is in fact within the perspective of ecclesial communion that the universal authority of the Successor of Peter shines forth more clearly, not primarily as juridical power over the local Churches, but above all as a pastoral

primacy at the service of the unity of faith and life of the whole People of God. Fully aware that "the Petrine office has a unique ministry in guaranteeing and promoting the unity of the Church", 125 the Synod Fathers acknowledged the service which the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Holy See's Diplomatic Service render to the local Churches, in the spirit of communion and collegiality. 126 An essential feature of this service is the respect and sensitivity which these close co-workers of the Successor of Peter show towards the legitimate diversity of the local Churches and the variety of cultures and peoples with which they are in contact.

Each particular Church must be grounded in the witness of ecclesial communion which constitutes its very nature as Church. The Synod Fathers chose to describe the Diocese as a communion of communities gathered around the Shepherd, where clergy, consecrated persons and the laity are engaged in a "dialogue of life and heart" sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit. 127 It is primarily in the Diocese that the vision of a communion of communities can be actualized in the midst of the complex social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia. Ecclesial communion implies that each local Church should become what the Synod Fathers called a "participatory Church", a Church, that is, in which all live their proper vocation and perform their proper role. In order to build up the "communion for mission" and the "mission of communion", every member's unique charism needs to be acknowledged, developed and effectively utilized. 128 In particular there is a need to foster greater involvement of the laity and consecrated men and women in pastoral planning and decision-making, through such participatory structures as Pastoral Councils and Parish Assemblies. 129

In every Diocese, the parish remains the ordinary place where the faithful gather to grow in faith, to live the mystery of ecclesial communion and to take part in the Church's mission. Therefore, the Synod Fathers urged Pastors to devise new and effective ways of shepherding the faithful, so that everyone, especially the poor, will feel truly a part of the parish and of God's People as a whole. Pastoral planning with the lay faithful should be a normal feature of all parishes. 130 The Synod singled out young people in particular as those for whom "the parish should provide greater opportunity for fellowship and communion... by means of organized youth apostolates and youth clubs". 131 No one should be excluded a priori from sharing fully in the life and mission of the parish because of their social, economic, political, cultural or educational background. Just as each follower of Christ has a gift to offer the community, so the community should show a willingness to receive and benefit from the gift of each one.

In this context, and drawing on their pastoral experience, the Synod Fathers underlined the value of basic ecclesial communities as an effective way of promoting communion and participation in parishes and Dioceses, and as a genuine force for evangelization. 132 These small groups help the faithful to live as believing, praying and loving communities like the early Christians (cf. Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35). They aim to help their members to live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service, and are therefore a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a civilization of love. With the Synod, I encourage the Church in Asia, where possible, to consider these basic communities as a positive feature of the Church's evangelizing activity. At the same time they will only be truly effective if—as Pope Paul VI wrote—they live in union with the particular and the universal Church, in heartfelt communion with the Church's Pastors and the Magisterium, with a commitment to missionary outreach and without yielding to isolationism or ideological exploitation. 133 The presence of these small communities does not do away with the established institutions and structures, which remain necessary for the Church to fulfil her mission.

The Synod also recognized the role of renewal movements in building communion, in providing opportunities for a more intimate experience of God through faith and the sacraments, and in fostering conversion of life. 134 It is the responsibility of Pastors to guide, accompany and encourage these groups so that they may be well integrated into the life and mission of the parish and Diocese. Those involved in associations and movements should offer their support to the local Church and not present themselves as alternatives to Diocesan structures and parish life. Communion grows stronger when the local leaders of these movements work together with the Pastors in a spirit of charity for the good of all (cf. 1 Cor 1:13).

Solidarity among the Churches

26. This communion *ad intra* contributes to solidarity among the particular Churches themselves. Attention to local needs is legitimate and indispensable, but communion requires that the particular Churches remain open to one another and collaborate with one another, so that in their diversity they may preserve and clearly manifest the bond of communion with the universal Church. Communion calls for mutual understanding and a coordinated approach to mission, without prejudice to the autonomy and rights of the Churches according to their respective theological, liturgical and spiritual traditions. History however shows how divisions have often wounded the communion of the Churches in Asia. Down the centuries, relations between particular Churches of different ecclesiastical jurisdictions, liturgical traditions and missionary styles have sometimes been tense and difficult. The Bishops present at the Synod acknowledged that even today within and among the particular Churches in Asia there are sometimes unfortunate divisions, often connected with ritual, linguistic, ethnic, caste and ideological differences. Some wounds have been partially healed, but there is not yet full healing. Recognizing that wherever communion is weakened the Church's witness and missionary work suffer, the Fathers proposed concrete steps to strengthen relations between the particular Churches in Asia. As well as the necessary spiritual expressions of support and encouragement, they suggested a more

equitable distribution of priests, more effective financial solidarity, cultural and theological exchanges, and increased opportunities for partnership between Dioceses. 135

Regional and continental associations of Bishops, notably the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences have helped to foster union among the local Churches and have provided venues for cooperation in resolving pastoral problems. Similarly, there are many centres of theology, spirituality and pastoral activity across Asia which foster communion and practical cooperation. 136 It must be the concern of all to see these promising initiatives develop further for the good of both the Church and society in Asia.

The Catholic Eastern Churches

27. The situation of the Catholic Eastern Churches, principally of the Middle East and India, merits special attention. From Apostolic times they have been the custodians of a precious spiritual, liturgical and theological heritage. Their traditions and rites, born of a deep inculturation of the faith in the soil of many Asian countries, deserve the greatest respect. With the Synod Fathers, I call upon everyone to recognize the legitimate customs and the legitimate freedom of these Churches in disciplinary and liturgical matters, as stipulated by the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. 137 Following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, there is an urgent need to overcome the fears and misunderstandings which appear at times between the Catholic Eastern Churches and the Latin Church, and among those Churches themselves, especially with regard to the pastoral care of their people, also outside their own territories. 138 As children of the one Church, reborn into the newness of life in Christ, believers are called to undertake all things in a spirit of common purpose, trust and unfailing charity. Conflicts must not be allowed to create division, but must instead be handled in a spirit of truth and respect, since no good can come except from love. 139

These venerable Churches are directly involved in ecumenical dialogue with their sister Orthodox Churches, and the Synod Fathers urged them to pursue this path. 140 They have also had valuable experiences in interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam. This can be helpful to other Churches in Asia and elsewhere. It is clear that the Catholic Eastern Churches possess a great wealth of tradition and experience which can greatly benefit the whole Church.

Sharing Hopes and Sufferings

28. The Synod Fathers were also aware of the need for effective communion and cooperation with the local Churches present in the ex-Soviet territories of Asia, which are rebuilding in the trying circumstances inherited from a difficult period of history. The Church accompanies them in prayer, sharing their sufferings and their new-found hopes. I encourage the whole Church to lend moral, spiritual and material support, and much needed ordained and non-ordained personnel to help these communities in the task of sharing with the peoples of these lands the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. 141

In many parts of Asia, our brothers and sisters continue to live their faith in the midst of restrictions or even the total denial of freedom. For these suffering members of the Church, the Synod Fathers expressed special concern and solicitude. With the Bishops of Asia, I urge our brothers and sisters of these Churches in difficult circumstances to join their sufferings to those of the crucified Lord, for we and they know that the Cross alone, when borne in faith and love, is the path to resurrection and new life for humanity. I encourage the various national Episcopal Conferences in Asia to establish an office to help these Churches; and I pledge the Holy See's continued closeness to and concern for all those who are suffering persecution for their faith in Christ. 142 I appeal to governments and the leaders of nations to adopt and implement policies that guarantee religious freedom for all their citizens.

On many occasions the Synod Fathers turned their thoughts to the Catholic Church in Mainland China and prayed that the day may soon come when our beloved Chinese brothers and sisters will be completely free to practise their faith in full communion with the See of Peter and the universal Church. To you, dear Chinese brothers and sisters, I make this fervent exhortation: never allow hardship and sorrow to diminish your devotion to Christ and your commitment to your great nation. 143 The Synod also expressed a cordial sense of solidarity with the Catholic Church in Korea, and supported "the efforts of Catholics to give assistance to the people of North Korea who are deprived of the minimal means of survival, and to bring reconciliation among two countries of one people, one language and one cultural heritage". 144

Likewise, the Synod's thoughts frequently returned to the Church in Jerusalem, which has a special place in the hearts of all Christians. Indeed, the words of the Prophet Isaiah find an echo in the hearts of millions of believers throughout the world, for whom Jerusalem occupies a unique and cherished position: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her... that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory" (66:10-11). Jerusalem, the city of reconciliation of men with God and among themselves, has so often been a place of conflict and division. The Synod Fathers called upon the particular Churches to stand in solidarity with the Church in Jerusalem by sharing her sorrows, by praying for her and cooperating with her in serving peace, justice and reconciliation between the two peoples and the three religions present in the Holy City. 145 I renew the appeal which I have often made to political and religious leaders and to all people of good will to search for ways to ensure the peace and integrity of Jerusalem. As I have already written, it is my own fervent wish to go there on a religious pilgrimage, like my predecessor Pope

Paul VI, to pray in the Holy City where Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again and to visit the place from which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles went forth to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. 146

A Mission of Dialogue

29. The common theme of the various "continental" Synods which have helped to prepare the Church for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 is that of the new evangelization. A new era of proclamation of the Gospel is essential not only because, after two millennia, a major part of the human family still does not acknowledge Christ, but also because the situation in which the Church and the world find themselves at the threshold of the new millennium is particularly challenging for religious belief and the moral truths which spring from it. There is a tendency almost everywhere to build progress and prosperity without reference to God, and to reduce the religious dimension of the human person to the private sphere. Society, separated from the most basic truth about man, namely his relationship to the Creator and to the redemption brought about by Christ in the Holy Spirit, can only stray further and further from the true sources of life, love and happiness. This violent century which is fast coming to a close bears terrifying witness to what can happen when truth and goodness are abandoned in favour of the lust for power and self-aggrandizement. The new evangelization, as a call to conversion, grace and wisdom, is the only genuine hope for a better world and a brighter future. The question is not whether the Church has something essential to say to the men and women of our time, but how she can say it clearly and convincingly!

At the time of the Second Vatican Council, my predecessor Pope Paul VI declared, in his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, that the question of the relationship between the Church and the modern world was one of the most important concerns of our time. He wrote that "its existence and its urgency are such as to create a burden on our soul, a stimulus, a vocation". 147 Since the Council the Church has consistently shown that she wants to pursue that relationship in a spirit of dialogue. The desire for dialogue, however, is not simply a strategy for peaceful coexistence among peoples; it is an essential part of the Church's mission because it has its origin in the Father's loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church can accomplish her mission only in a way that corresponds to the way in which God acted in Jesus Christ: he became man, shared our human life and spoke in a human language to communicate his saving message. The dialogue which the Church proposes is grounded in the logic of the Incarnation. Therefore, nothing but fervent and unselfish solidarity prompts the Church's dialogue with the men and women of Asia who seek the truth in love.

As the sacrament of the unity of all mankind, the Church cannot but enter into dialogue with all peoples, in every time and place. Responding to the mission she has received, she ventures forth to meet the peoples of the world, conscious of being a "little flock" within the vast throng of humanity (cf. Lk 12:32), but also of being leaven in the dough of the world (cf. Mt 13:33). Her efforts to engage in dialogue are directed in the first place to those who share her belief in Jesus Christ the Lord and Saviour. It extends beyond the Christian world to the followers of every other religious tradition, on the basis of the religious yearnings found in every human heart. Ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue constitute a veritable vocation for the Church.

Ecumenical Dialogue

30. Ecumenical dialogue is a challenge and a call to conversion for the whole Church, especially for the Church in Asia where people expect from Christians a clearer sign of unity. For all peoples to come together in the grace of God, communion needs to be restored among those who in faith have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus himself prayed and does not cease to call for the visible unity of his disciples, so that the world may believe that the Father has sent him (cf. Jn 17:21). 148 But the Lord's will that his Church be one awaits a complete and courageous response from his disciples.

In Asia, precisely where the number of Christians is proportionately small, division makes missionary work still more difficult. The Synod Fathers acknowledged that "the scandal of a divided Christianity is a great obstacle for evangelization in Asia". 149 In fact, the division among Christians is seen as a counter-witness to Jesus Christ by many in Asia who are searching for harmony and unity through their own religions and cultures. Therefore the Catholic Church in Asia feels especially impelled to work for unity with other Christians, realizing that the search for full communion demands from everyone charity, discernment, courage and hope. "In order to be authentic and bear fruit, ecumenism requires certain fundamental dispositions on the part of the Catholic faithful: in the first place, charity that shows itself in goodness and a lively desire to cooperate wherever possible with the faithful of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities; secondly, fidelity towards the Catholic Church, without however ignoring or denying the shortcomings manifested by some of her members; thirdly, a spirit of discernment in order to appreciate all that is good and worthy of praise. Finally, a sincere desire for purification and renewal is also needed". 150

While recognizing the difficulties still existing in the relationships between Christians, which involve not only prejudices inherited from the past but also judgments rooted in profound convictions which involve conscience, 151 the Synod Fathers also pointed to signs of improved relations among some Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities in Asia. Catholic and Orthodox Christians, for example, often recognize a cultural unity with one another, a sense of

sharing important elements of a common ecclesial tradition. This forms a solid basis for a continuing fruitful ecumenical dialogue into the next millennium, which, we must hope and pray, will ultimately bring an end to the divisions of the millennium that is now coming to a close.

On the practical level, the Synod proposed that the national Episcopal Conferences in Asia invite other Christian Churches to join in a process of prayer and consultation in order to explore the possibilities of new ecumenical structures and associations to promote Christian unity. The Synod's suggestion that the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be celebrated more fruitfully is also helpful. Bishops are encouraged to set up and oversee ecumenical centres of prayer and dialogue; and adequate formation for ecumenical dialogue needs to be included in the curriculum of seminaries, houses of formation and educational institutions.

Interreligious Dialogue

31. In my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* I indicated that the advent of a new millennium offers a great opportunity for interreligious dialogue and for meetings with the leaders of the great world religions. 152 Contact, dialogue and cooperation with the followers of other religions is a task which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the whole Church as a duty and a challenge. The principles of this search for a positive relationship with other religious traditions are set out in the Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, promulgated on 28 October 1965, the *Magna Carta* of interreligious dialogue for our times. From the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission *ad gentes*. 153 Christians bring to interreligious dialogue the firm belief that the fullness of salvation comes from Christ alone and that the Church community to which they belong is the ordinary means of salvation. 154 Here I repeat what I wrote to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences: "Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without failing Jesus Christ who is 'the way and the truth and the life'... The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people". 155

In the process of dialogue, as I have already written in my Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, "there must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings". 156 Only those with a mature and convinced Christian faith are qualified to engage in genuine interreligious dialogue. "Only Christians who are deeply immersed in the mystery of Christ and who are happy in their faith community can without undue risk and with hope of positive fruit engage in interreligious dialogue". 157 It is therefore important for the Church in Asia to provide suitable models of interreligious dialogue-evangelization in dialogue and dialogue for evangelization-and suitable training for those involved.

Having stressed the need in interreligious dialogue for firm faith in Christ, the Synod Fathers went on to speak of the need for a dialogue of life and heart. The followers of Christ must have the gentle and humble heart of their Master, never proud, never condescending, as they meet their partners in dialogue (cf. Mt 11:29). "Interreligious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences. For all this, love of others is indispensable. This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment". 158

To guide those engaged in the process, the Synod suggested that a directory on interreligious dialogue be drawn up. 159 As the Church explores new ways of encountering other religions, I mention some forms of dialogue already taking place with good results, including scholarly exchanges between experts in the various religious traditions or representatives of those traditions, common action for integral human development and the defence of human and religious values. 160 I repeat how important it is to revitalize prayer and contemplation in the process of dialogue. Men and women in the consecrated life can contribute very significantly to interreligious dialogue by witnessing to the vitality of the great Christian traditions of asceticism and mysticism. 161

The memorable meeting held in Assisi, the city of Saint Francis, on 27 October 1986, between the Catholic Church and representatives of the other world religions shows that religious men and women, without abandoning their own traditions, can still commit themselves to praying and working for peace and the good of humanity. 162 The Church must continue to strive to preserve and foster at all levels this spirit of encounter and cooperation between religions.

Communion and dialogue are two essential aspects of the Church's mission, which have their infinitely transcendent exemplar in the mystery of the Trinity, from whom all mission comes and to whom it must be directed. One of the great "birthday" gifts which the members of the Church, and especially her Pastors, can offer the Lord of History on the two thousandth anniversary of his Incarnation is a strengthening of the spirit of unity and communion at every level of ecclesial life, a renewed "holy pride" in the Church's continuing fidelity to what has been handed down, and a new confidence in the unchanging grace and mission which sends her out among the peoples of the world to witness to God's saving love and mercy. Only if the People of God recognize the gift that is theirs in Christ will they be able to communicate that gift to others through proclamation and dialogue.

CHAPTER VI - THE SERVICE OF HUMAN PROMOTION

The Social Doctrine of the Church

32. In the service of the human family, the Church reaches out to all men and women without distinction, striving to build with them a civilization of love, founded upon the universal values of peace, justice, solidarity and freedom, which find their fulfilment in Christ. As the Second Vatican Council said so memorably: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts". 163 The Church in Asia then, with its multitude of poor and oppressed people, is called to live a communion of life which shows itself particularly in loving service to the poor and defenceless.

If in recent times the Church's Magisterium has insisted more and more upon the need to promote the authentic and integral development of the human person, 164 this is in response to the real situation of the world's peoples, as well as to an increased consciousness that not just the actions of individuals but also structures of social, political and economic life are often inimical to human well-being. The imbalances entrenched in the increasing gap between those who benefit from the world's growing capacity to produce wealth and those who are left at the margin of progress call for a radical change of both mentality and structures in favour of the human person. The great moral challenge facing nations and the international community in relation to development is to have the courage of a new solidarity, capable of taking imaginative and effective steps to overcome both dehumanizing underdevelopment and the "overdevelopment" which tends to reduce the person to an economic unit in an ever more oppressive consumer network. In seeking to bring about this change, "the Church does not have technical solutions to offer", but "offers her first contribution to the solution of the urgent problem of development when she proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation". 165 After all, human development is never a merely technical or economic question; it is fundamentally a human and moral question.

The social doctrine of the Church, which proposes a set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgement and directives for action, 166 is addressed in the first place to the members of the Church. It is essential that the faithful engaged in human promotion should have a firm grasp of this precious body of teaching and make it an integral part of their evangelizing mission. The Synod Fathers therefore stressed the importance of offering the faithful in all educational activities, and especially in seminaries and houses of formation- a solid training in the social doctrine of the Church. 167 Christian leaders in the Church and society, and especially lay men and women with responsibilities in public life, need to be well formed in this teaching so that they can inspire and vivify civil society and its structures with the leaven of the Gospel. 168 The social doctrine of the Church will not only alert these Christian leaders to their duty, but will also give them guidelines for action in favour of human development, and will free them from false notions of the human person and human activity.

The Dignity of the Human Person

33. Human beings, not wealth or technology, are the prime agents and destination of development. Therefore, the kind of development that the Church promotes reaches far beyond questions of economy and technology. It begins and ends with the integrity of the human person created in the image of God and endowed with a God-given dignity and inalienable human rights. The various international declarations on human rights and the many initiatives which these have inspired are a sign of growing attention on a worldwide level to the dignity of the human person. Unfortunately, these declarations are often violated in practice. Fifty years after the solemn proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, many people are still subjected to the most degrading forms of exploitation and manipulation, which make them veritable slaves to those who are more powerful, to an ideology, economic power, oppressive political systems, scientific technocracy or the intrusiveness of the mass media. 169

The Synod Fathers were well aware of the persistent violations of human rights in many parts of the world, and particularly in Asia, where "teeming millions are suffering from discrimination, exploitation, poverty and marginalization". 170 They expressed the need for all God's people in Asia to come to a clear awareness of the inescapable and unrenounceable challenge involved in the defence of human rights and the promotion of justice and peace.

Preferential Love of the Poor

34. In seeking to promote human dignity, the Church shows a preferential love of the poor and the voiceless, because the Lord has identified himself with them in a special way (cf. Mt 25:40). This love excludes no one, but simply embodies a priority of service to which the whole Christian tradition bears witness. "This love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. It is impossible not to

take account of the existence of these realities. To ignore them would mean becoming like the 'rich man' who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate (cf. Lk 16:19-31)". 171 This is especially so with regard to Asia, a continent of plentiful resources and great civilizations, but where some of the poorest nations on earth are to be found, and where more than half the population suffers deprivation, poverty and exploitation. 172 The poor of Asia and of the world will always find their best reason for hope in the Gospel command to love one another as Christ has loved us (cf. Jn 13:34); and the Church in Asia cannot but strive earnestly to fulfil that command towards the poor, in word and in deed.

Solidarity with the poor becomes more credible if Christians themselves live simply, following the example of Jesus. Simplicity of life, deep faith and unfeigned love for all, especially the poor and the outcast, are luminous signs of the Gospel in action. The Synod Fathers called on Asian Catholics to adopt a lifestyle consonant with the teachings of the Gospel, so that they may better serve the Church's mission and so that the Church herself may become a Church of the poor and for the poor. 173

In her love for the poor of Asia, the Church concerns herself especially with migrants, with indigenous and tribal peoples, with women and with children, since they are often the victims of the worst forms of exploitation. In addition, untold numbers of people suffer discrimination because of their culture, colour, race, caste, economic status, or because of their way of thinking. They include those who are victimized on the basis of their conversion to Christianity. 174 I join the Synod Fathers in appealing to all nations to recognize the right to freedom of conscience and religion and the other basic human rights. 175

At the present time Asia is experiencing an unprecedented flow of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and overseas workers. In the countries to which they come, these people often find themselves friendless, culturally estranged, linguistically disadvantaged and economically vulnerable. They need support and care in order to preserve their human dignity and their cultural and religious heritage. 176 Despite limited resources, the Church in Asia generously seeks to be a welcoming home to the weary and heavy-burdened, knowing that in the Heart of Jesus, where no one is a stranger, they will find rest (cf. Mt 11:28-29).

In almost every Asian country, there are large aboriginal populations, some of them on the lowest economic rung. The Synod repeatedly noted that indigenous or tribal people often feel drawn to the person of Jesus Christ and to the Church as a community of love and service. 177 Herein lies an immense field of action in education and health care, as well as in promoting social participation. The Catholic community needs to intensify pastoral work among these people, attending to their concerns and to the questions of justice which affect their lives. This implies an attitude of deep respect for their traditional religion and its values; it implies as well the need to help them to help themselves, so that they can work to improve their situation and become the evangelizers of their own culture and society. 178

No one can remain indifferent to the suffering of the countless children in Asia who fall victim to intolerable exploitation and violence, not just as the result of the evil perpetrated by individuals but often as a direct consequence of corrupt social structures. The Synod Fathers identified child labour, paedophilia and the drug culture as the social evils which affect children most directly, and they saw clearly that these ills are compounded by others like poverty and ill-conceived programmes of national development. 179 The Church must do all she can to overcome such evils, to act on behalf of those most exploited, and to seek to guide the little ones to the love of Jesus, for to such belongs the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 18:16). 180

The Synod voiced special concern for women, whose situation remains a serious problem in Asia, where discrimination and violence against women is often found in the home, in the workplace and even within the legal system. Illiteracy is most widespread among women, and many are treated simply as commodities in prostitution, tourism and the entertainment industry. 181 In their fight against all forms of injustice and discrimination, women should find an ally in the Christian community, and for this reason the Synod proposed that where possible the local Churches in Asia should promote human rights activities on behalf of women. The aim must be to bring about a change of attitude through a proper understanding of the role of men and women in the family, in society and in the Church, through greater awareness of the original complementarity between men and women, and through clearer appreciation of the importance of the feminine dimension in all things human. The contributions of women have all too often been undervalued or ignored, and this has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity. The Church in Asia would more visibly and effectively uphold women's dignity and freedom by encouraging their role in the Church's life, including her intellectual life, and by opening to them ever greater opportunities to be present and active in the Church's mission of love and service. 182

The Gospel of Life

35. The service of human development begins with the service of life itself. Life is a great gift entrusted to us by God: he entrusts it to us as a project and a responsibility. We are therefore guardians of life, not its proprietors. We receive the gift freely and, in gratitude, we must never cease to respect and defend it, from its beginning to its natural conclusion. From the moment of conception, human life involves God's creative action and remains forever in a special bond with the Creator, who is life's source and its sole end. There is no true progress, no true civil society, no true human promotion without respect for human life, especially the life of those who have no voice of their own with

which to defend themselves. The life of every person, whether of the child in the womb, or of someone who is sick, handicapped or elderly, is a gift for all.

The Synod Fathers wholeheartedly reaffirmed the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Magisterium, including my Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, on the sanctity of human life. I join them here in calling upon the faithful in their countries, where the demographic question is often used as an argument for the need to introduce abortion and artificial population control programmes, to resist "the culture of death".¹⁸³ They can show their fidelity to God and their commitment to true human promotion by supporting and participating in programmes which defend the life of those who are powerless to defend themselves.

Health Care

36. Following in the steps of Jesus Christ who had compassion for all and cured "all kinds of disease and illness" (Mt 9:35), the Church in Asia is committed to becoming still more involved in the care of the sick, since this is a vital part of her mission of offering the saving grace of Christ to the whole person. Like the Good Samaritan of the parable (cf. Lk 10:29-37), the Church wants to care for the sick and disabled in concrete ways,¹⁸⁴ especially where people are deprived of elementary medical care as a result of poverty and marginalization.

On numerous occasions during my visits to the Church in different parts of the world I have been deeply moved by the extraordinary Christian witness borne by religious and consecrated persons, doctors, nurses and other health care workers, especially those working with the handicapped, or in the field of terminal care, or contending with the spread of new diseases such as AIDS. Increasingly, Christian health care workers are called to be generous and self-giving in tending the victims of drug addiction and AIDS, who are often despised and abandoned by society.¹⁸⁵ Many Catholic medical institutions in Asia are facing pressures from public health care policies not based on Christian principles, and many of them are burdened by ever increasing financial difficulties. In spite of these problems, it is the exemplary self-giving love and dedicated professionalism of those involved that make these facilities an admirable and appreciated service to the community, and a particularly visible and effective sign of God's unfailing love. These health care workers must be encouraged and supported in the good that they do. Their continuing commitment and effectiveness is the best way to ensure that Christian values and ethics enter deeply into the health care systems of the continent and transform them from within.¹⁸⁶

Education

37. Throughout Asia, the Church's involvement in education is extensive and highly visible, and is therefore a key element of her presence among the peoples of the continent. In many countries, Catholic schools play an important role in evangelization, inculturating the faith, teaching the ways of openness and respect, and fostering interreligious understanding. The Church's schools often provide the only educational opportunities for girls, tribal minorities, the rural poor and less privileged children. The Synod Fathers were convinced of the need to extend and develop the apostolate of education in Asia, with an eye in particular to the disadvantaged, so that all may be helped to take their rightful place as full citizens in society.¹⁸⁷ As the Synod Fathers noted, this will mean that the system of Catholic education must become still more clearly directed towards human promotion, providing an environment where students receive not only the formal elements of schooling but, more broadly, an integral human formation based upon the teachings of Christ.¹⁸⁸ Catholic schools should continue to be places where the faith can be freely proposed and received. In the same way, Catholic universities, in addition to pursuing the academic excellence for which they are already well known, must retain a clear Christian identity in order to be a Christian leaven in Asian societies.¹⁸⁹

Peacemaking

38. At the end of the twentieth century the world is still threatened by forces which generate conflicts and wars, and Asia is certainly not exempt from these. Among these forces are intolerance and marginalization of all kinds—social, cultural, political, and even religious. Day by day fresh violence is inflicted upon individuals and entire peoples, and the culture of death takes hold in the unjustifiable recourse to violence to resolve tensions. Given the appalling situation of conflict in so many parts of the world, the Church is called to be deeply involved in international and interreligious efforts to bring about peace, justice and reconciliation. She continues to insist on the negotiated and non-military resolution of conflicts, and she looks to the day when nations will abandon war as a way of vindicating claims or a means of resolving differences. She is convinced that war creates more problems than it ever solves, that dialogue is the only just and noble path to agreement and reconciliation, and that the patient and wise art of peacemaking is especially blessed by God.

Especially troubling in Asia is the continual race to acquire weapons of mass destruction, an immoral and wasteful expenditure in national budgets, which in some cases cannot even satisfy people's basic needs. The Synod Fathers also spoke of the vast number of landmines in Asia, which have maimed or killed hundreds of thousands of innocent people, while despoiling fertile land which could otherwise be used for food production.¹⁹⁰ It is the responsibility of all, especially of those who govern nations, to work more energetically for disarmament. The Synod called for a stop to the manufacture, sale and use of nuclear, chemical and biological arms and urged those who have set landmines to assist in

the work of rehabilitation and restoration. 191 Above all the Synod Fathers prayed to God, who knows the depths of every human conscience, to put sentiments of peace in the hearts of those tempted to follow the ways of violence so that the biblical vision will become a reality: "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is 2:4).

The Synod heard many testimonies concerning the sufferings of the people of Iraq, and about the fact that many Iraqis, especially children, have died because of the lack of medicines and other basic commodities deriving from the continuing embargo. With the Synod Fathers, I wish to express once again my solidarity with the Iraqi people, and I am particularly close in prayer and hope to the sons and daughters of the Church in that country. The Synod prayed that God will enlighten the minds and hearts of all those who bear responsibility for bringing about a just solution to the crisis, in order that an already sorely tried people may be spared further suffering and sorrow. 192

Globalization

39. Considering the question of human promotion in Asia, the Synod Fathers recognized the importance of the process of economic globalization. While acknowledging its many positive effects, they pointed out that globalization has also worked to the detriment of the poor, 193 tending to push poorer countries to the margin of international economic and political relations. Many Asian nations are unable to hold their own in a global market economy. And perhaps more significantly, there is also the aspect of a cultural globalization, made possible by the modern communications media, which is quickly drawing Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic. The result is an eroding of traditional family and social values which until now had sustained peoples and societies. All of this makes it clear that the ethical and moral aspects of globalization need to be more directly addressed by the leaders of nations and by organizations concerned with human promotion.

The Church insists upon the need for "globalization without marginalization". 194 With the Synod Fathers, I call upon the particular Churches everywhere, and especially those in the Western countries, to work to ensure that the Church's social doctrine has its due impact upon the formulation of ethical and juridical norms for regulating the world's free markets and for the means of social communication. Catholic leaders and professionals should urge governments and financial and trade institutions to recognize and respect such norms. 195

Foreign Debt

40. Furthermore, in her search for justice in a world marred by social and economic inequalities, the Church cannot ignore the heavy burden of debt incurred by many developing nations in Asia, with its consequent impact upon their present and future. In many cases, these countries are forced to cut down spending on the necessities of life such as food, health, housing and education, in order to service their debts to international monetary agencies and banks. This means that many people are trapped in living conditions which are an affront to human dignity. While aware of the technical complexities of this matter, the Synod recognized that this issue tests the capacity of peoples, societies and governments to value the human person and the lives of millions of human beings more highly than financial and material gain. 196

The approach of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 is an opportune time for the Episcopal Conferences of the world, especially of the wealthier nations, to encourage international monetary agencies and banks to explore ways of easing the international debt situation. Among the more obvious are a renegotiation of debts, with either substantial reduction or outright cancellation, as also business ventures and investments to assist the economies of the poorer countries. 197 At the same time the Synod Fathers also addressed the debtor countries. They emphasized the need to develop a sense of national responsibility, reminding them of the importance of sound economic planning, transparency and good management, and invited them to wage a resolute campaign against corruption. 198 They called upon the Christians of Asia to condemn all forms of corruption and the misappropriation of public funds by those holding political power. 199 The citizens of debtor countries have too often been victims of waste and inefficiency at home, before falling victim to the international debt crisis.

The Environment

41. When concern for economic and technological progress is not accompanied by concern for the balance of the ecosystem, our earth is inevitably exposed to serious environmental damage, with consequent harm to human beings. Blatant disrespect for the environment will continue as long as the earth and its potential are seen merely as objects of immediate use and consumption, to be manipulated by an unbridled desire for profit. 200 It is the duty of Christians and of all who look to God as the Creator to protect the environment by restoring a sense of reverence for the whole of God's creation. It is the Creator's will that man should treat nature not as a ruthless exploiter but as an intelligent and responsible administrator. 201 The Synod Fathers pleaded in a special way for greater responsibility on the part of the leaders of nations, legislators, business people and all who are directly involved in the management of the earth's resources. 202 They underlined the need to educate people, especially the young, in environmental responsibility,

training them in the stewardship over creation which God has entrusted to humanity. The protection of the environment is not only a technical question; it is also and above all an ethical issue. All have a moral duty to care for the environment, not only for their own good but also for the good of future generations.

In conclusion, it is worth remembering that in calling on Christians to work and sacrifice themselves in the service of human development the Synod Fathers were drawing upon some of the core insights of biblical and ecclesial tradition. Ancient Israel insisted passionately upon the unbreakable bond between worship of God and care for the weak, represented typically in Scripture as "the widow, the stranger and orphan" (cf. Ex 22:21-22; Dt 10:18; 27:19), who in the societies of the time were most vulnerable to the threat of injustice. Time and again in the Prophets we hear the cry for justice, for the right ordering of human society, without which there can be no true worship of God (cf. Is 1:10-17; Am 5:21-24). In the appeal of the Synod Fathers we thus hear an echo of the Prophets filled with the Spirit of God, who wants "mercy not sacrifice" (Hos 6:6). Jesus made these words his own (cf. Mt 9:13), and the same is true of the Saints in every time and place. Consider the words of Saint John Chrysostom: "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Then do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him silken honours in the temple only then to neglect him when he goes cold and naked outside. He who said; 'This is my body' is the One who also said, 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food'... What good is it if the Eucharistic Table groans under the weight of golden chalices, when Christ is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what remains you may adorn the altar as well!". 203 In the Synod's appeal for human development and for justice in human affairs, we hear a voice which is both old and new. It is old because it rises from the depths of our Christian tradition, which looks to that profound harmony which the Creator intends; it is new because it speaks to the immediate situation of countless people in Asia today.

CHAPTER VII - WITNESSES TO THE GOSPEL

A Witnessing Church

42. The Second Vatican Council taught clearly that the entire Church is missionary, and that the work of evangelization is the duty of the whole People of God. 204 Since the whole People of God is sent forth to preach the Gospel, evangelization is never an individual and isolated act; it is always an ecclesial task which has to be carried out in communion with the whole community of faith. The mission is one and indivisible, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it there are different responsibilities and different kinds of activity. 205 In every case it is clear that there can be no true proclamation of the Gospel unless Christians also offer the witness of lives in harmony with the message they preach: "The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living... Everyone in the Church, striving to imitate the Divine Master, can and must bear this kind of witness; in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary". 206 Genuine Christian witness is needed especially now, because "people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories". 207 This is certainly true in the Asian context, where people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument. The experience of faith and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit thus becomes the basis of all missionary work, in towns or villages, in schools or hospitals, among the handicapped, migrants or tribal peoples, or in the pursuit of justice and human rights. Every situation is an opportunity for Christians to show forth the power which the truth of Christ has become in their lives. Therefore, inspired by the many missionaries who bore heroic witness to God's love among the peoples of the continent in the past, the Church in Asia strives now to witness with no less zeal to Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Christian mission demands no less.

Conscious of the Church's essentially missionary character and looking to a new outpouring of the dynamism of the Holy Spirit as the Church enters the new millennium, the Synod Fathers asked that this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation should offer some directives and guidelines to those working in the vast field of evangelization in Asia.

Pastors

43. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the Church to accomplish the mission entrusted to her by Christ. Before sending out his disciples as his witnesses, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20:22), who worked through them and stirred the hearts of those who heard them (cf. Acts 2:37). The same is true of those whom he sends out now. At one level, all the baptized, by the very grace of the Sacrament, are deputed to take part in continuing the saving mission of Christ, and they are capable of this task precisely because God's love has been poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to them (Rom 5:5). But on another level this common mission is accomplished through a variety of specific functions and charisms in the Church. The principal responsibility for the Church's mission has been entrusted by Christ to the Apostles and their successors. By virtue of episcopal ordination and hierarchical communion with the Head of the Episcopal College, Bishops receive the mandate and authority to teach, govern and sanctify the People of God. By the will of Christ himself, within the College of Bishops, the Successor of Peter—the rock upon which the Church is built (cf. Mt 16:18)—exercises a special ministry of unity. Bishops therefore are to fulfil their

ministry in union with the Successor of Peter, the guarantor of the truth of their teaching and of their full communion in the Church.

Associated with the Bishops in the work of proclaiming the Gospel, priests are called upon at ordination to be shepherds of the flock, preachers of the good news of salvation and ministers of the sacraments. To serve the Church as Christ intends, Bishops and priests need a solid and continuing formation, which should provide opportunities for human, spiritual and pastoral renewal, as well as courses on theology, spirituality and the human sciences. 208 People in Asia need to see the clergy not just as charity workers and institutional administrators but as men whose minds and hearts are set on the deep things of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:5). The reverence which Asian peoples have for those in authority needs to be matched by a clear moral uprightness on the part of those with ministerial responsibilities in the Church. By their life of prayer, zealous service and exemplary conduct, the clergy witness powerfully to the Gospel in the communities which they shepherd in the name of Christ. It is my fervent prayer that the ordained ministers of the Churches in Asia will live and work in a spirit of communion and cooperation with the Bishops and all the faithful, bearing witness to the love which Jesus declared to be the true mark of his disciples (cf. Jn 13:35).

I particularly wish to underline the Synod's concern for the preparation of those who will staff and teach in seminaries and theological faculties. 209 After a thorough training in the sacred sciences and related subjects, they should receive a specific formation focused on priestly spirituality, the art of spiritual direction, and other aspects of the difficult and delicate task that awaits them in the education of future priests. This is an apostolate second to none for the Church's well-being and vitality.

The Consecrated Life and Missionary Societies

44. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, I emphasized the intimate connection between the consecrated life and mission. Under its three aspects of *confessio Trinitatis*, *signum fraternitatis* and *servitium caritatis*, the consecrated life shows forth God's love in the world by its specific witness to the saving mission which Jesus accomplished by his total consecration to the Father. Recognizing that all action in the Church has its support in prayer and communion with God, the Church in Asia looks with profound respect and appreciation to the contemplative religious communities as a special source of strength and inspiration. Following the recommendations of the Synod Fathers, I strongly encourage the establishment of monastic and contemplative communities wherever possible. In this way, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, the work of building up the earthly city can have its foundation in the Lord and can tend towards him, lest those who build labour in vain. 210

The search for God, a life of fraternal communion, and service to others are the three chief characteristics of the consecrated life which can offer an appealing Christian testimony to the peoples of Asia today. The Special Assembly for Asia urged those in the consecrated life to be witnesses to the universal call to holiness and inspiring examples to Christians and non-Christians alike of self-giving love for everyone, especially the least of their brothers and sisters. In a world in which the sense of God's presence is often diminished, consecrated persons need to bear convincing prophetic witness to the primacy of God and to eternal life. Living in community, they attest to the values of Christian fraternity and to the transforming power of the Good News. 211 All who have embraced the consecrated life are called to become leaders in the search for God, a search which has always stirred the human heart and which is particularly visible in Asia's many forms of spirituality and asceticism. 212 In the numerous religious traditions of Asia, men and women dedicated to the contemplative and ascetical life enjoy great respect, and their witness has an especially persuasive power. Their lives lived in community, in peaceful and silent testimony, can inspire people to work for greater harmony in society. No less is expected of consecrated men and women in the Christian tradition. Their silent example of poverty and abnegation, of purity and sincerity, of self-sacrifice in obedience, can become an eloquent witness capable of touching all people of good will and leading to a fruitful dialogue with surrounding cultures and religions, and with the poor and the defenceless. This makes the consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelization. 213

The Synod Fathers recognized the vital role played by religious orders and congregations, missionary institutes and societies of apostolic life in the evangelization of Asia in past centuries. For this magnificent contribution, the Synod expressed to them the Church's gratitude and urged them not to waver in their missionary commitment. 214 I join the Synod Fathers in calling on those in the consecrated life to renew their zeal to proclaim the saving truth of Christ. All are to have appropriate formation and training, which should be Christ-centred and faithful to their founding charism, with emphasis on personal sanctity and witness; their spirituality and lifestyle should be sensitive to the religious heritage of the people among whom they live and whom they serve. 215 While maintaining respect for their specific charism, they should integrate themselves into the pastoral plan of the Diocese in which they work. The local Churches, for their part, need to foster awareness of the ideal of the religious and consecrated life, and promote such vocations. This requires that each Diocese should devise a pastoral programme for vocations, including the assignment of priests and religious to full-time work among the young to help them hear and discern the call of God. 216

In the context of the communion of the universal Church, I cannot fail to urge the Church in Asia to send forth missionaries, even though she herself needs labourers in the vineyard. I am glad to see that in several Asian countries missionary institutes of apostolic life have recently been founded in recognition of the Church's missionary character

and of the responsibility of the particular Churches in Asia to preach the Gospel to the whole world. 217 The Synod Fathers recommended "the establishment within each local Church of Asia, where such do not exist, of missionary societies of apostolic life, characterized by their special commitment to the mission ad gentes, ad exteros and ad vitam". 218 Such an initiative is sure to bear abundant fruit not only in the Churches which receive the missionaries but also in the Churches which send them.

The Laity

45. As the Second Vatican Council clearly indicated, the vocation of lay people sets them firmly in the world to perform the most varied tasks, and it is here that they are called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 219 By the grace and call of Baptism and Confirmation, all lay people are missionaries; and the arena of their missionary work is the vast and complex worlds of politics, economics, industry, education, the media, science, technology, the arts and sport. In many Asian countries, lay people are already serving as true missionaries, reaching out to fellow Asians who might never have contact with clergy and religious. 220 To them I express the thanks of the whole Church, and I encourage all lay people to assume their proper role in the life and mission of the People of God, as witnesses to Christ wherever they may find themselves.

It is the task of the Pastors to ensure that the laity are formed as evangelizers able to face the challenges of the contemporary world, not just with worldly wisdom and efficiency, but with hearts renewed and strengthened by the truth of Christ. 221 Witnessing to the Gospel in every area of life in society, the lay faithful can play a unique role in rooting out injustice and oppression, and for this too they must be adequately formed. To this end, I join the Synod Fathers in proposing the establishment at the diocesan or national level of lay formation centres to prepare the laity for their missionary work as witnesses to Christ in Asia today. 222

The Synod Fathers were most concerned that the Church should be a participatory Church in which no one feels excluded, and they judged the wider participation of women in the life and mission of the Church in Asia to be an especially pressing need. "Woman has a quite special aptitude in passing on the faith, so much so that Jesus himself appealed to it in the work of evangelization. That is what happened to the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at Jacob's well: he chose her for the first expansion of the new faith in non-Jewish territory". 223 To enhance their service in the Church, there should be greater opportunities for women to take courses in theology and other fields of study; and men in seminaries and houses of formation need to be trained to regard women as co-workers in the apostolate. 224 Women should be more effectively involved in pastoral programmes, in diocesan and parish pastoral councils, and in diocesan synods. Their abilities and services should be fully appreciated in health care, in education, in preparing the faithful for the sacraments, in building community and in peacemaking. As the Synod Fathers noted, the presence of women in the Church's mission of love and service contributes greatly to bringing the compassionate Jesus, the healer and reconciler, to Asian people, especially the poor and marginalized. 225

The Family

46. The family is the normal place where the young grow to personal and social maturity. It is also the bearer of the heritage of humanity itself, because through the family life is passed on from generation to generation. The family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures; and, as the Synod Fathers noted, family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions.

Seen through Christian eyes, the family is "the domestic Church" (*ecclesia domestica*). 226 The Christian family, like the Church as a whole, should be a place where the truth of the Gospel is the rule of life and the gift which the family members bring to the wider community. The family is not simply the object of the Church's pastoral care; it is also one of the Church's most effective agents of evangelization. Christian families are today called to witness to the Gospel in difficult times and circumstances, when the family itself is threatened by an array of forces. 227 To be an agent of evangelization in such a time, the Christian family needs to be genuinely "the domestic Church", humbly and lovingly living out the Christian vocation.

As the Synod Fathers pointed out, this means that the family should be active in parish life, partaking of the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance, and being involved in service to others. It also means that parents should strive to make the moments when the family naturally comes together an opportunity for prayer, for Bible reading and reflection, for appropriate rituals presided over by the parents and for healthy recreation. This will help the Christian family to become a hearth of evangelization, where each member experiences God's love and communicates it to others. 228 The Synod Fathers also acknowledged that children have a role in evangelization, both in their family and in the wider community. 229 Convinced that "the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family", 230 I once again propose for study and implementation what I wrote on the theme of the family in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, following the Fifth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1980.

Young People

47. The Synod Fathers were particularly sensitive to the theme of youth in the Church. The many complex problems which young people now face in the changing world of Asia impel the Church to remind the young of their responsibility for the future of society and the Church, and to encourage and support them at every step to ensure that they are ready to accept that responsibility. To them the Church offers the truth of the Gospel as a joyful and liberating mystery to be known, lived and shared, with conviction and courage.

If young people are to be effective agents of mission, the Church needs to offer them suitable pastoral care. 231 In agreement with the Synod Fathers, I recommend that, where possible, every diocese in Asia should appoint youth chaplains or directors to promote the spiritual formation and apostolate of young people. Catholic schools and parishes have a vital role in providing all-round formation for the young, by seeking to lead them in the way of true discipleship and developing in them the human qualities that mission requires. Organized youth apostolates and youth clubs can provide the experience of Christian friendship which is so important for the young. The parish, and associations and movements, can help young people to cope better with social pressures by offering them not only a more mature growth in the Christian life but also help in the form of career guidance, vocational training and youth counselling.

The Christian formation of young people in Asia should recognize that they are not only the object of the Church's pastoral care but also "agents and co-workers in the Church's mission in her various apostolic works of love and service". 232 In parishes and dioceses, young men and women should therefore be invited to take part in the organization of activities which concern them. Their freshness and enthusiasm, their spirit of solidarity and hope can make them peacemakers in a divided world; and, on this score, it is encouraging to see young people involved in exchange programmes between the particular Churches and countries in Asia and elsewhere fostering interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

Social Communication

48. In an era of globalization, "the means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media". 233 The world is seeing the emergence of a new culture that "originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology". 234 The exceptional role played by the means of social communication in shaping the world, its cultures and ways of thinking has led to rapid and far-reaching changes in Asian societies.

Inevitably, the Church's evangelizing mission too is deeply affected by the impact of the mass media. Since the mass media have an ever increasing influence even in remote areas of Asia, they can assist greatly in the proclamation of the Gospel to every corner of the continent. However, "it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications". 235 To this end, the Church needs to explore ways of thoroughly integrating the mass media into her pastoral planning and activity, so that by their effective use the Gospel's power can reach out still further to individuals and entire peoples, and infuse Asian cultures with the values of the Kingdom.

I echo the Synod Fathers' commendation of Radio Veritas Asia, the only continent-wide radio station for the Church in Asia, for its almost thirty years of evangelization through broadcasting. Efforts must be made to strengthen this excellent instrument of mission, through appropriate language programming, personnel and financial help from Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses in Asia. 236 In addition to radio, Catholic publications and news agencies can help to disseminate information and offer continuing religious education and formation throughout the continent. In places where Christians are a minority, these can be an important means of sustaining and nurturing a sense of Catholic identity and of spreading knowledge of Catholic moral principles. 237

I take up the recommendations of the Synod Fathers on the point of evangelization through social communications, the "areopagus of the modern age", in the hope that it may serve human promotion and the spreading of the truth of Christ and the teaching of the Church. 238 It would help if each Diocese would establish, where possible, a communications and media office. Media education, including the critical evaluation of media output, needs to be an increasing part of the formation of priests, seminarians, religious, catechists, lay professionals, students in Catholic schools and parish communities. Given the wide influence and extraordinary impact of the mass media, Catholics need to work with the members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and with the followers of other religions to ensure a place for spiritual and moral values in the media. With the Synod Fathers, I encourage the development of pastoral plans for communications at the national and diocesan levels, following the indications of the Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, with appropriate attention to the circumstances prevailing in Asia.

The Martyrs

49. However important programmes of formation and strategies for evangelization may be, in the end it is martyrdom which reveals to the world the very essence of the Christian message. The word itself, "martyr", means witness, and those who have shed their blood for Christ have borne the ultimate witness to the true value of the Gospel. In the Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, I stressed the vital importance of remembering the martyrs: "From the psychological point of view, martyrdom is the most eloquent proof of the truth of the faith, for faith can give a human face even to the most violent of deaths and show its beauty even in the midst of the most atrocious persecutions". 239 Through the ages, Asia has given the Church and the world a great host of these heroes of the faith, and from the heart of Asia there rises the great song of praise: *Te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus*. This is the song of those who died for Christ on Asian soil in the first centuries of the Church, and it is also the joyful cry of men and women of more recent times like Saint Paul Miki and his companions, Saint Lorenzo Ruiz and his companions, Saint Andrew Dung Lac and his companions, Saint Andrew Kim Taegon and his companions. May the great host of Asian martyrs, old and new, never cease to teach the Church in Asia what it means to bear witness to the Lamb in whose blood they have washed their shining robes (cf. Rev 7:14)! May they stand as indomitable witnesses to the truth that Christians are called always and everywhere to proclaim nothing other than the power of the Lord's Cross! And may the blood of Asia's martyrs be now as always the seed of new life for the Church in every corner of the continent!

CONCLUSION

Gratitude and Encouragement

50. At the end of this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation which, seeking to discern the Spirit's word to the Churches in Asia (cf. Rev 1:11), has endeavoured to set forth the fruits of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, I wish to express the Church's gratitude to all of you, dear Asian brothers and sisters, who have contributed in any way to the success of this important ecclesial event. First and foremost, we again praise God for the wealth of cultures, languages, traditions and religious sensibilities of this great continent. Blessed be God for the peoples of Asia, so rich in their diversity yet one in their yearning for peace and fullness of life. Especially now, in the immediate vicinity of the 2000th anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ, we thank God for choosing Asia as the earthly dwelling place of his incarnate Son, the Saviour of the world.

I cannot fail to express my appreciation to the Bishops of Asia for their deep love of Jesus Christ, the Church and the peoples of Asia, and for their testimony of communion and generous dedication to the task of evangelization. I am grateful to all those who form the great family of the Church in Asia: the clergy, the men and women religious and other consecrated persons, the missionaries, the laity, families, the young, indigenous peoples, workers, the poor and afflicted. Deep in my heart there is a special place for those in Asia who are persecuted for their faith in Christ. They are the hidden pillars of the Church, to whom Jesus himself speaks words of comfort: "You are blessed in the Kingdom of heaven" (cf. Mt 5:10).

The words of Jesus reassure the Church in Asia: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32). Those who believe in Christ are still a small minority in this vast and most populous continent. Yet far from being a timid minority, they are lively in faith, full of the hope and vitality which only love can bring. In their humble and courageous way, they have influenced the cultures and societies of Asia, especially the lives of the poor and the helpless, many of whom do not share the Catholic faith. They are an example to Christians everywhere to be eager to share the treasure of the Good News "in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2). They find strength in the wondrous power of the Holy Spirit who, despite the generally small numbers of the Church in Asia, ensures that the Church's presence is like the yeast which mixes with the flour in a quiet and hidden way till it is all leavened (cf. Mt 13:33).

The peoples of Asia need Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Asia is thirsting for the living water that Jesus alone can give (cf. Jn 4:10-15). The disciples of Christ in Asia must therefore be unstinting in their efforts to fulfil the mission they have received from the Lord, who has promised to be with them to the end of the age (cf. Mt 28:20). Trusting in the Lord who will not fail those whom he has called, the Church in Asia joyfully makes her pilgrim way into the Third Millennium. Her only joy is that which comes from sharing with the multitude of Asia's peoples the immense gift which she herself has received—the love of Jesus the Saviour. Her one ambition is to continue his mission of service and love, so that all Asians "may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

Prayer to the Mother of Christ

51. Faced with such a challenging mission, we turn to Mary, for whom, as the Synod Fathers said, Asian Christians have a great love and affection, revering her as their own Mother and the Mother of Christ. 240 Throughout Asia there are hundreds of Marian sanctuaries and shrines where not only the Catholic faithful gather, but also believers of other religions too.

To Mary, model of all disciples and bright Star of Evangelization, I entrust the Church in Asia at the threshold of the Third Millennium of the Christian era, trusting absolutely that hers is an ear that always listens, hers a heart that always welcomes, and hers a prayer that never fails:

O Holy Mary, Daughter of the Most High God,
Virgin Mother of the Saviour and Mother of us all,
look tenderly upon the Church of your Son
planted on Asian soil.
Be her guide and model
as she continues your Son's mission
of love and service in Asia.

You fully and freely accepted the Father's call
to be the Mother of God;
teach us to empty our hearts
of all that is not of God,
that we too may be filled
with the Holy Spirit from on high.
You pondered the mysteries of God's will
in the silence of your heart;
help us on our journey
to discern the signs of God's powerful hand.
You went quickly to visit Elizabeth
and help in her days of waiting;
obtain for us the same spirit of zeal and service
in our evangelizing task.
You sang the praises of the Lord;
lead us in joyful proclamation of faith
in Christ our Saviour.

You had compassion on the needy
and spoke to your Son on their behalf;
teach us never to fear
to speak of the world to Jesus
and of Jesus to the world.
You stood at the foot of the Cross
as your Son breathed his last;
be with us as we seek to be one
in spirit and service with all who suffer.
You prayed with the disciples in the Upper Room;
help us to wait upon the Spirit
and to go wherever he leads us.

Protect the Church from all the powers
that threaten her.
Help her to be a true image
of the Most Holy Trinity.
Pray that through the Church's love and service
all the peoples of Asia may come
to know your Son
Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world,
and so taste the joy of life in all its fullness.
O Mary, Mother of the New Creation
and Mother of Asia,
pray for us, your children, now and always!

Given at New Delhi, in India, on the sixth day of November in the year 1999, the twenty-second of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

- (1) John Paul II, Address to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Manila (15 January 1995), 11: *Insegnamenti XVIII*, 1 (1995), 159.
- (2) Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38: AAS 87 (1995), 30.
- (3) No. 11: *Insegnamenti XVIII*, 1 (1995), 159.
- (4) John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 38: AAS 87 (1995), 30.
- (5) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Nuntius* (Final Message), 2.
- (6) Address to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Manila (15 January 1995), 10: *Insegnamenti XVIII*, 1 (1995), 159.
- (7) John Paul II, Letter Concerning Pilgrimage to the Places Linked to the History of Salvation (29 June 1999), 3: *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 June - 1 July 1999), 8.
- (8) Cf. *Propositio 3*.
- (9) *Propositio 1*.
- (10) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, 3.
- (11) Cf. *ibid.*
- (12) Cf. *Propositio 32*.
- (13) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 9.
- (14) Cf. *Propositiones 36 and 50*.
- (15) *Propositio 44*.
- (16) *Propositio 27*.
- (17) Cf. *Propositio 45*.
- (18) Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 9.
- (19) Cf. *Propositio 39*.
- (20) *Propositio 35*.
- (21) Cf. *Propositio 38*.
- (22) Cf. *Propositio 22*.
- (23) Cf. *Propositio 52*.
- (24) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Lineamenta*, 6.
- (25) Cf. *Propositio 56*.
- (26) John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 18: AAS 87 (1995), 16.
- (27) Cf. *Propositio 29*.
- (28) Cf. *Propositiones 29 and 31*.
- (29) *Propositio 51*.
- (30) Cf. *Propositiones 51, 52 and 53*.
- (31) *Propositio 57*.
- (32) Cf. *ibid.*
- (33) *Propositio 54*.
- (34) No. 3: AAS 83 (1991), 252.
- (35) Cf. *Propositio 5*.
- (36) Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem*: *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 5.
- (37) Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 3.
- (38) *Propositio 8*.
- (39) No. 11: AAS 83 (1991), 260.
- (40) *Ibid.*
- (41) Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 3.
- (42) Roman Missal: Eucharistic Prayer I for Masses of Reconciliation.
- (43) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 10: AAS 71 (1979), 274.
- (44) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- (45) No. 9: AAS 71 (1979), 272f.
- (46) Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 3.
- (47) Cf. *ibid.*
- (48) *Ibid.*
- (49) *Propositio 5*.
- (50) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 6: AAS 83 (1991), 255.
- (51) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 7: AAS 71 (1979), 269.
- (52) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 54: AAS 78 (1986), 875.
- (53) Cf. *ibid.*, 59: *loc. cit.*, 885.

- (54) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991), 274; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.
- (55) Cf. *Propositio* 11; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 4 and 15; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 11, 22 and 38; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991), 273f.
- (56) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem: L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 5.
- (57) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, (18 May 1986), 50: AAS 78 (1986), 870; cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 2, 10-12; 6, 6; 7, 13.
- (58) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 50: AAS 78 (1986), 870.
- (59) Cf. *ibid.*, 24: *loc. cit.*, 832.
- (60) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991), 274.
- (61) No. 29: AAS 83 (1991), 275; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.
- (62) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 29: AAS 83 (1991), 275.
- (63) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.
- (64) *Propositio* 12.
- (65) Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17.
- (66) Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 22: AAS 68 (1976), 20.
- (67) *Propositio* 8.
- (68) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 45: AAS 83 (1991), 292.
- (69) Cf. *ibid.*, 46: *loc. cit.*, 292f.
- (70) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3-4; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 39: AAS 83 (1991), 287; *Propositio* 40.
- (71) Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 53: AAS 68 (1976), 41f.
- (72) Address to Representatives of Non-Christians Religions, Madras (5 February 1986), 2: AAS 78 (1986), 767.
- (73) Cf. *Propositiones* 11 and 12; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991), 273f.
- (74) Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem: L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 5.
- (75) *Propositio* 58.
- (76) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 72: AAS 91 (1999), 61.
- (77) Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 15.
- (78) Cf. *ibid.*
- (79) *Ibid.*
- (80) *Propositio* 6.
- (81) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 6.
- (82) *Ibid.*
- (83) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem: L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 5.
- (84) Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 20: AAS 68 (1976), 18f.
- (85) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 52: AAS 83 (1991), 300.
- (86) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 9.
- (87) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991), 273f.
- (88) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 56: AAS 83 (1991), 304.
- (89) John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for the Catholics of West Bengal, Calcutta (4 February 1986), 3: *Insegnamenti* IX, 1 (1986), 314.
- (90) Cf. *Propositio* 43.
- (91) Cf. *Propositio* 7.
- (92) *Ibid.*
- (93) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 54: AAS 83 (1991), 302.
- (94) Cf. *ibid.*: *loc. cit.*, 301.
- (95) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10; Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 14.
- (96) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 14; *Propositio* 43.
- (97) Cf. *Propositio* 43.
- (98) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 13.
- (99) Cf. *Propositio* 17.

- (100) Cf. Propositio 18.
- (101) Cf. Propositio 17.
- (102) Nos. 60; 62; 105: AAS 91 (1999), 52f.; 54; 85f.
- (103) Cf. Propositio 24.
- (104) Cf. Propositio 25.
- (105) Cf. *ibid.*
- (106) Cf. Propositio 27.
- (107) Cf. Propositio 29.
- (108) Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 91: AAS 83 (1991), 338.
- (109) Propositio 19.
- (110) Propositio 8.
- (111) Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.
- (112) Propositio 6.
- (113) Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 51, 2: PL 41, 614; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.
- (114) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17.
- (115) Paul VI, Address to the College of Cardinals (22 June 1973): AAS 65 (1973), 391.
- (116) John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 18: AAS 81 (1989), 421.
- (117) Cf. *ibid.*; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 4.
- (118) Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 775.
- (119) Cf. *ibid.*
- (120) John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 32: AAS 81 (1989), 451f.
- (121) Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16.
- (122) Propositio 13.
- (123) *Ibid.*
- (124) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem: L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 6.
- (125) Propositio 13; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 22.
- (126) Cf. Propositio 13.
- (127) Cf. Propositio 15; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio Notio* (28 May 1992), 3-10: AAS 85 (1993), 839-844.
- (128) Cf. Propositio 15.
- (129) Cf. *ibid.*
- (130) Cf. Propositio 16.
- (131) Propositio 34.
- (132) Cf. Propositio 30; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 51: AAS 83 (1991), 298.
- (133) Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 58: AAS 68 (1976), 46-49; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 51: AAS 83 (1991), 299.
- (134) Cf. Propositio 31.
- (135) Cf. Propositio 14.
- (136) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem: L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 6.
- (137) Cf. Propositio 50.
- (138) Cf. Propositiones 36 and 50.
- (139) Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church (8 January 1996), 6: AAS 88 (1996), 41.
- (140) Cf. Propositio 50.
- (141) Cf. Propositio 56.
- (142) Cf. Propositio 51.
- (143) Cf. Propositio 52.
- (144) Propositio 53.
- (145) Cf. Propositio 57.
- (146) Cf. Letter Concerning Pilgrimage to the Places Linked to the History of Salvation (29 June 1999), 7: *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 June - 1 July 1999), 9.

- (147) AAS 56 (1964), 613.
- (148) Cf. Propositio 42.
- (149) Ibid.
- (150) John Paul II, Address at the General Audience (26 July 1995), 4: Insegnamenti XVIII, 2 (1995), 138.
- (151) Cf. John Paul II, Address at the General Audience (20 January 1982), 2: Insegnamenti V, 1 (1982), 162.
- (152) Cf. No. 53: AAS 87 (1995), 37.
- (153) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio (7 December 1990), 55: AAS 83 (1991), 302.
- (154) Cf. *ibid.*: loc. cit., 304.
- (155) No. 4: AAS 83 (1991), 101f.
- (156) No. 56: AAS 83 (1991), 304.
- (157) Propositio 41.
- (158) Ibid.
- (159) Cf. *ibid.*
- (160) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio (7 December 1990), 57: AAS 83 (1991), 305.
- (161) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata (25 March, 1996), 8: AAS 88 (1996), 383.
- (162) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (30 December 1987), 47: AAS 80 (1988), 582.
- (163) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 1.
- (164) In many ways the point of departure was the Encyclical Letter Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII (15 May 1891) which ushered in a series of solemn Church statements on various aspects of the social question. Among these was the Encyclical Letter Populorum Progressio (26 March 1967) which Pope Paul VI issued in response to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and a changed world situation. To commemorate the twentieth anniversary of that Encyclical, I released the Encyclical Letter Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (30 December 1987) in which, following the earlier Magisterium, I invited all the faithful to see themselves as called to a mission of service which necessarily includes the promotion of integral human development.
- (165) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (30 December 1987), 41: AAS 80 (1988), 570f.
- (166) Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation Libertatis Conscientia (22 March 1986), 72: AAS 79 (1987), 586.
- (167) Cf. Propositio 22.
- (168) Cf. Propositio 21.
- (169) Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici (30 December 1988), 5: AAS 81 (1989), 400-402; Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae (25 March 1995), 18: AAS 87 (1995), 419f.
- (170) Propositio 22; cf. Propositio 39.
- (171) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (30 December 1987), 42: AAS 80 (1988), 573; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation Libertatis Conscientia (22 March 1986), 68: AAS 79 (1987), 583.
- (172) Cf. Propositio 44.
- (173) Cf. *ibid.*
- (174) Cf. Propositio 39.
- (175) Cf. Propositio 22.
- (176) Cf. Propositio 36.
- (177) Cf. Propositio 38.
- (178) Cf. *ibid.*
- (179) Cf. Propositio 33.
- (180) Cf. *ibid.*
- (181) Cf. Propositio 35.
- (182) Cf. *ibid.*
- (183) Propositio 32.
- (184) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris (11 February 1984), 28-29: AAS 76 (1984), 242-244.
- (185) Cf. Propositio 20.
- (186) Cf. *ibid.*
- (187) Cf. Propositio 21.
- (188) Cf. *ibid.*
- (189) Cf. *ibid.*
- (190) Cf. Propositio 23.
- (191) Cf. *ibid.*
- (192) Cf. Propositio 55.
- (193) Cf. Propositio 49.
- (194) John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace (1 January 1998), 3: AAS 90 (1998), 50.
- (195) Cf. Propositio 49.

- (196) Cf. Propositio 48.
- (197) Cf. *ibid.*; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 51: AAS 87 (1995), 36.
- (198) Cf. Propositio 48.
- (199) Cf. Propositio 22; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 44: AAS 80 (1988), 576f.
- (200) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 15: AAS 71 (1979), 287.
- (201) Cf. *ibid.*
- (202) Cf. Propositio 47.
- (203) Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, 50, 3-4: PG 58, 508-509.
- (204) Cf. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 2 and 35.
- (205) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 31: AAS 83 (1991), 277.
- (206) *Ibid.* 42: *loc. cit.*, 289.
- (207) *Ibid.*
- (208) Cf. Propositio 25.
- (209) Cf. *ibid.*
- (210) Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 46.
- (211) Cf. Propositio 27.
- (212) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 103: AAS 88 (1996), 479.
- (213) Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 69: AAS 68 (1976), 59.
- (214) Cf. Propositio 27.
- (215) Cf. *ibid.*
- (216) Cf. *ibid.*
- (217) Cf. Propositio 28.
- (218) *Ibid.*
- (219) Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 31.
- (220) Cf. Propositio 29.
- (221) Cf. *ibid.*
- (222) Cf. *ibid.*
- (223) John Paul II, Address at the General Audience (13 July 1994), 4: *Insegnamenti XVII*, 2 (1994), 40.
- (224) Cf. Propositio 35.
- (225) Cf. *ibid.*
- (226) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.
- (227) Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio ante disceptationem: L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1998), 6.
- (228) Cf. Propositio 32.
- (229) Cf. Propositio 33.
- (230) John Paul II, Address to the Confederation of Family Advisory Bureaus of Christian Inspiration (29 November 1980), 4: *Insegnamenti III*, 2 (1980), 1454.
- (231) Cf. Propositio 34.
- (232) *Ibid.*
- (233) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 37: AAS 83 (1991), 285.
- (234) *Ibid.*
- (235) *Ibid.*
- (236) Cf. Propositio 45.
- (237) Cf. *ibid.*
- (238) Cf. *ibid.*
- (239) No. 13: AAS 91 (1999), 142.
- (240) Cf. Propositio 59.

Post-Synodal
 Apostolic Exhortation
 Ecclesia In America
 Of The Holy Father
 John Paul II
 To The Bishops,
 Priests And Deacons,
 Men And Women Religious,
 And All The Lay Faithful
 On The Encounter With The Living Jesus Christ:
 The Way To Conversion,
 Communion And Solidarity
 In America

INTRODUCTION

1. Rejoicing in the faith received and praising Christ for this immense gift, the Church in America has recently celebrated the fifth centenary of the first preaching of the Gospel on its soil. The commemoration made all American Catholics more deeply aware of Christ's desire to meet the inhabitants of the so-called New World so that, gathering them into his Church, he might be present in the continent's history. The evangelization of America is not only a gift from the Lord; it is also a source of new responsibilities. Thanks to the work of those who preached the Gospel through the length and breadth of the continent, countless sons and daughters have been generated by the Church and the Holy Spirit.(1) Now, no less than in the past, the words of the Apostle echo in their hearts: "If I preach the Gospel, I have no reason to boast. It is my duty: woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16). This duty is founded on the Risen Lord's command to the Apostles before he ascended into heaven: "Preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mk 16:15).

This command applies to the whole Church; and, in this moment of her history, the Church in America is called to take it up and respond with loving generosity to the fundamental task of evangelization. This was what my Predecessor Paul VI, the first Pope to visit America, stressed at Bogotá: "It will be our task, [Lord Jesus], as your representatives and stewards of your divine mysteries (cf. 1 Cor 4:1; 1 Pt 4:10), to spread among men the treasures of your word, your grace, your example".(2) For the disciple of Christ the duty to evangelize is an obligation of love. "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14), declares the Apostle Paul, recalling all that the Son of God did for us in his redeeming sacrifice: "One man has died for all... that those who live may live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for their sake" (2 Cor 5:14-15).

The celebration of anniversaries which evoke in a particular way Christ's love for us stirs in our soul not only a sense of gratitude but also a sense of the need to "proclaim the wonders of God", to evangelize. Thus, the recent celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the coming of the Gospel to America - the moment, that is, when Christ first called America to faith - and the approaching Jubilee, when the Church will celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the Incarnation of the Son of God, are special times when our hearts spontaneously ring out in gratitude to the Lord. Realizing the greatness of the gifts received, the pilgrim Church in America wishes to bring the whole of society and every man and woman to share in the riches of faith and communion in Christ.

How the Synod Assembly came about

2. On October 12, 1992, the very day marking the five hundredth anniversary of the first evangelization of America, I spoke at the opening of the Fourth General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo. With the aim of broadening perspectives and giving impetus to the new evangelization, I proposed a synodal meeting, "with a view to increased cooperation between the different particular Churches", so that together we might address, as part of the new evangelization and as an expression of episcopal communion, "the problems relating to justice and solidarity among all the nations of America".

(3) The positive response to my suggestion from the Bishops' Conferences of America enabled me to propose in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* a synodal meeting "on the problems of the new evangelization in both parts of the same continent, so different in origin and history, and on issues of justice and of international economic relations, in view of the enormous gap between North and South".(4) This paved the way for more immediate preparations, leading to the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops, which was held in the Vatican from November 16 to December 12, 1997.

The theme of the Assembly

3. In keeping with the original idea, and after listening to the suggestions of the Pre-Synodal Council, which expressed the views of many Pastors of the People of God on the American continent, I announced the theme of the Special Assembly for America of the Synod in these words: Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America. Put this way, the theme makes clear the centrality of the person of the Risen Christ, present in the life of the Church and calling people to conversion, communion and solidarity. The starting-point of such a program of evangelization is in fact the encounter with the Lord. Given by Christ in the Paschal Mystery, the Holy Spirit guides us towards those pastoral goals which the Church in America must attain in the third Christian millennium.

The celebration of the Assembly as an experience of encounter

4. It is certain that the Assembly was an experience of encounter with the Lord. I have especially happy memories of the two Solemn Concelebrations at which I presided in Saint Peter's Basilica at the opening and closing of the Assembly proceedings. Contact with the Risen Lord, truly, really and substantially present in the Eucharist, generated the spiritual atmosphere which enabled the Bishops taking part in the Synodal Assembly to see themselves not only as brothers in the Lord but also as members of the College of Bishops, eager to follow in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd under the leadership of the Successor of Peter, and serving the Church as she makes her pilgrim way in every corner of the continent. None could fail to see the joy of the participants, as they found the Assembly an extraordinary moment of encounter with the Lord, with the Vicar of Christ, with so many Bishops, priests, religious and lay people from every part of the continent.

To be sure, a number of earlier events contributed in a preliminary but powerful way to creating an atmosphere of fraternal encounter in the Synodal Assembly. First, there were the prior experiences of communion in the General Assemblies of the Bishops of Latin America in Rio de Janeiro (1955), Medellin (1968), Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992). These were moments when the Pastors of the Church in Latin America were able to reflect together as brothers on the most urgent pastoral questions affecting that part of the continent. There are also the periodic pan-American meetings of Bishops, in which the participants can address issues affecting the entire continent, and exchange views on the common problems and challenges facing the Church in the countries of America.

Contributing to the unity of the continent

5. In Santo Domingo, when I first proposed a Special Assembly of the Synod, I remarked that "on the threshold of the third Christian millennium and at a time when many walls and ideological barriers have fallen, the Church feels absolutely duty-bound to bring into still deeper spiritual union the peoples who compose this great continent and also, prompted by the religious mission which is proper to the Church, to stir among these peoples a spirit of solidarity".(5) I asked that the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops reflect on America as a single entity, by reason of all that is common to the peoples of the continent, including their shared Christian identity and their genuine attempt to strengthen the bonds of solidarity and communion between the different forms of the continent's rich cultural heritage. The decision to speak of "America" in the singular was an attempt to express not only the unity which in some way already exists, but also to point to that closer bond which the peoples of the continent seek and which the Church wishes to foster as part of her own mission, as she works to promote the communion of all in the Lord.

In the context of the new evangelization

6. With an eye to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I was keen that there should be a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for each of the five continents: after the Assembly for Africa (1994), America (1997), Asia (1998) and most recently Oceania (1998), in 1999 there will be, with the Lord's help, a Special Assembly for Europe. This will make possible an Ordinary General Assembly during the Jubilee year, to identify the rich insights which have come from the continental Assemblies and synthesize the conclusions to be drawn from them. That will be possible because similar concerns and points of interest have emerged from all the Synods. In this regard, referring to this series of Synodal Assemblies, I noted how "the theme underlying them all is evangelization, or rather the new evangelization, the foundations of which were laid down in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI".(6) And so, in both my initial proposal to hold this Special Assembly of the Synod, and later in announcing the Synod itself, and after the Bishops' Conferences of America had agreed to the idea, I suggested that the Assembly's deliberations should address "the area of the new evangelization", (7) and the problems emerging from it.(8)

This concern was all the more prominent, given that I myself had outlined an initial program for a new evangelization on American soil. As the Church throughout America prepared to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the first evangelization of the continent, when speaking to the Council of Latin American Bishops in Port-au-Prince (Haiti), I had said: "The commemoration of the five hundred years of evangelization will achieve its full meaning if it becomes a commitment by you the Bishops, together with your priests and people, a commitment not to a re-evangelization but

to a new evangelization - new in ardor, methods and expression".(9) Later, I invited the whole Church to respond to this call, although the program of evangelization, embracing today's world in all its diversity, must take different shape in the light of two quite different situations: on the one hand, the situation of countries strongly affected by secularization, and, on the other, the situation of countries where there are still "many vital traditions of piety and popular forms of Christian religiosity".(10) There is no doubt that in varying degrees both these situations are present in different countries or, better perhaps, in different groups within the various countries of the American continent.

With the presence and help of the Lord

7. With the command to evangelize which the Risen Lord left to his Church there goes the certitude, founded on his promise, that he continues to live and work among us: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). The mysterious presence of Christ in his Church is the sure guarantee that the Church will succeed in accomplishing the task entrusted to her. At the same time, this presence enables us to encounter him, as the Son sent by the Father, as the Lord of Life who gives us his Spirit. A fresh encounter with Jesus Christ will make all the members of the Church in America aware that they are called to continue the Redeemer's mission in their lands.

If it is genuine, the personal encounter with the Lord will also bring a renewal of the Church: as sisters and neighbors to each other, the particular Churches of the continent will strengthen the bonds of cooperation and solidarity in order that the saving work of Christ may continue in the history of America with ever greater effect. Open to the unity which comes from true communion with the Risen Lord, the particular Churches, and all who belong to them, will discover through their own spiritual experience that "the encounter with the living Jesus Christ" is "the path to conversion, communion and solidarity". To the extent that these goals are reached, there will emerge an ever increasing dedication to the new evangelization of America.

CHAPTER I - THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE LIVING JESUS CHRIST

"We have found the Messiah" (Jn 1:41)

Encounters with the Lord in the New Testament

8. The Gospels relate many meetings between Jesus and the men and women of his day. A common feature of all these narratives is the transforming power present and manifest in these encounters with Jesus, inasmuch as they "initiate an authentic process of conversion, communion and solidarity" (11) Among the most significant is the meeting with the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:5-42). Jesus calls her in order to quench his thirst, a thirst which was not only physical: indeed, "he who asked for a drink was thirsting for the faith of that woman".(12) By saying to her "Give me a drink" (Jn 4:7) and speaking to her about living water, the Lord awakened in the Samaritan woman a question, almost a prayer for something far greater than she was capable of understanding at the time: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst" (Jn 4:15). The Samaritan woman, even though "she does not yet understand", (13) is in fact asking for the living water of which her divine visitor speaks. When Jesus reveals to her that he is indeed the Christ (cf. Jn 4:26), the Samaritan woman feels impelled to proclaim to the other townspeople that she has found the Messiah (cf. Jn 4:28-30). Similarly, the most precious fruit of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus (cf. Lk 19:1-10) is the conversion of the tax collector, who becomes aware of his past unjust actions and decides to make abundant restitution - "four times as much" - to those he had cheated. Furthermore, he adopts an attitude of detachment from material goods and of charity towards the needy, which leads him to give half of his possessions to the poor.

Special mention should be made of the encounters with the Risen Jesus reported in the New Testament.

Mary Magdalen meets the Risen One, and as a result overcomes her discouragement and grief at the death of the Master (cf. Jn 20:11-18). In his new Paschal glory, Jesus tells her to proclaim to the disciples that he has risen: "Go to my brethren" (Jn 20:17). For this reason, Mary Magdalen could be called "the apostle of the Apostles".(14) The disciples of Emmaus, for their part, after meeting and recognizing the Risen Lord, return to Jerusalem to recount to the Apostles and the other disciples all that had happened to them (cf. Lk 24:13-35). Jesus, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24:27). Later they would recognize that their hearts were burning within them as the Lord talked to them along the road and opened the Scriptures to them (cf. Lk 24:32). There is no doubt that Saint Luke, in relating this episode, especially the decisive moment in which the two disciples recognize Jesus, makes explicit allusion to the accounts of the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus at the Last Supper (cf. Lk 24:30). The Evangelist, in relating what the disciples of Emmaus told the Eleven, uses an expression which had a precise Eucharistic meaning for the early Church: "He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Lk 24:35).

One of the encounters with the Risen Lord which had a decisive influence on the history of Christianity was certainly the conversion of Saul, the future Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, on the road to Damascus. There his life was radically changed: from being a persecutor, he became an Apostle (cf. Acts 9:3-30; 22:6-11; 26:12-18). Paul himself

describes this extraordinary experience as a revelation of the Son of God “in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (Gal 1:16).

The Lord always respects the freedom of those he calls. There are cases where people, in encountering Jesus, close their hearts to the change of life to which the Lord is calling them. Many people in Jesus's own time saw and heard him, and yet did not open their hearts to his word. Saint John's Gospel points to sin as the reason which prevents human beings from opening themselves to the light which is Christ: “the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn 3:19). The Gospels teach that attachment to wealth is an obstacle to accepting Christ's call to follow him fully and without reserve. Here, the attitude of the rich young man is indicative (cf. Mt 19:16-22; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23).

Personal encounters and community encounters

9. Some of the encounters with Jesus mentioned in the Gospel are clearly personal, as, for example, when he summons someone to follow him (cf. Mt 9:9; Mk 2:13-14; Lk 5:27-28). In these cases, Jesus deals familiarly with his hearers: “Rabbi (which means teacher), where are you staying?... ‘Come and see’” (Jn 1:38-39). But at other times the encounters are communal in nature. This is especially true of the encounters with the Apostles, which are of fundamental importance for the constitution of the Church. Indeed, the Apostles, chosen by Jesus from among the wider circle of his disciples (cf. Mk 3:13-19; Lk 6:12-16), receive special training and enjoy a closer relationship with him. To the crowds Jesus speaks in parables, while explaining to the Twelve: “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Mt 13:11). They are called to be heralds of the Good News and to carry out a special mission of building up the Church by the grace of the sacraments. To this end, they receive the necessary power: Jesus confers upon them the authority to forgive sins, invoking the same authority which the Father has given him in heaven and on earth (cf. Mt 28:18). They would be the first to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:1-4), a gift then bestowed upon all who by virtue of the Sacraments of Initiation would become part of the Christian community (cf. Acts 2:38).

Encountering Christ in the time of the Church 10. The Church is the place where men and women, by encountering Jesus, can come to know the love of the Father, for whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). After his Ascension into heaven, Jesus acts through the powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (cf. Jn 16:17), who transforms believers by giving them new life. Thus they become capable of loving with God's own love, which “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). God's grace also enables Christians to work for the transformation of the world, in order to bring about a new civilization, which my Predecessor Paul VI appropriately called “the civilization of love”.(15)

Indeed, “the Word of God, by taking on our human nature in all things save sin (cf. Heb 4:15), manifests the Father's plan by revealing to each human person the way to realize fully his or her vocation. Thus Jesus not only reconciles man with the Father, but also reconciles man with himself and thus reveals his true nature”.(16) With these words the Synod Fathers, taking up the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, reaffirmed that Jesus is the way which leads to full personal realization, culminating in the definitive and eternal encounter with God. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6). God has predestined us “to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born of many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Jesus Christ is thus the definitive answer to the question of the meaning of life, and to those fundamental questions which still trouble so many men and women on the American continent.

We encounter Jesus through Mary

11. At the birth of Jesus, the Magi came from the East to Bethlehem and “saw the child with Mary his Mother” (Mt 2:11). At the beginning of his public life, at the marriage of Cana, when the Son of God works the first of his signs, awakening faith in the disciples (cf. Jn 2:11), it is Mary who intervenes and directs the servants towards her Son in these words: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). In this regard I once wrote that “the Mother of Christ presents herself as the spokeswoman of her Son's will, pointing out those things which must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested”.(17) For this reason Mary is the sure path to our meeting with Christ. Devotion to the Mother of the Lord, when it is genuine, is always an impetus to a life guided by the spirit and values of the Gospel.

How can we fail to emphasize the role which belongs to the Virgin Mary in relation to the pilgrim Church in America journeying towards its encounter with the Lord? Indeed, the Most Blessed Virgin “is linked in a special way to the birth of the Church in the history... of the peoples of America; through Mary they came to encounter the Lord”.(18)

Throughout the continent, from the time of the first evangelization, the presence of the Mother of God has been strongly felt, thanks to the efforts of the missionaries. In their preaching, “the Gospel was proclaimed by presenting the Virgin Mary as its highest realization. From the beginning - invoked as Our Lady of Guadalupe - Mary, by her motherly and merciful figure, was a great sign of the closeness of the Father and of Jesus Christ, with whom she invites us to enter into communion”.(19)

The appearance of Mary to the native Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac in 1531 had a decisive effect on evangelization.(20) Its influence greatly overflows the boundaries of Mexico, spreading to the whole Continent. America, which historically has been, and still is, a melting-pot of peoples, has recognized in the mestiza face of the Virgin of Tepeyac, “in Blessed Mary of Guadalupe, an impressive example of a perfectly inculturated evangelization”.(21) Consequently, not only in Central and South America, but in North America as well, the Virgin of Guadalupe is venerated as Queen of all America.(22)

With the passage of time, pastors and faithful alike have grown increasingly conscious of the role of the Virgin Mary in the evangelization of America. In the prayer composed for the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops, Holy Mary of Guadalupe is invoked as “Patroness of all America and Star of the first and new evangelization”. In view of this, I welcome with joy the proposal of the Synod Fathers that the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother and Evangelizer of America, be celebrated throughout the continent on December 12.(23) It is my heartfelt hope that she, whose intercession was responsible for strengthening the faith of the first disciples (cf. Jn 2:11), will by her maternal intercession guide the Church in America, obtaining the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as she once did for the early Church (cf. Acts 1:14), so that the new evangelization may yield a splendid flowering of Christian life.

Places of encounter with Christ

12. Trusting in the help of Mary, the Church in America desires to lead the men and women of the continent to encounter Christ. This encounter will be the starting-point of authentic conversion and of renewed communion and solidarity. Such an encounter will contribute greatly to strengthening the faith of many Catholics, helping them to mature in strong, lively and active faith.

Lest the search for Christ present in his Church become something merely abstract, we need to indicate the specific times and places in which, in the Church, it is possible to encounter him. Here the reflections of the Synod Fathers offered abundant suggestions and observations.

They pointed above all to “Sacred Scripture read in the light of Tradition, the Fathers and the Magisterium, and more deeply understood through meditation and prayer”.(24) A recommendation was made to promote knowledge of the Gospels, which proclaim in words easily understood by all the way Jesus lived among the people of his time. Reading these sacred texts and listening to Jesus as attentively as did the multitudes of the mount of the Beatitudes, or on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias as he preached from the boat, produces authentic fruits of conversion of heart.

A second place of encounter with Jesus is the sacred Liturgy.(25) Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, we have a very rich account of the manifold presence of Christ in the Liturgy, the importance of which should lead to it being a theme of constant preaching. Christ is present in the celebrant who renews at the altar the one and only Sacrifice of the Cross; he is present in the Sacraments through which he exercises his efficacious power. When his word is proclaimed, it is he himself who speaks to us. He is also present in the community, by virtue of his promise that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). He is present “especially under the Eucharistic species”.(26) My Predecessor Paul VI deemed it necessary to explain the uniqueness of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, which “is called 'real' not to exclude the idea that the others are 'real' too, but rather to indicate presence par excellence, because it is substantial”.(27) Under the species of bread and wine, “Christ is present, whole and entire in his physical 'reality', corporally present”.(28)

The Scriptures and the Eucharist, places of encounter with Christ, are evoked in the story of the apparition of the Risen Jesus to the disciples of Emmaus. The Gospel text concerning the final judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46), which states that we will be judged on our love towards the needy in whom the Lord Jesus is mysteriously present, indicates that we must not neglect a third place of encounter with Christ: “the persons, especially the poor, with whom Christ identifies himself”.(29) At the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI recalled that “on the face of every human being, especially when marked by tears and sufferings, we can and must see the face of Christ (cf. Mt 25:40), the Son of Man”.(30)

CHAPTER II - ENCOUNTERING JESUS CHRIST IN AMERICA TODAY

“From those who have received much,
much will be required” (Lk 12:48)

The situation of the men and women of America and their encounter with the Lord

13. The Gospels tell of Jesus encountering people in very diverse situations. At times these are situations of sin, which show the need for conversion and the Lord's forgiveness. At other moments we find people searching for the truth and genuinely trusting in Jesus - positive attitudes which help to establish a friendship with him and awaken the desire to imitate him. Nor can we forget the gifts with which the Lord prepares some people for a later encounter. Thus, by making Mary “full of grace” (Lk 1:28) from the very beginning, God prepared her for the realization in her of God's supreme encounter with human nature: the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation.

Like the social virtues, sins do not exist in the abstract, but are the consequence of personal acts.(31) Hence it is necessary to bear in mind that America today is a complex reality, the result of the attitudes and actions of the men and women who live there. It is in this real and concrete situation that they must encounter Jesus.

The Christian identity of America

14. The greatest gift which America has received from the Lord is the faith which has forged its Christian identity. For more than five hundred years the name of Christ has been proclaimed on the continent. The evangelization which accompanied the European migrations has shaped America's religious profile, marked by moral values which, though they are not always consistently practiced and at times are cast into doubt, are in a sense the heritage of all Americans, even of those who do not explicitly recognize this fact. Clearly, America's Christian identity is not synonymous with Catholic identity. The presence of other Christian communities, to a greater or lesser degree in the different parts of America, means that the ecumenical commitment to seek unity among all those who believe in Christ is especially urgent.(32)

The fruits of holiness in America

15. The Saints are the true expression and the finest fruits of America's Christian identity. In them, the encounter with the living Christ "is so deep and demanding... that it becomes a fire which consumes them completely and impels them to build his Kingdom, to the point that Christ and the new Covenant are the meaning and the soul... of personal and communal life".(33) The fruits of holiness have flourished from the first days of the evangelization of America. Thus we have Saint Rose of Lima (1586-1617), "the New World's first flower of holiness", proclaimed principal patroness of America in 1670 by Pope Clement X.

(34) After her, the list of American saints has grown to its present length.(35) The beatifications and canonizations which have raised many sons and daughters of the continent to public veneration provide heroic models of the Christian life across the range of nations and social backgrounds. In beatifying or canonizing them, the Church points to them as powerful intercessors made one with Christ, the eternal High Priest, the mediator between God and man. The Saints and the Beatified of America accompany the men and women of today with fraternal concern in all their joys and sufferings, until the final encounter with the Lord.(36) With a view to encouraging the faithful to imitate them ever more closely and to seek their intercession more frequently and fruitfully, the Synod Fathers proposed - and I find this a very timely initiative - that there be prepared "a collection of short biographies of the Saints and the Beatified of America, which can shed light on and stimulate the response to the universal call to holiness in America".(37)

Among the Saints it has produced, "the history of the evangelization of America numbers many martyrs, men and women, Bishops and priests, consecrated religious and lay people who have given life... to [these] nations with their blood. Like a cloud of witnesses (cf. Heb 12:1), they stir us to take up fearlessly and fervently today's task of the new evangelization".(38) Their example of boundless dedication to the cause of the Gospel must not only be saved from oblivion, but must become better and more widely known among the faithful of the continent. In this regard, I wrote in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*: "The local Churches should do everything possible to ensure that the memory of those who have suffered martyrdom should be safeguarded, gathering the necessary documentation".(39)

Popular piety

16. A distinctive feature of America is an intense popular piety, deeply rooted in the various nations. It is found at all levels and in all sectors of society, and it has special importance as a place of encounter with Christ for all those who in poverty of spirit and humility of heart are sincerely searching for God (cf. Mt 11:25). This piety takes many forms: "Pilgrimages to shrines of Christ, of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, prayer for the souls in purgatory, the use of sacramentals (water, oil, candles...). These and other forms of popular piety are an opportunity for the faithful to encounter the living Christ".(40) The Synod Fathers stressed the urgency of discovering the true spiritual values present in popular religiosity, so that, enriched by genuine Catholic doctrine, it might lead to a sincere conversion and a practical exercise of charity.(41) If properly guided, popular piety also leads the faithful to a deeper sense of their membership of the Church, increasing the fervor of their attachment and thus offering an effective response to the challenges of today's secularization.(42)

Given that in America, popular piety is a mode of inculturation of the Catholic faith and that it has often assumed indigenous religious forms, we must not underestimate the fact that, prudently considered, it too can provide valid cues for a more complete inculturation of the Gospel.(43) This is especially important among the indigenous peoples, in order that "the seeds of the Word" found in their culture may come to their fullness in Christ.(44) The same is true for Americans of African origin. The Church "recognizes that it must approach these Americans from within their own culture, taking seriously the spiritual and human riches of that culture which appear in the way they worship, their sense of joy and solidarity, their language and their traditions".(45)

The Eastern Catholic presence

17. Immigration is an almost constant feature of America's history from the beginning of evangelization to our own day. As part of this complex phenomenon, we see that in recent times different parts of America have welcomed many members of the Eastern Catholic Churches who, for various reasons, have left their native lands. A first wave of immigration came especially from Western Ukraine; and then it involved the nations of the Middle East. This made it pastorally necessary to establish an Eastern Catholic hierarchy for these Catholic immigrants and their descendants. The Synod Fathers recalled the norms given by the Second Vatican Council, which recognize that the Eastern Churches "have the right and the duty to govern themselves according to their own particular discipline", given the mission they have of bearing witness to an ancient doctrinal, liturgical and monastic tradition. Moreover, these Churches have a duty to maintain their own disciplines, since these "correspond better to the customs of their faithful and are judged to be better suited to provide for the good of souls".(46) The universal Church needs a synergy between the particular Churches of East and West so that she may breathe with her two lungs, in the hope of one day doing so in perfect communion between the Catholic Church and the separated Eastern Churches.(47) Therefore, we cannot but rejoice that the Eastern Churches have in recent times taken root in America alongside the Latin Churches present there from the beginning, thus making the catholicity of the Lord's Church appear more clearly.(48)

The Church in the field of education and social action

18. One of the reasons for the Church's influence on the Christian formation of Americans is her vast presence in the field of education and especially in the university world. The many Catholic universities spread throughout the continent are a typical feature of Church life in America. Also in the field of primary and secondary education, the large number of Catholic schools makes possible a wide-ranging evangelizing effort, as long as there is a clear will to impart a truly Christian education.(49)

Another important area in which the Church is present in every part of America is social and charitable work. The many initiatives on behalf of the elderly, the sick and the needy, through nursing homes, hospitals, dispensaries, canteens providing free meals, and other social centers are a concrete testimony of the preferential love for the poor which the Church in America nurtures. She does so because of her love for the Lord and because she is aware that "Jesus identified himself with the poor (cf. Mt 25:31-46)".(50) In this task which has no limits, the Church in America has been able to create a sense of practical solidarity among the various communities of the continent and of the world, showing in this way the fraternal spirit which must characterize Christians in every time and place.

For this service of the poor to be both evangelical and evangelizing, it must faithfully reflect the attitude of Jesus, who came "to proclaim Good News to the poor" (Lk 4:18). When offered in this spirit, the service of the poor shows forth God's infinite love for all people and becomes an effective way of communicating the hope of salvation which Christ has brought to the world, a hope which glows in a special way when it is shared with those abandoned or rejected by society.

This constant dedication to the poor and disadvantaged emerges in the Church's social teaching, which ceaselessly invites the Christian community to a commitment to overcome every form of exploitation and oppression. It is a question not only of alleviating the most serious and urgent needs through individual actions here and there, but of uncovering the roots of evil and proposing initiatives to make social, political and economic structures more just and fraternal.

Growing respect for human rights

19. Among the positive aspects of America today, we see in civil society a growing support throughout the continent for democratic political systems and the gradual retreat of dictatorial regimes; this has immediate moral implications. The Church looks sympathetically upon this evolution insofar as it favors an ever more marked respect for the rights of each individual, including those accused and condemned, against whom it is never legitimate to resort to modes of detention and investigation - one thinks especially of torture - which are offensive to human dignity. "The rule of law is the necessary condition for establishing true democracy".(51)

There can be no rule of law, however, unless citizens and especially leaders are convinced that there is no freedom without truth.(52) In effect, "the grave problems which threaten the dignity of the human person, the family, marriage, education, the economy and working conditions, the quality of life and life itself, raise the question of the rule of law".(53) The Synod Fathers rightly stressed that "the fundamental rights of the human person are inscribed in human nature itself, they are willed by God and therefore call for universal observance and acceptance. No human authority can infringe upon them by appealing to majority opinion or political consensus, on the pretext of respect for pluralism and democracy. Therefore, the Church must be committed to the task of educating and supporting lay people involved in law-making, government and the administration of justice, so that legislation will always reflect those principles and moral values which are in conformity with a sound anthropology and advance the common good".(54)

The phenomenon of globalization

20. A feature of the contemporary world is the tendency towards globalization, a phenomenon which, although not exclusively American, is more obvious and has greater repercussions in America. It is a process made inevitable by increasing communication between the different parts of the world, leading in practice to overcoming distances, with evident effects in widely different fields.

The ethical implications can be positive or negative. There is an economic globalization which brings some positive consequences, such as efficiency and increased production and which, with the development of economic links between the different countries, can help to bring greater unity among peoples and make possible a better service to the human family. However, if globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative. These are, for example, the absolutizing of the economy, unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between rich and poor, unfair competition which puts the poor nations in a situation of ever increasing inferiority.(55) While acknowledging the positive values which come with globalization, the Church considers with concern the negative aspects which follow in its wake.

And what should we say about the cultural globalization produced by the power of the media? Everywhere the media impose new scales of values which are often arbitrary and basically materialistic, in the face of which it is difficult to maintain a lively commitment to the values of the Gospel.

Growing urbanization

21. Also on the increase in America is the phenomenon of urbanization. For some time now the continent has been experiencing a constant exodus from the countryside to the city. This is a complex phenomenon already described by my Predecessor Paul VI.(56) There are different reasons for it, but chief among them are poverty and underdevelopment in rural areas, where utilities, transportation, and educational and health services are often inadequate. Moreover, the city, with the allure of entertainment and prosperity often presented in the media, exerts a special attraction for simple people from country areas.

The frequent lack of planning in this process is a source of many evils. As the Synod Fathers pointed out, "in certain cases, some urban areas are like islands where violence, juvenile delinquency and an air of desperation flourish".(57) The phenomenon of urbanization therefore presents great challenges for the Church's pastoral action, which must address cultural rootlessness, the loss of family traditions and of people's particular religious traditions. As a result, faith is often weakened because it is deprived of the expressions that helped to keep it alive.

The evangelization of urban culture is a formidable challenge for the Church. Just as she was able to evangelize rural culture for centuries, the Church is called in the same way today to undertake a methodical and far-reaching urban evangelization through catechesis, the liturgy and the very way in which her pastoral structures are organized.(58)

The burden of external debt

22. The Synod Fathers voiced concern about the external debt afflicting many American nations and expressed solidarity with them. They were consistent in reminding public opinion of the complexity of this issue, acknowledging that "the debt is often the result of corruption and poor administration".(59) In keeping with the spirit of the Synod's deliberations, such an acknowledgment does not mean to place on one side all the blame for a phenomenon which is extremely complex in its origin and in the solutions which it demands.(60)

Among the causes which have helped to create massive external debt are not only high interest rates, caused by speculative financial policies, but also the irresponsibility of people in government who, in incurring debt, have given too little thought to the real possibility of repaying it. This has been aggravated by the fact that huge sums obtained through international loans sometimes go to enrich individuals instead of being used to pay for the changes needed for the country's development. At the same time, it would be unjust to impose the burden resulting from these irresponsible decisions upon those who did not make them. The gravity of the situation is all the more evident when we consider that "even the payment of interest alone represents a burden for the economy of poor nations, which deprives the authorities of the money necessary for social development, education, health and the establishment of a fund to create jobs". (61)

Corruption

23. Corruption is often among the causes of crushing public debt, and is therefore a serious problem which needs to be considered carefully. "Respecting no boundaries, [corruption] involves persons, public and private structures of power and the governing elites". It creates a situation which "encourages impunity and the illicit accumulation of money, lack of trust in political institutions, especially the administration of justice and public investments, which are not always transparent, equal for all and effective".(62)

Here I wish to recall what I wrote in the Message for the 1998 World Day of Peace - that the plague of corruption needs to be denounced and combatted forcefully by those in authority, with "the generous support of all citizens, sustained by

a firm moral conscience".(63) Appropriate supervisory bodies and transparency in economic and financial transactions are helpful and in many cases stop the spread of corruption, the dire consequences of which fall in the main upon the weakest and most marginal members of society. It is also the poor who are the first to suffer as a result of delays and inefficiency, by not being properly defended, because of structural deficiencies, especially when corruption affects the administration of justice itself.

The drug trade

24. The drug trade and drug use represent a grave threat to the social fabric of American nations. The drug trade "contributes to crime and violence, to the destruction of family life, to the physical and emotional destruction of many individuals and communities, especially among the young. It also undermines the ethical dimension of work and increases the number of people in prison - in a word, it leads to the degradation of the person created in the image of God".(64) This devastating trade also leads to "the ruin of governments and erodes economic security and the stability of nations".(65) Here we are facing one of the most urgent challenges which many nations around the world need to address: it is in fact a challenge which threatens many features of the human progress achieved in recent times. For some American nations, the production, trafficking and use of drugs are factors which tarnish their international reputation, because they reduce their credibility and render more difficult the cooperation which they seek with other countries and which is so essential nowadays for harmonious social development.

Ecological concern

25. "And God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:25). These words from the first chapter of the Book of Genesis reveal the meaning of what God has done. To men and women, the crown of the entire process of creation, the Creator entrusts the care of the earth (cf. Gen 2:15). This brings concrete obligations in the area of ecology for every person. Fulfillment of these obligations supposes an openness to a spiritual and ethical perspective capable of overcoming selfish attitudes and "life-styles which lead to the depletion of natural resources".(66)

In this area too, so relevant today, the action of believers is more important than ever. Alongside legislative and governmental bodies, all people of good will must work to ensure the effective protection of the environment, understood as a gift from God. How much ecological abuse and destruction there is in many parts of America! It is enough to think of the uncontrolled emission of harmful gases or the dramatic phenomenon of forest fires, sometimes deliberately set by people driven by selfish interest. Devastations such as these could lead to the desertification of many parts of America, with the inevitable consequences of hunger and misery. This is an especially urgent problem in the forests of Amazonia, an immense territory extending into different countries: from Brazil to Guyana, Surinam, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.(67) This is one of the world's most precious natural regions because of its bio-diversity which makes it vital for the environmental balance of the entire planet.

CHAPTER III - THE PATH OF CONVERSION

"Repent therefore and be converted" (Acts 3:19)

The urgency of the call to conversion

26. "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is close at hand: repent and believe the Good News" (Mk 1:15). These words with which Jesus began his Galilean ministry still echo in the ears of Bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women and the lay faithful throughout America. Both the recent celebration of the fifth centenary of the first evangelization of America and the commemoration of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus, the Great Jubilee we are preparing to celebrate, summon everyone alike to a deeper sense of our Christian vocation. The greatness of the Incarnation and gratitude for the gift of the first proclamation of the Gospel in America are an invitation to respond readily to Christ with a more decisive personal conversion and a stimulus to ever more generous fidelity to the Gospel. Christ's call to conversion finds an echo in the words of the Apostle: "It is time now to wake from sleep, because our salvation is closer than when we first became believers" (Rom 13:11). The encounter with the living Jesus impels us to conversion.

In speaking of conversion, the New Testament uses the word *metanoia*, which means a change of mentality. It is not simply a matter of thinking differently in an intellectual sense, but of revising the reasons behind one's actions in the light of the Gospel. In this regard, Saint Paul speaks of "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). This means that true conversion needs to be prepared and nurtured through the prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture and the practice of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Conversion leads to fraternal communion, because it enables us to understand that Christ is the head of the Church, his Mystical Body; it urges solidarity, because it makes us aware that whatever we do for others, especially for the poorest, we do for Christ himself. Conversion, therefore, fosters a new life, in which there is no separation between faith and works in our daily response to the universal call to holiness. In order to speak of conversion, the gap between faith and life must be bridged. Where this gap exists, Christians are such

only in name. To be true disciples of the Lord, believers must bear witness to their faith, and “witnesses testify not only with words, but also with their lives”.(68) We must keep in mind the words of Jesus: “Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7:21). Openness to the Father's will supposes a total self-giving, including even the gift of one's life: “The greatest witness is martyrdom”.(69)

The social dimension of conversion

27. Yet conversion is incomplete if we are not aware of the demands of the Christian life and if we do not strive to meet them. In this regard, the Synod Fathers noted that unfortunately “at both the personal and communal level there are great shortcomings in relation to a more profound conversion and with regard to relationships between sectors, institutions and groups within the Church”.(70) “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20).

Fraternal charity means attending to all the needs of our neighbor. “If any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?” (1 Jn 3:17). Hence, for the Christian people of America conversion to the Gospel means to revise “all the different areas and aspects of life, especially those related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good”.(71) It will be especially necessary “to nurture the growing awareness in society of the dignity of every person and, therefore, to promote in the community a sense of the duty to participate in political life in harmony with the Gospel”.(72) Involvement in the political field is clearly part of the vocation and activity of the lay faithful.(73)

In this regard, however, it is most important, especially in a pluralistic society, to understand correctly the relationship between the political community and the Church, and to distinguish clearly between what individual believers or groups of believers undertake in their own name as citizens guided by Christian conscience and what they do in the name of the Church in communion with their Pastors. The Church which, in virtue of her office and competence, can in no way be confused with the political community nor be tied to any political system, is both a sign and safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person.(74)

Continuing conversion

28. In this life, conversion is a goal which is never fully attained: on the path which the disciple is called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, conversion is a lifelong task. While we are in this world, our intention to repent is always exposed to temptations. Since “no one can serve two masters” (Mt 6:24), the change of mentality (metanoia) means striving to assimilate the values of the Gospel, which contradict the dominant tendencies of the world. Hence there is a need to renew constantly “the encounter with the living Jesus Christ”, since this, as the Synod Fathers pointed out, is the way “which leads us to continuing conversion”.(75)

The universal call to conversion has special implications for the Church in America, involved as she is in the renewal of faith. The Synod Fathers expressed this very specific and demanding task in this way: “This conversion demands especially of us Bishops a genuine identification with the personal style of Jesus Christ, who leads us to simplicity, poverty, responsibility for others and the renunciation of our own advantage, so that, like him and not trusting in human means, we may draw from the strength of the Holy Spirit and of the Word all the power of the Gospel, remaining open above all to those who are furthest away and excluded”.(76) To be Pastors after God's own heart (cf. Jer 3:15), it is essential to adopt a mode of living which makes us like the one who says of himself: “I am the good shepherd” (Jn 10:11), and to whom Saint Paul points when he writes: “Imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

Guided by the Holy Spirit to a new way of living

29. The proposal of a new style of life applies not only to the Pastors, but to all Christians living in America. They are asked to know more deeply and to make their own a genuine Christian spirituality. “In effect, the term spirituality means a mode or form of life in keeping with Christian demands. Spirituality is 'life in Christ' and 'in the Spirit', which is accepted in faith, expressed in love and inspired by hope, and so becomes the daily life of the Church community”.(77) In this sense, by spirituality, which is the goal of conversion, we mean “not a part of life, but the whole of life guided by the Holy Spirit”.(78) Among the many elements of spirituality which all Christians must make their own, prayer holds a pre-eminent place. Prayer leads Christians “little by little to acquire a contemplative view of reality, enabling them to recognize God in every moment and in every thing; to contemplate God in every person; to seek his will in all that happens”.(79)

Prayer, both personal and liturgical, is the duty of every Christian. “Jesus Christ, the Good News of the Father, warns us that without him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:5). He himself, in the decisive moments of his life, before doing something, used to withdraw to an isolated place to give himself to prayer and contemplation, and he asked the Apostles to do the same”.(80) He tells his disciples without exception: “Go into your room and shut the door and pray

to your Father who is in secret” (Mt 6:6). This intense life of prayer must be adapted to the capacity and condition of each Christian, so that in all the different situations of life each one may be able “to drink of the one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:13) from the wellspring of their encounter with Christ”.(81) In this sense, contemplation is not a privilege reserved to the few; on the contrary, in parishes, in communities and movements there is a need to foster a spirituality clearly oriented to contemplation of the fundamental truths of faith: the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, the Redemption of humanity, and the other great saving works of God.(82)

Men and women who are dedicated exclusively to the contemplative life accomplish a fundamental mission in the Church in America. As the Second Vatican Council put it, they are “a glory of the Church and a source of heavenly graces”.(83) Therefore, the monasteries which exist throughout the continent must be “especially loved by the Pastors, who should be deeply convinced that souls dedicated to the contemplative life obtain an abundance of grace, through the prayer, penance and contemplation to which they have given their lives. Contemplatives must know that they are part of the Church’s mission in the present and that, by the witness of their lives, they work for the spiritual good of the faithful, and help them to seek the face of God in everyday life”.(84)

Christian spirituality is nourished above all by a constant sacramental life, since the Sacraments are the root and endless source of God’s grace which believers need to sustain them on their earthly pilgrimage. The sacramental life needs to be complemented by the values of popular piety, values which will be enriched in turn by sacramental practice and saved from falling into the danger of routine. It should also be noted that this spirituality is not opposed to the social responsibilities of the Christian life. On the contrary, in following the path of prayer, believers become more conscious of the Gospel’s demands and of their duties towards others. Through prayer, they are strengthened with the grace they need to persevere in doing good. In order to mature spiritually, Christians do well to seek the counsel of the Church’s ministers or of other persons expert in the field of spiritual direction, which is a traditional practice in the Church. The Synod Fathers felt that it was necessary to recommend to priests this important ministry.(85)

The universal call to holiness

30. “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev 19:2). The Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops has wished to offer a forceful reminder to all Christians of the importance of the doctrine of the universal call to holiness in the Church.(86) This is one of the key points of the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.(87) Conversion is directed to holiness, since conversion “is not an end in itself but a journey towards God who is holy. To be holy is to be like God and to glorify his name in the works which we accomplish in our lives (cf. Mt 5:16)”.(88) On the path of holiness, Jesus Christ is the point of reference and the model to be imitated: he is “the Holy One of God”, and was recognized as such (cf. Mk 1:24). It is he who teaches us that the heart of holiness is love, which leads even to giving our lives for others (cf. Jn 15:13). Therefore, to imitate the holiness of God, as it was made manifest in Jesus Christ his Son, “is nothing other than to extend in history his love, especially towards the poor, the sick and the needy (cf. Lk 10:25ff.)”.(89)

Jesus, the one way to holiness

31. “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6). With these words, Jesus presents himself as the one path which leads to holiness. But a specific knowledge of this way comes chiefly through the word of God which the Church proclaims in her preaching. Therefore, the Church in America “must give a clear priority to prayerful reflection on Sacred Scripture by all the faithful”.(90) This reading of the Bible, accompanied by prayer, is known in the tradition of the Church as *lectio divina*, and it is a practice to be encouraged among all Christians. For priests, the *lectio divina* must be a basic feature of the preparation of their homilies, especially the Sunday homily.(91)

Penance and reconciliation

32. Conversion (*metanoia*), to which every person is called, leads to an acceptance and appropriation of the new vision which the Gospel proposes. This requires leaving behind our worldly way of thinking and acting, which so often heavily conditions our behavior. As Sacred Scripture reminds us, the old man must die and the new man must be born, that is, the whole person must be renewed “in full knowledge after the image of the Creator” (Col 3:10). Strongly recommended on this path of conversion and quest for holiness are “the ascetical practices which have always been part of the Church’s life and which culminate in the Sacrament of forgiveness, received and celebrated with the right dispositions”.(92) Only those reconciled with God can be prime agents of true reconciliation with and among their brothers and sisters.

The present crisis of the Sacrament of Penance, from which the Church in America is not exempt and about which I have voiced my concern from the beginning of my Pontificate, (93) will be overcome by resolute and patient pastoral efforts.

On this point, the Synod Fathers rightly asked “that priests give the necessary time to the Sacrament of Penance, and strongly and insistently invite the faithful to receive the Sacrament, without the Pastors themselves neglecting frequent

confession in their own lives".(94) Bishops and priests personally experience the mysterious encounter with the forgiving Christ in the Sacrament of Penance and they are privileged witnesses of his merciful love.

The Catholic Church, which embraces men and women "of every nation, race, people and tongue" (Rev 7:9) is called to be, "in a world marked by ideological, ethnic, economic and cultural divisions", the "living sign of the unity of the human family".(95) In the multiplicity of nations and the variety of ethnic groups, as in the features common to the entire continent, America presents many differences which cannot be ignored and which the Church has the duty to address. Thanks to effective efforts to integrate the members of the People of God within each country and to unite the members of the particular Churches of the various countries, today's differences can be a source of mutual enrichment. As the Synod Fathers rightly affirmed, "it is most important that the Church throughout America be a living sign of reconciled communion, an enduring appeal to solidarity and a witness ever present in our various political, economic and social systems".(96) This is a significant contribution which believers can make to the unity of the American continent.

CHAPTER IV - THE PATH TO COMMUNION

"As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be one in us" (Jn 17:21)

The Church, sacrament of communion

33. "Faced with a divided world which is in search of unity, we must proclaim with joy and firm faith that God is communion, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, unity in distinction, and that he calls all people to share in that same Trinitarian communion. We must proclaim that this communion is the magnificent plan of God the Father; that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Lord, is the heart of this communion, and that the Holy Spirit works ceaselessly to create communion and to restore it when it is broken. We must proclaim that the Church is the sign and instrument of the communion willed by God, begun in time and destined for completion in the fullness of the Kingdom".(97) The Church is the sign of communion because her members, like branches, share the life of Christ, the true vine (cf. Jn 15:5). Through communion with Christ, Head of the Mystical Body, we enter into living communion with all believers.

This communion, present in the Church and essential to her nature, (98) must be made visible in concrete signs, "such as communal prayer for one another, the desire for closer relations between Episcopal Conferences and between Bishops, fraternal ties between dioceses and parishes, and communication among pastoral workers with a view to specific missionary works".(99) Communion requires that the deposit of faith be preserved in its purity and integrity, together with the unity of the College of Bishops under the authority of the Successor of Peter. In this context, the Synod Fathers stressed that "the strengthening of the Petrine ministry is fundamental for the preservation of the Church's unity", and that "the full exercise of the primacy of Peter is fundamental for the Church's identity and vitality in America". (100) By the Lord's mandate, Peter and his Successors have the task of confirming their brethren in faith (cf. Lk 22:32) and of feeding the entire flock of Christ (cf. Jn 21:15-17). The Successor of the Prince of the Apostles is called to

be the rock upon which the Church is built, and to exercise the ministry belonging to the one to whom the keys of the Kingdom were given (cf. Mt 16:18-19). The Vicar of Christ is in fact "the enduring principle of unity and the visible foundation" of the Church. (101)

Christian initiation and communion

34. Communion of life in the Church comes through the sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. Baptism is "the doorway to the spiritual life; it makes us members of Christ and draws us into the body of the Church". (102) In Confirmation, the baptized "are joined more completely to the Church, they are enriched with special strength by the Holy Spirit and thus are more solemnly obliged to spread and defend the faith in word and deed as true witnesses of Christ". (103) The journey of Christian initiation comes to completion and reaches its summit in the Eucharist, which fully incorporates the baptized into the Body of Christ. (104)

"These sacraments are an excellent opportunity for an effective evangelization and catechesis, when preparation for them is entrusted to people of faith and competence". (105) While dioceses in America have made undeniable progress in preparing people for the sacraments of Christian initiation, the Synod Fathers nonetheless expressed regret that "many receive them without adequate formation". (106) In the case of the Baptism of children, efforts to catechize the parents and godparents should not be spared.

The Eucharist as center of communion with God and with each other

35. The Eucharist is more than simply the culmination of Christian initiation. While Baptism and Confirmation serve as a beginning and introduction to the life of the Church and cannot be repeated, (107) the Eucharist is the living and lasting center around which the entire community of the Church gathers.

(108) The various aspects of the Eucharist reveal its inexhaustible wealth: it is at one and the same time a Sacrament of Sacrifice, Communion and Presence. (109)

The Eucharist is the outstanding moment of encounter with the living Christ. For this reason, by their preaching and catechesis, the Pastors of the People of God in America must strive “to give the Sunday Eucharistic celebration new strength, as the source and summit of the Church's life, the safeguard of communion in the Body of Christ, and an invitation to solidarity, expressing the Lord's command: 'Love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 13:34)”. (110) As the Synod Fathers suggest, an effort of this kind must include a number of fundamental aspects. First of all, there is a need to renew in the faithful the sense that the Eucharist is an immense gift: this will lead them to do all they can to participate actively and worthily, at least on Sundays and Holy Days. At the same time, “efforts by priests to make attendance possible, even for the most distant communities” must be encouraged. (111) The faithful need to be reminded that “their full, conscious and active participation, although essentially distinct from the office of the ordained priest, is an exercise of the common priesthood received in Baptism”. (112)

The need of the faithful to attend the Eucharist and the difficulties that arise from the shortage of priests make clear how urgent it is to promote priestly vocations. (113) The whole Church in America needs to be reminded also of “the link between the Eucharist and charity”, (114) a link which was expressed in the early Church by the joining of the agape and the Eucharistic Supper. (115) As a result of the grace received in the Sacrament, sharing in the Eucharist must lead to a more fervent exercise of charity.

The Bishops as builders of communion

36. Precisely because it signifies life, communion in the Church must constantly increase. Therefore, the Bishops, remembering that “each of them is the visible principle and foundation of the unity of his particular Church”, (116) cannot but feel duty-bound to promote communion in their dioceses, so that the drive for a new evangelization in America may be more effective. Working in favor of this communion are the structures which the Second Vatican Council called for as a means of supporting the diocesan Bishop's work, and which post-conciliar legislation has spelled out in greater detail. (117) “It is up to the Bishop, with the help of the priests, deacons, religious and lay people to implement a coordinated pastoral plan, which is systematic and participatory, involving all the members of the Church and awakening in them a missionary consciousness”. (118)

Each Ordinary will make sure to promote among priests and lay faithful the sense that the diocese is the visible expression of the Church's communion, which is formed at the table of the Word and of the Eucharist, around the Bishop in union with the College of Bishops and under its head, the Roman Pontiff. As a particular Church, the diocese is charged with initiating and deepening the encounter of all the members of God's People with Jesus Christ, (119) respecting and fostering that plurality and diversification which are not obstacles to unity but which give it the character of communion. (120) The spirit of participation and shared responsibility in the working of diocesan structures will certainly be strengthened if the nature of the particular Church is better known and appreciated. (121)

Deeper communion between the particular Churches

37. The Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops was the first ever to have gathered Bishops from the entire continent, and it was seen by all as a special grace of the Lord to the pilgrim Church in America. It strengthened the communion which must exist among the ecclesial communities of the continent, making clear to all the need for this communion to grow. Experiences of episcopal communion, more frequent since the Second Vatican Council as a result of the growth of Bishops' Conferences, should be seen as encounters with the living Christ, present in the brothers gathered in his name (cf. Mt 18:20).

The experience of the Synod showed just as clearly the value of a communion transcending individual Conferences of Bishops. Even though structures for dialogue between Conferences already exist, the Synod Fathers underlined the benefit of inter-American gatherings, such as those sponsored by the Episcopal Conferences of various American countries, as an expression of practical solidarity and a chance to study common challenges to evangelization in America. (122) It would be helpful to specify more exactly the nature of these meetings, so that they may become a better expression of communion among all Bishops. Beyond these more inclusive meetings, it could be useful, whenever circumstances require it, to establish special commissions to explore more deeply issues which concern America as a whole. Areas in which it seems especially necessary “to strengthen cooperation are the sharing of information on pastoral matters, missionary collaboration, education, immigration and ecumenism”. (123)

The Bishops, whose duty it is to promote communion among the particular Churches, should encourage the faithful to live this communion more and more, and to assume the “responsibility of developing bonds of communion with the local Churches in other areas of America through education, the exchange of information, fraternal ties between parishes and dioceses, and projects involving cooperation and joint intervention in questions of greater importance, especially those affecting the poor”. (124)

Fraternal communion with the Eastern Catholic Churches

38. The recent phenomenon of the establishment and development in America of Eastern Catholic particular Churches, with their own hierarchy, was a matter of special attention on the part of some Synod Fathers. A genuine desire to embrace, in ways both cordial and practical, these brethren in the faith and in hierarchical communion under the Successor of Peter led the Synod to propose concrete ways for the particular Churches of the Latin rite to offer fraternal assistance to the Eastern Catholic Churches throughout the continent. Thus, for example, the possibility was raised that Latin rite priests, especially those with Eastern roots, might offer liturgical assistance to Eastern communities which do not have enough priests of their own. Likewise, with regard to sacred buildings, the Eastern faithful could use Latin rite Churches wherever this seems appropriate.

In this spirit of communion, it is worth considering a few proposals of the Synod Fathers: namely, that - where necessary - mixed commissions charged with studying common pastoral problems be created in national Episcopal Conferences and in international agencies for cooperation among Bishops; that catechesis and theological formation for lay people and seminarians of the Latin Church include knowledge of the living tradition of the Christian East; that the Bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches participate in the Latin Episcopal Conferences of the different countries. (125) This fraternal cooperation, while offering valuable help to the Eastern Churches of recent foundation in America, will certainly also enrich the particular Churches of the Latin rite with the spiritual heritage of the Eastern Christian tradition.

The priesthood as a sign of unity

39. "As a member of a particular Church, each priest must be a sign of communion with the Bishop, since he is his immediate collaborator, in union with his brothers in the priesthood. With pastoral charity, he exercises his ministry, chiefly in the community entrusted to him, and he leads his community to encounter Christ the Good Shepherd. His vocation requires him to be a sign of unity. Therefore, he must avoid any involvement in party politics, since this would divide the community". (126) The Synod Fathers call for "a pastoral plan for diocesan clergy, to strengthen their spirituality and their sense of mission and identity, centered on following Christ, the eternal High Priest, always striving to obey the Father's will. Christ is the model of generous dedication, of austerity of life and of service even unto death. The priest should be conscious of the fact that, by virtue of the Sacrament of Orders, he is the bearer of grace, which he communicates to his brothers and sisters in the sacraments. He himself is sanctified in the exercise of his ministry". (127)

The field in which priests work is vast. Therefore they should concentrate on what is essential to their ministry: "letting themselves be configured to Christ the Head and Shepherd, the source of all pastoral charity, offering themselves each day with Christ in the Eucharist, in order to help the faithful both personally and communally to experience the living Jesus Christ". (128) As witnesses and disciples of the merciful Christ, they are called to be instruments of forgiveness and reconciliation, putting themselves generously at the service of the faithful in the spirit of the Gospel.

As pastors of the People of God in America, priests must also be alert to the challenges of the world today and sensitive to the problems and hopes of their people, sharing their experiences and growing, above all, in solidarity towards the poor. They should be careful to discern the charisms and strengths of the faithful who might be leaders in the community, listening to them and through dialogue encouraging their participation and co-responsibility. This will lead to a better distribution of tasks, enabling priests "to dedicate themselves to what is most closely tied to the encounter with and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and thus to represent better within the community the presence of Jesus who draws his people together". (129)

The task of discerning charisms also includes knowing how best to use those priests who show an aptitude for special ministries. Moreover, every priest is expected to offer his fraternal help to other priests and to turn trustingly to them in time of need.

Given the outstanding number of priests in America who, by God's grace, strive to meet the challenges of a truly remarkable workload, I join the Synod Fathers in acknowledging and praising their "untiring commitment as pastors, preachers of the Gospel and agents of ecclesial communion, in thanking them and in encouraging them to continue to offer their lives in service of the Gospel". (130)

Promoting vocations

40. The indispensable role of the priest within the community must lead all the members of the Church in America to recognize the importance of promoting vocations. The American continent has many young people, who represent an immense spiritual resource. Therefore, it is necessary to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life where they first develop, and Christian families must be invited to support their children if they feel called to follow this path. (131) Vocations "are a gift of God" and "they are born in communities of faith, above all in the family, the parish, Catholic schools and other Church organizations. Bishops and priests are particularly responsible for encouraging vocations by personally presenting the call, and above all by their witness of a life of fidelity, joy, enthusiasm and holiness. The entire People of God is responsible for promoting vocations, and does so chiefly by persistent and humble prayer for vocations". (132)

As places which accept and train those called to the priesthood, seminaries must prepare the future ministers of the Church to live “a solid spirituality of communion with Christ the Shepherd and of openness to the workings of the Spirit, that will make them specially able to discern the needs of God's People and their various charisms, and to work together”. (133) Therefore, in seminaries “there should be special insistence upon specifically spiritual formation, so that through constant conversion, the spirit of prayer, the practice of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance, the candidates may learn to be close to the Lord and learn to commit themselves generously to pastoral work”. (134) Those responsible for formation should carefully supervise and guide the seminarians towards emotional maturity so that they may be fit to embrace priestly celibacy and be prepared to live in communion with their brother priests. They should also foster in seminarians the capacity for critical observation so that they can discern true and false values, since this is an essential requirement for establishing a constructive dialogue with the world of today.

Special attention needs to be given to vocations among indigenous peoples: they need a formation which takes account of their culture. While receiving a proper theological and pastoral formation for their future ministry, these candidates for the priesthood should not be uprooted from their own culture. (135)

The Synod Fathers wished to thank and bless all those who devote their lives to the formation of future priests in seminaries. They also invited the Bishops to assign the most suitable priests to this work, after preparing them with specific training for this delicate mission. (136)

Renewing parishes

41. The parish is a privileged place where the faithful concretely experience the Church. (137) Today in America as elsewhere in the world the parish is facing certain difficulties in fulfilling its mission. The parish needs to be constantly renewed on the basis of the principle that “the parish must continue to be above all a Eucharistic community”. (138) This principle implies that “parishes are called to be welcoming and fraternal, places of Christian initiation, of education in and celebration of the faith, open to the full range of charisms, services and ministries, organized in a communal and responsible way, capable of utilizing existing movements of the apostolate, attentive to the cultural diversity of the people, open to pastoral projects which go beyond the individual parish, and alert to the world in which they live”. (139)

Because of the particular problems they present, special attention needs to be given to parishes in large urban areas, where the difficulties are such that normal parish structures are inadequate and the opportunities for the apostolate are significantly reduced. The institution of the parish, however, retains its importance and needs to be preserved. For this, there is a need “to keep looking for ways in which the parish and its pastoral structures can be more effective in urban areas”. (140) One way of renewing parishes, especially urgent for parishes in large cities, might be to consider the parish as a community of communities and movements. (141) It seems timely therefore to form ecclesial communities and groups of a size that allows for true human relationships. This will make it possible to live communion more intensely, ensuring that it is fostered not only “ad intra”, but also with the parish communities to which such groups belong, and with the entire diocesan and universal Church. In such a human context, it will be easier to gather to hear the word of God, to reflect on the range of human problems in the light of this word, and gradually to make responsible decisions inspired by the all-embracing love of Christ. (142) The institution of the parish, thus renewed, “can be the source of great hope. It can gather people in community, assist family life, overcome the sense of anonymity, welcome people and help them to be involved in their neighborhood and in society”. (143) In this way, every parish, and especially city parishes, can promote nowadays a more person-centered evangelization and better cooperate with other social, educational and community work. (144)

Moreover, “this kind of renewed parish needs as its leader a pastor who has a deep experience of the living Christ, a missionary spirit, a father's heart, who is capable of fostering spiritual life, preaching the Gospel and promoting cooperation. A renewed parish needs the collaboration of lay people and therefore a director of pastoral activity and a pastor who is able to work with others. Parishes in America should be distinguished by their missionary spirit, which leads them to reach out to those who are faraway”. (145)

Permanent deacons

42. For serious pastoral and theological reasons, the Second Vatican Council decided to restore the diaconate as a permanent element of the hierarchy of the Latin Church, leaving to the Episcopal Conferences, with the approval of the Supreme Pontiff, the task of assessing whether and where to establish permanent deacons. (146) The experience has varied significantly, not only in the different parts of America but even between dioceses of the same area. “Some dioceses have trained and ordained a good number of deacons, and they are fully satisfied with their integration and their ministry”. (147) Here we see with joy how deacons “sustained by the grace of the Sacrament, in the ministry (diakonia) of the Liturgy, of the word and of charity are at the service of the People of God, in communion with the Bishop and his priests”. (148) Other dioceses have not followed this path, while elsewhere there have been difficulties in integrating permanent deacons into the hierarchical structure.

With due respect for the freedom of the particular Churches to restore the permanent diaconate, with the approval of the Supreme Pontiff, it is clear that for such a move to be successful there has to be a careful selection process, solid formation and continuous attention to the suitability of the candidates, as well as constant concern for them once they are ordained, and - in the case of married deacons - concern as well for their families, wives and children. (149)

Consecrated life

43. The history of evangelization in America bears eloquent testimony to the missionary work accomplished by countless consecrated Religious who from the beginning proclaimed the Gospel, defended the rights of the indigenous peoples and, with heroic love for Christ, dedicated themselves to service of the People of God on the continent. (150) The contribution of Religious to the proclamation of the Gospel in America is still enormously important; it is a varied contribution shaped by the charisms of each group: "Institutes of contemplative life which witness to God as absolute; apostolic and missionary Institutes which make Christ present in all the many different areas of human life; Secular Institutes which help to resolve the tension between real openness to the values of the modern world and the profound offering of one's heart to God. New Institutes and new forms of consecrated life are also coming into being, and these require evangelical discernment". (151)

Since "the future of the new evangelization... is unthinkable without the renewed contribution of women, especially women Religious", (152) it is urgent to promote their participation in the various areas of Church life, including decision-making processes, especially on issues which concern them directly. (153)

"Today too the witness of a life consecrated completely to God is an eloquent proclamation of the fact that God suffices to give fulfillment to the life of each person". (154) This consecration to the Lord must become generous service in the spreading of God's Kingdom. For this reason, on the threshold of the Third Millennium, it is necessary to ensure "that consecrated life be more highly esteemed and promoted by Bishops, priests, and Christian communities, and that, conscious of the joy and responsibility of their vocation, consecrated religious be fully integrated into the particular Church to which they belong, fostering communion and mutual cooperation". (155)

Lay faithful and the renewal of the Church

44. "The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the unity of the Church as the People of God gathered into the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit stresses that Baptism confers upon all who receive it a dignity which includes the imitation and following of Christ, communion with one another and the missionary mandate". (156) The lay faithful should thus be conscious of their baptismal dignity. For their part, Pastors should have a profound respect "for the witness and evangelizing work of lay people who, incorporated into the People of God through a spirituality of communion, lead their brothers and sisters to encounter the living Jesus Christ. The renewal of the Church in America will not be possible without the active presence of the laity. Therefore, they are largely responsible for the future of the Church". (157)

There are two areas in which lay people live their vocation. The first, and the one best suited to their lay state, is the secular world, which they are called to shape according to God's will. (158) "Their specific activity brings the Gospel to the structures of the world; 'working in holiness wherever they are, they consecrate the world itself to God'". (159) Thanks to the lay faithful, "the presence and mission of the Church in the world is realized in a special way in the variety of charisms and ministries which belong to the laity. Secularity is the true and distinctive mark of the lay person and of lay spirituality, which means that the laity strive to evangelize the various sectors of family, social, professional, cultural and political life. On a continent marked by competition and aggressiveness, unbridled consumerism and corruption, lay people are called to embody deeply evangelical values such as mercy, forgiveness, honesty, transparency of heart and patience in difficult situations. What is expected from the laity is a great creative effort in activities and works demonstrating a life in harmony with the Gospel". (160)

America needs lay Christians able to assume roles of leadership in society. It is urgent to train men and women who, in keeping with their vocation, can influence public life, and direct it to the common good. In political life, understood in its truest and noblest sense as the administration of the common good, they can find the path of their own sanctification. For this, they must be formed in the truths and values of the Church's social teaching, and in the basic notions of a theology of the laity. A deeper knowledge of Christian ethical principles and moral values will enable them to be exponents of these in their own particular setting, proclaiming them even where appeals are made to the so-called "neutrality of the State". (161)

There is a second area in which many lay faithful are called to work, and this can be called "intra-ecclesial". A good number of lay people in America legitimately aspire to contribute their talents and charisms "to the building of the ecclesial community as delegates of the word, catechists, visitors to the sick and the imprisoned, group leaders, etc." (162) The Synod Fathers expressed the hope that the Church would recognize some of these works as lay ministries, with a basis in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, without compromising the specific ministries proper to the Sacrament of Orders. This is a large and complex issue and some time ago I established a Commission to study it; (163) in this regard the offices of the Holy See have from time to time provided guidelines. (164) There is a need to

promote positive cooperation by properly trained lay men and women in different activities within the Church, while avoiding any confusion with the ordained ministries and the activities proper to the Sacrament of Orders, so that the common priesthood of the faithful remains clearly distinguished from that of the ordained.

In this respect, the Synod Fathers recommended that the works entrusted to lay people be clearly “distinct from those which constitute steps on the way to the ordained ministry” (165) and which are carried out by candidates for the priesthood before ordination. It was also noted that these lay works “should be undertaken only by men and women who have received the necessary training in accordance with clearly defined criteria: a stable presence, a real readiness to serve a determined group of persons, and the duty of accountability to their Pastor”. (166) In any event, while the intra-ecclesial apostolate of lay people needs to be promoted, care must be taken to ensure that it goes hand in hand with the activity proper to the laity, in which their place cannot be taken by priests: the area of temporal realities.

The dignity of women

45. Particular attention needs to be given to the vocation of women. On other occasions I have expressed my esteem for the specific contribution of women to the progress of humanity and recognized the legitimacy of their aspiration to take part fully in ecclesial, cultural, social and economic life. (167) Without this contribution, we would miss the enrichment which only the “feminine genius” (168) can bring to the life of the Church and to society. To fail to recognize this would be an historic injustice, especially in America, if we consider the contribution which women have made to the material and cultural development of the continent, just as they have in handing down and preserving the faith. Indeed, “their role was decisive, above all in consecrated life, in education and in health care”. (169)

Unfortunately, in many parts of America women still meet forms of discrimination. It can be said that the face of the poor in America is also the face of many women. That is why the Synod Fathers spoke of a “feminine side of poverty”. (170) The Church feels the duty to defend the human dignity which belongs to every person, and “denounces discrimination, sexual abuse and male domination as actions contrary to God's plan”. (171) In particular, the Church deplores the appalling practice, sometimes part of a larger plan, of the sterilization of women, especially the poorest and most marginalized, often carried out surreptitiously, without the women themselves realizing it. This is all the more serious when it is done in order to obtain economic aid at the international level.

The Church throughout America feels committed to show greater concern for women and to defend them “so that society in America can better support family life based on marriage, better protect motherhood and show greater respect for the dignity of all women”. (172) There is a need to help women in America to take an active and responsible role in the Church's life and mission, (173) and also to acknowledge the need for the wisdom and cooperation of women in leadership roles within American society.

Challenges facing Christian families

46. “God the Creator, by forming the first man and woman and commanding them to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1:28), definitively established the family. In this sanctuary life is born and is welcomed as God's gift. The word of God, faithfully read in the family, gradually builds it up as a domestic church and makes it fruitful in human and Christian virtues; it is there that the source of vocations is to be found. Marian devotion, nourished by prayer, will keep families united and prayerful with Mary, like the disciples of Jesus before Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:14)”. (174) Many insidious forces are endangering the solidity of the institution of the family in most countries of America, and these represent so many challenges for Christians. Among them we should mention the increase in divorce, the spread of abortion, infanticide and the contraceptive mentality. Faced with this situation, we need to reaffirm “that the foundation of human life is the conjugal relationship between husband and wife, a relationship which, between Christians, is sacramental”. (175)

Hence there is urgent need of a broad catechetical effort regarding the Christian ideal of conjugal communion and family life, including a spirituality of fatherhood and motherhood. Greater pastoral attention must be given to the role of men as husbands and fathers, as well as to the responsibility which they share with their wives for their marriage, the family and the raising of their children. Also required is a serious preparation of young people for marriage, one which clearly presents Catholic teaching on this sacrament at the theological, anthropological and spiritual levels. On a continent like America, characterized by significant population growth, there needs to be a constant increase of pastoral initiatives directed to families.

In order to be a true “domestic church” (176) the Christian family needs to be a setting in which parents hand down the faith, since they are “for their children, by word and example, the first heralds of the faith”.

(177) Families should not fail to set time aside for prayer, in which spouses are united with each other and with their children. There is a need to encourage shared spiritual moments such as participating in the Eucharist on Sundays and Holy Days, receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, daily prayer in the family and practical signs of charity. This will strengthen fidelity in marriage and unity in families. In such a family setting it will not be difficult for children to discover a vocation of service in the community and the Church, and to learn, especially by seeing the example of their parents, that family life is a way to realize the universal call to holiness. (178)

Young people, the hope of the future

47. Young people are a great force in society and for evangelization. They “represent quite a large part of the population in many nations of America. On their encounter with the living Christ depends the hope and expectation of a future of greater communion and solidarity for the Church and society in America”. (179) The particular Churches throughout the continent are clearly making real efforts to catechize young people before Confirmation and to offer them other kinds of support in developing their relationship with Christ and their knowledge of the Gospel. The formation process for young people must be constant and active, capable of helping them to find their place in the Church and in the world. Consequently, youth ministry must be one of the primary concerns of Pastors and communities.

In fact, while many young people in America are searching for true meaning in life and are thirsting for God, quite often they lack the conditions needed to take advantage of their abilities and realize their aspirations. Unfortunately, unemployment and the lack of prospects for the future lead them at times to withdrawal and to violence. The resulting sense of frustration not infrequently leads them to abandon the search for God. Faced with this complex situation, “the Church is committed to maintaining her pastoral and missionary commitment to young people, so that they will encounter today the living Jesus Christ”. (180)

In her pastoral activity the Church reaches a great number of adolescents and young people through programs for Christian families, catechesis, Catholic educational institutions and community life in parishes. But there are many others, especially among those affected by various kinds of poverty, who remain outside the range of the Church's activity. Young Christians, trained to have a mature missionary consciousness, must become apostles to their contemporaries. There is need for pastoral outreach to young people wherever they are found: in schools, universities, the workplace, the countryside, with appropriate adaptation to their particular inclinations. At the parish and diocesan level it would be helpful also to develop a pastoral outreach that takes account of the changing world of young people. Such an effort should seek to engage them in dialogue, take advantage of favorable occasions for meetings on a larger scale, encourage local initiatives and make the most of programs already in place at the interdiocesan and international levels.

And what of those young people who do not grow out of their adolescent attitudes and find it difficult to take on serious and lasting responsibilities? In response to this lack of maturity, young people need to be invited to have courage and they need to be trained to appreciate the value of life-long commitments such as the priesthood, consecrated life and Christian married life. (181)

Leading children to encounter Christ

48. Children are God's gift and a sign of his presence. “There is a need to accompany children in their encounter with Christ, from Baptism to First Communion, since they are part of the living community of faith, hope and love”. (182) The Church is grateful for the efforts of parents, teachers, pastoral, social and health care workers, and all those who seek to serve the family and children with the same attitude as Jesus Christ who said: “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:4).

The Synod Fathers rightly deplored and condemned the painful condition of many children throughout America who are denied their dignity, their innocence and even their life. “This condition includes violence, poverty, homelessness, lack of adequate health care and education, the harm inflicted by drugs and alcohol, and other states of neglect and abuse”. (183) In this regard, special mention was made during the Synod of the problem of the sexual abuse of children and child prostitution, and the Fathers made an urgent appeal “to all those holding authority in society, that, as a priority, they do all in their power to alleviate the suffering of children in America”. (184)

Elements of communion with other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities

49. Between the Catholic Church and the other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities there exists a drive towards communion rooted in the Baptism which each administers. (185) It is a drive nourished by prayer, dialogue and joint action. The Synod Fathers wished to express their special desire “to cooperate in the dialogue already under way with the Orthodox Church, with which we share many elements of faith, sacramental life and piety”. (186) The specific proposals of the Synodal assembly concerning non-Catholic Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities as a whole were numerous. It was suggested in the first place “that Catholic Christians, Pastors and faithful foster cooperation between Christians of the different confessions, in the name of the Gospel, in response to the cry of the poor, by the promotion of justice, by common prayer for unity and by sharing in the word of God and the experience of faith in the living Christ”. (187) Also to be promoted, when possible and appropriate, are meetings of experts from the different Churches and Ecclesial Communities aimed at facilitating ecumenical dialogue. Ecumenism should be a subject of reflection and shared experience between the different Catholic Episcopal Conferences in America.

Although the Second Vatican Council refers to all those who are baptized and believe in Christ as “brothers and sisters in the Lord”, (188) it is necessary to distinguish clearly between Christian communities, with which ecumenical relations can be established, and sects, cults and other pseudo-religious movements.

The Church's relations with Jewish communities

50. American society also includes Jewish communities, with which the Church has fostered increasing cooperation in recent years. (189) The history of salvation makes clear our special relationship with the Jewish people. Jesus belongs to the Jewish people and he inaugurated his Church within the Jewish nation. A great part of the Holy Scriptures, which we Christians read as the word of God, constitute a spiritual patrimony which we share with Jews. (190) Consequently any negative attitude in their regard must be avoided, since "in order to be a blessing for the world, Jews and Christians need first to be a blessing for each other". (191)

Non-Christian religions

51. As for non-Christian religions, the Catholic Church rejects nothing in them which is true and holy. (192) Hence, with regard to other religions Catholics intend to emphasize elements of truth wherever they are to be found, while at the same time firmly bearing witness to the newness of the revelation of Christ, preserved in its fullness by the Church. (193) Consistent with this attitude, they reject as alien to the spirit of Christ any discrimination or persecution directed against persons on the basis of race, color, condition of life or religion. Difference of religion must never be a cause of violence or war. Instead persons of different beliefs must feel themselves drawn, precisely because of these beliefs, to work together for peace and justice. "Muslims, like Christians and Jews, call Abraham their father. Consequently throughout America these three communities should live in harmony and work together for the common good. The Church in America must also work for greater mutual respect and good relations with the native American religions". (194) A similar attitude should be fostered with regard to the followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions who have come to America as a result of recent waves of immigration from the East.

CHAPTER V - THE PATH TO SOLIDARITY

"By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35)

Solidarity, the fruit of communion

52. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40; cf. 25:45). The awareness of communion with Christ and with our brothers and sisters, for its part the fruit of conversion, leads to the service of our neighbors in all their needs, material and spiritual, since the face of Christ shines forth in every human being. "Solidarity is thus the fruit of the communion which is grounded in the mystery of the triune God, and in the Son of God who took flesh and died for all. It is expressed in Christian love which seeks the good of others, especially of those most in need". (195)

For the particular Churches of the American continent, this is the source of a commitment to reciprocal solidarity and the sharing of the spiritual gifts and material goods with which God has blessed them, fostering in individuals a readiness to work where they are needed. Taking the Gospel as its starting-point, a culture of solidarity needs to be promoted, capable of inspiring timely initiatives in support of the poor and the outcast, especially refugees forced to leave their villages and lands in order to flee violence. The Church in America must encourage the international agencies of the continent to establish an economic order dominated not only by the profit motive but also by the pursuit of the common good of nations and of the international community, the equitable distribution of goods and the integral development of peoples. (196)

The Church's teaching, a statement of the demands of conversion

53. At a time when in the sphere of morality there is a disturbing spread of relativism and subjectivism, the Church in America is called to proclaim with renewed vigor that conversion consists in commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, with all the theological and moral implications taught by the Magisterium of the Church. There is a need to recognize "the role played by theologians, catechists and religion teachers who, by setting forth the Church's teaching in fidelity to the Magisterium, cooperate directly in the correct formation of the consciences of the faithful". (197) If we believe that Jesus is the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6), we cannot fail to desire ardently to be his witnesses in order to bring our brothers and sisters closer to the full truth that dwells in the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead for the salvation of the human race. "In this way we will be able to be, in this world, living beacons of faith, hope and charity". (198)

The Church's social doctrine

54. Faced with the grave social problems which, with different characteristics, are present throughout America, Catholics know that they can find in the Church's social doctrine an answer which serves as a starting-point in the search for practical solutions. Spreading this doctrine is an authentic pastoral priority. It is therefore important "that in America the agents of evangelization (Bishops, priests, teachers, pastoral workers, etc.) make their own this treasure which is the Church's social teaching and, inspired by it, become capable of interpreting the present situation and determine the actions to take". (199) In this regard, special care must be taken to train lay persons capable of working, on the basis of their faith in Christ, to transform earthly realities. In addition, it will help to promote and support the study of this doctrine in every area of the life of the particular Churches in America, especially in the universities, so that it may be more deeply known and applied to American society. The complex social reality of the continent is a fruitful field for the analysis and application of the universal principles contained in this doctrine.

To this end, it would be very useful to have a compendium or approved synthesis of Catholic social doctrine, including a "Catechism", which would show the connection between it and the new evangelization. The part which the Catechism of the Catholic Church devotes to this material, in its treatment of the seventh commandment of the Decalogue, could serve as the starting-point for such a "Catechism of Catholic Social Doctrine". Naturally, as in the case of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, such a synthesis would only formulate general principles, leaving their application to further treatment of the specific issues bound up with the different local situations. (200)

An important place in the Church's social doctrine belongs to the right to dignified labor. Consequently, given the high rates of unemployment found in numerous countries in America and the harsh conditions in which many industrial and rural workers find themselves, "it is necessary to value work as a factor of the fulfillment and dignity of the human person. It is the ethical responsibility of an organized society to promote and support a culture of work". (201)

The globalization of solidarity

55. As I mentioned earlier, the complex phenomenon of globalization is one of the features of the contemporary world particularly visible in America. An important part of this many-faceted reality is the economic aspect. By her social doctrine the Church makes an effective contribution to the issues presented by the current globalized economy. Her moral vision in this area "rests on the threefold cornerstone of human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity". (202) The globalized economy must be analyzed in the light of the principles of social justice, respecting the preferential option for the poor who must be allowed to take their place in such an economy, and the requirements of the international common good. For "the Church's social doctrine is a moral vision which aims to encourage governments, institutions and private organizations to shape a future consonant with the dignity of every person. Within this perspective it is possible to examine questions of external debt, internal political corruption and discrimination both within and between nations". (203)

The Church in America is called not only to promote greater integration between nations, thus helping to create an authentic globalized culture of solidarity, (204) but also to cooperate with every legitimate means in reducing the negative effects of globalization, such as the domination of the powerful over the weak, especially in the economic sphere, and the loss of the values of local cultures in favor of a misconstrued homogenization.

Social sins which cry to heaven

56. The Church's social doctrine also makes possible a clearer appreciation of the gravity of the "social sins which cry to heaven because they generate violence, disrupt peace and harmony between communities within single nations, between nations and between the different regions of the continent". (205) Among these must be mentioned: "the drug trade, the recycling of illicit funds, corruption at every level, the terror of violence, the arms race, racial discrimination, inequality between social groups and the irrational destruction of nature". (206) These sins are the sign of a deep crisis caused by the loss of a sense of God and the absence of those moral principles which should guide the life of every person. In the absence of moral points of reference, an unbridled greed for wealth and power takes over, obscuring any Gospel-based vision of social reality.

Not infrequently, this leads some public institutions to ignore the actual social climate. More and more, in many countries of America, a system known as "neoliberalism" prevails; based on a purely economic conception of man, this system considers profit and the law of the market as its only parameters, to the detriment of the dignity of and the respect due to individuals and peoples. At times this system has become the ideological justification for certain attitudes and behavior in the social and political spheres leading to the neglect of the weaker members of society. Indeed, the poor are becoming ever more numerous, victims of specific policies and structures which are often unjust. (207)

On the basis of the Gospel, the best response to this tragic situation is the promotion of solidarity and peace, with a view to achieving real justice. For this to happen, encouragement and support must be given to all those who are examples of honesty in the administration of public finances and of justice. So too there is a need to support the process of democratization presently taking place in America, (208) since a democratic system provides greater control over potential abuses.

“The rule of law is the necessary condition for the establishment of an authentic democracy”. (209) For democracy to develop, there is a need for civic education and the promotion of public order and peace. In effect, “there is no authentic and stable democracy without social justice. Thus the Church needs to pay greater attention to the formation of consciences, which will prepare the leaders of society for public life at all levels, promote civic education, respect for law and for human rights, and inspire greater efforts in the ethical training of political leaders”. (210)

The ultimate foundation of human rights

57. It is appropriate to recall that the foundation on which all human rights rest is the dignity of the person. “God's masterpiece, man, is made in the divine image and likeness. Jesus took on our human nature, except for sin; he advanced and defended the dignity of every human person, without exception; he died that all might be free. The Gospel shows us how Christ insisted on the centrality of the human person in the natural order (cf. Lk 12:22-29) and in the social and religious orders, even against the claims of the Law (cf. Mk 2:27): defending men, women (cf. Jn 8:11) and even children (cf. Mt 19:13-15), who in his time and culture occupied an inferior place in society. The human being's dignity as a child of God is the source of human rights and of corresponding duties”. (211) For this reason, “every offense against the dignity of man is an offense against God himself, in whose image man is made”. (212) This dignity is common to all, without exception, since all have been created in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:26). Jesus' answer to the question “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:29) demands of each individual an attitude of respect for the dignity of others and of real concern for them, even if they are strangers or enemies (cf. Lk 10:30-37). In all parts of America the awareness that human rights must be respected has increased in recent times, yet much still remains to be done, if we consider the violations of the rights of persons and groups still taking place on the continent.

Preferential love for the poor and the outcast

58. “The Church in America must incarnate in her pastoral initiatives the solidarity of the universal Church towards the poor and the outcast of every kind. Her attitude needs to be one of assistance, promotion, liberation and fraternal openness. The goal of the Church is to ensure that no one is marginalized”. (213) The memory of the dark chapters of America's history, involving the practice of slavery and other situations of social discrimination, must awaken a sincere desire for conversion leading to reconciliation and communion.

Concern for those most in need springs from a decision to love the poor in a special manner. This is a love which is not exclusive and thus cannot be interpreted as a sign of partiality or sectarianism; (214) in loving the poor the Christian imitates the attitude of the Lord, who during his earthly life devoted himself with special compassion to all those in spiritual and material need.

The Church's work on behalf of the poor in every part of America is important; yet efforts are still needed to make this line of pastoral activity increasingly directed to an encounter with Christ who, though rich, made himself poor for our sakes, that he might enrich us by his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). There is a need to intensify and broaden what is already being done in this area, with the goal of reaching as many of the poor as possible. Sacred Scripture reminds us that God hears the cry of the poor (cf. Ps 34:7) and the Church must heed the cry of those most in need. Hearing their voice, “she must live with the poor and share their distress. By her lifestyle her priorities, her words and her actions, she must testify that she is in communion and solidarity with them”. (215)

Foreign debt

59. The existence of a foreign debt which is suffocating quite a few countries of the American continent represents a complex problem. While not entering into its many aspects, the Church in her pastoral concern cannot ignore this difficult situation, since it touches the life of so many people. For this reason, different Episcopal Conferences in America, conscious of the gravity of the question, have organized study meetings on the subject and have published documents aimed at pointing out workable solutions. (216) I too have frequently expressed my concern about this situation, which in some cases has become unbearable. In light of the imminent Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, and recalling the social significance that Jubilees had in the Old Testament, I wrote: “In the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations”. (217)

Once more I express the hope, which the Synod Fathers made their own, that the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace together with other competent agencies, such as the Section for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State, “through study and dialogue with representatives of the First World and with the leaders of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, will seek ways of resolving the problem of the foreign debt and produce guidelines that would prevent similar situations from recurring on the occasion of future loans”. (218) On the broadest level possible, it would be helpful if “internationally known experts in economics and monetary questions would undertake a critical analysis of the world economic order, in its positive and negative aspects, so as to correct the present order, and that they would propose a system and mechanisms capable of ensuring an integral and concerted development of individuals and peoples”. (219)

The fight against corruption

60. In America too, the phenomenon of corruption is widespread. The Church can effectively help to eradicate this evil from civil society by “the greater involvement of competent Christian laity who, thanks to their training in the family, at school and in the parish, foster the practice of values such as truth, honesty, industriousness and the service of the common good”. (220) In order to attain this goal, and to offer enlightenment to all people of good will anxious to put an end to the evils resulting from corruption, there is a need to teach and make known as widely as possible the passages of the Catechism of the Catholic Church devoted to this subject, while making Catholics in the different nations better acquainted with the relevant documents published by Episcopal Conferences in other countries. (221) With such training, Christians will contribute significantly to resolving the problem of corruption, committing themselves to put into practice the Church's social doctrine in all matters affecting their lives and in those areas where they can be of help to others.

The drug problem

61. With regard to the serious problem of the drug trade, the Church in America can cooperate effectively with national and business leaders, non-governmental organizations and international agencies in developing projects aimed at doing away with this trade which threatens the well-being of the peoples of America. (222) This cooperation must be extended to legislative bodies, in support of initiatives to prevent the “recycling of funds”, foster control of the assets of those involved in this traffic, and ensure that the production and marketing of the chemical substances from which drugs are obtained are carried out according to the law. The urgency and the gravity of the problem make it imperative to call upon the various sectors and groups within civil society to be united in the fight against the drug trade. (223) Specifically, as far as the Bishops are concerned, it is necessary - as the Synod Fathers suggested - that they themselves, as Pastors of the People of God, courageously and forcefully condemn the hedonism, materialism and life styles which easily lead to drug use. (224)

There is also a need to help poor farmers from being tempted by the easy money gained from cultivating plants used for drug-production. In this regard international agencies can make a valuable contribution to governments by providing incentives to encourage the production of alternative crops. Encouragement must also be given to those involved in rehabilitating drug users and to those engaged in the pastoral care of the victims of drug dependence. It is fundamentally important to offer the proper “meaning of life” to young people who, when faced with a lack of such meaning, not infrequently find themselves caught in the destructive spiral of drugs. Experience shows that this work of recuperation and social rehabilitation can be an authentic commitment to evangelization. (225)

The arms race

62. One factor seriously paralyzing the progress of many nations in America is the arms race. The particular Churches in America must raise a prophetic voice to condemn the arms race and the scandalous arms trade, which consumes huge sums of money which should instead be used to combat poverty and promote development. (226) On the other hand, the stockpiling of weapons is a cause of instability and a threat to peace. (227) For this reason the Church remains vigilant in situations where there is a risk of armed conflict, even between sister nations. As a sign and instrument of reconciliation and peace, she must seek “by every means possible, including mediation and arbitration, to act in favor of peace and fraternity between peoples”. (228)

The culture of death and a society dominated by the powerful

63. Nowadays, in America as elsewhere in the world, a model of society appears to be emerging in which the powerful predominate, setting aside and even eliminating the powerless: I am thinking here of unborn children, helpless victims of abortion; the elderly and incurably ill, subjected at times to euthanasia; and the many other people relegated to the margins of society by consumerism and materialism. Nor can I fail to mention the unnecessary recourse to the death penalty when other “bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons. Today, given the means at the State's disposal to deal with crime and control those who commit it, without abandoning all hope of their redemption, the cases where it is absolutely necessary to do away with an offender 'are now very rare, even non-existent practically’”. (229) This model of society bears the stamp of the culture of death, and is therefore in opposition to the Gospel message. Faced with this distressing reality, the Church community intends to commit itself all the more to the defense of the culture of life.

In this regard, the Synod Fathers, echoing recent documents of the Church's Magisterium, forcefully restated their unconditional respect for and total dedication to human life from the moment of conception to that of natural death, and their condemnation of evils like abortion and euthanasia. If the teachings of the divine and natural law are to be upheld, it is essential to promote knowledge of the Church's social doctrine and to work so that the values of life and family are

recognized and defended in social customs and in State ordinances. (230) As well as protecting life, greater efforts should be made, through a variety of pastoral initiatives, to promote adoptions and to provide continuing assistance to women with problem pregnancies, both before and after the birth of the child. Special pastoral attention must also be given to women who have undergone or actively procured an abortion. (231)

How can we fail to thank God and express genuine appreciation to our brothers and sisters in the faith throughout America who are committed, along with other Christians and countless individuals of good will, to defending life by every legal means and to protecting the unborn, the incurably ill and the handicapped? Their work is all the more praiseworthy if we consider the indifference of so many people, the threats posed by eugenics and the assaults on life and human dignity perpetrated everywhere each day. (232)

This same concern must be shown to the elderly, who are often neglected and left to fend for themselves. They must be respected as persons; it is important to care for them and to help them in ways which will promote their rights and ensure their greatest possible physical and spiritual well-being. The elderly must be protected from situations or pressures which could drive them to suicide; in particular they must be helped nowadays to resist the temptation of assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Together with the Pastors of the People of God in America, I appeal to “Catholics working in the field of medicine and health care, to those holding public office or engaged in teaching, to make every effort to defend those lives most at risk, and to act with a conscience correctly formed in accordance with Catholic doctrine. Here Bishops and priests have a special responsibility to bear tireless witness to the Gospel of life and to exhort the faithful to act accordingly”. (233) At the same time, it is essential for the Church in America to take appropriate measures to influence the deliberations of legislative assemblies, encouraging citizens, both Catholics and other people of good will, to establish organizations to propose workable legislation and to resist measures which endanger the two inseparable realities of life and the family. Nowadays there is a special need to pay attention to questions related to prenatal diagnosis, in order to avoid any violation of human dignity.

Discrimination against indigenous peoples and Americans of African descent

64. If the Church in America, in fidelity to the Gospel of Christ, intends to walk the path of solidarity, she must devote special attention to those ethnic groups which even today experience discrimination. Every attempt to marginalize the indigenous peoples must be eliminated. This means, first of all, respecting their territories and the pacts made with them; likewise, efforts must be made to satisfy their legitimate social, health and cultural requirements. And how can we overlook the need for reconciliation between the indigenous peoples and the societies in which they are living?

Here I would like to mention that in some places Americans of African descent still suffer from ethnic prejudice, and this represents a serious obstacle to their encounter with Christ. Since all people, whatever their race or condition, have been created by God in his image, it is necessary to encourage concrete programs, in which common prayer must play a part, aimed at promoting understanding and reconciliation between different peoples. These can build bridges of Christian love, peace and justice between all men and women. (234)

In order to attain these goals it is essential to train competent pastoral workers capable of employing methods already legitimately “inculturated” in catechesis and the liturgy, avoiding a syncretism which gives only a partial account of true Christian doctrine. Then too, it will be easier to provide a sufficient number of pastors to work with the native peoples if efforts are made to promote priestly and religious vocations within the midst of these very people. (235)

The question of immigrants

65. In its history, America has experienced many immigrations, as waves of men and women came to its various regions in the hope of a better future. The phenomenon continues even today, especially with many people and families from Latin American countries who have moved to the northern parts of the continent, to the point where in some cases they constitute a substantial part of the population. They often bring with them a cultural and religious heritage which is rich in Christian elements. The Church is well aware of the problems created by this situation and is committed to spare no effort in developing her own pastoral strategy among these immigrant people, in order to help them settle in their new land and to foster a welcoming attitude among the local population, in the belief that a mutual openness will bring enrichment to all.

Church communities will not fail to see in this phenomenon a specific call to live an evangelical fraternity and at the same time a summons to strengthen their own religious spirit with a view to a more penetrating evangelization. With this in mind, the Synod Fathers recalled that “the Church in America must be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another. Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration”. (236)

Migrants should be met with a hospitable and welcoming attitude which can encourage them to become part of the Church's life, always with due regard for their freedom and their specific cultural identity. Cooperation between the dioceses from which they come and those in which they settle, also through specific pastoral structures provided for in

the legislation and praxis of the Church, (237) has proved extremely beneficial to this end. In this way the most adequate and complete pastoral care possible can be ensured. The Church in America must be constantly concerned to provide for the effective evangelization of those recent arrivals who do not yet know Christ. (238)

CHAPTER VI - THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN AMERICA TODAY: THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

“As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21)

Sent by Christ

66. The Risen Christ, before his Ascension into heaven, sent the Apostles to preach the Gospel to the whole world (cf. Mk 16:15) and conferred on them the powers needed to carry out this mission. It is significant that, before giving his final missionary mandate, Jesus should speak of the universal power he had received from the Father (cf. Mt 28:18). In effect, Christ passed on to the Apostles the mission which he had received from the Father (cf. Jn 20:21), and in this way gave them a share in his powers.

Yet “the lay faithful too, precisely as members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit”. (239) They have been “in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ”. (240) Consequently, “the lay faithful, in virtue of their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, are fully part of this work of the Church” (241) and so should feel called and encouraged to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus' words: “You too, go into the vineyard” (Mt 20:4), (242) must be seen as addressed not only to the Apostles but to all who desire to be authentic disciples of the Lord.

The basic task for which Jesus sends out his disciples is the proclamation of the Good News, that is, evangelization (cf. Mk 16:15-18). Consequently, “to evangelize is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her most profound identity”. (243) As I have said on other occasions, the new and unique situation in which the world and the Church find themselves at the threshold of the Third Millennium, and the urgent needs which result, mean that the mission of evangelization today calls for a new program which can be defined overall as a “new evangelization”. (244) As the Church's Supreme Pastor, I urgently desire to encourage all the members of God's People, particularly those living in America - where I first appealed for a commitment “new in its ardor, methods and expression” (245) - to take up this project and to cooperate in carrying it out. In accepting this mission, everyone should keep in mind that the vital core of the new evangelization must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery. (246)

Jesus Christ, the “good news” and the prime evangelizer

67. Jesus Christ is the “good news” of salvation made known to people yesterday, today and for ever; but he is also the first and greatest evangelizer. (247) The Church must make the crucified and risen Christ the center of her pastoral concern and her evangelizing activity. “Everything planned in the Church must have Christ and his Gospel as its starting-point”. (248) Therefore, “the Church in America must speak increasingly of Jesus Christ, the human face of God and the divine face of man. It is this proclamation that truly makes an impact on people, awakens and transforms hearts, in a word, converts. Christ must be proclaimed with joy and conviction, but above all by the witness of each one's life”. (249)

Individual Christians will be able to carry out their mission effectively to the extent that they make the life of the Son of God made man the perfect model for their work of spreading the Gospel. The simplicity of his manner and his choices must be normative for everyone in the work of evangelization. In this perspective, the poor will certainly be considered among the first to be evangelized, following the example of Christ, who said of himself: “The Spirit of the Lord... has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18). (250)

As I have already noted, love for the poor must be preferential, but not exclusive. The Synod Fathers observed that it was in part because of an approach to the pastoral care of the poor marked by a certain exclusiveness that the pastoral care for the leading sectors of society has been neglected and many people have thus been estranged from the Church. (251) The damage done by the spread of secularism in these sectors - political or economic, union-related, military, social or cultural - shows how urgent it is that they be evangelized, with the encouragement and guidance of the Church's Pastors, who are called by God to care for everyone. They will be able to count on the help of those who - fortunately still numerous - have remained faithful to Christian values. In this regard the Synod Fathers have recognized “the commitment of many leaders to building a just and fraternal society”. (252) With their support, Pastors will face the not easy task of evangelizing these sectors of society. With renewed fervor and updated methods, they will announce Christ to leaders, men and women alike, insisting especially on the formation of consciences on the basis of the Church's social doctrine. This formation will act as the best antidote to the not infrequent cases of inconsistency and

even corruption marking socio-political structures. Conversely, if this evangelization of the leadership sector is neglected, it should not come as a surprise that many who are a part of it will be guided by criteria alien to the Gospel and at times openly contrary to it.

The encounter with Christ spurs evangelization

68. An encounter with the Lord brings about a profound transformation in all who do not close themselves off from him. The first impulse coming from this transformation is to communicate to others the richness discovered in the experience of the encounter. This does not mean simply teaching what we have come to know but also, like the Samaritan woman, enabling others to encounter Jesus personally: "Come and see" (Jn 4:29). The result will be the same as that which took place in the heart of the Samaritans, who said to the woman: "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (Jn 4:42). The Church, which draws her life from the permanent and mysterious presence of her Risen Lord, has as the core of her mission a duty "to lead all people to encounter Christ". (253)

She is called to proclaim that Christ is indeed the Living One, the Son of God, who became man, died and rose again. He alone is the Savior of every person and of the whole person; as the Lord of history, he is constantly at work in the Church and in the world through his Spirit, until the end of time. This presence of the Risen One in the Church makes it possible for us to encounter him, thanks to the invisible working of his life-giving Spirit. This encounter takes place in the faith received from and lived in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. The encounter with Christ then has an essentially ecclesial dimension, and it leads to a life commitment. Indeed, "to encounter the living Christ means to accept the love by which he loves us first, to choose him, to adhere freely to his person and his plan, which consists in proclaiming and in bringing about the Kingdom of God". (254)

The calling gives rise to a search for Jesus: "'Rabbi' (which means Teacher), 'where are you staying'. He said to them: 'Come and see'. They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed that day with him" (Jn 1:38-39). This "staying" is not limited to the day of one's call, but rather extends to the whole of life. To follow Jesus involves living as he lived, accepting his message, adopting his way of thinking, embracing his destiny and sharing his project, which is the plan of the Father: it involves inviting everyone to communion with the Trinity and to communion among ourselves in a just and fraternal society". (255) The burning desire to invite others to encounter the One whom we have encountered is the start of the evangelizing mission to which the whole Church is called. This mission has become particularly urgent today in America, five hundred years after the first evangelization, as we prepare to commemorate with gratitude the two thousandth anniversary of the coming of the only-begotten Son of God into the world.

The importance of catechesis

69. The new evangelization in which the whole continent is engaged means that faith cannot be taken for granted, but must be explicitly proposed in all its breadth and richness. This is the principal objective of catechesis, which, by its very nature, is an essential aspect of the new evangelization. "Catechesis is a process of formation in faith, hope and charity; it shapes the mind and touches the heart, leading the person to embrace Christ fully and completely. It introduces the believer more fully into the experience of the Christian life, which involves the liturgical celebration of the mystery of the Redemption and the Christian service of others". (256)

Well realizing the need for a complete catechesis, I made my own the proposal of the Fathers of the 1985 Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to compose "a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals", which could serve as "a point of reference for the catechisms or compendia that are prepared in the various regions". (257) This proposal was implemented with the publication of the typical edition of the *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*. (258) In addition to the text of the Catechism, and for a better utilization of its contents, I intended that a General Directory for Catechesis should also be compiled and published. (259) I heartily recommend the use of these two resources, of universal value, to everyone involved in catechesis in America. It is to be hoped that both documents will be employed "in the preparation and the evaluation of all parochial and diocesan programs of catechesis, bearing in mind that the religious situation of young people and adults calls for a catechesis which is more kerygmatic and more organic in its presentation of the contents of the faith". (260)

It is necessary to acknowledge and encourage the outstanding work done by so many catechists throughout America as authentic messengers of the kingdom: "Their faith and their witness of life are an integral part of catechesis". (261) I wish all the more to encourage the faithful to take up, with commitment and love of the Lord, this service to the Church, generously offering their time and their talents. Bishops for their part should be concerned that catechists receive appropriate formation to enable them to carry out this task, so indispensable in the life of the Church.

In catechesis it will be useful to keep in mind, especially on a continent like America where the social question takes on such importance, that "growth in the understanding of the faith and its practical expression in social life are intimately connected. Efforts made to favor an encounter with Christ cannot fail to have a positive repercussion in the promotion of the common good in a just society". (262)

The evangelization of culture

70. My Predecessor Paul VI widely remarked that “the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the drama of our time”. (263) Hence the Synod Fathers rightly felt that “the new evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture”. (264) The Son of God, by taking upon himself our human nature, became incarnate within a particular people, even though his redemptive death brought salvation to all people, of every culture, race and condition. The gift of his Spirit and his love are meant for each and every people and culture, in order to bring them all into unity after the example of the perfect unity existing in the Triune God. For this to happen, it is necessary to inculturate preaching in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers.

(265) At the same time, however, it must not be forgotten that the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the supreme manifestation of the infinite God within the finitude of history, is the only valid point of reference for all of humanity on its pilgrimage in search of authentic unity and true peace.

In America, the mestiza face of the Virgin of Guadalupe was from the start a symbol of the inculturation of the Gospel, of which she has been the lodestar and the guide. Through her powerful intercession, the Gospel will penetrate the hearts of the men and women of America and permeate their cultures, transforming them from within. (266)

Evangelizing centers of education

71. Education can play an outstanding role in promoting the inculturation of the Gospel. Nonetheless, Catholic centers of education, and those which, although non-denominational, are clearly inspired by Catholic principles, will be able to engage in authentic evangelization only if at all levels - including that of the university - they clearly preserve their Catholic orientation. The content of the education they impart should make constant reference to Jesus Christ and his message as the Church presents it in her dogmatic and moral teaching. Only in this way will they train truly Christian leaders in the different spheres of human activity, and in society, especially in politics, economics, science, art and philosophical reflection. (267) Hence, “it is essential that the Catholic university be truly both things at once: a university and Catholic. Its Catholic character is an essential element of the university as an institution, and therefore does not depend simply on the decision of the individuals who govern the university at any particular time”.

(268) Pastoral work in Catholic universities will therefore be given special attention: it must encourage a commitment to the apostolate on the part of the students themselves, so that they can become the evangelizers of the university world. (269) In addition, “cooperation between Catholic universities throughout America needs to be encouraged, for their mutual enrichment”; (270) this will help put into effect, at the university level too, the principle of solidarity and interchange between the peoples of the whole continent.

Something similar must also be said about Catholic schools, particularly with regard to secondary education: “A special effort should be made to strengthen the Catholic identity of schools, whose specific character is based on an educational vision having its origin in the person of Christ and its roots in the teachings of the Gospel. Catholic schools must seek not only to impart a quality education from the technical and professional standpoint, but also and above all provide for the integral formation of the human person. (271) Given the importance of the work done by Catholic educators, I join the Synod Fathers in gratefully encouraging all those devoted to teaching in Catholic schools - priests, consecrated men and women and committed lay people - “to persevere in their most important mission”. (272) The influence of these educational centers should extend to all sectors of society, without distinction or exclusion. It is essential that every possible effort be made to ensure that Catholic schools, despite financial difficulties, continue to provide “a Catholic education to the poor and the marginalized in society”. (273) It will never be possible to free the needy from their poverty unless they are first freed from the impoverishment arising from the lack of adequate education.

In the overall work of the new evangelization, the educational sector occupies a place of honor. For this reason, the activity of all Catholic teachers, including those working in non-denominational schools, should be encouraged. I also make an urgent appeal to men and women religious not to abandon this field which is so important for the new evangelization. (274)

As a fruit and an expression of the communion existing between all the particular Churches of America, certainly strengthened by the spiritual experience of the Synodal Assembly, an effort must be made to promote gatherings of Catholic educators at the national and continental levels, in an attempt to coordinate and expand the educational apostolate in every context. (275)

To carry out these tasks, the Church in America requires a degree of freedom in the field of education; this is not to be seen as a privilege but as a right, in virtue of the evangelizing mission entrusted to the Church by the Lord. Furthermore, parents have a fundamental and primary right to make decisions about the education of their children; consequently, Catholic parents must be able to choose an education in harmony with their religious convictions. The function of the State in this area is subsidiary; the State has the duty “to ensure that education is available to all and to respect and defend freedom of instruction. A State monopoly in this area must be condemned as a form of totalitarianism which violates the fundamental rights which it ought to defend, especially the right of parents to provide religious education for their children. The family is the place where the education of the person primarily takes place”. (276)

Evangelization through the media

72. For the new evangelization to be effective, it is essential to have a deep understanding of the culture of our time in which the social communications media are most influential. Therefore, knowledge and use of the media, whether the more traditional forms or those which technology has produced in recent times, is indispensable. Contemporary reality demands a capacity to learn the language, nature and characteristics of mass media. Using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine inculturation of the Gospel. At the same time, the media also help to shape the culture and mentality of people today, which is why there must be special pastoral activity aimed at those working in the media. (277)

On this point, the Synod Fathers suggested a range of concrete initiatives to make the Gospel effectively present in the world of social communications: the training of pastoral workers for this task; the support of high-quality production centers; the careful and effective use of satellite and other new technologies; teaching the faithful to be "critical" in their use of the media; joining forces in order to acquire and manage new transmitters and TV and radio networks, as well as coordinating those already in operation. Catholic publications also deserve support and need to develop the excellence sought by all.

Business people should be encouraged to provide economic support for quality products promoting human and Christian values. (278) But a program as vast as this is far beyond the resources of the individual particular Churches of the American continent. Therefore, the Synod Fathers proposed an inter-American coordination of current activities in the field of social communications, aimed at fostering mutual awareness and coordination of current projects in the field. (279)

The challenge of the sects

73. The proselytizing activity of the sects and new religious groups in many parts of America is a grave hindrance to the work of evangelization. The word "proselytism" has a negative meaning when it indicates a way of winning followers which does not respect the freedom of those to whom a specific kind of religious propaganda is directed. (280) The Catholic Church in America is critical of proselytism by the sects and, for this reason, rejects methods of this kind in her own evangelizing work. Presenting the Gospel of Christ in its entirety, the work of evangelization must respect the inner sanctuary of every individual's conscience, where the decisive and absolutely personal dialogue between grace and human freedom unfolds.

This must be borne in mind especially with regard to the sisters and brothers of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities separated from the Catholic Church, long-established in some regions. The bonds of true though imperfect communion which, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, (281) these communities already have with the Catholic Church must enlighten the attitudes of the Church and her members towards them. (282) These attitudes, however, must not be such that they weaken the firm conviction that only in the Catholic Church is found the fullness of the means of salvation established by Jesus Christ. (283)

The success of proselytism by sects and new religious groups in America cannot be ignored. It demands of the Church on the continent a thorough study, to be carried out in each nation and at the international level, to ascertain why many Catholics leave the Church. Pastoral policies will have to be revised, so that each particular Church can offer the faithful more personalized religious care, strengthen the structures of communion and mission, make the most of the evangelizing possibilities of a purified popular religiosity, and thus give new life to every Catholic's faith in Jesus Christ, through prayer and meditation upon the word of God, suitably explained. (284) No one can deny the urgency of prompt evangelizing efforts aimed at those segments of the People of God most exposed to proselytism by the sects: immigrants, neighborhoods on the outskirts of the cities or rural towns with no regular presence of a priest and therefore marked by widespread religious ignorance, families of simple people suffering from material difficulties of various kinds. From this point of view too, base-communities, movements, family groups and other forms of association in which it is easier to build interpersonal bonds of mutual support, both spiritual and economic, have shown themselves to be very helpful.

Moreover, as some of the Synod Fathers indicated, it is necessary to ask whether a pastoral strategy directed almost exclusively to meeting people's material needs has not in the end left their hunger for God unsatisfied, making them vulnerable to anything which claims to be of spiritual benefit. Hence, "it is indispensable that all remain united to Christ by means of a joyful and transforming kerygma, especially in liturgical preaching". (285) A Church which fervently lives the spiritual and contemplative dimension, and which gives herself generously to the service of charity, will be an ever more eloquent witness to God for men and women searching for meaning in their lives. (286) To this end, it is more necessary than ever for all the faithful to move from a faith of habit, sustained perhaps by social context alone, to a faith which is conscious and personally lived. The renewal of faith will always be the best way to lead others to the Truth that is Christ.

For the response to the challenge of the sects to be effective, there is a need for an appropriate coordination of initiatives among dioceses, aimed at bringing about a more effective cooperation through shared projects which will produce better results. (287)

The mission ad gentes

74. Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church the mission of evangelizing all nations: "Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). There must always be a dynamic awareness of the universality of the evangelizing mission which the Church has received, as there has been consistently throughout the history of the pilgrim People of God in America. Evangelization is most urgent among those on this continent who do not yet know the name of Jesus, the only name given to men and women that they may be saved (cf. Acts 4:12). Unfortunately, the name of Jesus is unknown to a vast part of humanity and in many sectors of American society. It is enough to think of the indigenous peoples not yet Christianized or of the presence of non-Christian religions such as Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism, especially among immigrants from Asia.

This obliges the Church in America to be involved in the mission ad gentes. (288) The program of a new evangelization on the American continent, to which many pastoral projects are directed, cannot be restricted to revitalizing the faith of regular believers, but must strive as well to proclaim Christ where he is not known.

Likewise, the particular Churches in America are called to extend their missionary efforts beyond the bounds of the continent. They cannot keep for themselves the immense riches of their Christian heritage. They must take this heritage to the whole world and share it with those who do not yet know it. Here it is a question of many millions of men and women who, without faith, suffer the most serious kind of poverty. Faced with this poverty, it would be a mistake not to encourage an evangelizing effort beyond the continent with the excuse that there is still much to do in America or to wait until the Church in America reaches the point, basically utopian, of full maturity.

With the hope that the American continent, in accordance with its Christian vitality, will play its part in the great task of the mission ad gentes, I make my own the practical proposals presented by the Synod Fathers: "to maintain a greater cooperation between sister Churches; to send missionaries (priests, religious and lay faithful) within the continent and abroad; to strengthen or create missionary institutes; to encourage the missionary dimension of consecrated and contemplative life; to give greater impetus to mission promotion, training and organization". (289) I am sure that the pastoral zeal of the Bishops and of the sons and daughters of the Church throughout America will devise concrete plans, also at the international level, to implement with great dynamism and creativity these missionary proposals.

CONCLUSION

With hope and gratitude

75. "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Trusting in this promise of the Lord, the pilgrim Church in America prepares enthusiastically to meet the challenges of today's world and those that will come in the future. In the Gospel, the Good News of the Resurrection of the Lord is accompanied by the invitation to fear not (cf. Mt 28:5, 10). The Church in America wishes to walk in hope, as the Synod Fathers declared: "With serene trust in the Lord of history, the Church prepares to cross the threshold of the Third Millennium freed from prejudice, hesitation, selfishness, fear or doubt, and convinced of the fundamental and primary service which she must provide as a testimony to her fidelity to God and to the men and women of the continent". (290)

Furthermore, the Church in America feels especially impelled to walk in faith, responding with gratitude to the love of Jesus, "the merciful love of God made flesh (cf. Jn 3:16)". (291) The celebration of the beginning of the Third Christian Millennium can be the right moment for the People of God in America to renew "their thanks for the great gift of faith", (292) which they first received five centuries ago. The year 1492, beyond its historical and political meaning, was the great year of grace when America welcomed the faith: a faith which proclaims the supreme gift of the Incarnation of the Son of God two thousand years ago, and which we will solemnly commemorate in the Great Jubilee now so close.

This twofold sense of hope and gratitude must accompany every pastoral action of the Church on the continent, permeating with the spirit of the Jubilee the various initiatives in the dioceses, parishes, religious communities, ecclesial movements, and the activities which will be organized at both regional and continental levels. (293)

Prayer to Jesus Christ for the families of America

76. I therefore invite all the Catholics of America to take an active part in the evangelizing initiatives which the Holy Spirit is stirring in every part of this immense continent, so full of resources and hopes for the future. In a special way, I invite Catholic families to be "domestic Churches", (294) in which the Christian faith is lived and passed on to the young as a treasure, and where all pray together. If they live up to the ideal which God places before them, Catholic homes will be true centers of evangelization.

In concluding this Apostolic Exhortation, in which I have taken up the proposals of the Synod Fathers, I gladly welcome their suggestion to compose a prayer for the families of America. (295) I invite individuals, communities and ecclesial groups, wherever two or more gather in the Lord's name, to strengthen through prayer the spiritual bond between all American Catholics. Let everyone join in the prayer of the Successor of Peter, invoking Christ who is "the way of conversion, communion and solidarity in America":

We thank you, Lord Jesus,
because the Gospel of the Father's love,
with which you came to save the world,
has been proclaimed far and wide in America
as a gift of the Holy Spirit
that fills us with gladness.

We thank you for the gift of your Life,
which you have given us by loving us to the end:
your Life makes us children of God,
brothers and sisters to each other.
Increase, O Lord, our faith and our love for you,
present in all the tabernacles of the continent.

Grant us to be faithful witnesses
to your Resurrection
for the younger generation of Americans,
so that, in knowing you, they may follow you
and find in you their peace and joy.
Only then will they know that they
are brothers and sisters
of all God's children scattered
throughout the world.

You who, in becoming man,
chose to belong to a human family,
teach families the virtues which filled with light
the family home of Nazareth.

May families always be united,
as you and the Father are one,
and may they be living witnesses
to love, justice and solidarity;
make them schools of respect,
forgiveness and mutual help,
so that the world may believe;
help them to be the source of vocations
to the priesthood and the consecrated life,
and all the other forms
of firm Christian commitment.

Protect your Church and the Successor of Peter,
to whom you, Good Shepherd, have entrusted
the task of feeding your flock.
Grant that the Church in America may flourish
and grow richer in the fruits of holiness.

Teach us to love your Mother, Mary,
as you loved her.
Give us strength to proclaim
your word with courage
in the work of the new evangelization,
so that the world may know new hope.
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America,

pray for us!

Given at Mexico City, January 22, in the year 1999, the twenty-first of my Pontificate.

- (1) In this regard, the ancient inscription in the Baptistery of Saint John Lateran is eloquent: “Virgineo foetu Genitrix Ecclesia natos quos spirante Deo concipit amne parit” (E. Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, No. 1513, I. I., Berolini 1925, p. 289).
- (2) Homily at the Ordination of Priests and Deacons at Bogotà (August 22, 1968): AAS 60 (1968), 614-615.
- (3) No. 17: AAS 85 (1993), 820.
- (4) No. 38: AAS 87 (1995), 30.
- (5) Address at the Opening of the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops (October 12, 1992), 17: AAS 85 (1993), 820-821.
- (6) John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (November 10, 1994), 21: AAS 87 (1995), 17.
- (7) Address at the Opening of the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops (October 12, 1992), 17: AAS 85 (1993), 820.
- (8) Cf. Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (November 10, 1994), 21: AAS 87 (1995), 17.
- (9) Address to the Assembly of CELAM (March 9, 1983), III: AAS 75 (1983), 778.
- (10) Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 34: AAS 81 (1989), 454.
- (11) *Propositio* 3.
- (12) Saint Augustine, *Tract. In Ioh. 15, 11*: CCL 36, 154.
- (13) *Ibid.*, 15, 17: *loc. cit.*, 156.
- (14) “*Salvator... ascensionis suae eam (Mariam Magdalenam) ad apostolos instituit apostolam*”. Rabanus Maurus, *De Vita Beatae Mariae Magdalenae*, 27: PL 112, 1574. Cf. Saint Peter Damian, *Sermo* 56: PL 144, 820; Hugh of Cluny, *Comitorium*: PL 159, 952; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *In Ioh. Evang. Expositio*, c. 20, l. 3.
- (15) Address for the Closing of the Holy Year (December 25, 1975): AAS 68 (1976), 145.
- (16) *Propositio* 9; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- (17) Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), 21: AAS 79 (1987), 369.
- (18) *Propositio* 5.
- (19) Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, Puebla, February 1979, *Message to the Peoples of Latin America*, No. 282. For the United States, cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Pastoral Letter Behold Your Mother. Woman of Faith* (Washington, 1973), p. 37.
- (20) *Propositio* 6.
- (21) John Paul II, Address at the Opening of the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops (October 12, 1992), 24: AAS 85 (1993), 826.
- (22) Cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Behold Your Mother. Woman of Faith* (Washington, 1973), 37.
- (23) Cf. *Propositio* 6.
- (24) *Propositio* 4.
- (25) Cf. *ibid.*
- (26) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.
- (27) Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (September 3, 1965): AAS 57 (1965), 764.
- (28) *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, 766.
- (29) *Propositio* 4.
- (30) Address at the Final Public Session of the Second Vatican Council (December 7, 1965): AAS 58 (1966), 58.
- (31) Cf. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (December 2, 1984), 16: AAS 77 (1985), 214-217.
- (32) Cf. *Propositio* 61.
- (33) *Propositio* 29.
- (34) Cf. Bull *Sacrosancti Apostolatus Cura* (August 11, 1670), § 3: *Bullarium Romanum*, 26VII, 42.
- (35) Among others, we may mention the following: the martyrs John de Brébeuf and his seven companions, Roque Gonzales and his two companions; the saints Elizabeth Ann Seton, Marguerite Bourgeoys, Peter Claver, Juan de Castillo, Rose Philippine Duchesne, Marguerite d'Youville, Francisco Febres Cordero, Teresa Fernández Solar de las Andes, Juan Macías, Turibius of Mongrovejo, Ezechiel Moreno y Diaz, John Neumann, Maria Ana de Jesús Paredes y Flores, Martin de Porres, Alfonso Rodriguez, Francisco Solano, Frances Xavier Cabrini; and those beatified: José de Anchieta, Pedro de San José de Betancur, Juan Diego, Katharine Drexel, Maria de la Encarnación Rosal, Rafael Guizar Valencia, Dina Bélanger, Alberto Hurtado Cruchaga, Elias del Socorro Nieves, Maria Francisca de Jesús Rubatto, Mercedes de Jesús Molina, Narcisa de Jesús Martillo Morán, Miguel Pro, Maria de San José Alvarado Cardozo, Junípero Serra, Kateri Tekakwitha, Laura Vicuña, Antônio de Sant'Anna Galvão and many others who have been beatified and whom the peoples of America invoke with faith and devotion (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 17).

- (36) Cf. Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 50.
- (37) *Propositio* 31.
- (38) *Propositio* 30.
- (39) No. 37: AAS 87 (1995), 29; cf. *Propositio* 31.
- (40) *Propositio* 21.
- (41) Cf. *ibid.*
- (42) Cf. *ibid.*
- (43) Cf. *ibid.*
- (44) Cf. *Propositio* 18.
- (45) *Propositio* 19.
- (46) Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 5; cf. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon. 28; *Propositio* 60.
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- (48) Cf. *Propositio* 60.
- (49) Cf. *Propositiones* 23 and 24.
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- (51) *Propositio* 72; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), 46: AAS 83 (1991), 850.
- (52) Cf. Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Europe, Declaration *Ut Testes Simus Christi Qui Nos Liberavit* (December 13, 1991), I, 1; II, 4; IV, 10; *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 13, 613-615; 627-633; 660-669.
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- (54) *Ibid.*
- (55) Cf. *Propositio* 74.
- (56) Cf. Apostolic Epistle *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), 8-9: AAS 63 (1971), 406-408.
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- (61) *Propositio* 75.
- (62) *Propositio* 37.
- (63) No. 5: AAS 90 (1998), 152.
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- (66) *Propositio* 36.
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- (68) Synod of Bishops, Second Extraordinary General Assembly, Final Summary *Ecclesia sub Verbo Dei Mysteria Christi Celebrans pro Salute Mundi* (December 7, 1985), II, B, a, 2: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 9, 1795.
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- (71) *Ibid.*
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- (73) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 31.
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- (84) *Propositio* 27.
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- (93) Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), 20: *AAS* 71 (1979) 309-316.
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- (101) First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ *Pastor Aeternus*, Prologue: *DS* 3051.
- (102) Ecumenical Council of Florence, Bull of Union *Exultate Deo* (November 22, 1439): *DS* 1314.
- (103) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.
- (104) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.
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- (109) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (March 4, 1979), 20: *AAS* 71 (1979), 309-316.
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- (112) *Propositio* 42; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14; Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10.
- (113) Cf. *Propositio* 42.
- (114) *Propositio* 41.
- (115) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8.
- (116) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.
- (117) Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 27; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7; Paul VI, *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* (August 6, 1966), I, 15-17: *AAS* 58 (1966), 766-767; Code of Canon Law, Canons 495, 502, 511; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canons 264, 271, 272.
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- (121) Cf. *ibid.*
- (122) Cf. *Propositio* 44.
- (123) *Ibid.*
- (124) *Ibid.*
- (125) Cf. *Propositio* 60.
- (126) *Propositio* 49.
- (127) *Ibid.*
- (128) *Ibid.*; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14.
- (129) *Propositio* 49.
- (130) *Ibid.*
- (131) Cf. *Propositio* 51.
- (132) *Propositio* 48.
- (133) *Propositio* 51.
- (134) *Propositio* 52.
- (135) Cf. *ibid.*
- (136) Cf. *ibid.*
- (137) Cf. *Propositio* 46.

- (138) Ibid.
- (139) Ibid.
- (140) Propositio 35.
- (141) Cf. Fourth General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, Santo Domingo, October 1992: New Evangelization, Human Promotion and Christian Culture, 58.
- (142) Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990), 51: AAS 83 (1991), 298-299.
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- (144) Cf. Propositio 46.
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- (146) Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 29; Paul VI, *Motu Proprio Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* (June 18, 1967), I, 1: AAS 59 (1967), 699.
- (147) Propositio 50.
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- (149) Cf. Propositio 50; Congregation for Catholic Education and Congregation for the Clergy, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Diaconorum Permanentium* and *Directorium pro Ministerio et Vita Diaconorum Permanentium* (February 22, 1998), AAS 90 (1998): 843-926.
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- (161) Cf. *ibid.*
- (162) Propositio 56.
- (163) Cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 23: AAS 81 (1989), 429-433.
- (164) Cf. Congregation for the Clergy et al., *Instruction Ecclesiae de Mysterio* (August 15, 1997): AAS 89 (1997), 852-877.
- (165) Propositio 56.
- (166) Ibid.
- (167) Cf. Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988): AAS 80 (1988), 1653-1729; Letter to Women (June 29, 1995): AAS 87 (1995), 803-812; Propositio 11.
- (168) Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), 31: AAS 80 (1988), 1728.
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- (173) Cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 49: AAS 81 (1989), 486-489.
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- (177) Ibid.
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- (182) Propositio 15.
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- (184) Ibid.
- (185) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.
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(294) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

(295) *Propositio* 12.

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Apostolic Letter
 Of The Holy Father
 John Paul II
 To The Bishops, Clergy And Faithful
 Of The Catholic Church
 On Keeping The Lord's Day Holy

My esteemed Brothers in the Episcopate
 and the Priesthood,
 Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. The Lord's Day - as Sunday was called from Apostolic times(1) - has always been accorded special attention in the history of the Church because of its close connection with the very core of the Christian mystery. In fact, in the weekly reckoning of time Sunday recalls the day of Christ's Resurrection. It is Easter which returns week by week, celebrating Christ's victory over sin and death, the fulfilment in him of the first creation and the dawn of "the new creation" (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). It is the day which recalls in grateful adoration the world's first day and looks forward in active hope to "the last day", when Christ will come in glory (cf. Acts 1:11; 1 Th 4:13-17) and all things will be made new (cf. Rev 21:5). Rightly, then, the Psalmist's cry is applied to Sunday: "This is the day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24). This invitation to joy, which the Easter liturgy makes its own, reflects the astonishment which came over the women who, having seen the crucifixion of Christ, found the tomb empty when they went there "very early on the first day after the Sabbath" (Mk 16:2). It is an invitation to relive in some way the experience of the two disciples of Emmaus, who felt their hearts "burn within them" as the Risen One walked with them on the road, explaining the Scriptures and revealing himself in "the breaking of the bread" (cf. Lk 24:32, 35). And it echoes the joy - at first uncertain and then overwhelming

- which the Apostles experienced on the evening of that same day, when they were visited by the Risen Jesus and received the gift of his peace and of his Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23).

2. The Resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental event upon which Christian faith rests (cf. 1 Cor 15:14). It is an astonishing reality, fully grasped in the light of faith, yet historically attested to by those who were privileged to see the Risen Lord. It is a wondrous event which is not only absolutely unique in human history, but which lies at the very heart of the mystery of time. In fact, "all time belongs to [Christ] and all the ages", as the evocative liturgy of the Easter Vigil recalls in preparing the Paschal Candle. Therefore, in commemorating the day of Christ's Resurrection not just once a year but every Sunday, the Church seeks to indicate to every generation the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world's origin and its final destiny leads.

It is right, therefore, to claim, in the words of a fourth century homily, that "the Lord's Day" is "the lord of days".(2) Those who have received the grace of faith in the Risen Lord cannot fail to grasp the significance of this day of the week with the same deep emotion which led Saint Jerome to say: "Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, it is the day of Christians, it is our day".(3) For Christians, Sunday is "the fundamental feastday", (4) established not only to mark the succession of time but to reveal time's deeper meaning.

3. The fundamental importance of Sunday has been recognized through two thousand years of history and was emphatically restated by the Second Vatican Council: "Every seven days, the Church celebrates the Easter mystery. This is a tradition going back to the Apostles, taking its origin from the actual day of Christ's Resurrection - a day thus appropriately designated 'the Lord's Day'".(5) Paul VI emphasized this importance once more when he approved the new General Roman Calendar and the Universal Norms which regulate the ordering of the Liturgical Year.(6) The coming of the Third Millennium, which calls believers to reflect upon the course of history in the light of Christ, also invites them to rediscover with new intensity the meaning of Sunday: its "mystery", its celebration, its significance for Christian and human life.

I note with pleasure that in the years since the Council this important theme has prompted not only many interventions by you, dear Brother Bishops, as teachers of the faith, but also different pastoral strategies which - with the support of your clergy - you have developed either individually or jointly. On the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, it has been my wish to offer you this Apostolic Letter in order to support your pastoral efforts in this vital area. But at the same time I wish to turn to all of you, Christ's faithful, as though I were spiritually present in all the communities in which you gather with your Pastors each Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist and "the Lord's Day". Many of the insights and intuitions which prompt this Apostolic Letter have grown from my episcopal service in Krakow and, since the time when I assumed the ministry of Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter, in the visits to the Roman parishes which I have made regularly on the Sundays of the different seasons of the Liturgical Year. I see this Letter as continuing the lively exchange which I am always happy to have with the faithful, as I reflect with you on the meaning of Sunday and underline the reasons for living Sunday as truly "the Lord's Day", also in the changing circumstances of our own times.

4. Until quite recently, it was easier in traditionally Christian countries to keep Sunday holy because it was an almost universal practice and because, even in the organization of civil society, Sunday rest was considered a fixed part of the work schedule. Today, however, even in those countries which give legal sanction to the festive character of Sunday, changes in socioeconomic conditions have often led to profound modifications of social behaviour and hence of the character of Sunday. The custom of the "weekend" has become more widespread, a weekly period of respite, spent perhaps far from home and often involving participation in cultural, political or sporting activities which are usually held on free days. This social and cultural phenomenon is by no means without its positive aspects if, while respecting true values, it can contribute to people's development and to the advancement of the life of society as a whole. All of this responds not only to the need for rest, but also to the need for celebration which is inherent in our humanity. Unfortunately, when Sunday loses its fundamental meaning and becomes merely part of a "weekend", it can happen that people stay locked within a horizon so limited that they can no longer see "the heavens".(7) Hence, though ready to celebrate, they are really incapable of doing so.

The disciples of Christ, however, are asked to avoid any confusion between the celebration of Sunday, which should truly be a way of keeping the Lord's Day holy, and the "weekend", understood as a time of simple rest and relaxation. This will require a genuine spiritual maturity, which will enable Christians to "be what they are", in full accordance with the gift of faith, always ready to give an account of the hope which is in them (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). In this way, they will be led to a deeper understanding of Sunday, with the result that, even in difficult situations, they will be able to live it in complete docility to the Holy Spirit.

5. From this perspective, the situation appears somewhat mixed. On the one hand, there is the example of some young Churches, which show how fervently Sunday can be celebrated, whether in urban areas or in widely scattered villages. By contrast, in other parts of the world, because of the sociological pressures already noted, and perhaps because the motivation of faith is weak, the percentage of those attending the Sunday liturgy is strikingly low. In the minds of many of the faithful, not only the sense of the centrality of the Eucharist but even the sense of the duty to give thanks to the Lord and to pray to him with others in the community of the Church, seems to be diminishing.

It is also true that both in mission countries and in countries evangelized long ago the lack of priests is such that the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist cannot always be guaranteed in every community.

6. Given this array of new situations and the questions which they prompt, it seems more necessary than ever to recover the deep doctrinal foundations underlying the Church's precept, so that the abiding value of Sunday in the Christian life will be clear to all the faithful. In doing this, we follow in the footsteps of the age-old tradition of the Church, powerfully restated by the Second Vatican Council in its teaching that on Sunday "Christian believers should come together, in order to commemorate the suffering, Resurrection and glory of the Lord Jesus, by hearing God's Word and sharing the Eucharist, and to give thanks to God who has given them new birth to a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (cf. 1 Pt 1:3)".(8)

7. The duty to keep Sunday holy, especially by sharing in the Eucharist and by relaxing in a spirit of Christian joy and fraternity, is easily understood if we consider the many different aspects of this day upon which the present Letter will focus our attention.

Sunday is a day which is at the very heart of the Christian life. From the beginning of my Pontificate, I have not ceased to repeat: "Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ!".(9) In the same way, today I would strongly urge everyone to rediscover Sunday: Do not be afraid to give your time to Christ! Yes, let us open our time to Christ, that he may cast light upon it and give it direction. He is the One who knows the secret of time and the secret of eternity, and he gives us "his day" as an ever new gift of his love. The rediscovery of this day is a grace which we must implore, not only so that we may live the demands of faith to the full, but also so that we may respond concretely to the deepest human yearnings. Time given to Christ is never time lost, but is rather time gained, so that our relationships and indeed our whole life may become more profoundly human.

CHAPTER I - DIES DOMINI

The Celebration of the Creator's Work

"Through him all things were made" (Jn 1:3)

8. For the Christian, Sunday is above all an Easter celebration, wholly illumined by the glory of the Risen Christ. It is the festival of the "new creation". Yet, when understood in depth, this aspect is inseparable from what the first pages of Scripture tell us of the plan of God in the creation of the world. It is true that the Word was made flesh in "the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4); but it is also true that, in virtue of the mystery of his identity as the eternal Son of the Father, he is the origin and end of the universe. As John writes in the Prologue of his Gospel: "Through him all things were made, and without him was made nothing that was made" (1:3). Paul too stresses this in writing to the Colossians: "In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.... All things were created through him and for him" (1:16). This active presence of the Son in the creative work of God is revealed fully in the Paschal Mystery, in which Christ, rising as "the first fruits of those who had fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), established the new creation and began

the process which he himself will bring to completion when he returns in glory to "deliver the kingdom to God the Father..., so that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:24, 28).

Already at the dawn of creation, therefore, the plan of God implied Christ's "cosmic mission". This Christocentric perspective, embracing the whole arc of time, filled God's well-pleased gaze when, ceasing from all his work, he "blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gn 2:3). According to the Priestly writer of the first biblical creation story, then was born the "Sabbath", so characteristic of the first Covenant, and which in some ways foretells the sacred day of the new and final Covenant. The theme of "God's rest" (cf. Gn 2:2) and the rest which he offered to the people of the Exodus when they entered the Promised Land (cf. Ex 33:14; Dt 3:20; 12:9; Jos 21:44; Ps 95:11) is re-read in the New Testament in the light of the definitive "Sabbath rest" (Heb 4:9) into which Christ himself has entered by his Resurrection. The People of God are called to enter into this same rest by persevering in Christ's example of filial obedience (cf. Heb 4:3-16). In order to grasp fully the meaning of Sunday, therefore, we must re-read the great story of creation and deepen our understanding of the theology of the "Sabbath".

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1)

9. The poetic style of the Genesis story conveys well the awe which people feel before the immensity of creation and the resulting sense of adoration of the One who brought all things into being from nothing. It is a story of intense religious significance, a hymn to the Creator of the universe, pointing to him as the only Lord in the face of recurring temptations to divinize the world itself. At the same time, it is a hymn to the goodness of creation, all fashioned by the mighty and merciful hand of God.

"God saw that it was good" (Gn 1:10, 12, etc.). Punctuating the story as it does, this refrain sheds a positive light upon every element of the universe and reveals the secret for a proper understanding of it and for its eventual regeneration: the world is good insofar as it remains tied to its origin and, after being disfigured by sin, it is again made good when, with the help of grace, it returns to the One who made it. It is clear that this process directly concerns not inanimate objects and animals but human beings, who have been endowed with the incomparable gift and risk of freedom. Immediately after the creation stories, the Bible highlights the dramatic contrast between the grandeur of man, created in the image and likeness of God, and the fall of man, which unleashes on the world the darkness of sin and death (cf. Gn 3).

10. Coming as it does from the hand of God, the cosmos bears the imprint of his goodness. It is a beautiful world, rightly moving us to admiration and delight, but also calling for cultivation and development. At the "completion" of God's work, the world is ready for human activity. "On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done" (Gn 2:2). With this anthropomorphic image of God's "work", the Bible not only gives us a glimpse of the mysterious relationship between the Creator and the created world, but also casts light upon the task of human beings in relation to the cosmos. The "work" of God is in some ways an example for man, called not only to inhabit the cosmos, but also to "build" it and thus become God's "co-worker". As I wrote in my Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, the first chapters of Genesis constitute in a sense the first "gospel of work".(10) This is a truth which the Second Vatican Council also stressed: "Created in God's image, man was commissioned to subdue the earth and all it contains, to rule the world in justice and holiness, and, recognizing God as the creator of all things, to refer himself and the totality of things to God so that with everything subject to God, the divine name would be glorified in all the earth".(11)

The exhilarating advance of science, technology and culture in their various forms - an ever more rapid and today even overwhelming development - is the historical consequence of the mission by which God entrusts to man and woman the task and responsibility of filling the earth and subduing it by means of their work, in the observance of God's Law.

"Shabbat": the Creator's joyful rest

11. If the first page of the Book of Genesis presents God's "work" as an example for man, the same is true of God's "rest": "On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done" (Gn 2:2). Here too we find an anthropomorphism charged with a wealth of meaning.

It would be banal to interpret God's "rest" as a kind of divine "inactivity". By its nature, the creative act which founds the world is unceasing and God is always at work, as Jesus himself declares in speaking of the Sabbath precept: "My Father is working still, and I am working" (Jn 5:17). The divine rest of the seventh day does not allude to an inactive God, but emphasizes the fullness of what has been accomplished. It speaks, as it were, of God's lingering before the "very good" work (Gn 1:31) which his hand has wrought, in order to cast upon it a gaze full of joyous delight. This is a "contemplative" gaze which does not look to new accomplishments but enjoys the beauty of what has already been achieved. It is a gaze which God casts upon all things, but in a special way upon man, the crown of creation. It is a gaze which already discloses something of the nuptial shape of the relationship which God wants to establish with the creature made in his own image, by calling that creature to enter a pact of love. This is what God will gradually accomplish, in offering salvation to all humanity through the saving covenant made with Israel and fulfilled in Christ. It

will be the Word Incarnate, through the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit and the configuration of the Church as his Body and Bride, who will extend to all humanity the offer of mercy and the call of the Father's love.

12. In the Creator's plan, there is both a distinction and a close link between the order of creation and the order of salvation. This is emphasized in the Old Testament, when it links the "shabbat" commandment not only with God's mysterious "rest" after the days of creation (cf. Ex 20:8-11), but also with the salvation which he offers to Israel in the liberation from the slavery of Egypt (cf. Dt 5:12-15). The God who rests on the seventh day, rejoicing in his creation, is the same God who reveals his glory in liberating his children from Pharaoh's oppression. Adopting an image dear to the Prophets, one could say that in both cases God reveals himself as the bridegroom before the bride (cf. Hos 2:16-24; Jer 2:2; Is 54:4-8).

As certain elements of the same Jewish tradition suggest, (12) to reach the heart of the "shabbat", of God's "rest", we need to recognize in both the Old and the New Testament the nuptial intensity which marks the relationship between God and his people. Hosea, for instance, puts it thus in this marvellous passage: "I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord" (2:18-20).

"God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gn 2:3)

13. The Sabbath precept, which in the first Covenant prepares for the Sunday of the new and eternal Covenant, is therefore rooted in the depths of God's plan. This is why, unlike many other precepts, it is set not within the context of strictly cultic stipulations but within the Decalogue, the "ten words" which represent the very pillars of the moral life inscribed on the human heart. In setting this commandment within the context of the basic structure of ethics, Israel and then the Church declare that they consider it not just a matter of community religious discipline but a defining and indelible expression of our relationship with God, announced and expounded by biblical revelation. This is the perspective within which Christians need to rediscover this precept today. Although the precept may merge naturally with the human need for rest, it is faith alone which gives access to its deeper meaning and ensures that it will not become banal and trivialized.

14. In the first place, therefore, Sunday is the day of rest because it is the day "blessed" by God and "made holy" by him, set apart from the other days to be, among all of them, "the Lord's Day".

In order to grasp fully what the first of the biblical creation accounts means by keeping the Sabbath "holy", we need to consider the whole story, which shows clearly how every reality, without exception, must be referred back to God. Time and space belong to him. He is not the God of one day alone, but the God of all the days of humanity.

Therefore, if God "sanctifies" the seventh day with a special blessing and makes it "his day" par excellence, this must be understood within the deep dynamic of the dialogue of the Covenant, indeed the dialogue of "marriage". This is the dialogue of love which knows no interruption, yet is never monotonous. In fact, it employs the different registers of love, from the ordinary and indirect to those more intense, which the words of Scripture and the witness of so many mystics do not hesitate to describe in imagery drawn from the experience of married love.

15. All human life, and therefore all human time, must become praise of the Creator and thanksgiving to him. But man's relationship with God also demands times of explicit prayer, in which the relationship becomes an intense dialogue, involving every dimension of the person. "The Lord's Day" is the day of this relationship par excellence when men and women raise their song to God and become the voice of all creation.

This is precisely why it is also the day of rest. Speaking vividly as it does of "renewal" and "detachment", the interruption of the often oppressive rhythm of work expresses the dependence of man and the cosmos upon God. Everything belongs to God! The Lord's Day returns again and again to declare this principle within the weekly reckoning of time. The "Sabbath" has therefore been interpreted evocatively as a determining element in the kind of "sacred architecture" of time which marks biblical revelation.(13) It recalls that the universe and history belong to God; and without a constant awareness of that truth, man cannot serve in the world as co-worker of the Creator.

To "keep holy" by "remembering"

16. The commandment of the Decalogue by which God decrees the Sabbath observance is formulated in the Book of Exodus in a distinctive way: "Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy" (20:8). And the inspired text goes on to give the reason for this, recalling as it does the work of God: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (v. 11). Before decreeing that something be done, the commandment urges that something be remembered. It is a call to awaken remembrance of the grand and fundamental work of God which is creation, a remembrance which must inspire the entire religious life of man and then fill the day on which man is called to rest. Rest therefore acquires a sacred value: the faithful are called to rest not only as God rested, but to rest in the Lord, bringing the entire creation to him, in praise and thanksgiving, intimate as a child and friendly as a spouse.

17. The connection between Sabbath rest and the theme of "remembering" God's wonders is found also in the Book of Deuteronomy (5:12-15), where the precept is grounded less in the work of creation than in the work of liberation accomplished by God in the Exodus: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with mighty hand and outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Dt 5:15).

This formulation complements the one we have already seen; and taken together, the two reveal the meaning of "the Lord's Day" within a single theological vision which fuses creation and salvation. Therefore, the main point of the precept is not just any kind of interruption of work, but the celebration of the marvels which God has wrought.

Insofar as this "remembrance" is alive, full of thanksgiving and of the praise of God, human rest on the Lord's Day takes on its full meaning. It is then that man enters the depths of God's "rest" and can experience a tremor of the Creator's joy when, after the creation, he saw that all he had made "was very good" (Gn 1:31).

From the Sabbath to Sunday

18. Because the Third Commandment depends upon the remembrance of God's saving works and because Christians saw the definitive time inaugurated by Christ as a new beginning, they made the first day after the Sabbath a festive day, for that was the day on which the Lord rose from the dead. The Paschal Mystery of Christ is the full revelation of the mystery of the world's origin, the climax of the history of salvation and the anticipation of the eschatological fulfilment of the world. What God accomplished in Creation and wrought for his People in the Exodus has found its fullest expression in Christ's Death and Resurrection, though its definitive fulfilment will not come until the Parousia, when Christ returns in glory. In him, the "spiritual" meaning of the Sabbath is fully realized, as Saint Gregory the Great declares: "For us, the true Sabbath is the person of our Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ".(14) This is why the joy with which God, on humanity's first Sabbath, contemplates all that was created from nothing, is now expressed in the joy with which Christ, on Easter Sunday, appeared to his disciples, bringing the gift of peace and the gift of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23). It was in the Paschal Mystery that humanity, and with it the whole creation, "groaning in birth-pangs until now" (Rom 8:22), came to know its new "exodus" into the freedom of God's children who can cry out with Christ, "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). In the light of this mystery, the meaning of the Old Testament precept concerning the Lord's Day is recovered, perfected and fully revealed in the glory which shines on the face of the Risen Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:6). We move from the "Sabbath" to the "first day after the Sabbath", from the seventh day to the first day: the dies Domini becomes the dies Christi!

CHAPTER II - DIES CHRISTI

The Day of the Risen Lord and of the Gift of the Holy Spirit

The weekly Easter

19. "We celebrate Sunday because of the venerable Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we do so not only at Easter but also at each turning of the week": so wrote Pope Innocent I at the beginning of the fifth century, (15) testifying to an already well established practice which had evolved from the early years after the Lord's Resurrection. Saint Basil speaks of "holy Sunday, honoured by the Lord's Resurrection, the first fruits of all the other days";(16) and Saint Augustine calls Sunday "a sacrament of Easter".(17)

The intimate bond between Sunday and the Resurrection of the Lord is strongly emphasized by all the Churches of East and West. In the tradition of the Eastern Churches in particular, every Sunday is the anastäsimos hemèra, the day of Resurrection, (18) and this is why it stands at the heart of all worship.

In the light of this constant and universal tradition, it is clear that, although the Lord's Day is rooted in the very work of creation and even more in the mystery of the biblical "rest" of God, it is nonetheless to the Resurrection of Christ that we must look in order to understand fully the Lord's Day. This is what the Christian Sunday does, leading the faithful each week to ponder and live the event of Easter, true source of the world's salvation.

20. According to the common witness of the Gospels, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead took place on "the first day after the Sabbath" (Mk 16:2, 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1). On the same day, the Risen Lord appeared to the two disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35) and to the eleven Apostles gathered together (cf. Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19). A week later - as the Gospel of John recounts (cf. 20:26) - the disciples were gathered together once again, when Jesus appeared to them and made himself known to Thomas by showing him the signs of his Passion. The day of Pentecost - the first day of the eighth week after the Jewish Passover (cf. Acts 2:1), when the promise made by Jesus to the Apostles after the Resurrection was fulfilled by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4-5) - also fell on a Sunday. This was the day of the first proclamation and the first baptisms: Peter announced to the assembled crowd that Christ was risen and "those who received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). This was the epiphany of the Church, revealed as the people into which are gathered in unity, beyond all their differences, the scattered children of God.

The first day of the week

21. It was for this reason that, from Apostolic times, "the first day after the Sabbath", the first day of the week, began to shape the rhythm of life for Christ's disciples (cf. 1 Cor 16:2). "The first day after the Sabbath" was also the day upon which the faithful of Troas were gathered "for the breaking of bread", when Paul bade them farewell and miraculously restored the young Eutychus to life (cf. Acts 20:7-12). The Book of Revelation gives evidence of the practice of calling the first day of the week "the Lord's Day" (1:10). This would now be a characteristic distinguishing Christians from the world around them. As early as the beginning of the second century, it was noted by Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, in his report on the Christian practice "of gathering together on a set day before sunrise and singing among themselves a hymn to Christ as to a god".(19) And when Christians spoke of the "Lord's Day", they did so giving to this term the full sense of the Easter proclamation: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:11; cf. Acts 2:36; 1 Cor 12:3). Thus Christ was given the same title which the Septuagint used to translate what in the revelation of the Old Testament was the unutterable name of God: YHWH.

22. In those early Christian times, the weekly rhythm of days was generally not part of life in the regions where the Gospel spread, and the festive days of the Greek and Roman calendars did not coincide with the Christian Sunday. For Christians, therefore, it was very difficult to observe the Lord's Day on a set day each week. This explains why the faithful had to gather before sunrise.(20) Yet fidelity to the weekly rhythm became the norm, since it was based upon the New Testament and was tied to Old Testament revelation. This is eagerly underscored by the Apologists and the Fathers of the Church in their writings and preaching where, in speaking of the Paschal Mystery, they use the same Scriptural texts which, according to the witness of Saint Luke (cf. 24:27, 44-47), the Risen Christ himself would have explained to the disciples. In the light of these texts, the celebration of the day of the Resurrection acquired a doctrinal and symbolic value capable of expressing the entire Christian mystery in all its newness.

Growing distinction from the Sabbath

23. It was this newness which the catechesis of the first centuries stressed as it sought to show the prominence of Sunday relative to the Jewish Sabbath. It was on the Sabbath that the Jewish people had to gather in the synagogue and to rest in the way prescribed by the Law. The Apostles, and in particular Saint Paul, continued initially to attend the synagogue so that there they might proclaim Jesus Christ, commenting upon "the words of the prophets which are read every Sabbath" (Acts 13:27). Some communities observed the Sabbath while also celebrating Sunday. Soon, however, the two days began to be distinguished ever more clearly, in reaction chiefly to the insistence of those Christians whose origins in Judaism made them inclined to maintain the obligation of the old Law. Saint Ignatius of Antioch writes: "If those who were living in the former state of things have come to a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath but keeping the Lord's Day, the day on which our life has appeared through him and his death..., that mystery from which we have received our faith and in which we persevere in order to be judged disciples of Christ, our only Master, how could we then live without him, given that the prophets too, as his disciples in the Spirit, awaited him as master?".(21) Saint Augustine notes in turn: "Therefore the Lord too has placed his seal on his day, which is the third after the Passion. In the weekly cycle, however, it is the eighth day after the seventh, that is after the Sabbath, and the first day of the week".(22) The distinction of Sunday from the Jewish Sabbath grew ever stronger in the mind of the Church, even though there have been times in history when, because the obligation of Sunday rest was so emphasized, the Lord's Day tended to become more like the Sabbath. Moreover, there have always been groups within Christianity which observe both the Sabbath and Sunday as "two brother days".(23)

The day of the new creation

24. A comparison of the Christian Sunday with the Old Testament vision of the Sabbath prompted theological insights of great interest. In particular, there emerged the unique connection between the Resurrection and Creation. Christian thought spontaneously linked the Resurrection, which took place on "the first day of the week", with the first day of that cosmic week (cf. Gn 1:1 - 2:4) which shapes the creation story in the Book of Genesis: the day of the creation of light (cf. 1:3-5). This link invited an understanding of the Resurrection as the beginning of a new creation, the first fruits of which is the glorious Christ, "the first born of all creation" (Col 1:15) and "the first born from the dead" (Col 1:18).

25. In effect, Sunday is the day above all other days which summons Christians to remember the salvation which was given to them in baptism and which has made them new in Christ. "You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12; cf. Rom 6:4-6). The liturgy underscores this baptismal dimension of Sunday, both in calling for the celebration of baptisms - as well as at the Easter Vigil - on the day of the week "when the Church commemorates the Lord's Resurrection", (24) and in suggesting as an appropriate penitential rite at the start of Mass the sprinkling of holy water, which recalls the moment of Baptism in which all Christian life is born.(25)

The eighth day: image of eternity

26. By contrast, the Sabbath's position as the seventh day of the week suggests for the Lord's Day a complementary symbolism, much loved by the Fathers. Sunday is not only the first day, it is also "the eighth day", set within the sevenfold succession of days in a unique and transcendent position which evokes not only the beginning of time but also its end in "the age to come". Saint Basil explains that Sunday symbolizes that truly singular day which will follow the present time, the day without end which will know neither evening nor morning, the imperishable age which will never grow old; Sunday is the ceaseless foretelling of life without end which renews the hope of Christians and encourages them on their way.(26) Looking towards the last day, which fulfils completely the eschatological symbolism of the Sabbath, Saint Augustine concludes the Confessions describing the Eschaton as "the peace of quietness, the peace of the Sabbath, a peace with no evening".(27) In celebrating Sunday, both the "first" and the "eighth" day, the Christian is led towards the goal of eternal life.(28)

The day of Christ-Light

27. This Christocentric vision sheds light upon another symbolism which Christian reflection and pastoral practice ascribed to the Lord's Day. Wise pastoral intuition suggested to the Church the christianization of the notion of Sunday as "the day of the sun", which was the Roman name for the day and which is retained in some modern languages.(29) This was in order to draw the faithful away from the seduction of cults which worshipped the sun, and to direct the celebration of the day to Christ, humanity's true "sun". Writing to the pagans, Saint Justin uses the language of the time to note that Christians gather together "on the day named after the sun", (30) but for believers the expression had already assumed a new meaning which was unmistakably rooted in the Gospel.(31) Christ is the light of the world (cf. Jn 9:5; also 1:4-5, 9), and, in the weekly reckoning of time, the day commemorating his Resurrection is the enduring reflection of the epiphany of his glory. The theme of Sunday as the day illuminated by the triumph of the Risen Christ is also found in the Liturgy of the Hours(32) and is given special emphasis in the Pannichida, the vigil which in the Eastern liturgies prepares for Sunday. From generation to generation as she gathers on this day, the Church makes her own the wonderment of Zechariah as he looked upon Christ, seeing in him the dawn which gives "light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Lk 1:78-79), and she echoes the joy of Simeon when he takes in his arms the divine Child who has come as the "light to enlighten the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32).

The day of the gift of the Spirit

28. Sunday, the day of light, could also be called the day of "fire", in reference to the Holy Spirit. The light of Christ is intimately linked to the "fire" of the Spirit, and the two images together reveal the meaning of the Christian Sunday.(33) When he appeared to the Apostles on the evening of Easter, Jesus breathed upon them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:22-23). The outpouring of the Spirit was the great gift of the Risen Lord to his disciples on Easter Sunday. It was again Sunday when, fifty days after the Resurrection, the Spirit descended in power, as "a mighty wind" and "fire" (Acts 2:2-3), upon the Apostles gathered with Mary. Pentecost is not only the founding event of the Church, but is also the mystery which for ever gives life to the Church.(34) Such an event has its own powerful liturgical moment in the annual celebration which concludes "the great Sunday", (35) but it also remains a part of the deep meaning of every Sunday, because of its intimate bond with the Paschal Mystery. The "weekly Easter" thus becomes, in a sense, the "weekly Pentecost", when Christians relive the Apostles' joyful encounter with the Risen Lord and receive the life-giving breath of his Spirit.

The day of faith

29. Given these different dimensions which set it apart, Sunday appears as the supreme day of faith. It is the day when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the Church's living "memory" (cf. Jn 14:26), the first appearance of the Risen Lord becomes an event renewed in the "today" of each of Christ's disciples. Gathered in his presence in the Sunday assembly, believers sense themselves called like the Apostle Thomas: "Put your finger here, and see my hands. Put out your hand, and place it in my side. Doubt no longer, but believe" (Jn 20:27). Yes, Sunday is the day of faith. This is stressed by the fact that the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy, like the liturgy of other solemnities, includes the Profession of Faith. Recited or sung, the Creed declares the baptismal and Paschal character of Sunday, making it the day on which in a special way the baptized renew their adherence to Christ and his Gospel in a rekindled awareness of their baptismal promises. Listening to the word and receiving the Body of the Lord, the baptized contemplate the Risen Jesus present in the "holy signs" and confess with the Apostle Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).
An indispensable day!

30. It is clear then why, even in our own difficult times, the identity of this day must be protected and above all must be lived in all its depth. An Eastern writer of the beginning of the third century recounts that as early as then the faithful in

every region were keeping Sunday holy on a regular basis.(36) What began as a spontaneous practice later became a juridically sanctioned norm. The Lord's Day has structured the history of the Church through two thousand years: how could we think that it will not continue to shape her future? The pressures of today can make it harder to fulfil the Sunday obligation; and, with a mother's sensitivity, the Church looks to the circumstances of each of her children. In particular, she feels herself called to a new catechetical and pastoral commitment, in order to ensure that, in the normal course of life, none of her children are deprived of the rich outpouring of grace which the celebration of the Lord's Day brings. It was in this spirit that the Second Vatican Council, making a pronouncement on the possibility of reforming the Church calendar to match different civil calendars, declared that the Church "is prepared to accept only those arrangements which preserve a week of seven days with a Sunday".(37) Given its many meanings and aspects, and its link to the very foundations of the faith, the celebration of the Christian Sunday remains, on the threshold of the Third Millennium, an indispensable element of our Christian identity.

CHAPTER III - DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly:

Heart of Sunday

The presence of the Risen Lord

31. "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). This promise of Christ never ceases to resound in the Church as the fertile secret of her life and the wellspring of her hope. As the day of Resurrection, Sunday is not only the remembrance of a past event: it is a celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his own people.

For this presence to be properly proclaimed and lived, it is not enough that the disciples of Christ pray individually and commemorate the death and Resurrection of Christ inwardly, in the secrecy of their hearts. Those who have received the grace of baptism are not saved as individuals alone, but as members of the Mystical Body, having become part of the People of God.(38) It is important therefore that they come together to express fully the very identity of the Church, the *ekklesia*, the assembly called together by the Risen Lord who offered his life "to reunite the scattered children of God" (Jn 11:52). They have become "one" in Christ (cf. Gal 3:28) through the gift of the Spirit. This unity becomes visible when Christians gather together: it is then that they come to know vividly and to testify to the world that they are the people redeemed, drawn "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). The assembly of Christ's disciples embodies from age to age the image of the first Christian community which Luke gives as an example in the Acts of the Apostles, when he recounts that the first baptized believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42).

The Eucharistic assembly

32. The Eucharist is not only a particularly intense expression of the reality of the Church's life, but also in a sense its "fountain-head".(39) The Eucharist feeds and forms the Church: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). Because of this vital link with the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the mystery of the Church is savoured, proclaimed, and lived supremely in the Eucharist.(40)

This ecclesial dimension intrinsic to the Eucharist is realized in every Eucharistic celebration. But it is expressed most especially on the day when the whole community comes together to commemorate the Lord's Resurrection. Significantly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that "the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life".(41)

33. At Sunday Mass, Christians relive with particular intensity the experience of the Apostles on the evening of Easter when the Risen Lord appeared to them as they were gathered together (cf. Jn 20:19). In a sense, the People of God of all times were present in that small nucleus of disciples, the first fruits of the Church. Through their testimony, every generation of believers hears the greeting of Christ, rich with the messianic gift of peace, won by his blood and offered with his Spirit: "Peace be with you!" Christ's return among them "a week later" (Jn 20:26) can be seen as a radical prefiguring of the Christian community's practice of coming together every seven days, on "the Lord's Day" or Sunday, in order to profess faith in his Resurrection and to receive the blessing which he had promised: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn 20:29). This close connection between the appearance of the Risen Lord and the Eucharist is suggested in the Gospel of Luke in the story of the two disciples of Emmaus, whom Christ approached and led to understand the Scriptures and then sat with them at table. They recognized him when he "took the bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them" (24:30). The gestures of Jesus in this account are his gestures at the Last Supper, with the clear allusion to the "breaking of bread", as the Eucharist was called by the first generation of Christians.

The Sunday Eucharist

34. It is true that, in itself, the Sunday Eucharist is no different from the Eucharist celebrated on other days, nor can it be separated from liturgical and sacramental life as a whole. By its very nature, the Eucharist is an epiphany of the

Church;(42) and this is most powerfully expressed when the diocesan community gathers in prayer with its Pastor: "The Church appears with special clarity when the holy People of God, all of them, are actively and fully sharing in the same liturgical celebrations - especially when it is the same Eucharist - sharing one prayer at one altar, at which the Bishop is presiding, surrounded by his presbyters and his ministers".(43) This relationship with the Bishop and with the entire Church community is inherent in every Eucharistic celebration, even when the Bishop does not preside, regardless of the day of the week on which it is celebrated. The mention of the Bishop in the Eucharistic Prayer is the indication of this.

But because of its special solemnity and the obligatory presence of the community, and because it is celebrated "on the day when Christ conquered death and gave us a share in his immortal life", (44) the Sunday Eucharist expresses with greater emphasis its inherent ecclesial dimension. It becomes the paradigm for other Eucharistic celebrations. Each community, gathering all its members for the "breaking of the bread", becomes the place where the mystery of the Church is concretely made present. In celebrating the Eucharist, the community opens itself to communion with the universal Church, (45) imploring the Father to "remember the Church throughout the world" and make her grow in the unity of all the faithful with the Pope and with the Pastors of the particular Churches, until love is brought to perfection.

The day of the Church

35. Therefore, the dies Domini is also the dies Ecclesiae. This is why on the pastoral level the community aspect of the Sunday celebration should be particularly stressed. As I have noted elsewhere, among the many activities of a parish, "none is as vital or as community-forming as the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist".(46) Mindful of this, the Second Vatican Council recalled that efforts must be made to ensure that there is "within the parish, a lively sense of community, in the first place through the community celebration of Sunday Mass".(47) Subsequent liturgical directives made the same point, asking that on Sundays and holy days the Eucharistic celebrations held normally in other churches and chapels be coordinated with the celebration in the parish church, in order "to foster the sense of the Church community, which is nourished and expressed in a particular way by the community celebration on Sunday, whether around the Bishop, especially in the Cathedral, or in the parish assembly, in which the pastor represents the Bishop".(48)

36. The Sunday assembly is the privileged place of unity: it is the setting for the celebration of the sacramentum unitatis which profoundly marks the Church as a people gathered "by" and "in" the unity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.(49) For Christian families, the Sunday assembly is one of the most outstanding expressions of their identity and their "ministry" as "domestic churches", (50) when parents share with their children at the one Table of the word and of the Bread of Life. We do well to recall in this regard that it is first of all the parents who must teach their children to participate in Sunday Mass; they are assisted in this by catechists, who are to see to it that initiation into the Mass is made a part of the formation imparted to the children entrusted to their care, explaining the important reasons behind the obligatory nature of the precept. When circumstances suggest it, the celebration of Masses for Children, in keeping with the provisions of the liturgical norms, (51) can also help in this regard.

At Sunday Masses in parishes, insofar as parishes are "Eucharistic communities", (52) it is normal to find different groups, movements, associations and even the smaller religious communities present in the parish. This allows everyone to experience in common what they share most deeply, beyond the particular spiritual paths which, by discernment of Church authority, (53) legitimately distinguish them. This is why on Sunday, the day of gathering, small group Masses are not to be encouraged: it is not only a question of ensuring that parish assemblies are not without the necessary ministry of priests, but also of ensuring that the life and unity of the Church community are fully safeguarded and promoted.(54) Authorization of possible and clearly restricted exceptions to this general guideline will depend upon the wise discernment of the Pastors of the particular Churches, in view of special needs in the area of formation and pastoral care, and keeping in mind the good of individuals or groups - especially the benefits which such exceptions may bring to the entire Christian community.

A pilgrim people

37. As the Church journeys through time, the reference to Christ's Resurrection and the weekly recurrence of this solemn memorial help to remind us of the pilgrim and eschatological character of the People of God. Sunday after Sunday the Church moves towards the final "Lord's Day", that Sunday which knows no end. The expectation of Christ's coming is inscribed in the very mystery of the Church(55) and is evidenced in every Eucharistic celebration. But, with its specific remembrance of the glory of the Risen Christ, the Lord's Day recalls with greater intensity the future glory of his "return". This makes Sunday the day on which the Church, showing forth more clearly her identity as "Bride", anticipates in some sense the eschatological reality of the heavenly Jerusalem. Gathering her children into the Eucharistic assembly and teaching them to wait for the "divine Bridegroom", she engages in a kind of "exercise of desire", (56) receiving a foretaste of the joy of the new heavens and new earth, when the holy city, the new Jerusalem, will come down from God, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2).

The day of hope

38. Viewed in this way, Sunday is not only the day of faith, but is also the day of Christian hope. To share in "the Lord's Supper" is to anticipate the eschatological feast of the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9). Celebrating this memorial of Christ, risen and ascended into heaven, the Christian community waits "in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ".(57) Renewed and nourished by this intense weekly rhythm, Christian hope becomes the leaven and the light of human hope. This is why the Prayer of the Faithful responds not only to the needs of the particular Christian community but also to those of all humanity; and the Church, coming together for the Eucharistic celebration, shows to the world that she makes her own "the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially of the poor and all those who suffer".(58) With the offering of the Sunday Eucharist, the Church crowns the witness which her children strive to offer every day of the week by proclaiming the Gospel and practising charity in the world of work and in all the many tasks of life; thus she shows forth more plainly her identity "as a sacrament, or sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the entire human race". (59)

The table of the word

39. As in every Eucharistic celebration, the Risen Lord is encountered in the Sunday assembly at the twofold table of the word and of the Bread of Life. The table of the word offers the same understanding of the history of salvation and especially of the Paschal Mystery which the Risen Jesus himself gave to his disciples: it is Christ who speaks, present as he is in his word "when Sacred Scripture is read in the Church".

(60) At the table of the Bread of Life, the Risen Lord becomes really, substantially and enduringly present through the memorial of his Passion and Resurrection, and the Bread of Life is offered as a pledge of future glory. The Second Vatican Council recalled that "the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are so closely joined together that they form a single act of worship".(61) The Council also urged that "the table of the word of God be more lavishly prepared for the faithful, opening to them more abundantly the treasures of the Bible".(62) It then decreed that, in Masses of Sunday and holy days of obligation, the homily should not be omitted except for serious reasons.(63) These timely decrees were faithfully embodied in the liturgical reform, about which Paul VI wrote, commenting upon the richer offering of biblical readings on Sunday and holy days: "All this has been decreed so as to foster more and more in the faithful 'that hunger for hearing the word of the Lord' (Am 8:11) which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, spurs the People of the New Covenant on towards the perfect unity of the Church".(64)

40. In considering the Sunday Eucharist more than thirty years after the Council, we need to assess how well the word of God is being proclaimed and how effectively the People of God have grown in knowledge and love of Sacred Scripture.(65) There are two aspects of this - that of celebration and that of personal appropriation - and they are very closely related. At the level of celebration, the fact that the Council made it possible to proclaim the word of God in the language of the community taking part in the celebration must awaken a new sense of responsibility towards the word, allowing "the distinctive character of the sacred text" to shine forth "even in the mode of reading or singing".(66) At the level of personal appropriation, the hearing of the word of God proclaimed must be well prepared in the souls of the faithful by an apt knowledge of Scripture and, where pastorally possible, by special initiatives designed to deepen understanding of the biblical readings, particularly those used on Sundays and holy days. If Christian individuals and families are not regularly drawing new life from the reading of the sacred text in a spirit of prayer and docility to the Church's interpretation, (67) then it is difficult for the liturgical proclamation of the word of God alone to produce the fruit we might expect. This is the value of initiatives in parish communities which bring together during the week those who take part in the Eucharist - priest, ministers and faithful(68) - in order to prepare the Sunday liturgy, reflecting beforehand upon the word of God which will be proclaimed. The objective sought here is that the entire celebration - praying, singing, listening, and not just the preaching - should express in some way the theme of the Sunday liturgy, so that all those taking part may be penetrated more powerfully by it. Clearly, much depends on those who exercise the ministry of the word. It is their duty to prepare the reflection on the word of the Lord by prayer and study of the sacred text, so that they may then express its contents faithfully and apply them to people's concerns and to their daily lives.

41. It should also be borne in mind that the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, especially in the Eucharistic assembly, is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialogue between God and his People, a dialogue in which the wonders of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the Covenant are continually restated. On their part, the People of God are drawn to respond to this dialogue of love by giving thanks and praise, also by demonstrating their fidelity to the task of continual "conversion". The Sunday assembly commits us therefore to an inner renewal of our baptismal promises, which are in a sense implicit in the recitation of the Creed, and are an explicit part of the liturgy of the Easter Vigil and whenever Baptism is celebrated during Mass. In this context, the proclamation of the word in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration takes on the solemn tone found in the Old Testament at moments when the Covenant was renewed, when the Law was proclaimed and the community of Israel was called - like the People in the desert at the foot of Sinai (cf. Ex 19:7-8; 24:3, 7) - to repeat its "yes", renewing its decision to be faithful to God and to obey his commandments. In speaking his word, God awaits our response: a response which Christ has already made for

us with his "Amen" (cf. 2 Cor 1:20-22), and which echoes in us through the Holy Spirit so that what we hear may involve us at the deepest level.(69)

The table of the Body of Christ

42. The table of the word leads naturally to the table of the Eucharistic Bread and prepares the community to live its many aspects, which in the Sunday Eucharist assume an especially solemn character. As the whole community gathers to celebrate "the Lord's Day", the Eucharist appears more clearly than on other days as the great "thanksgiving" in which the Spirit-filled Church turns to the Father, becoming one with Christ and speaking in the name of all humanity. The rhythm of the week prompts us to gather up in grateful memory the events of the days which have just passed, to review them in the light of God and to thank him for his countless gifts, glorifying him "through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit". The Christian community thus comes to a renewed awareness of the fact that all things were created through Christ (cf. Col 1:16; Jn 1:3), and that in Christ, who came in the form of a slave to take on and redeem our human condition, all things have been restored (cf. Eph 1:10), in order to be handed over to God the Father, from whom all things come to be and draw their life. Then, giving assent to the Eucharistic doxology with their "Amen", the People of God look in faith and hope towards the eschatological end, when Christ "will deliver the kingdom to God the Father... so that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:24, 28).

43. This "ascending" movement is inherent in every Eucharistic celebration and makes it a joyous event, overflowing with gratitude and hope. But it emerges particularly at Sunday Mass because of its special link with the commemoration of the Resurrection. By contrast, this "Eucharistic" rejoicing which "lifts up our hearts" is the fruit of God's "descending" movement towards us, which remains for ever etched in the essential sacrificial element of the Eucharist, the supreme expression and celebration of the mystery of the kenosis, the descent by which Christ "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross" (Phil 2:8).

The Mass in fact truly makes present the sacrifice of the Cross. Under the species of bread and wine, upon which has been invoked the outpouring of the Spirit who works with absolutely unique power in the words of consecration, Christ offers himself to the Father in the same act of sacrifice by which he offered himself on the Cross. "In this divine sacrifice which is accomplished in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once and for all in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner".(70) To his sacrifice Christ unites the sacrifice of the Church: "In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value".(71) The truth that the whole community shares in Christ's sacrifice is especially evident in the Sunday gathering, which makes it possible to bring to the altar the week that has passed, with all its human burdens.

Easter banquet and fraternal gathering

44. The communal character of the Eucharist emerges in a special way when it is seen as the Easter banquet, in which Christ himself becomes our nourishment. In fact, "for this purpose Christ entrusted to the Church this sacrifice: so that the faithful might share in it, both spiritually, in faith and charity, and sacramentally, in the banquet of Holy Communion. Sharing in the Lord's Supper is always communion with Christ, who offers himself for us in sacrifice to the Father".(72) This is why the Church recommends that the faithful receive communion when they take part in the Eucharist, provided that they are properly disposed and, if aware of grave sin, have received God's pardon in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, (73) in the spirit of what Saint Paul writes to the community at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-32). Obviously, the invitation to Eucharistic communion is more insistent in the case of Mass on Sundays and holy days.

It is also important to be ever mindful that communion with Christ is deeply tied to communion with our brothers and sisters. The Sunday Eucharistic gathering is an experience of brotherhood, which the celebration should demonstrate clearly, while ever respecting the nature of the liturgical action. All this will be helped by gestures of welcome and by the tone of prayer, alert to the needs of all in the community. The sign of peace - in the Roman Rite significantly placed before Eucharistic communion - is a particularly expressive gesture which the faithful are invited to make as a manifestation of the People of God's acceptance of all that has been accomplished in the celebration(74) and of the commitment to mutual love which is made in sharing the one bread, with the demanding words of Christ in mind: "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24).

From Mass to "mission"

45. Receiving the Bread of Life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and his Spirit the tasks which await them in their ordinary life. For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door. Like the first witnesses of the Resurrection, Christians who gather each Sunday to experience and proclaim the presence of the Risen Lord are called to evangelize and bear witness in their daily lives. Given this, the Prayer after Communion and the Concluding Rite -

the Final Blessing and the Dismissal - need to be better valued and appreciated, so that all who have shared in the Eucharist may come to a deeper sense of the responsibility which is entrusted to them. Once the assembly disperses, Christ's disciples return to their everyday surroundings with the commitment to make their whole life a gift, a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1). They feel indebted to their brothers and sisters because of what they have received in the celebration, not unlike the disciples of Emmaus who, once they had recognized the Risen Christ "in the breaking of the bread" (cf. Lk 24:30-32), felt the need to return immediately to share with their brothers and sisters the joy of meeting the Lord (cf. Lk 24:33-35).

The Sunday obligation

46. Since the Eucharist is the very heart of Sunday, it is clear why, from the earliest centuries, the Pastors of the Church have not ceased to remind the faithful of the need to take part in the liturgical assembly. "Leave everything on the Lord's Day", urges the third century text known as the Didascalia, "and run diligently to your assembly, because it is your praise of God. Otherwise, what excuse will they make to God, those who do not come together on the Lord's Day to hear the word of life and feed on the divine nourishment which lasts forever?".(75) The faithful have generally accepted this call of the Pastors with conviction of soul and, although there have been times and situations when this duty has not been perfectly met, one should never forget the genuine heroism of priests and faithful who have fulfilled this obligation even when faced with danger and the denial of religious freedom, as can be documented from the first centuries of Christianity up to our own time.

In his first Apology addressed to the Emperor Antoninus and the Senate, Saint Justin proudly described the Christian practice of the Sunday assembly, which gathered in one place Christians from both the city and the countryside.(76) When, during the persecution of Diocletian, their assemblies were banned with the greatest severity, many were courageous enough to defy the imperial decree and accepted death rather than miss the Sunday Eucharist. This was the case of the martyrs of Abitina, in Proconsular Africa, who replied to their accusers: "Without fear of any kind we have celebrated the Lord's Supper, because it cannot be missed; that is our law"; "We cannot live without the Lord's Supper". As she confessed her faith, one of the martyrs said: "Yes, I went to the assembly and I celebrated the Lord's Supper with my brothers and sisters, because I am a Christian".(77)

47. Even if in the earliest times it was not judged necessary to be prescriptive, the Church has not ceased to confirm this obligation of conscience, which rises from the inner need felt so strongly by the Christians of the first centuries. It was only later, faced with the half-heartedness or negligence of some, that the Church had to make explicit the duty to attend Sunday Mass: more often than not, this was done in the form of exhortation, but at times the Church had to resort to specific canonical precepts. This was the case in a number of local Councils from the fourth century onwards (as at the Council of Elvira of 300, which speaks not of an obligation but of penalties after three absences)(78) and most especially from the sixth century onwards (as at the Council of Agde in 506).(79) These decrees of local Councils led to a universal practice, the obligatory character of which was taken as something quite normal.(80)

The Code of Canon Law of 1917 for the first time gathered this tradition into a universal law.(81) The present Code reiterates this, saying that "on Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to attend Mass".(82) This legislation has normally been understood as entailing a grave obligation: this is the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, (83) and it is easy to understand why if we keep in mind how vital Sunday is for the Christian life.

48. Today, as in the heroic times of the beginning, many who wish to live in accord with the demands of their faith are being faced with difficult situations in various parts of the world. They live in surroundings which are sometimes decidedly hostile and at other times - more frequently in fact - indifferent and unresponsive to the Gospel message. If believers are not to be overwhelmed, they must be able to count on the support of the Christian community. This is why they must be convinced that it is crucially important for the life of faith that they should come together with others on Sundays to celebrate the Passover of the Lord in the sacrament of the New Covenant. It is the special responsibility of the Bishops, therefore, "to ensure that Sunday is appreciated by all the faithful, kept holy and celebrated as truly 'the Lord's Day', on which the Church comes together to renew the remembrance of the Easter mystery in hearing the word of God, in offering the sacrifice of the Lord, in keeping the day holy by means of prayer, works of charity and abstention from work".(84)

49. Because the faithful are obliged to attend Mass unless there is a grave impediment, Pastors have the corresponding duty to offer to everyone the real possibility of fulfilling the precept. The provisions of Church law move in this direction, as for example in the faculty granted to priests, with the prior authorization of the diocesan Bishop, to celebrate more than one Mass on Sundays and holy days, (85) the institution of evening Masses(86) and the provision which allows the obligation to be fulfilled from Saturday evening onwards, starting at the time of First Vespers of Sunday.(87) From a liturgical point of view, in fact, holy days begin with First Vespers.(88) Consequently, the liturgy of what is sometimes called the "Vigil Mass" is in effect the "festive" Mass of Sunday, at which the celebrant is required to preach the homily and recite the Prayer of the Faithful.

Moreover, Pastors should remind the faithful that when they are away from home on Sundays they are to take care to attend Mass wherever they may be, enriching the local community with their personal witness. At the same time, these

communities should show a warm sense of welcome to visiting brothers and sisters, especially in places which attract many tourists and pilgrims, for whom it will often be necessary to provide special religious assistance.(89)

A joyful celebration in song

50. Given the nature of Sunday Mass and its importance in the lives of the faithful, it must be prepared with special care. In ways dictated by pastoral experience and local custom in keeping with liturgical norms, efforts must be made to ensure that the celebration has the festive character appropriate to the day commemorating the Lord's Resurrection. To this end, it is important to devote attention to the songs used by the assembly, since singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart, accentuating the solemnity of the celebration and fostering the sense of a common faith and a shared love. Care must be taken to ensure the quality, both of the texts and of the melodies, so that what is proposed today as new and creative will conform to liturgical requirements and be worthy of the Church's tradition which, in the field of sacred music, boasts a priceless heritage.

A celebration involving all

51. There is a need too to ensure that all those present, children and adults, take an active interest, by encouraging their involvement at those points where the liturgy suggests and recommends it.(90) Of course, it falls only to those who exercise the priestly ministry to effect the Eucharistic Sacrifice and to offer it to God in the name of the whole people.(91) This is the basis of the distinction, which is much more than a matter of discipline, between the task proper to the celebrant and that which belongs to deacons and the non-ordained faithful.(92) Yet the faithful must realize that, because of the common priesthood received in Baptism, "they participate in the offering of the Eucharist".(93) Although there is a distinction of roles, they still "offer to God the divine victim and themselves with him. Offering the sacrifice and receiving holy communion, they take part actively in the liturgy", (94) finding in it light and strength to live their baptismal priesthood and the witness of a holy life.

Other moments of the Christian Sunday

52. Sharing in the Eucharist is the heart of Sunday, but the duty to keep Sunday holy cannot be reduced to this. In fact, the Lord's Day is lived well if it is marked from beginning to end by grateful and active remembrance of God's saving work. This commits each of Christ's disciples to shape the other moments of the day - those outside the liturgical context: family life, social relationships, moments of relaxation - in such a way that the peace and joy of the Risen Lord will emerge in the ordinary events of life. For example, the relaxed gathering of parents and children can be an opportunity not only to listen to one another but also to share a few formative and more reflective moments. Even in lay life, when possible, why not make provision for special times of prayer - especially the solemn celebration of Vespers, for example - or moments of catechesis, which on the eve of Sunday or on Sunday afternoon might prepare for or complete the gift of the Eucharist in people's hearts?

This rather traditional way of keeping Sunday holy has perhaps become more difficult for many people; but the Church shows her faith in the strength of the Risen Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit by making it known that, today more than ever, she is unwilling to settle for minimalism and mediocrity at the level of faith. She wants to help Christians to do what is most correct and pleasing to the Lord. And despite the difficulties, there are positive and encouraging signs. In many parts of the Church, a new need for prayer in its many forms is being felt; and this is a gift of the Holy Spirit. There is also a rediscovery of ancient religious practices, such as pilgrimages; and often the faithful take advantage of Sunday rest to visit a Shrine where, with the whole family perhaps, they can spend time in a more intense experience of faith. These are moments of grace which must be fostered through evangelization and guided by genuine pastoral wisdom.

Sunday assemblies without a priest

53. There remains the problem of parishes which do not have the ministry of a priest for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. This is often the case in young Churches, where one priest has pastoral responsibility for faithful scattered over a vast area. However, emergency situations can also arise in countries of long-standing Christian tradition, where diminishing numbers of clergy make it impossible to guarantee the presence of a priest in every parish community. In situations where the Eucharist cannot be celebrated, the Church recommends that the Sunday assembly come together even without a priest, (95) in keeping with the indications and directives of the Holy See which have been entrusted to the Episcopal Conferences for implementation.(96) Yet the objective must always remain the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass, the one way in which the Passover of the Lord becomes truly present, the only full realization of the Eucharistic assembly over which the priest presides in persona Christi, breaking the bread of the word and the Eucharist. At the pastoral level, therefore, everything has to be done to ensure that the Sacrifice of the Mass is made available as often as possible to the faithful who are regularly deprived of it, either by arranging the presence of a priest

from time to time, or by taking every opportunity to organize a gathering in a central location accessible to scattered groups.

Radio and television

54. Finally, the faithful who, because of sickness, disability or some other serious cause, are prevented from taking part, should as best they can unite themselves with the celebration of Sunday Mass from afar, preferably by means of the readings and prayers for that day from the Missal, as well as through their desire for the Eucharist.⁽⁹⁷⁾ In many countries, radio and television make it possible to join in the Eucharistic celebration broadcast from some sacred place.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Clearly, this kind of broadcast does not in itself fulfil the Sunday obligation, which requires participation in the fraternal assembly gathered in one place, where Eucharistic communion can be received. But for those who cannot take part in the Eucharist and who are therefore excused from the obligation, radio and television are a precious help, especially if accompanied by the generous service of extraordinary ministers who bring the Eucharist to the sick, also bringing them the greeting and solidarity of the whole community. Sunday Mass thus produces rich fruits for these Christians too, and they are truly enabled to experience Sunday as "the Lord's Day" and "the Church's day".

CHAPTER IV - DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

The "full joy" of Christ

55. "Blessed be he who has raised the great day of Sunday above all other days. The heavens and the earth, angels and of men give themselves over to joy".⁽⁹⁹⁾ This cry of the Maronite liturgy captures well the intense acclamations of joy which have always characterized Sunday in the liturgy of both East and West. Moreover, historically - even before it was seen as a day of rest, which in any case was not provided for in the civil calendar - Christians celebrated the weekly day of the Risen Lord primarily as a day of joy. "On the first day of the week, you shall all rejoice", urges the Didascalia. ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ This was also emphasized by liturgical practice, through the choice of appropriate gestures. ⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Voicing an awareness widespread in the Church, Saint Augustine describes the joy of the weekly Easter: "Fasting, is set aside and prayers are said standing, as a sign of the Resurrection, which is also why the Alleluia is sung on every Sunday". ⁽¹⁰²⁾

56. Beyond particular ritual forms, which can vary in time depending upon Church discipline, there remains the fact that Sunday, as a weekly echo of the first encounter with the Risen Lord, is unfailingly marked by the joy with which the disciples greeted the Master: "The disciples rejoiced to see the Lord" (Jn 20:20). This was the confirmation of the words which Jesus spoke before the Passion and which resound in every Christian generation: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy" (Jn 16:20). Had not he himself prayed for this, that the disciples would have "the fullness of his joy" (cf. Jn 17:13)? The festive character of the Sunday Eucharist expresses the joy that Christ communicates to his Church through the gift of the Spirit. Joy is precisely one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22).

57. Therefore, if we wish to rediscover the full meaning of Sunday, we must rediscover this aspect of the life of faith. Certainly, Christian joy must mark the whole of life, and not just one day of the week. But in virtue of its significance as the day of the Risen Lord, celebrating God's work of creation and "new creation", Sunday is the day of joy in a very special way, indeed the day most suitable for learning how to rejoice and to rediscover the true nature and deep roots of joy. This joy should never be confused with shallow feelings of satisfaction and pleasure, which inebriate the senses and emotions for a brief moment, but then leave the heart unfulfilled and perhaps even embittered. In the Christian view, joy is much more enduring and consoling; as the saints attest, it can hold firm even in the dark night of suffering. ⁽¹⁰³⁾ It is, in a certain sense, a "virtue" to be nurtured.

58. Yet there is no conflict whatever between Christian joy and true human joys, which in fact are exalted and find their ultimate foundation precisely in the joy of the glorified Christ, the perfect image and revelation of man as God intended. As my revered predecessor Paul VI wrote in his Exhortation on Christian joy: "In essence, Christian joy is a sharing in the unfathomable joy, at once divine and human, found in the heart of the glorified Christ". ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Pope Paul concluded his Exhortation by asking that, on the Lord's Day, the Church should witness powerfully to the joy experienced by the Apostles when they saw the Lord on the evening of Easter. To this end, he urged pastors to insist "upon the need for the baptized to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist in joy. How could they neglect this encounter, this banquet which Christ prepares for us in his love? May our sharing in it be most worthy and joyful! It is Christ, crucified and glorified, who comes among his disciples, to lead them all together into the newness of his Resurrection. This is the climax, here below, of the covenant of love between God and his people: the sign and source of Christian joy, a stage on the way to the eternal feast". ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ This vision of faith shows the Christian Sunday to be a true "time for celebration", a day given by God to men and women for their full human and spiritual growth.

The fulfilment of the Sabbath

59. This aspect of the Christian Sunday shows in a special way how it is the fulfilment of the Old Testament Sabbath. On the Lord's Day, which - as we have already said - the Old Testament links to the work of creation (cf. Gn 2:1-3; Ex 20:8-11) and the Exodus (cf. Dt 5:12-15), the Christian is called to proclaim the new creation and the new covenant brought about in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Far from being abolished, the celebration of creation becomes more profound within a Christocentric perspective, being seen in the light of the God's plan "to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10). The remembrance of the liberation of the Exodus also assumes its full meaning as it becomes a remembrance of the universal redemption accomplished by Christ in his Death and Resurrection. More than a "replacement" for the Sabbath, therefore, Sunday is its fulfilment, and in a certain sense its extension and full expression in the ordered unfolding of the history of salvation, which reaches its culmination in Christ.

60. In this perspective, the biblical theology of the "Sabbath" can be recovered in full, without compromising the Christian character of Sunday. It is a theology which leads us ever anew and in unflinching awe to the mystery of the beginning, when the eternal Word of God, by a free decision of love, created the world from nothing. The work of creation was sealed by the blessing and consecration of the day on which God ceased "from all the work which he had done in creation" (Gn 2:3). This day of God's rest confers meaning upon time, which in the sequence of weeks assumes not only a chronological regularity but also, in a manner of speaking, a theological resonance. The constant return of the "shabbat" ensures that there is no risk of time being closed in upon itself, since, in welcoming God and his *kairoi* - the moments of his grace and his saving acts - time remains open to eternity.

61. As the seventh day blessed and consecrated by God, the "shabbat" concludes the whole work of creation, and is therefore immediately linked to the work of the sixth day when God made man "in his image and likeness" (cf. Gn 1:26). This very close connection between the "day of God" and the "day of man" did not escape the Fathers in their meditation on the biblical creation story. Saint Ambrose says in this regard: "Thanks, then, to the Lord our God who accomplished a work in which he might find rest. He made the heavens, but I do not read that he found rest there; he made the stars, the moon, the sun, and neither do I read that he found rest in them. I read instead that he made man and that then he rested, finding in man one to whom he could offer the forgiveness of sins". (106) Thus there will be for ever a direct link between the "day of God" and the "day of man". When the divine commandment declares: "Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy" (Ex 20:8), the rest decreed in order to honour the day dedicated to God is not at all a burden imposed upon man, but rather an aid to help him to recognize his life-giving and liberating dependence upon the Creator, and at the same time his calling to cooperate in the Creator's work and to receive his grace. In honouring God's "rest", man fully discovers himself, and thus the Lord's Day bears the profound imprint of God's blessing (cf. Gn 2:3), by virtue of which, we might say, it is endowed in a way similar to the animals and to man himself, with a kind of "fruitfulness" (cf. Gn 1:22, 28). This "fruitfulness" is apparent above all in filling and, in a certain sense, "multiplying" time itself, deepening in men and women the joy of living and the desire to foster and communicate life.

62. It is the duty of Christians therefore to remember that, although the practices of the Jewish Sabbath are gone, surpassed as they are by the "fulfilment" which Sunday brings, the underlying reasons for keeping "the Lord's Day" holy - inscribed solemnly in the Ten Commandments - remain valid, though they need to be reinterpreted in the light of the theology and spirituality of Sunday: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. Then you shall do no work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your servant, or your maid, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your beasts, or the foreigner within your gates, that your servant and maid may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded that you keep the Sabbath day" (Dt 5:12-15). Here the Sabbath observance is closely linked with the liberation which God accomplished for his people.

63. Christ came to accomplish a new "exodus", to restore freedom to the oppressed. He performed many healings on the Sabbath (cf. Mt 12:9-14 and parallels), certainly not to violate the Lord's Day, but to reveal its full meaning: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). Opposing the excessively legalistic interpretation of some of his contemporaries, and developing the true meaning of the biblical Sabbath, Jesus, as "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mk 2:28), restores to the Sabbath observance its liberating character, carefully safeguarding the rights of God and the rights of man. This is why Christians, called as they are to proclaim the liberation won by the blood of Christ, felt that they had the authority to transfer the meaning of the Sabbath to the day of the Resurrection. The Passover of Christ has in fact liberated man from a slavery more radical than any weighing upon an oppressed people - the slavery of sin, which alienates man from God, and alienates man from himself and from others, constantly sowing within history the seeds of evil and violence.

The day of rest

64. For several centuries, Christians observed Sunday simply as a day of worship, without being able to give it the specific meaning of Sabbath rest. Only in the fourth century did the civil law of the Roman Empire recognize the

weekly recurrence, determining that on "the day of the sun" the judges, the people of the cities and the various trade corporations would not work. (107) Christians rejoiced to see thus removed the obstacles which until then had sometimes made observance of the Lord's Day heroic. They could now devote themselves to prayer in common without hindrance. (108)

It would therefore be wrong to see in this legislation of the rhythm of the week a mere historical circumstance with no special significance for the Church and which she could simply set aside. Even after the fall of the Empire, the Councils did not cease to insist upon the arrangements regarding Sunday rest. In countries where Christians are in the minority and where the festive days of the calendar do not coincide with Sunday, it is still Sunday which remains the Lord's Day, the day on which the faithful come together for the Eucharistic assembly. But this involves real sacrifices. For Christians it is not normal that Sunday, the day of joyful celebration, should not also be a day of rest, and it is difficult for them to keep Sunday holy if they do not have enough free time.

65.

By contrast, the link between the Lord's Day and the day of rest in civil society has a meaning and importance which go beyond the distinctly Christian point of view. The alternation between work and rest, built into human nature, is willed by God himself, as appears in the creation story in the Book of Genesis (cf. 2:2-3; Ex 20:8-11): rest is something "sacred", because it is man's way of withdrawing from the sometimes excessively demanding cycle of earthly tasks in order to renew his awareness that everything is the work of God. There is a risk that the prodigious power over creation which God gives to man can lead him to forget that God is the Creator upon whom everything depends. It is all the more urgent to recognize this dependence in our own time, when science and technology have so incredibly increased the power which man exercises through his work.

66.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that even in our own day work is very oppressive for many people, either because of miserable working conditions and long hours - especially in the poorer regions of the world - or because of the persistence in economically more developed societies of too many cases of injustice and exploitation of man by man. When, through the centuries, she has made laws concerning Sunday rest, (109) the Church has had in mind above all the work of servants and workers, certainly not because this work was any less worthy when compared to the spiritual requirements of Sunday observance, but rather because it needed greater regulation to lighten its burden and thus enable everyone to keep the Lord's Day holy. In this matter, my predecessor Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* spoke of Sunday rest as a worker's right which the State must guarantee. (110)

In our own historical context there remains the obligation to ensure that everyone can enjoy the freedom, rest and relaxation which human dignity requires, together with the associated religious, family, cultural and interpersonal needs which are difficult to meet if there is no guarantee of at least one day of the week on which people can both rest and celebrate. Naturally, this right of workers to rest presupposes their right to work and, as we reflect on the question of the Christian understanding of Sunday, we cannot but recall with a deep sense of solidarity the hardship of countless men and women who, because of the lack of jobs, are forced to remain inactive on workdays as well.

67. Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspective: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the true face of the people with whom we live. Even the beauties of nature - too often marred by the desire to exploit, which turns against man himself - can be rediscovered and enjoyed to the full. As the day on which man is at peace with God, with himself and with others, Sunday becomes a moment when people can look anew upon the wonders of nature, allowing themselves to be caught up in that marvellous and mysterious harmony which, in the words of Saint Ambrose, welds the many elements of the cosmos in a "bond of communion and peace" by "an inviolable law of concord and love". (111) Men and women then come to a deeper sense, as the Apostle says, that "everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:4-5). If after six days of work - reduced in fact to five for many people - people look for time to relax and to pay more attention to other aspects of their lives, this corresponds to an authentic need which is in full harmony with the vision of the Gospel message. Believers are therefore called to satisfy this need in a way consistent with the manifestation of their personal and community faith, as expressed in the celebration and sanctification of the Lord's Day.

Therefore, also in the particular circumstances of our own time, Christians will naturally strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy. In any case, they are obliged in conscience to arrange their Sunday rest in a way which allows them to take part in the Eucharist, refraining from work and activities which are incompatible with the sanctification of the Lord's Day, with its characteristic joy and necessary rest for spirit and body. (112)

68. In order that rest may not degenerate into emptiness or boredom, it must offer spiritual enrichment, greater freedom, opportunities for contemplation and fraternal communion. Therefore, among the forms of culture and entertainment which society offers, the faithful should choose those which are most in keeping with a life lived in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Sunday rest then becomes "prophetic", affirming not only the absolute primacy of God, but also

the primacy and dignity of the person with respect to the demands of social and economic life, and anticipating in a certain sense the "new heavens" and the "new earth", in which liberation from slavery to needs will be final and complete. In short, the Lord's Day thus becomes in the truest sense the day of man as well.

A day of solidarity

69. Sunday should also give the faithful an opportunity to devote themselves to works of mercy, charity and apostolate. To experience the joy of the Risen Lord deep within is to share fully the love which pulses in his heart: there is no joy without love! Jesus himself explains this, linking the "new commandment" with the gift of joy: "If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept the Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:10-12).

The Sunday Eucharist, therefore, not only does not absolve the faithful from the duties of charity, but on the contrary commits them even more "to all the works of charity, of mercy, of apostolic outreach, by means of which it is seen that the faithful of Christ are not of this world and yet are the light of the world, giving glory to the Father in the presence of men". (113)

70. Ever since Apostolic times, the Sunday gathering has in fact been for Christians a moment of fraternal sharing with the very poor. "On the first day of the week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn" (1 Cor 16:2), says Saint Paul referring to the collection organized for the poor Churches of Judaea. In the Sunday Eucharist, the believing heart opens wide to embrace all aspects of the Church. But the full range of the apostolic summons needs to be accepted: far from trying to create a narrow "gift" mentality, Paul calls rather for a demanding culture of sharing, to be lived not only among the members of the community itself but also in society as a whole. (114) More than ever, we need to listen once again to the stern warning which Paul addresses to the community at Corinth, guilty of having humiliated the poor in the fraternal agape which accompanied "the Lord's Supper": "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the Church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (1 Cor 11:20-22). James is equally forceful in what he writes: "If a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, 'Take a seat here, please', while you say to the poor man, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet', have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?" (2:2-4).

71. The teachings of the Apostles struck a sympathetic chord from the earliest centuries, and evoked strong echoes in the preaching of the Fathers of the Church. Saint Ambrose addressed words of fire to the rich who presumed to fulfil their religious obligations by attending church without sharing their goods with the poor, and who perhaps even exploited them: "You who are rich, do you hear what the Lord God says? Yet you come into church not to give to the poor but to take instead". (115) Saint John Chrysostom is no less demanding: "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk only then to neglect him outside where he suffers cold and nakedness. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same One who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food', and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me'... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices, when he is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well". (116)

These words effectively remind the Christian community of the duty to make the Eucharist the place where fraternity becomes practical solidarity, where the last are the first in the minds and attentions of the brethren, where Christ himself - through the generous gifts from the rich to the very poor - may somehow prolong in time the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. (117)

72. The Eucharist is an event and programme of true brotherhood. From the Sunday Mass there flows a tide of charity destined to spread into the whole life of the faithful, beginning by inspiring the very way in which they live the rest of Sunday. If Sunday is a day of joy, Christians should declare by their actual behaviour that we cannot be happy "on our own". They look around to find people who may need their help. It may be that in their neighbourhood or among those they know there are sick people, elderly people, children or immigrants who precisely on Sundays feel more keenly their isolation, needs and suffering. It is true that commitment to these people cannot be restricted to occasional Sunday gestures. But presuming a wider sense of commitment, why not make the Lord's Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? Inviting to a meal people who are alone, visiting the sick, providing food for needy families, spending a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity: these would certainly be ways of bringing into people's lives the love of Christ received at the Eucharistic table.

73. Lived in this way, not only the Sunday Eucharist but the whole of Sunday becomes a great school of charity, justice and peace. The presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his people becomes an undertaking of solidarity, a compelling force for inner renewal, an inspiration to change the structures of sin in which individuals, communities and at times entire peoples are entangled. Far from being an escape, the Christian Sunday is a "prophecy" inscribed on time itself, a prophecy obliging the faithful to follow in the

footsteps of the One who came "to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives and new sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19). In the Sunday commemoration of Easter, believers learn from Christ, and remembering his promise: "I leave you peace, my peace I give you" (Jn 14:27), they become in their turn builders of peace.

CHAPTER V -DIES DIERUM

Sunday: the Primordial Feast,
Revealing the Meaning of Time

Christ the Alpha and Omega of time

74. "In Christianity time has a fundamental importance. Within the dimension of time the world was created; within it the history of salvation unfolds, finding its culmination in the 'fullness of time' of the Incarnation, and its goal in the glorious return of the Son of God at the end of time. In Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, time becomes a dimension of God, who is himself eternal". (118)

In the light of the New Testament, the years of Christ's earthly life truly constitute the centre of time; this centre reaches its apex in the Resurrection. It is true that Jesus is God made man from the very moment of his conception in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, but only in the Resurrection is his humanity wholly transfigured and glorified, thus revealing the fullness of his divine identity and glory. In his speech in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (cf. Acts 13:33), Paul applies the words of Psalm 2 to the Resurrection of Christ: "You are my Son, this day I have begotten you" (v. 7). It is precisely for this reason that, in celebrating the Easter Vigil, the Church acclaim the Risen Christ as "the Beginning and End, the Alpha and Omega". These are the words spoken by the celebrant as he prepares the Paschal candle, which bears the number of the current year. These words clearly attest that "Christ is the Lord of time; he is its beginning and its end; every year, every day and every moment are embraced by his Incarnation and Resurrection, and thus become part of the 'fullness of time'". (119)

75. Since Sunday is the weekly Easter, recalling and making present the day upon which Christ rose from the dead, it is also the day which reveals the meaning of time. It has nothing in common with the cosmic cycles according to which natural religion and human culture tend to impose a structure on time, succumbing perhaps to the myth of eternal return. The Christian Sunday is wholly other! Springing from the Resurrection, it cuts through human time, the months, the years, the centuries, like a directional arrow which points them towards their target: Christ's Second Coming. Sunday foreshadows the last day, the day of the Parousia, which in a way is already anticipated by Christ's glory in the event of the Resurrection.

In fact, everything that will happen until the end of the world will be no more than an extension and unfolding of what happened on the day when the battered body of the Crucified Lord was raised by the power of the Spirit and became in turn the wellspring of the Spirit for all humanity. Christians know that there is no need to wait for another time of salvation, since, however long the world may last, they are already living in the last times. Not only the Church, but the cosmos itself and history are ceaselessly ruled and governed by the glorified Christ. It is this life-force which propels creation, "groaning in birth-pangs until now" (Rom 8:22), towards the goal of its full redemption. Mankind can have only a faint intuition of this process, but Christians have the key and the certainty. Keeping Sunday holy is the important witness which they are called to bear, so that every stage of human history will be upheld by hope.

Sunday in the Liturgical Year

76. With its weekly recurrence, the Lord's Day is rooted in the most ancient tradition of the Church and is vitally important for the Christian. But there was another rhythm which soon established itself: the annual liturgical cycle. Human psychology in fact desires the celebration of anniversaries, associating the return of dates and seasons with the remembrance of past events. When these events are decisive in the life of a people, their celebration generally creates a festive atmosphere which breaks the monotony of daily routine.

Now, by God's design, the great saving events upon which the Church's life is founded were closely linked to the annual Jewish feasts of Passover and Pentecost, and were prophetically foreshadowed in them. Since the second century, the annual celebration of Easter by Christians - having been added to the weekly Easter celebration - allowed a more ample meditation on the mystery of Christ crucified and risen. Preceded by a preparatory fast, celebrated in the course of a long vigil, extended into the fifty days leading to Pentecost, the feast of Easter - "solemnity of solemnities" - became the day par excellence for the initiation of catechumens. Through baptism they die to sin and rise to a new life because Jesus "was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25; cf. 6:3-11). Intimately connected to the Paschal Mystery, the Solemnity of Pentecost takes on special importance, celebrating as it does the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles gathered with Mary and inaugurating the mission to all peoples. (120)

77. A similar commemorative logic guided the arrangement of the entire Liturgical Year. As the Second Vatican Council recalls, the Church wished to extend throughout the year "the entire mystery of Christ, from the Incarnation and Nativity to the Ascension, to the day of Pentecost and to the waiting in blessed hope for the return of the Lord.

Remembering in this way the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the treasury of the Lord's power and merits, making them present in some sense to all times, so that the faithful may approach them and be filled by them with the grace of salvation". (121)

After Easter and Pentecost, the most solemn celebration is undoubtedly the Nativity of the Lord, when Christians ponder the mystery of the Incarnation and contemplate the Word of God who deigns to assume our humanity in order to give us a share in his divinity.

78. Likewise, "in celebrating this annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, the holy Church venerates with special love the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, united forever with the saving work of her Son".(122)

In a similar way, by inserting into the annual cycle the commemoration of the martyrs and other saints on the occasion of their anniversaries, "the Church proclaims the Easter mystery of the saints who suffered with Christ and with him are now glorified". (123) When celebrated in the true spirit of the liturgy, the commemoration of the saints does not obscure the centrality of Christ, but on the contrary extols it, demonstrating as it does the power of the redemption wrought by him. As Saint Paulinus of Nola sings, "all things pass, but the glory of the saints endures in Christ, who renews all things, while he himself remains unchanged". (124) The intrinsic relationship between the glory of the saints and that of Christ is built into the very arrangement of the Liturgical Year, and is expressed most eloquently in the fundamental and sovereign character of Sunday as the Lord's Day. Following the seasons of the Liturgical Year in the Sunday observance which structures it from beginning to end, the ecclesial and spiritual commitment of Christians comes to be profoundly anchored in Christ, in whom believers find their reason for living and from whom they draw sustenance and inspiration.

79. Sunday emerges therefore as the natural model for understanding and celebrating these feast-days of the Liturgical Year, which are of such value for the Christian life that the Church has chosen to emphasize their importance by making it obligatory for the faithful to attend Mass and to observe a time of rest, even though these feast-days may fall on variable days of the week. (125) Their number has been changed from time to time, taking into account social and economic conditions, as also how firmly they are established in tradition, and how well they are supported by civil legislation. (126)

The present canonical and liturgical provisions allow each Episcopal Conference, because of particular circumstances in one country or another, to reduce the list of Holy Days of obligation. Any decision in this regard needs to receive the special approval of the Apostolic See, (127) and in such cases the celebration of a mystery of the Lord, such as the Epiphany, the Ascension or the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, must be transferred to Sunday, in accordance with liturgical norms, so that the faithful are not denied the chance to meditate upon the mystery. (128) Pastors should also take care to encourage the faithful to attend Mass on other important feast-days celebrated during the week. (129)

80. There is a need for special pastoral attention to the many situations where there is a risk that the popular and cultural traditions of a region may intrude upon the celebration of Sundays and other liturgical feast-days, mingling the spirit of genuine Christian faith with elements which are foreign to it and may distort it. In such cases, catechesis and well-chosen pastoral initiatives need to clarify these situations, eliminating all that is incompatible with the Gospel of Christ. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that these traditions - and, by analogy, some recent cultural initiatives in civil society - often embody values which are not difficult to integrate with the demands of faith. It rests with the discernment of Pastors to preserve the genuine values found in the culture of a particular social context and especially in popular piety, so that liturgical celebration - above all on Sundays and holy days - does not suffer but rather may actually benefit. (130)

CONCLUSION

81. The spiritual and pastoral riches of Sunday, as it has been handed on to us by tradition, are truly great. When its significance and implications are understood in their entirety, Sunday in a way becomes a synthesis of the Christian life and a condition for living it well. It is clear therefore why the observance of the Lord's Day is so close to the Church's heart, and why in the Church's discipline it remains a real obligation. Yet more than as a precept, the observance should be seen as a need rising from the depths of Christian life. It is crucially important that all the faithful should be convinced that they cannot live their faith or share fully in the life of the Christian community unless they take part regularly in the Sunday Eucharistic assembly. The Eucharist is the full realization of the worship which humanity owes to God, and it cannot be compared to any other religious experience. A particularly efficacious expression of this is the Sunday gathering of the entire community, obedient to the voice of the Risen Lord who calls the faithful together to give them the light of his word and the nourishment of his Body as the perennial sacramental wellspring of redemption. The grace flowing from this wellspring renews mankind, life and history.

82. It is with this strong conviction of faith, and with awareness of the heritage of human values which the observance of Sunday entails, that Christians today must face the enticements of a culture which has accepted the benefits of rest and free time, but which often uses them frivolously and is at times attracted by morally questionable forms of entertainment. Certainly, Christians are no different from other people in enjoying the weekly day of rest; but at the same time they are keenly aware of the uniqueness and originality of Sunday, the day on which they are called to

celebrate their salvation and the salvation of all humanity. Sunday is the day of joy and the day of rest precisely because it is "the Lord's Day", the day of the Risen Lord.

83. Understood and lived in this fashion, Sunday in a way becomes the soul of the other days, and in this sense we can recall the insight of Origen that the perfect Christian "is always in the Lord's Day, and is always celebrating Sunday". (131) Sunday is a true school, an enduring programme of Church pedagogy - an irreplaceable pedagogy, especially with social conditions now marked more and more by a fragmentation and cultural pluralism which constantly test the faithfulness of individual Christians to the practical demands of their faith. In many parts of the world, we see a "diaspora" Christianity, which is put to the test because the scattered disciples of Christ can no longer easily maintain contact with one another, and lack the support of the structures and traditions proper to Christian culture. In a situation of such difficulty, the opportunity to come together on Sundays with fellow believers, exchanging gifts of brotherhood, is an indispensable help.

84. Sustaining Christian life as it does, Sunday has the additional value of being a testimony and a proclamation. As a day of prayer, communion and joy, Sunday resounds throughout society, emanating vital energies and reasons for hope. Sunday is the proclamation that time, in which he who is the Risen Lord of history makes his home, is not the grave of our illusions but the cradle of an ever new future, an opportunity given to us to turn the fleeting moments of this life into seeds of eternity. Sunday is an invitation to look ahead; it is the day on which the Christian community cries out to Christ, "Marana tha: Come, O Lord!" (1 Cor 16:22). With this cry of hope and expectation, the Church is the companion and support of human hope. From Sunday to Sunday, enlightened by Christ, she goes forward towards the unending Sunday of the heavenly Jerusalem, which "has no need of the sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev 21:23).

85. As she strains towards her goal, the Church is sustained and enlivened by the Spirit. It is he who awakens memory and makes present for every generation of believers the event of the Resurrection. He is the inward gift uniting us to the Risen Lord and to our brothers and sisters in the intimacy of a single body, reviving our faith, filling our hearts with charity and renewing our hope. The Spirit is unfailingly present to every one of the Church's days, appearing unpredictably and lavishly with the wealth of his gifts. But it is in the Sunday gathering for the weekly celebration of Easter that the Church listens to the Spirit in a special way and reaches out with him to Christ in the ardent desire that he return in glory: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" (Rev 22:17). Precisely in consideration of the role of the Spirit, I have wished that this exhortation aimed at rediscovering the meaning of Sunday should appear in this year which, in the immediate preparation for the Jubilee, is dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

86. I entrust this Apostolic Letter to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, that it may be received and put into practice by the Christian community. Without in any way detracting from the centrality of Christ and his Spirit, Mary is always present in the Church's Sunday. It is the mystery of Christ himself which demands this: indeed, how could she who is Mater Domini and Mater Ecclesiae fail to be uniquely present on the day which is both dies Domini and dies Ecclesiae? As they listen to the word proclaimed in the Sunday assembly, the faithful look to the Virgin Mary, learning from her to keep it and ponder it in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19). With Mary, they learn to stand at the foot of the Cross, offering to the Father the sacrifice of Christ and joining to it the offering of their own lives. With Mary, they experience the joy of the Resurrection, making their own the words of the Magnificat which extol the inexhaustible gift of divine mercy in the inexorable flow of time: "His mercy is from age to age upon those who fear him" (Lk 1:50). From Sunday to Sunday, the pilgrim people follow in the footsteps of Mary, and her maternal intercession gives special power and fervour to the prayer which rises from the Church to the Most Holy Trinity.

87. Dear Brothers and Sisters, the imminence of the Jubilee invites us to a deeper spiritual and pastoral commitment. Indeed, this is its true purpose. In the Jubilee year, much will be done to give it the particular stamp demanded by the ending of the Second Millennium and the beginning of the Third since the Incarnation of the Word of God. But this year and this special time will pass, as we look to other jubilees and other solemn events. As the weekly "solemnity", however, Sunday will continue to shape the time of the Church's pilgrimage, until that Sunday which will know no evening.

Therefore, dear Brother Bishops and Priests, I urge you to work tirelessly with the faithful to ensure that the value of this sacred day is understood and lived ever more deeply. This will bear rich fruit in Christian communities, and will not fail to have a positive influence on civil society as a whole.

In coming to know the Church, which every Sunday joyfully celebrates the mystery from which she draws her life, may the men and women of the Third Millennium come to know the Risen Christ. And constantly renewed by the weekly commemoration of Easter, may Christ's disciples be ever more credible in proclaiming the Gospel of salvation and ever more effective in building the civilization of love.

My blessing to you all!

From the Vatican, on 31 May, the Solemnity of Pentecost, in the year 1998, the twentieth of my Pontificate.

(1) Cf. Rev 1:10: "Kyriake heméra"; cf. also the Didaché 14, 1, Saint Ignatius of Antioch, To the Magnesians 9, 1-2; SC 10, 88-89.

(2) Pseudo-Eusebius of Alexandria, Sermon 16: PG 86, 416.

- (3) In *Die Dominica Paschae II*, 52: CCL 78, 550.
- (4) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106.
- (5) *Ibid.*
- (6) Cf. *Motu Proprio Mysteriorum Paschalis* (14 February 1969): AAS 61 (1969), 222-226.
- (7) Cf. Pastoral Note of the Italian Episcopal Conference "Il giorno del Signore" (15 July 1984), 5: *Enchiridion CEI* 3, 1398.
- (8) *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106.
- (9) Homily for the Solemn Inauguration of the Pontificate (22 October 1978), 5: AAS 70 (1978), 947.
- (10) No. 25: AAS 73 (1981), 639.
- (11) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 34.
- (12) For our Jewish brothers and sisters, a "nuptial" spirituality characterizes the Sabbath, as appears, for example, in texts of *Genesis Rabbah* such as X, 9 and XI, 8 (cf. J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, vol. I, Atlanta 1985, p. 107 and p. 117). The song *Leka Dôdi* is also nuptial in tone: "Your God will delight in you, as the Bridegroom delights in the Bride... In the midst of the faithful of your beloved people, come O Bride, O Shabbat Queen" (cf. *Pregghiera serale del sabato*, issued by A. Toaff, Rome, 1968-69, p. 3).
- (13) Cf. A. J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (22nd ed., 1995), pp. 3-24.
- (14) "Verum autem sabbatum ipsum redemptorem nostrum Iesum Christum Dominum habemus": *Epist.* 13, 1: CCL 140A, 992.
- (15) *Ep. ad Decentium XXV*, 4, 7: PL 20, 555.
- (16) *Homiliae in Hexaemeron II*, 8: SC 26, 184.
- (17) Cf. *In Io. Ev. Tractatus XX*, 20, 2: CCL 36, 203; *Epist.* 55, 2: CSEL 34, 170-171.
- (18) The reference to the Resurrection is especially clear in Russian, which calls Sunday simply "Resurrection" (*Voskresenie*).
- (19) *Epist.* 10, 96, 7.
- (20) Cf. *ibid.* In reference to Pliny's letter, Tertullian also recalls the *coetus antelucani* in *Apologeticum* 2, 6: CCL 1, 88; *De Corona* 3, 3: CCL 2, 1043.
- (21) To the *Magnesians* 9, 1-2: SC 10, 88-89.
- (22) Sermon 8 in the Octave of Easter 4: PL 46, 841. This sense of Sunday as "the first day" is clear in the Latin liturgical calendar, where Monday is called *feria secunda*, Tuesday *feria tertia* and so on. In Portuguese, the days are named in the same way.
- (23) Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *De Castigatione*: PG 46, 309. The Maronite Liturgy also stresses the link between the Sabbath and Sunday, beginning with the "mystery of Holy Saturday" (cf. M. Hayek, *Maronite [Eglise], Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, X [1980], 632-644.)
- (24) Rite of Baptism of Children, No. 9; cf. Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, No. 59.
- (25) Cf. Roman Missal, Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water.
- (26) Cf. Saint Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 27, 66: SC 17, 484-485. Cf. also Letter of Barnabas 15, 8-9: SC 172, 186-189; Saint Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 24; 138: PG 6, 528, 793; Origen, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Psalm 118(119), 1: PG 12, 1588.
- (27) "Domine, praestitisti nobis pacem quietis, pacem sabbati, pacem sine vespera": *Confess.*, 13, 50: CCL 27, 272.
- (28) Cf. Saint Augustine, *Epist.* 55, 17: CSEL 34, 188: "Ita ergo erit octavus, qui primus, ut prima vita sed aeterna reddatur".
- (29) Thus in English "Sunday" and in German "Sonntag".
- (30) *Apologia I*, 67: PG 6, 430.
- (31) Cf. Saint Maximus of Turin, *Sermo* 44, 1: CCL 23, 178; *Sermo* 53, 2: CCL 23, 219; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Comm. in Ps.* 91: PG 23, 1169-1173.
- (32) See, for example, the Hymn of the Office of Readings: "Dies aetasque ceteris octava splendet sanctior in te quam, Iesu, consecras primitiae surgentium (Week I); and also: "Salve dies, dierum gloria, dies felix Christi victoria, dies digna iugi laetitia dies prima. Lux divina caecis irradiat, in qua Christus infernum spoliat, mortem vincit et reconciliat summis ima" (Week II). Similar expressions are found in hymns included in the Liturgy of the Hours in various modern languages.
- (33) Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI, 138, 1-2: PG 9, 364.
- (34) Cf. John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 22-26: AAS 78 (1986), 829-837.
- (35) Cf. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, *Sunday Letters* 1, 10: PG 26, 1366.
- (36) Cf. Bardesanes, *Dialogue on Destiny*, 46: PS 2, 606-607.
- (37) *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Appendix: Declaration on the Reform of the Calendar.
- (38) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, 9.
- (39) Cf. John Paul II, *Letter Dominicae Cena* (24 February 1980), 4: AAS 72 (1980), 120; *Encyclical Letter Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 62-64: AAS 78 (1986), 889-894.
- (40) Cf. John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Vicesimus Quintus Annus* (4 December 1988), 9: AAS 81 (1989), 905-906.

- (41) No. 2177.
- (42) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus Quintus Annus* (4 December 1988), 9: AAS 81 (1989), 905-906.
- (43) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41; cf. Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 15.
- (44) These are the words of the Embolism, formulated in this or similar ways in some of the Eucharistic Prayers of the different languages. They stress powerfully the "Paschal" character of Sunday.
- (45) Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Certain Aspects of the Church as Communion *Communio in Notio* (28 May 1992), 11-14: AAS 85 (1993), 844-847.
- (46) Speech to the Third Group of the Bishops of the United States of America (17 March 1998), 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 March 1998, 4.
- (47) Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42.
- (48) Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 26: AAS 59 (1967), 555.
- (49) Cf. Saint Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom.* 23: PL 4, 553; *De Cath. Eccl. Unitate*, 7: CSEL 31, 215; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 4; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26.
- (50) Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 57; 61: AAS 74 (1982), 151; 154.
- (51) Cf. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Directory for Masses with Children (1 November 1973): AAS 66 (1974), 30-46.
- (52) Cf. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 26: AAS 59 (1967), 555-556; Sacred Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Ecclesiae Imago* (22 February 1973), 86c: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 4, 2071.
- (53) Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 30: AAS 81 (1989), 446-447.
- (54) Cf. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Instruction *Masses for Particular Groups* (15 May 1969), 10: AAS 61 (1969), 810.
- (55) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 48-51.
- (56) "Haec est vita nostra, ut desiderando exerceamur": Saint Augustine, *In Prima Ioan. Tract.* 4, 6: SC 75, 232.
- (57) Roman Missal, Embolism after the Lord's Prayer.
- (58) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.
- (59) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 61-64: AAS 78 (1986), 888-894.
- (60) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7; cf. 33.
- (61) *Ibid.*, 56; cf. *Ordo Lectionum Missae, Praenotanda*, No. 10.
- (62) Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 51.
- (63) Cf. *ibid.*, 52; Code of Canon Law, Canon 767, 2; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 614.
- (64) Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* (3 April 1969): AAS 61 (1969), 220.
- (65) The Council's Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* speaks of "suavis et vivus Sacrae Scripturae affectus" (No. 24).
- (66) John Paul II, Letter *Dominicae Cenaee* (24 February 1980), 10: AAS 72 (1980), 135.
- (67) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 25.
- (68) Cf. *Ordo Lectionum Missae, Praenotanda*, Chap. III.
- (69) Cf. *Ordo Lectionum Missae, Praenotanda*, Chap. I, No. 6.
- (70) Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XXII, Doctrine and Canons on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, II: DS 1743; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1366.
- (71) Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1368.
- (72) Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 3b: AAS 59 (1967), 541; cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947), II: AAS 39 (1947), 564-566.
- (73) Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1385; cf. also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church concerning the Reception of Eucharistic Communion by Divorced and Remarried Faithful (14 September 1994): AAS 86 (1994), 974-979.
- (74) Cf. Innocent I, Epist. 25, 1 to Decentius of Gubbio: PL 20, 553.
- (75) II, 59, 2-3: ed. F. X. Funk, 1905, pp. 170-171.
- (76) Cf. *Apologia I*, 67, 3-5: PG 6, 430.
- (77) *Acta SS. Saturnini, Dativi et aliorum plurimorum Martyrum in Africa*, 7, 9, 10: PL 8, 707, 709-710.
- (78) Cf. Canon 21, *Mansi, Conc. II*, 9.
- (79) Cf. Canon 47, *Mansi, Conc. VIII*, 332.

- (80) Cf. the contrary proposition, condemned by Innocent XI in 1679, concerning the moral obligation to keep the feast-day holy: DS 2152.
- (81) Canon 1248: "Festis de praecepto diebus Missa audienda est": Canon 1247, 1: "Dies festi sub praecepto in universa Ecclesia sunt...omnes et singuli dies dominici".
- (82) Code of Canon Law, Canon 1247; the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 881, 1, prescribes that "the Christian faithful are bound by the obligation to participate on Sundays and feast days in the Divine Liturgy or, according to the prescriptions or legitimate customs of their own Church sui iuris, in the celebration of the divine praises".
- (83) No. 2181: "Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin".
- (84) Sacred Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Ecclesiae Imago* (22 February 1973), 86a: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 4, 2069.
- (85) Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 905, 2.
- (86) Cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Christus Dominus* (6 January 1953): AAS 45 (1953), 15-24; *Motu Proprio Sacram Communionem* (19 March 1957): AAS 49 (1957), 177-178. Congregation of the Holy Office, Instruction on the Discipline concerning the Eucharist Fast (6 January 1953): AAS 45 (1953), 47-51.
- (87) Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 1248, 1; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 881, 2.
- (88) Cf. *Missale Romanum, Normae Universales de Anno Liturgico et de Calendario*, 3.
- (89) Cf. Sacred Congregation of Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Ecclesiae Imago* (22 February 1973), 86: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 4, 2069-2073.
- (90) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14; 26; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus Quintus Annus* (4 December 1988), 4; 6; 12: AAS 81 (1989), 900-901; 902; 909-910.
- (91) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10.
- (92) Cf. Interdicasterial Instruction on Certain Questions concerning the Collaboration of Lay Faithful in the Ministry of Priests *Ecclesiae de Mysterio* (15 August 1997), 6; 8: AAS 89 (1997), 869; 870-872.
- (93) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10: "in oblationem Eucharistiae concurrunt".
- (94) *Ibid.*, 11.
- (95) Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 1248, 2.
- (96) Cf. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest *Christi Ecclesia* (2 June 1988): *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 11, 442-468; Interdicasterial Instruction on Certain Questions concerning the Collaboration of Lay Faithful in the Ministry of Priests *Ecclesiae de Mysterio* (15 August 1997): AAS 89 (1997), 852-877.
- (97) Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 1248, 2; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Sacerdotium Ministeriale* (6 August 1983), III: AAS 75 (1983), 1007.
- (98) Cf. Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, Instruction *Communio et Progressio* (23 May 1971), 150-152; 157: AAS 63 (1971), 645-646; 647.
- (99) This is the Deacon's proclamation in honour of the Lord's Day: cf. the Syriac text in the Missal of the Church of Antioch of the Maronites (edition in Syriac and Arabic), Jounieh (Lebanon) 1959, p. 38.
- (100) V, 20, 11: ed. F. X. Funk, 1905, p. 298; cf. *Didache* 14, 1: ed. F. X. Funk, 1901, p. 32; Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 16, 11: CCL 1, 116. See in particular the Epistle of Barnabas, 15, 9: SC 172, 188-189: "This is why we celebrate as a joyous feast the eighth day on which Jesus was raised from the dead and, after having appeared, ascended into heaven".
- (101) Tertullian for example tells us that on Sunday it was forbidden to kneel, since kneeling, which was then seen as an essentially penitential gesture, seemed unsuited to the day of joy. Cf. *De Corona* 3, 4: CCL 2, 1043.
- (102) Ep. 55, 28: CSEL 342, 202.
- (103) Cf. Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, *Derniers entretiens*, 5-6 July 1897, in: *Oeuvres complètes*, Cerf - Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1992, pp. 1024-1025.
- (104) Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete in Domino* (9 May 1975), II: AAS 67 (1975), 295.
- (105) *Ibid.* VII, l.c., 322.
- (106) Hex. 6, 10, 76: CSEL 321, 261.
- (107) Cf. The Edict of Constantine, 3 July 321: *Codex Theodosianus* II, tit. 8, 1, ed. T. Mommsen, 12, p. 87; *Codex Iustiniani*, 3, 12, 2, ed. P. Krueger, p. 248.
- (108) Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*, 4, 18: PG 20, 1165.
- (109) The most ancient text of this kind is can. 29 of the Council of Laodicea (second half of the fourth century): Mansi, II, 569-570. From the sixth to the ninth century, many Councils prohibited "opera ruralia". The legislation on prohibited activities, supported by civil laws, became increasingly detailed.
- (110) Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* (15 May 1891): *Acta Leonis XIII* 11 (1891), 127-128.
- (111) Hex. 2, 1, 1: CSEL 321, 41.
- (112) Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 1247; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 881, 1; 4.
- (113) Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 9.

- (114) Cf. also Saint Justin, *Apologia I*, 67, 6: "Each of those who have an abundance and who wish to make an offering gives freely whatever he chooses, and what is collected is given to him who presides and he assists the orphans, the widows, the sick, the poor, the prisoners, the foreign visitors - in a word, he helps all those who are in need": PG 6, 430.
- (115) *De Nabuthae*, 10, 45: "Audis, dives, quid Dominus Deus dicat? Et tu ad ecclesiam venis, non ut aliquid largiaris pauperi, sed ut auferas": CSEL 322, 492.
- (116) *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 50, 3-4: PG 58, 508-509.
- (117) Saint Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 13, 11-12 to Pammachius: CSEL 29, 92-93. The Roman Senator is praised because, by combining participation in the Eucharist with distribution of food to the poor, he in a sense reproduced the Gospel miracle.
- (118) John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), 10: AAS 87 (1995), 11.
- (119) *Ibid.*
- (120) Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 731-732.
- (121) *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 102.
- (122) *Ibid.*, 103.
- (123) *Ibid.*, 104.
- (124) *Carm.* XVI, 3-4: "Omnia praetereunt, sanctorum gloria durat in Christo qui cuncta novat, dum permanet ipse": CSEL 30, 67.
- (125) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1247; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 881, 1; 4.
- (126) By general law, the holy days of obligation in the Latin Church are the Feasts of the Nativity of the Lord, the Epiphany, the Ascension, the Body and Blood of Christ, Mary Mother of God, the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, Saint Joseph, Saints Peter and Paul and All Saints: cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1246. The holy days of obligation in all the Eastern Churches are the Feasts of the Nativity of the Lord, the Epiphany, the Ascension, the Dormition of Mary Mother of God and Saints Peter and Paul: cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 880, 3.
- http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_05071998_dies-domini_en.html
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- (127) Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1246, 2; for the Eastern Churches, cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 880, 3.
- (128) Cf. *Sacred Congregation of Rites, Normae Universales de Anno Liturgico et de Calendario* (21 March 1969), 5, 7: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 3, 895; 897.
- (129) Cf. *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*, ed. typica 1995, No. 230.
- (130) Cf. *ibid.*, No. 233.
- (131) *Contra Celsum VIII*, 22: SC 150, 222-224. *m VIII*, 22: SC 150, 222-224.
- (131) *Contra Celsum VIII*, 22: SC 150, 222-224. *Liturgico et de Calendario* (21 March 1969), 5, 7: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 3, 895; 897.

Apostolic Letter Of His Holiness Pope John Paul II
 Saint Thérèse Of The Child Jesus And The Holy Face
 Is Proclaimed A Doctor Of The Universal Church

1. THE SCIENCE OF DIVINE LOVE, which the Father of mercies pours out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, is a gift granted to the little and the humble so that they may know and proclaim the secrets of the kingdom, hidden from the learned and the wise; for this reason Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, praising the Father who graciously willed it so (cf. Lk 10:21-22; Mt 11:25-26).

Mother Church also rejoices in noting that throughout history the Lord has continued to reveal himself to the little and the humble, enabling his chosen ones, through the Spirit who "searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10), to speak of the gifts "bestowed on us by God... in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths in spiritual language" (1 Cor 2:12, 13). In this way the Holy Spirit guides the Church into the whole truth, endowing her with various gifts, adorning her with his fruits, rejuvenating her with the power of the Gospel and enabling her to discern the signs of the times in order to respond ever more fully to the will of God (cf. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 4, 12; *Gaudium et spes*, n. 4).

Shining brightly among the little ones to whom the secrets of the kingdom were revealed in a most special way is Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, a professed nun of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, the 100th anniversary of whose entry into the heavenly homeland occurs this year.

During her life Thérèse discovered "new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings" (Ms A, 83v) and received from the divine Teacher that "science of love" which she then expressed with particular originality in her writings (cf. Ms B, 1r). This science is the luminous expression of her knowledge of the mystery of the kingdom and of her personal experience of grace. It can be considered a special charism of Gospel wisdom which Thérèse, like other saints and teachers of faith, attained in prayer (cf. Ms C, 36r).

2. The reception given to the example of her life and Gospel teaching in our century was quick, universal and constant. As if in imitation of her precocious spiritual maturity, her holiness was recognized by the Church in the space of a few years. In fact, on 10 June 1914 Pius X signed the decree introducing her cause of beatification; on 14 August 1921 Benedict XV declared the heroic virtues of the Servant of God, giving an address for the occasion on the way of spiritual childhood; and Pius XI proclaimed her blessed on 29 April 1923. Shortly afterwards, on 17 May 1925, the same Pope canonized her before an immense crowd in St Peter's Basilica, highlighting the splendour of her virtues and the originality of her doctrine. Two years later, on 14 December 1927, in response to the petition of many missionary Bishops, he proclaimed her patron of the missions along with St Francis Xavier.

Beginning with these acts of recognition, the spiritual radiance of Thérèse of the Child Jesus increased in the Church and spread throughout the world. Many institutes of consecrated life and ecclesial movements, especially in the young Churches, chose her as their patron and teacher, taking their inspiration from her spiritual doctrine. Her message, often summarized in the so-called "little way", which is nothing other than the Gospel way of holiness for all, was studied by theologians and experts in spirituality. Cathedrals, basilicas, shrines and churches throughout the world were built and dedicated to the Lord under the patronage of the Saint of Lisieux. The Catholic Church venerates her in the various Eastern and Western rites. Many of the faithful have been able to experience the power of her intercession. Many of those called to the priestly ministry or the consecrated life, especially in the missions and the cloister, attribute the divine grace of their vocation to her intercession and example.

3. The Pastors of the Church, beginning with my predecessors, the Supreme Pontiffs of this century, who held up her holiness as an example for all, also stressed that Thérèse is a teacher of the spiritual life with a doctrine both spiritual and profound, which she drew from the Gospel sources under the guidance of the divine Teacher and then imparted to her brothers and sisters in the Church with the greatest effectiveness (cf. Ms B, 2v-3).

This spiritual doctrine has been passed on to us primarily by her autobiography which, taken from three manuscripts she wrote in the last years of her life and published a year after her death with the title *Histoire d'une âme* (Lisieux 1898), has aroused an extraordinary interest down to our day. This autobiography, translated along with her other writings into about 50 languages, has made Thérèse known in every part of the world, even outside the Catholic Church. A century after her death, Thérèse of the Child Jesus continues to be recognized as one of the great masters of the spiritual life in our time.

4. It is not surprising then that the Apostolic See received many petitions to confer on her the title of Doctor of the Universal Church.

In recent years, especially with the happy occasion of the first centenary of her death close at hand, these requests became more and more numerous, including on the part of Episcopal Conferences; in addition, study conferences were held and numerous publications have pointed out how Thérèse of the Child Jesus possesses an extraordinary wisdom and with her doctrine helps so many men and women of every state in life to know and love Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

In the light of these facts, I decided carefully to study whether the Saint of Lisieux had the prerequisites for being awarded the title of Doctor of the Universal Church.

5. In this context I am pleased to recall briefly some events in the life of Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Born in Alençon, France, on 2 January 1873, she is baptized two days later in the Church of Notre Dame, receiving the name Marie-Françoise-Thérèse. Her parents are Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin, whose heroic virtues I recently recognized. After her mother's death on 28 August 1877, Thérèse moves with her whole family to the town of Lisieux where, surrounded by the affection of her father and sisters, she receives a formation both demanding and full of tenderness.

Towards the end of 1879 she receives the sacrament of Penance for the first time. On the day of Pentecost in 1883 she has the extraordinary grace of being healed from a serious illness through the intercession of Our Lady of Victories. Educated by the Benedictines of Lisieux, she receives First Communion on 8 May 1884, after an intense preparation crowned with an exceptional experience of the grace of intimate union with Jesus. A few weeks later, on 14 June of that same year, she receives the sacrament of Confirmation with a vivid awareness of what the gift of the Holy Spirit involves in her personal sharing in the grace of Pentecost. On Christmas Day of 1886 she has a profound spiritual experience that she describes as a "complete conversion". As a result, she overcomes the emotional weakness caused by the loss of her mother and begins "to run as a giant" on the way of perfection (cf. Ms A, 44v45v).

Thérèse wishes to embrace the contemplative life, like her sisters Pauline and Marie in the Carmel of Lisieux, but is prevented from doing so by her young age. During a pilgrimage to Italy, after visiting the Holy House of Loreto and places in the Eternal City, at an audience granted by the Pope to the faithful of the Diocese of Lisieux on 20 November 1887, she asks Leo XIII with filial boldness to be able to enter Carmel at the age of 15 years.

On 9 April 1888 she enters the Carmel of Lisieux, where she receives the habit of the Blessed Virgin's order on 10 January of the following year and makes her religious profession on 8 September 1890, the feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary. At Carmel she undertakes the way of perfection marked out by the Mother Foundress, Teresa of Jesus, with genuine fervour and fidelity in fulfilling the various community tasks entrusted to her. Illumined by the Word of God, particularly tried by the illness of her beloved father, Louis Martin, who dies on 29 July 1894, Thérèse embarks on the way of holiness, insisting on the centrality of love. She discovers and imparts to the novices entrusted to her care the little way of spiritual childhood, by which she enters more and more deeply into the mystery of the Church and, drawn by the love of Christ, feels growing within her the apostolic and missionary vocation which spurs her to bring everyone with her to meet the divine Spouse.

On 9 June 1895, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, she offers herself as a sacrificial victim to the merciful Love of God. On 3 April of the following year, on the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, she notices the first symptoms of the illness which will lead to her death. Thérèse welcomes it as a mysterious visitation of the divine Spouse. At the same time she undergoes a trial of faith which will last until her death. As her health deteriorates, she is moved to the infirmary on 8 July 1897. Her sisters and other religious collect her sayings, while her sufferings and trials, borne with patience, intensify to the moment of her death on the afternoon of 30 September 1897. "I am not dying; I am entering life", she had written to one of her spiritual brothers, Fr Bellière (Lettres 244). Her last words, "My God, I love you", are the seal of her life.

6. Thérèse of the Child Jesus left us writings that deservedly qualify her as a teacher of the spiritual life. Her principal work remains the account of her life in three autobiographical manuscripts (Manuscrits autobiographiques A, B, C), first published with the soon to be famous title of *Histoire d'une Âme*.

In Manuscript A, written at the request of her sister Agnes of Jesus, then Prioress of the monastery, and given to her on 21 January 1896, Thérèse describes the stages of her religious experience: the early years of childhood, especially the time of her First Communion and Confirmation, adolescence, up to her entrance into Carmel and her first profession.

Manuscript B, written during her retreat that same year at the request of her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, contains some of the most beautiful, best known and oft-quoted passages from the Saint of Lisieux. They reveal the Saint's full maturity as she speaks of her vocation in the Church, the Bride of Christ and Mother of souls.

Manuscript C, composed in June and the first days of July 1897, a few months before her death and dedicated to the Prioress, Marie de Gonzague, who had requested it, completes the recollections in Manuscript A on life in Carmel. These pages reveal the author's supernatural wisdom. Thérèse recounts some sublime experiences during this final period of her life. She devotes moving pages to her trial of faith: a grace of purification that immerses her in a long and painful dark night, illuminated by her trust in the merciful, fatherly love of God. Once again, and without repeating herself, Thérèse makes the light of the Gospel shine brightly. Here we find the most beautiful pages she devoted to trusting abandonment into God's hands, to unity between love of God and love of neighbour, to her missionary vocation in the Church.

In these three different manuscripts, which converge in a thematic unity and in a progressive description of her life and spiritual way, Thérèse has left us an original autobiography which is the story of her soul. It shows how in her life God has offered the world a precise message, indicating an evangelical way, the "little way", which everyone can take, because everyone is called to holiness.

In the 266 *Lettres* we possess, addressed to family members, women religious and missionary "brothers", Thérèse shares her wisdom, developing a teaching that is actually a profound exercise in the spiritual direction of souls.

Her writings also include 54 Poésies, some of which have great theological and spiritual depth inspired by Sacred Scripture. Worthy of special mention are *Vivre d'Amour!...* (Poésies 17) and *Pourquoi je t'aime, ô Marie!* (Poésies 54), an original synthesis of the Virgin Mary's journey according to the Gospel. To this literary production should be added eight *Récréations pieuses*: poetic and theatrical compositions, conceived and performed by the Saint for her community on certain feast days, in accordance with the tradition of Carmel. Among those writings should be mentioned a series of 21 *Prières*. Nor can we forget the collection of all she said during the last months of her life. These sayings, of which there are several editions, known as the *Novissima verba*, have also been given the title *Derniers Entretiens*.

7. From careful study of the writings of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and from the resonance they have had in the Church, salient aspects can be noted of her "eminent doctrine", which is the fundamental element for conferring the title of Doctor of the Church.

First of all, we find a special charism of wisdom. This young Carmelite, without any particular theological training, but illumined by the light of the Gospel, feels she is being taught by the divine Teacher who, as she says, is "the Doctor of Doctors" (Ms A, 83v), and from him she receives "divine teachings" (Ms B, 1r). She feels that the words of Scripture are fulfilled in her: "Whoever is a little one, let him come to me.... For to him that is little, mercy shall be shown" (Ms B, 1v; cf. Prv 9:4; Wis 6:6) and she knows she is being instructed in the science of love, hidden from the wise and prudent, which the divine Teacher deigned to reveal to her, as to babes (Ms A, 49r; cf. Lk 10:21-22).

Pius XI, who considered Thérèse of Lisieux the "Star of his pontificate", did not hesitate to assert in his homily on the day of her canonization, 17 May 1925: "The Spirit of truth opened and made known to her what he usually hides from the wise and prudent and reveals to little ones; thus she enjoyed such knowledge of the things above - as Our immediate Predecessor attests - that she shows everyone else the sure way of salvation" (AAS 17 [1925], p. 213).

Her teaching not only conforms to Scripture and the Catholic faith, but excels ("eminent") for the depth and wise synthesis it achieved. Her doctrine is at once a confession of the Church's faith, an experience of the Christian mystery and a way to holiness. Thérèse offers a mature synthesis of Christian spirituality: she combines theology and the spiritual life; she expresses herself with strength and authority, with a great ability to persuade and communicate, as is shown by the reception and dissemination of her message among the People of God.

Thérèse's teaching expresses with coherence and harmonious unity the dogmas of the Christian faith as a doctrine of truth and an experience of life. In this regard it should not be forgotten that the understanding of the deposit of faith transmitted by the Apostles, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, makes progress in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit: "There is growth in insight into the realities and words that are passed on... through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth" (Dei Verbum, n. 8).

In the writings of Thérèse of Lisieux we do not find perhaps, as in other Doctors, a scholarly presentation of the things of God, but we can discern an enlightened witness of faith which, while accepting with trusting love God's merciful condescension and salvation in Christ, reveals the mystery and holiness of the Church.

Thus we can rightly recognize in the Saint of Lisieux the charism of a Doctor of the Church, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit she received for living and expressing her experience of faith, and because of her particular understanding of the mystery of Christ. In her are found the gifts of the new law, that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit, who manifests himself in living faith working through charity (cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 106, art. 1; q. 108, art. 1).

We can apply to Thérèse of Lisieux what my Predecessor Paul VI said of another young Saint and Doctor of the Church, Catherine of Siena: "What strikes us most about the Saint is her infused wisdom, that is to say, her lucid, profound and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and mysteries of faith.... That assimilation was certainly favoured by the most singular natural gifts, but it was also evidently something prodigious, due to a charism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit" (AAS 62 [1970], p. 675).

8. With her distinctive doctrine and unmistakable style, Thérèse appears as an authentic teacher of faith and the Christian life. In her writings, as in the sayings of the Holy Fathers, is found that life-giving presence of Catholic tradition whose riches, as the Second Vatican Council again says, "are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and prayer" (Dei Verbum, n. 8).

If considered in its literary genre, corresponding to her education and culture, and if evaluated according to the particular circumstances of her era, the doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux appears in providential harmony with the Church's most authentic tradition, both for its confession of the Catholic faith and for its promotion of the most genuine spiritual life, presented to all the faithful in a living, accessible language.

She has made the Gospel shine appealingly in our time; she had the mission of making the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, known and loved; she helped to heal souls of the rigours and fears of Jansenism, which tended to stress God's justice rather than his divine mercy. In God's mercy she contemplated and adored all the divine perfections, because "even his justice (and perhaps even more so than the other perfections) seems to me clothed in love" (Ms A, 83v-). Thus she became a living icon of that God who, according to the Church's prayer, "shows his almighty power in his mercy and forgiveness" (cf. Roman Missal, Opening prayer, 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time).

Even though Thérèse does not have a true and proper doctrinal corpus, nevertheless a particular radiance of doctrine shines forth from her writings which, as if by a charism of the Holy Spirit, grasp the very heart of the message of Revelation in a fresh and original vision, presenting a teaching of eminent quality.

The core of her message is actually the mystery itself of God-Love, of the Triune God, infinitely perfect in himself. If genuine Christian spiritual experience should conform to the revealed truths in which God communicates himself and the mystery of his will (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 2), it must be said that Thérèse experienced divine revelation, going so far as to contemplate the fundamental truths of our faith united in the mystery of Trinitarian life. At the summit, as the source and goal, is the merciful love of the three Divine Persons, as she expresses it, especially in her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love. At the root, on the subject's part, is the experience of being the Father's adoptive children in Jesus; this is the most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood, that is, the experience of divine filiation, under the movement of the Holy Spirit. At the root again, and standing before us, is our neighbour, others, for whose salvation we must collaborate with and in Jesus, with the same merciful love as his.

Through spiritual childhood one experiences that everything comes from God, returns to him and abides in him, for the salvation of all, in a mystery of merciful love. Such is the doctrinal message taught and lived by this Saint.

As it was for the Church's Saints in every age, so also for her, in her spiritual experience Christ is the centre and fullness of Revelation. Thérèse knew Jesus, loved him and made him loved with the passion of a bride. She penetrated the mysteries of his infancy, the words of his Gospel, the passion of the suffering Servant engraved on his holy Face, in the splendour of his glorious life, in his Eucharistic presence. She sang of all the expressions of Christ's divine charity, as they are presented in the Gospel (cf. PN 24, *Jésus, mon Bien-Aimé, rappelle-toi!*).

Thérèse received particular light on the reality of Christ's Mystical Body, on the variety of its charisms, gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the eminent power of love, which in a way is the very heart of the Church, where she found her vocation as a contemplative and missionary (cf. Ms B, 2r-3v).

Lastly, among the most original chapters of her spiritual doctrine we must recall Thérèse's wise delving into the mystery and journey of the Virgin Mary, achieving results very close to the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council in chapter eight of the Constitution *Lumen gentium* and to what I myself taught in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* of 25 March 1987.

9. The primary source of her spiritual experience and her teaching is the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments. She herself admits it, particularly stressing her passionate love for the Gospel (cf. Ms A, 83v). Her writings contain over 1,000 biblical quotations: more than 400 from the Old Testament and over 600 from the New.

Despite her inadequate training and lack of resources for studying and interpreting the sacred books, Thérèse immersed herself in meditation on the Word of God with exceptional faith and spontaneity. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit she attained a profound knowledge of Revelation for herself and for others. By her loving concentration on Scripture - she even wanted to learn Hebrew and Greek to understand better the spirit and letter of the sacred books - she showed the importance of the biblical sources in the spiritual life, she emphasized the originality and freshness of the Gospel, she cultivated with moderation the spiritual exegesis of the Word of God in both the Old and New Testaments. Thus she discovered hidden treasures, appropriating words and episodes, sometimes with supernatural boldness, as when, in reading the texts of St Paul (cf. 1 Cor 12-13), she realized her vocation to love (cf. Ms B, 3r-3v). Enlightened by the revealed Word, Thérèse wrote brilliant pages on the unity between love of God and love of neighbour (cf. Ms C, 11v-19r); and she identified with Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper as the expression of her intercession for the salvation of all (cf. Ms C, 34r-35r).

Her doctrine, as was said, conforms to the Church's teaching. From childhood she was taught by her family to participate in prayer and liturgical worship. In preparation for her first Confession, first Communion and the sacrament of Confirmation, she gave evidence of an extraordinary love for the truths of the faith, and she learned the Catechism almost word for word (cf. Ms A, 37r-37v). At the end of her life she wrote the Apostles' Creed in her own blood, as an expression of her unreserved attachment to the profession of faith.

In addition to the words of Scripture and the Church's doctrine, Thérèse was nourished as a youth by the teaching of the Imitation of Christ, which, as she herself acknowledges, she knew almost by heart (cf. Ms A, 47r). Decisive for fulfilling her Carmelite vocation were the spiritual texts of the Mother Foundress, Teresa of Jesus, especially those explaining the contemplative and ecclesial meaning of the charism of the Teresian Carmel (cf. Ms C, 33v). But in a very special way, Thérèse was nourished on the mystical doctrine of St John of the Cross, who was her true spiritual master (cf. Ms A, 83r). It should cause no surprise, then, if she who had been an outstanding pupil in the school of these two Saints, later declared Doctors of the Church, should later become a master of the spiritual life.

10. The spiritual doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux has helped extend the kingdom of God. By her example of holiness, of perfect fidelity to Mother Church, of full communion with the See of Peter, as well as by the special graces obtained by her for many missionary brothers and sisters, she has rendered a particular service to the renewed proclamation and experience of Christ's Gospel and to the extension of the Catholic faith in every nation on earth.

There is no need to dwell at length on the universality of Thérèse's doctrine and on the broad reception of her message during the century since her death: it has been well documented in the studies made in view of conferring on her the title of Doctor of the Church.

A particularly important fact in this regard is that the Church's Magisterium has not only recognized Thérèse's holiness, but has also highlighted the wisdom of her doctrine. Pius X had already said that she was "the greatest saint of modern times". On joyfully receiving the first Italian edition of the *Story of a Soul*, he extolled the fruits that had resulted from Thérèse's spirituality. Benedict XV, on the occasion of proclaiming the Servant of God's heroic virtues, explained the way of spiritual childhood and praised the knowledge of divine realities which God granted to Thérèse in order to teach others the ways of salvation (cf. AAS 13 [1921], pp. 449-452). On the occasion of both her beatification and canonization, Pius XI wished to expound and recommend the Saint's doctrine, underscoring her special divine enlightenment (*Discorsi di Pio XI*, vol. I, Turin 1959, p. 91) and describing her as a teacher of life (cf. AAS 17 [1925], pp. 211-214). When the Basilica of Lisieux was consecrated in 1954, Pius XII said, among other things, that Thérèse penetrated to the very heart of the Gospel with her doctrine (cf. AAS 46 [1954], pp. 404-408). Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, visited Lisieux several times, especially when he was Nuncio in Paris. On various occasions during his pontificate he showed his devotion to the Saint and explained the relationship between the doctrine of the Saint of Avila and her daughter, Thérèse of Lisieux (*Discorsi, Messaggi, Colloqui*, vol. II [1959-1960], pp. 771-772). Many times during the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, the Fathers recalled her example and doctrine. On the centenary of her birth, Paul VI addressed a Letter on 2 January 1973 to the Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, in which he extolled Thérèse's example in the search for God, offered her as a teacher of prayer and theological virtue of hope, and a model of communion with the Church, calling the attention of teachers, educators, pastors and theologians themselves to the study of her doctrine (cf. AAS 65 [1973], pp. 12-15). I myself on various occasions have had the joy of recalling the person and doctrine of the Saint, especially during my unforgettable visit to Lisieux on 2 June 1980, when I wished to remind everyone: "One can say with conviction about Thérèse of Lisieux that the Spirit of God allowed her heart to reveal directly to the people of our time the fundamental mystery, the reality of the Gospel.... Her 'little way' is the way of 'holy childhood'. There is something unique in this way, the genius of St Thérèse of Lisieux. At the same time there is the confirmation and renewal of the most basic and most universal truth. What truth of the Gospel message is really more basic and more universal than this: God is our Father and we are his children?" (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. III/1 [1980], p. 1659).

These simple references to an uninterrupted series of testimonies from the Popes of this century on the holiness and doctrine of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and to the universal dissemination of her message clearly express to what extent the Church, in her pastors and her faithful, has accepted the spiritual doctrine of this young Saint.

A sign of the ecclesial reception of the Saint's teaching is the appeal to her doctrine in many documents of the Church's ordinary Magisterium, especially when speaking of the contemplative and missionary vocation, of trust in the just and merciful God, of Christian joy and of the call to holiness. Evidence of this fact is the presence of her doctrine in the recent Catechism of the Catholic Church (nn. 127, 826, 956, 1011, 2011, 2558). She who so loved to learn the truths of the faith in the catechism deserved to be included among the authoritative witnesses of Catholic doctrine.

Thérèse possesses an exceptional universality. Her person, the Gospel message of the "little way" of trust and spiritual childhood have received and continue to receive a remarkable welcome, which has transcended every border.

The influence of her message extends first of all to men and women whose holiness and heroic virtues the Church herself has recognized, to the Church's pastors, to experts in theology and spirituality, to priests and seminarians, to men and women religious, to ecclesial movements and new communities, to men and women of every condition and every continent. To everyone Thérèse gives her personal confirmation that the Christian mystery, whose witness and apostle she became by making herself in prayer "the apostle of the apostles", as she boldly calls herself (*Ms A*, 56r.), must be taken literally, with the greatest possible realism, because it has a value for every time and place. The power of her message lies in its concrete explanation of how all Jesus' promises are fulfilled in the believer who knows how confidently to welcome in his own life the saving presence of the Redeemer.

11. All these reasons are clear evidence of how timely is the Saint of Lisieux's doctrine and of the particular impact her message has had on the men and women of our century. Moreover, some circumstances contribute to making her designation as a Teacher for the Church of our time even more significant.

First of all, Thérèse is a woman, who in approaching the Gospel knew how to grasp its hidden wealth with that practicality and deep resonance of life and wisdom which belong to the feminine genius. Because of her universality she stands out among the multitude of holy women who are resplendent for their Gospel wisdom.

Thérèse is also a contemplative. In the hiddenness of her Carmel she lived the great adventure of Christian experience to the point of knowing the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ's love (cf. Eph 3:18-19). God did not want his secrets to remain hidden, but enabled Thérèse to proclaim the secrets of the King (cf. *Ms C*, 2v.). By her life Thérèse offers a witness and theological illustration of the beauty of the contemplative life as the total dedication to Christ, Spouse of the Church, and as an affirmation of God's primacy over all things. Hers is a hidden life which possesses a mysterious fruitfulness for spreading the Gospel and fills the Church and the world with the sweet odour of Christ (cf. *LT* 169, 2v.).

Lastly, Thérèse of Lisieux is a young person. She reached the maturity of holiness in the prime of youth (cf. *Ms C*, 4r). As such, she appears as a Teacher of evangelical life, particularly effective in illuminating the paths of young people, who must be the leaders and witnesses of the Gospel to the new generations.

Thérèse of the Child Jesus is not only the youngest Doctor of the Church, but is also the closest to us in time, as if to emphasize the continuity with which the Spirit of the Lord sends his messengers to the Church, men and women as teachers and witnesses to the faith. In fact, whatever changes can be noted in the course of history and despite the repercussions they usually have on the life and thought of individuals in every age, we must never lose sight of the continuity which links the Doctors of the Church to each other: in every historical context they remain witnesses to the unchanging Gospel and, with the light and strength that come from the Holy Spirit, they become its messengers, returning to proclaim it in its purity to their contemporaries. Thérèse is a Teacher for our time, which thirsts for living and essential words, for heroic and credible acts of witness. For this reason she is also loved and accepted by brothers and sisters of other Christian communities and even by non-Christians.

12. This year, when the centenary of the glorious death of Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is being celebrated, as we prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, after receiving a great number of authoritative petitions, especially from many Episcopal Conferences throughout the world, and after accepting the official petition, or *Supplex Libellus*, addressed to me on 8 March 1997 by the Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, as well as from the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel and from the Postulator General of the same order, I decided to entrust the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which has competence in this matter, with the special study of the cause for conferring the title of Doctor on this Saint, "after hearing the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the eminent doctrine" (Apost. Const. *Pastor Bonus*, n. 73).

After the necessary documentation had been collected, the two above-mentioned Congregations addressed the question in the meetings of their respective consultors: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 5 May 1997, with regard to the "eminent doctrine", and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on 29 May of the same year, to examine the special "*Positio*". On the following 17 June, the Cardinals and Bishops who are members of these Congregations, following a procedure approved by me for this occasion, met in a plenary interdicasterial session and discussed the cause, giving a unanimously favourable opinion on granting the title of Doctor of the Universal Church to St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. I was personally informed of this opinion by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and by the Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Archbishop Alberto Bovone, titular Archbishop of Caesarea in Numidia.

In view of this, on 24 August last, during the Angelus prayer in the presence of hundreds of Bishops and before a vast throng of young people from around the world, gathered in Paris for the 12th World Youth Day, I wanted personally to announce my intention to proclaim Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face a Doctor of the Universal Church during the celebration of World Mission Sunday in Rome.

Today, 19 October 1997, in St Peter's Square, filled with faithful from every part of the world, and in the presence of a great many Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, during the solemn Eucharistic celebration I proclaimed Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face a Doctor of the Universal Church in these words:

Fulfilling the wishes of many Brothers in the Episcopate and of a great number of the faithful throughout the world, after consulting the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and hearing the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding her eminent doctrine, with certain knowledge and after lengthy reflection, with the fullness of Our apostolic authority We declare Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, virgin, to be a Doctor of the Universal Church. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This having been duly enacted, We decree that this Apostolic Letter is to be religiously preserved and to have full effect both now and in the future; furthermore, it is thus to be judged and defined as right, and whatever to the contrary may be attempted by anyone, on whatever authority, knowingly or unknowingly, is null and void.

Given in Rome, at St Peter's, under the Fisherman's ring, the 19th day of the month of October in the year of the Lord 1997, the 20th of the Pontificate.

Apostolic Letter
Of Pope John Paul II

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers" (Rom 1:8-9).

The joyful occasion of the 350th anniversary of the Union of Uzhorod constitutes an important moment in the history of a Church which by that act re-established full union with the Bishop of Rome. It is therefore very understandable that I too join in the thanksgiving to God of all those who rejoice in the memory of that significant event. The facts themselves are well known: on 24 April 1646, in the church of the Castle of Uzhorod, 63 Byzantine-rite priests of the Eparchy of Mukacheve, led by the Basilian monk Parthenius Petrovyc and in the presence of the Bishop of Eger, George Jakusics, were received into full communion with the See of Peter.

It was not an isolated gesture. It was part of that process of reunification between the Churches which had had its culminating moment in the Council of Florence (1439), when the decrees re-establishing full communion between the Churches of the East and the Church of Rome were signed. It was in fact the celebrated Metropolitan Isidore of Kyiv, after his return from the Council of Florence, who became in the Carpathian regions the herald of the rediscovered unity.

In 1595, the representatives of the Metropolitan See of Kyiv met Pope Clement VIII; and in the following year, 1596, that union was proclaimed at Brest, with the intention of implementing the agreement reached at Florence. Very soon the impulse coming from the Ecumenical Council of Florence reached the Carpathians and, after certain initial difficulties had been overcome, became a practical reality in the Union of Uzhorod. Sown in the fertile soil of Mukacheve, it was the mustard seed of the Gospel which grew with time into a tree under the shade of which a vast group of faithful of the Byzantine tradition gathered. Taking note of this reality, on 19 September 1771, with the Apostolic Constitution *Eximia Regalium Principum*, Pope Clement XIV established the Greek-Catholic Eparchy of Mukacheve, the seat of which would be transferred a few years later to nearby Uzhorod.

Subsequently, like flourishing offshoots of that vigorous tree new ecclesiastical jurisdictions came into being: the Eparchies of Kriveci (1777), Prešov (1818) and Hajdúdorog (1912). In the meantime, a steady flow of the faithful, heirs of that Union, had migrated overseas. The Holy See, always careful to identify and favour God's providential designs, erected for them in the United States of America the Byzantine Metropolitan See of Pittsburgh (1969), with the suffragan Eparchies of Passaic (1963), Parma (1969) and Van Nuys (1981).

The shared rejoicing of the various Eparchies born of the Union of Uzhorod, in celebrating the event which is at the root of their ecclesial identity, is a precious opportunity for renewing awareness of the bonds deriving from their common origin, and for strengthening that exchange of fellowship and co-operation which tragic historical events have long hindered.

2. While the Union of Uzhorod came about as a result of the deliberations of the Council of Florence, it is certainly not out of place to highlight its close spiritual connection with the background of the mission of the Apostles of the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius, whose preaching extended from Greater Moravia to the Carpathian Mountains. Rightly therefore the faithful of the Churches linked to the Union of Uzhorod are proud to be sharers in the heritage of Cyril and Methodius.

I have already drawn attention to the extraordinary value of the evangelizing work done by Cyril and Methodius in union with both the Church of Constantinople and the See of Rome.² I have also emphasized that "the fervent solicitude shown by both Brothers... to preserve unity of faith and love between the Churches of which they were members, namely, between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome on the one hand, and the Churches which arose in the lands of the Slavs on the other, was and will always remain their great merit".³ The preaching of the Gospel in the fullness of communion among Christians constitutes the aspiration, never completely lost, which marks, though in different ways, the history of the Churches which came into being in the lands of the Slavs from the time of the two holy Brothers.

The events which followed the Union were filled with suffering and sorrow. Nevertheless, the Eparchy, strengthened at first by the work of Bishop George G. Bizancij, later experienced a remarkable development in the period begun by the great Bishop Andrew Bacynskyj. In recent times, unfortunately, the Eparchy has once more been called, in not a few of its members, to walk with Christ the sorrowful path to Calvary in persecution, imprisonment and even the supreme sacrifice of their lives. This witness, sealed in blood, was borne by the Pastor of the Eparchy himself, Bishop Theodore Romzha, who did not hesitate to offer his life for the sheep of his flock (cf. Jn 10:11).

We cannot forget these shining examples of faithfulness to Christ and his Gospel: they constitute the precious patrimony of the Greek Catholic Church linked to the Union of Uzhorod. Indeed, the children of the entire Catholic

Church receive this witness with veneration and treasure this marvellous lesson of faithfulness to Christ's truth. With grateful hearts they thank the Christians of Mukacheve and all those who showed that they were ready to forsake everything they had in order to purchase the precious pearl of faith (cf. Mt 13:46).

3. The joyful commemoration of the Union of Uzhorod provides a favourable opportunity for giving thanks to the Lord who has dried the tears of his children at the end of a tragic period of severe persecution. He has sustained them in such a difficult period of their history, enabling them to preserve the wealth of their Eastern tradition and to remain at the same time in full communion with the Bishop of Rome. They thus bear witness to that universality which makes the Church a diverse reality able to embrace, under the charism of Peter, that legitimate variety of traditions and rites which, far from harming her unity, shows forth all her richness and splendour.⁴ This was what Pope Leo XIII recognized when, emphasizing the precious exchange of gifts between the Latin and Eastern traditions, he affirmed that the variety of the Eastern liturgy and discipline adorns the whole Church, illustrates her catholicity and clearly shows "the divine unity of the Catholic faith".⁵

Our hope, therefore, is that that chosen portion of the People of God connected in various ways with the event which took place at Uzhorod will be able to flourish once more in new prosperity, living serenely in the present and working for a future marked by full religious freedom, by the quest for reconciliation between Catholics and Orthodox, and by a tireless commitment to the building of peace.

An attitude of openness in listening to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council will help to bring this about. The Fathers gathered in the ecumenical assembly offered, under the Spirit's guidance, valuable directives on how to promote the dialogue of charity and the quest for the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). The goal to which they were looking is well expressed in these solemn words: "All people are called to be part of this catholic unity of the People of God, a unity which is harbinger of the universal peace it promotes. And there belong to it, or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful as well as all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind. For all people are called to salvation by the grace of God".⁶

4. The same Council reminded us that: "The Church established by Christ the Lord is, indeed, one and unique. Yet many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true heritage of Jesus Christ. To be sure, all proclaim themselves to be disciples of the Lord, but their convictions clash and their paths diverge, as though Christ himself were divided (cf. 1 Cor 1:13).

Without doubt, this discord openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature".⁷ In recent times, however, God "who is rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4) has touched the hearts of many Christians who are divided from one another and has inspired in them a sincere desire to find the path to full koinonia. "Today too Christ calls everyone to renew their commitment to work for full and visible communion".⁸ The Council Fathers insisted on the fact that "concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the potential of each".⁹ In order to answer this divine call, they suggested to all Catholics effective aids and means for promoting the ecumenical movement, in expectation of reaching full communion in the Church which is "one, holy, catholic and apostolic".

The Eastern Catholic Churches can make a great contribution to this cause, a cause sustained by divine grace. These Churches, in fact, "have the special duty of fostering the unity of all Christians, in particular of Eastern Christians, according to the principles of this holy Synod's Decree on Ecumenism, by prayer above all, by their example, by their scrupulous fidelity to the ancient traditions of the East, by better knowledge of each other, by working together, and by fraternal regard for persons and things".¹⁰

In this regard, in the Encyclical *Ut unum sint* I have emphasized that "the method to be followed towards full communion is the dialogue of truth, fostered and sustained by the dialogue of love. A recognition of the right of the Eastern Catholic Churches to have their own organizational structures and to carry out their own apostolate, as well as the actual involvement of these Churches in the dialogue of charity and in theological dialogue, will not only promote a true and fraternal esteem for one another between Orthodox and Catholics living in the same territory, but will also foster their joint commitment to work for unity".¹¹

5. The effective pursuit of so noble a task presupposes on the part of the Eastern Churches a renewed and generous commitment to the formation of future Pastors, to the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy as the community's lifegiving centre, to constant attention to the needs of the brethren through acts of practical charity, to the provision of a catechesis which by presenting anew the foundations of the Christian faith will hand on the "good news" as the leaven of daily life, in communion with the universal Church in her commitment to the new evangelization on the threshold of a new Christian millennium.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19960418_union-uzhorod_en.html (3 of 6)2006-10-03 17:28:40

The world in which we live "has undergone such cultural, political, social and economic transformations as to formulate the problem of evangelization in totally new terms".¹² Thus there must be devised "a new quality of evangelization, such as will succeed in setting before modern man the ageless message of salvation in convincing terms".¹³ Above all it is necessary to speed up the process towards full reconciliation between the Churches and within each ecclesial community.¹⁴ Since the Church is "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the

unity of all mankind"¹⁵ and has the task of working for the reconciliation of the whole of humanity, this vocation cannot be fulfilled with effectiveness while there still exist divisions among those who believe in Christ.

May the perspective of the forthcoming Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 bring about in everyone an attitude of humility, capable of effecting "the necessary purification of past memories"¹⁶ through prayer and conversion of heart, so as to help people to ask and give mutual forgiveness for the misunderstandings of centuries past.

The gaze focused on the future which sees "the approaching end of the second millennium demands of everyone an examination of conscience and the promotion of fitting ecumenical initiatives, so that we can celebrate the Great Jubilee, if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium".¹⁷

6. May fervent thanksgiving rise from the inmost hearts of the children of the whole Catholic Church for the path of faithfulness and courage along which the Father has led the Churches born of the Union of Uzhorod. It is a sign of his love that the planned celebrations can take place with due solemnity and freedom. At the same time let us also ardently implore the Holy Spirit that the time may be shortened for all believers in Christ to come to glorify the Trinity together with one voice (cf. Rom 15:6). An indispensable condition for such a joyful event is that the courage to forgive will mature in the hearts of everyone: this too is a grace to be implored with tireless perseverance.

As the third Christian millennium draws near, the Bishop of Rome celebrates with grateful heart this Jubilee and, remembering with emotion those who suffered to the point of heroism in order not to compromise their commitments of faith, he now offers to God their sufferings in communion with the whole Church, as a pleasing sacrifice, for the unity of Christians and the salvation of the world.

May the Mother of God, who at the foot of the Cross received from her Son the task of watching over the Church with motherly care; may the Queen of Peace, who gave her assent to the Eternal Word that he might make his dwelling among us in order to reconcile us with the Father; may the Virgin of Pentecost, from whose prayers we await a renewed outpouring of the Spirit of holiness; may Mary Most Holy make her loving presence felt by these brothers and sisters of ours who are preparing to celebrate with joy such a significant anniversary.

Entrusting those beloved ecclesial communities to her, the Mother of unity and peace, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, on 18 April in the year 1996, the eighteenth of my Pontificate.

NOTES

1 Cf. *Bullarium Romanum* IV/3 (1769-1774), 373-376.

2 Cf. Apostolic Letter *Egregiae virtutis* (31 December 1980), 1: AAS 73 (1981), 258.

3 Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli* (2 June 1985), 14: AAS 77 (1985), 798; cf. Apostolic Letter *Oriente lumen* (2 May 1995), 3; AAS 87 (1995), 747.

4 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 2.

5 Leo XIII, Apostolic Letter *Orientalium dignitatis* (30 November 1894): *Leonis XIII Acta*, 14 (1894), 360.

6 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 13.

7 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, 1.

8 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), 100: AAS 87 (1995), 981.

9 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, 5; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), 101: AAS 87 (1995), 981.

10 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 24.

11 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), 60: AAS 87 (1995), 957-958.

12 John Paul II, Discourse to the Participants in the Sixth Symposium of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (11 October 1985), 1: AAS 78 (1986), 179.

13 John Paul II, Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe (2 January 1986), 6: AAS 78 (1986), 457.

14 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), 78: AAS 87 (1995), 968.

15 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 1.

16 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), 2: AAS 87 (1995), 922.

17 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), 34: AAS 87 (1995), 26-27.

Apostolic Letter
Of The Supreme Pontiff
John Paul II
For The Fourth Centenary
Of The Union Of Brest

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

The day is drawing near when the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church will celebrate the fourth centenary of the union between the Bishops of the Metropolia of Kievan Rus' and the Apostolic See. The union was effected at the meeting of representatives of the Metropolia of Kiev with the Pope on 23 December 1595 and was solemnly proclaimed at Brest-Litovsk on the River Bug on 16 October 1596. Pope Clement VIII, in the Apostolic Constitution *Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis*,¹ announced the union to the whole Church and in the Apostolic Letter *Benedictus sit Pastor*² he addressed the Bishops of the Metropolia, informing them that the union had taken place.

The Popes followed with care and affection the often tragic and sorrowful journey of this Church. Here I would like to mention especially the memorable Encyclical Letter *Orientalis omnes*, in which Pope Pius XII, in December 1945, recalled the 350th anniversary of the restoration of full communion with the See of Rome.³

The Union of Brest opened a new page in the history of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine.⁴ Today that Church wishes to sing with joy a hymn of thanksgiving and praise to the One who, once more, has brought it back from death to life, and it wishes to set forth with renewed enthusiasm on the path marked out by the Second Vatican Council.

Joining the faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in this thanksgiving and petition are the Greek Catholic Churches of the diaspora which date back to the Union of Brest, together with the other Eastern Catholic Churches and the entire Church.

As the Bishop of Rome, I too wish to unite myself to the Catholics of the Byzantine tradition in those lands. For many years, during my pastoral ministry in Poland, I sensed a physical as well as a spiritual closeness with that Church, which was then undergoing such difficult trials. After my election to the See of Peter, I considered it a pressing duty, following the example of my Predecessors, to speak out in defence of its right to exist and freely to profess its faith, at a time when both these rights were being denied. I now have the privilege of joyfully sharing in its celebration of these days of regained freedom.

In search of unity

2. The celebrations commemorating the Union of Brest must be seen in the context of the Millennium of the Baptism of the Rus'. Seven years ago, in 1988, that event was celebrated with great solemnity. For the occasion I published two documents: the Apostolic Letter *Euntes in mundum* of 25 January 1988,⁵ for the whole Church, and the Message *Magnum Baptismi donum*, of 14 February of the same year,⁶ addressed to Ukrainian Catholics. It was an occasion for celebrating a moment of fundamental importance for the Christian and cultural identity of those peoples, a moment of unique significance, since at that time the Churches of the Byzantine tradition and the Church of Rome were still living in full communion.

After the division which damaged the unity between the West and the Byzantine East, frequent and intense efforts were made to restore full communion. I wish to mention two particularly significant events: the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, and above all the Council of Florence in 1439, when protocols of union with the Eastern Churches were signed. Unfortunately, various causes prevented the promise and potential of those agreements from being realized.

The Bishops of the Metropolia of Kiev, in restoring communion with Rome, made explicit reference to the decisions of the Council of Florence, a Council which had numbered among its participants representatives from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

In this context, the figure of Metropolitan Isidore of Kiev stands out. As a faithful interpreter and defender of the decisions of that Council, he had to endure exile for his convictions.

The Bishops who promoted the union and the members of their Church retained a lively awareness of their original close ties to their Orthodox brethren, together with a full consciousness of the Oriental identity of their Metropolia, an identity which was also to be upheld after the union. In the history of the Catholic Church, it is a highly significant fact that this just desire was respected and that the act of union did not involve passing over to the Latin tradition, as some thought would happen. Their Church saw an acknowledgment of its right to be governed by its own hierarchy with a specific discipline and to maintain its Eastern liturgical and spiritual heritage.

Between persecution and growth

3. After the union, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church enjoyed a period in which its ecclesiastical structures flourished, with resulting benefits for religious life, the education of the clergy and the spiritual commitment of the faithful. With remarkable farsightedness, great importance was attached to education. Thanks to the valuable contribution of the Basilian Order and other Religious Congregations, there was a great growth in the study of the sacred sciences and the nation's culture. In the present century, a figure of extraordinary prestige, in this regard as well as in his witness of suffering borne for Christ, was Metropolitan Andrii Sheptycky, whose education and fine spiritual qualities were combined with outstanding organizational gifts. He founded schools and academies, supported theological studies and the human sciences, the press and sacred art, and sought to preserve historical memories.

And yet, all this ecclesial vitality was continually marked by the tragedy of misunderstanding and opposition. An illustrious victim in this regard was the Archbishop of Polock and Vitebsk, Josaphat Kuntsevych, whose martyrdom merited the unfading crown of eternal glory. His body now lies in the Vatican Basilica, where it is continuously venerated with devotion and gratitude by Catholics from throughout the world.

The difficulties and trials continued unabated. Pope Pius XII recalled them in the Encyclical Letter *Orientalis omnes*. After describing the earlier persecutions, he predicted the tragic persecution which would take place under the atheistic regime.⁷

Outstanding among the heroic witnesses to the rights not only of the faith but also of human conscience in those difficult years is the figure of Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj: his courage in enduring exile and prison for 18 years and his indomitable confidence in the resurrection of his Church make him one of the most powerful figures among the confessors of the faith in our time. Nor should his many companions in punishment be forgotten, particularly Bishops Hryhory Khomyshyn and Josaphat Kocylowskyj.

These tempestuous events shook the Church in the homeland to its roots. But Divine Providence had already begun to make it possible for many of its members to find a way of escape for themselves and their people. From the beginning of the 19th century onwards, great waves of emigrants began to cross the ocean, settling above all in Canada, the United States of America, Brazil, Argentina and Australia. The Holy See took care to be close to them, by providing assistance and establishing pastoral structures for them in their new homes, including the establishment of their own Eparchies. At the time of trial, during the atheistic persecution in their native land, the voice of these believers could thus be raised, in full freedom, with strength and courage. In the international forum they defended the right of their persecuted brethren to religious freedom, and thus strengthened the Second Vatican Council's appeal for religious freedom,⁸ and the efforts made in this regard by the Holy See.

4. The whole Catholic Community recalls with deep emotion the victims of such great suffering: the martyrs and confessors of the faith of the Church in Ukraine offer us a magnificent lesson in fidelity even at the price of life itself. And we, the favoured witnesses of their sacrifice, are aware that they helped to maintain the dignity of a world which seemed overwhelmed by atrocities. They knew the truth, and the truth set them free. Christians in Europe and throughout the world, pausing in prayer before the concentration camps and prisons, should be grateful for the light which they gave: it was the light of Christ, which they caused to shine in the darkness. For long years the darkness seemed in the eyes of the world to prevail, but it was not able to extinguish that light, which was the light of God and the light of man, wounded but not laid low.

This inheritance of suffering and glory today stands at a historic crossroads: now that the chains of imprisonment have been broken, the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine has begun again to breathe in freedom and to regain fully its own active role in the Church and in history. This task, difficult yet providential, today calls for particular reflection, that it may be carried out with wisdom and farsightedness.

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council

5. The celebration of the Union of Brest should be lived and interpreted in the light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. This is perhaps the most important aspect for understanding the significance of the anniversary.

It is well known that the Second Vatican Council made a special point of studying the mystery of the Church, and that one of the most important documents which it produced was the Constitution *Lumen gentium*. Precisely because of this detailed study the Council takes on a particular ecumenical significance. This is confirmed by the Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, which presents a very enlightened programme of activities to be carried out in the work for Christian unity. Thirty years after the conclusion of the Council, I wished to reiterate this programme with my Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, published on 25 May of this year.⁹ This Encyclical traces the ecumenical progress which has been made since the Second Vatican Council and, at the same time, looking to the third millennium of the Christian era, it seeks to open up new possibilities for the future.

Putting the celebrations of the coming year in the context of a reflection on the Church, as proposed by the Council, I am anxious above all to encourage a deeper understanding of the proper role which the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is called to play today in the ecumenical movement.

6. There are those who see the existence of the Eastern Catholic Churches as a difficulty on the road of ecumenism. The Second Vatican Council did not fail to face this problem, indicating possibilities for solutions both in the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, and in the Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, which was specifically dedicated to

these Churches. Both documents reflect a spirit of ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern Churches not in full communion with the See of Rome, in such a way that the richness which the other Churches share with the Catholic Church can be appreciated, and that the quest for an ever fuller and deeper communion may be founded on this shared richness. In fact, "ecumenism is directed precisely to making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity".¹⁰

To promote dialogue with the Byzantine Orthodox Churches, there was set up, after the Second Vatican Council, a special Mixed Commission which also included among its members representatives of the Eastern Catholic Churches. In various documents efforts have been made to arrive at a deeper and greater understanding between the Orthodox Churches and the Eastern Catholic Churches, efforts which have not been without positive results. In my Apostolic Letter *Oriente lumen*¹¹ and in my Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*¹² I have already written of the elements of sanctification and truth¹³ common to Eastern and Western Christianity, and of the desirable path to follow in the search for full communion between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, in the light of the greater ecclesiological understanding brought about by the Second Vatican Council: "Today we know that unity can be achieved through the love of God only if the Churches want it together, in full respect for the traditions of each and for necessary autonomy. We know that this can take place only on the basis of the love of Churches which feel increasingly called to manifest the one Church of Christ, born from one Baptism and from one Eucharist, and which want to be sisters".¹⁴ The deepening of knowledge of the doctrine on the Church, brought about by the Council and continuing since the Council, has marked out what can be called a new path on the journey to unity: the path of the dialogue of truth nourished and sustained by the dialogue of charity (cf. Eph 4: 15).

7. The shift from an underground existence has meant a radical change in the situation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: this Church has found itself facing the grave problems of rebuilding the structures of which it had been completely deprived and, more generally, it has had to commit itself to rediscovering itself fully, not only from within, but also in relation to the other Churches.

Thanks be to God for having enabled it to celebrate this jubilee with religious freedom regained. Thanks be to God also for the growth of the dialogue of charity, whereby significant progress has been made on the road to the much desired reconciliation with the Orthodox Churches.

Numerous migrations and deportations have redrawn the religious geography of those lands; many years of official State atheism have profoundly affected people's minds; there is still not enough clergy to respond to the immense needs of religious and moral reconstruction: these are some of the more dramatic challenges facing all of the Churches.

In the face of these difficulties a common witness of charity is required, in order that the proclamation of the Gospel may not be impeded. As I said in my Apostolic Letter *Oriente lumen*, "today we can co-operate in proclaiming the Kingdom or we can become the upholders of new divisions".¹⁵ May the Lord guide our feet into the way of peace.

The blood of the martyrs

8. In the new-found freedom we cannot forget the persecution and martyrdom which the Churches of that region, both Catholic and Orthodox, suffered in their own flesh. This is an important aspect for the Church of all times, as I recalled in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*.¹⁶ It concerns a particularly significant heritage of the Churches of Europe, which remain profoundly marked by it: this needs to be studied in the light of the Word of God.

An integral part of this religious memory of ours is therefore the duty to call to mind the meaning of martyrdom, to propose the actual figures of those witnesses of faith to the veneration of everyone, in the awareness that even today the saying of Tertullian retains its full meaning: "Sanguis martyrum, semen Christianorum".¹⁷ We Christians already have a common martyrology in which God maintains and brings about communion among the baptized by the supreme demand of faith, manifested in the sacrifice of life itself. Real, if imperfect communion, already present between Catholics and Orthodox in their ecclesial life, reaches perfection in all that we "consider the highest point of the life of grace, martyrdom unto death, the truest communion possible with Christ who shed his Blood, and by that sacrifice brings near those who once were far off (cf. Eph 2:13)".¹⁸

Remembrance of the martyrs cannot be erased from the memory of the Church or of humanity: whether victims of the ideologies of the East or of the West, all of them are brought together in fellowship by the violence whereby hatred for the faith violated the dignity of the human person, created by God "in his image and likeness".

The Church of Christ is one

9. "Credo unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam". This profession of faith contained in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is common to both Catholic and Orthodox Christians: it emphasizes not only that they believe in the unity of the Church, but also that they live and wish to live in the one and indivisible Church as it was founded by Jesus Christ. The differences between Christianity in the East and in the West which arose and developed in the course of history are for the most part diversities of cultural origin and of tradition. In this sense, "legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission".¹⁹

Pope John XXIII was fond of repeating: "What unites us is much greater than what divides us". I am convinced that this attitude can be a great benefit to all the Churches. More than 30 years have gone by since the Pope made this statement. In this period of time there have been many indications which suggest to us that Christians have made progress in this direction. Eloquent signs of this progress have been the fraternal meetings between Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I, and those which I myself have had with the Ecumenical Patriarchs Dimitrios and, more recently, Bartholomaios, and with other venerable Patriarchs of the Churches of the East. All this, together with the many initiatives involving meetings and dialogue which are being promoted everywhere in the Church, encourages us to have hope: the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of unity, does not cease to work among Christians still separated from one another.

And yet human weakness and sin continue to resist the Spirit of unity. Sometimes one even has the impression that there are forces ready to do almost anything in order to slow down, and even put an end to, the movement towards Christian unity. But we cannot give in: daily we must find the courage and strength, which at one and the same time are the gift of the Spirit and the result of human effort, to continue on the path already undertaken.

10. In recalling the Union of Brest we must ask ourselves what this event means today. It was a union which concerned only a particular geographical region, but it is relevant for the entire field of ecumenism. The Eastern Catholic Churches can make a very important contribution to ecumenism. The Council's Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* reminds us that "the Eastern Churches in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome have a special role to play in promoting the unity of all Christians, particularly Easterners, according to the principles of this sacred Synod's Decree on Ecumenism: first of all by prayer, then by the example of their lives, by religious fidelity to ancient Eastern traditions, by greater mutual knowledge, by collaboration, and by a brotherly regard for objects and attitudes".²⁰ From this it follows that Eastern Catholics are to commit themselves to living profoundly what the Decree lays out. They are asked to make a confession of faith full of humility and gratitude to the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church towards the fulfilment promised her by the Redeemer of the world.

Time of prayer

11. Prayer will therefore be the fundamental element which should mark the celebration of this jubilee. Such prayer above all involves giving thanks for all that has been accomplished, down the centuries, by commitment to the Church's unity, and especially for the impulse given to the search for unity as a result of the Second Vatican Council.

This prayer is one of thanksgiving to the Lord, who guides the unfolding of history, for the situation of new-found religious freedom in which this jubilee is being celebrated. It is also an appeal to the Spirit-Paraclete, that he may cause to flourish everything which promotes unity, and may give courage and strength to all those who commit themselves, according to the guidelines of the Council's Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, to this work blessed by God. It is a plea for the gift of brotherly love, and for the forgiveness of offences and injustices suffered in the course of history. It is a petition that the power of the living God will bring good even out of the cruel and many-faceted evil caused by acts of human malice. This prayer also expresses hope for the future of the ecumenical journey: the power of God is greater than all human weaknesses, whether old or new. If this jubilee of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, on the threshold of the third millennium, marks a step forward towards full Christian unity, this result will be first of all the work of the Holy Spirit.

Time of reflection

12. The jubilee celebrations should also be a time of reflection. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church must first of all ask itself what full communion with the Apostolic See meant for it in the past, and what it will mean for it in the future. In a spirit of humble thanksgiving, the Greek Catholic Church will give glory to God, for its heroic fidelity to the Successor of Peter and, under the action of the Holy Spirit, it will understand that today this same fidelity commits it to fostering the unity of all the Churches. This fidelity cost it sufferings and martyrdom in the past: this is a sacrifice offered to God in order to implore the hoped-for union.

Faithfulness to the ancient Oriental traditions is one of the means available to the Eastern Catholic Churches for promoting Christian unity.²¹ The Council's Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* is very explicit when it declares: "All should realize that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve, and foster the exceedingly rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches, in order faithfully to preserve the fullness of Christian tradition, and to bring about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians".²²

A memory entrusted to Mary

13. We cannot fail to entrust the yearning for full Christian unity to the Mother of Christ, she who is ever present in the work of the Lord and of his Church. Chapter Eight of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* points to her as the one who goes before us on our earthly pilgrimage of faith and is tenderly present to the Church which, at the end of the second millennium, is working to re-establish among all those who believe in Christ that unity which the Lord wills for

them. Because she is the Mother of the one Christ, she is the Mother of unity. Since Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, gave birth to the Son of God, who received from her his human body, she ardently wills the visible unity of all believers who make up the Mystical Body of Christ. The veneration of Mary, which unites East and West so intimately, will serve, I am convinced, the cause of unity.

The Most Holy Virgin, already present everywhere in our midst both in so many sacred buildings and in the life of faith of so many families continuously speaks of unity, a unity for which she constantly intercedes. If today, in commemorating the Union of Brest, we recall the marvellous wealth of veneration that the Christian people of the Ukraine have offered to the Mother of God, we cannot but draw from this admiration for the history, spirituality and prayer of those peoples the consequences for unity which are so closely linked to those treasures.

Mary, who has inspired in their trials fathers and mothers, young people, the sick and the aged; Mary, the column of fire capable of guiding so many martyrs of the faith, is certainly at work in preparing the hoped-for union of all Christians: in the light of this, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church certainly has its own role to play.

To Mary the Church offers her thanks and asks her to make us share her concern for unity. With filial trust let us abandon ourselves to her, that we may be with her where God will be all in all.

To you, dear Brothers and Sisters, I impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, on 12 November, Memorial of Saint Josaphat, in the year 1995, the eighteenth of my Pontificate.

NOTES

1) Cf. *Bullarium romanum* V/2 (1594-1602), 87-92.

2) Cf. A. Welykyj, *Documenta Pontificum Romanorum Historiam Ucrainae illustrantia*, t. I, p. 257-259.

3) Cf. AAS 38 (1946), 33-63.

4) Cf. John Paul II, Letter to Cardinal Myroslav I. Lubachivsky, Major Archbishop of Lviv of the Ukrainians (25 March 1995), 3: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 May 1995, p. 6

5) Cf. AAS 80 (1988), 935-956.

6) Cf. *ibid.*, 988-997.

7) Cf. AAS 38 (1946), 54-57. Those fears would be disturbingly confirmed a few years later, as the same Pope precisely brought out in the Encyclical Epistle *Orientalis Ecclesias* (15 December 1952): AAS 45 (1953), 7-10.

8) Cf. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis humanae*.

9) Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 31 May 1995, 1-8.

10) *Ibid.*, n. 14, loc. cit., 2.

11) Cf. nn. 18-19; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 May 1995, 4.

12) Cf. nn. 12-14; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 31 May 1995, 2.

13) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 3.

14) John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Orientalis lumen* (2 May 1995), n. 20; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 May 1995, 4.

15) N. 19; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 May 1995, 4.

16) Cf. AAS 87 (1995), 29-30; Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 84; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 31 May 1995, 7.

17) *Apol.* 50, 13: CCL I, 171.

18) John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 84; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 31 May 1995, 7.

19) *Ibid.*, n. 50, loc. cit., 5.

20) N. 24.

21) Cf. *ibid.*

22) N. 15.

Post-Synodal
 Apostolic Exhortation
 Of The Holy Father
 John Paul II
 To The Bishops And Clergy
 Religious Orders And Congregations
 Societies Of Apostolic Life
 Secular Institutes
 And All The Faithful
 On The Consecrated Life And Its Mission
 In The Church And In The World

INTRODUCTION

1. The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus - the chaste, poor and obedient one - are made constantly "visible" in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.

In every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an "undivided" heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:34). Like the Apostles, they too have left everything behind in order to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters. In this way, through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in doing so have contributed to the renewal of society.

Thanksgiving for the consecrated life

2. Because the role of consecrated life in the Church is so important, I decided to convene a Synod in order to examine in depth its significance and its future prospects, especially in view of the approaching new millennium. It was my wish that the Synodal Assembly should include, together with the Bishops, a considerable number of consecrated men and women, in order that they too might contribute to the common reflection.

We are all aware of the treasure which the gift of the consecrated life in the variety of its charisms and institutions represents for the ecclesial community. Together let us thank God for the Religious Orders and Institutes devoted to contemplation or the works of the apostolate, for Societies of Apostolic Life, for Secular Institutes and for other groups of consecrated persons, as well as for all those individuals who, in their inmost hearts, dedicate themselves to God by a special consecration. The Synod was a tangible sign of the universal extension of the consecrated life, present in the local Churches throughout the world. The consecrated life inspires and accompanies the spread of evangelization in the different parts of the world, where Institutes from abroad are gratefully welcomed and new ones are being founded, in a great variety of forms and expressions. Consequently, although in some parts of the world Institutes of Consecrated Life seem to be experiencing a period of difficulty, in other places they are prospering with remarkable vitality. This shows that the choice of total self-giving to God in Christ is in no way incompatible with any human culture or historical situation. Nor is the consecrated life flourishing within the Catholic Church alone. In fact, it is particularly vibrant in the monasticism of the Orthodox Churches, where it is an essential feature of their life. It is also taking root or re-emerging in the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which originated in the Reformation, and is the sign of a grace shared by all of Christ's disciples. This fact is an incentive to ecumenism, which fosters the desire for an ever fuller communion between Christians, "that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).

The consecrated life: a gift to the Church

3. Its universal presence and the evangelical nature of its witness are clear evidence - if any were needed - that the consecrated life is not something isolated and marginal, but a reality which affects the whole Church. The Bishops at the Synod frequently reaffirmed this: "de re nostra agitur", "this is something which concerns us all". In effect, the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it "manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling" and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse. At the Synod it was stated on several occasions that the consecrated life has not only proved a help and support for the Church in the past, but is also a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the People of God, since it is an

intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission. The present difficulties which a number of Institutes are encountering in some parts of the world must not lead to a questioning of the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is an integral part of the Church's life and a much-needed incentive towards ever greater fidelity to the Gospel. The consecrated life may experience further changes in its historical forms, but there will be no change in the substance of a choice which finds expression in a radical gift of self for love of the Lord Jesus and, in him, of every member of the human family. This certainty, which has inspired countless individuals in the course of the centuries, continues to reassure the Christian people, for they know that they can draw from the contribution of these generous souls powerful support on their journey towards the heavenly home.

Gathering the fruits of the Synod

4. In response to the desire expressed by the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which met to discuss the theme "The Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World", I intend to set forth in this Apostolic Exhortation the results of the Synod process and to point out to all the faithful - Bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated persons and laity, and to any others who might be interested - the wondrous things which today too the Lord wishes to accomplish through the consecrated life.

This Synod, coming after the ones dedicated to the lay faithful and to priests, completes the treatment of the distinctive features of the states of life willed by the Lord Jesus for his Church. Whereas the Second Vatican Council emphasized the profound reality of ecclesial communion, in which all gifts converge for the building up of the Body of Christ and for the Church's mission in the world, in recent years there has been felt the need to clarify the specific identity of the various states of life, their vocation and their particular mission in the Church. Communion in the Church is not uniformity, but a gift of the Spirit who is present in the variety of charisms and states of life. These will be all the more helpful to the Church and her mission the more their specific identity is respected. For every gift of the Spirit is granted in order to bear fruit for the Lord in the growth of fraternity and mission.

The work of the Spirit in the various forms of the consecrated life

5. How can we not recall with gratitude to the Spirit the many different forms of consecrated life which he has raised up throughout history and which still exist in the Church today? They can be compared to a plant with many branches which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church's life. What an extraordinary richness! I myself, at the conclusion of the Synod, felt the need to stress this permanent element in the history of the Church: the host of founders and foundresses, of holy men and women who chose Christ by radically following the Gospel and by serving their brothers and sisters, especially the poor and the outcast. Such service is itself a sign of how the consecrated life manifests the organic unity of the commandment of love, in the inseparable link between love of God and love of neighbour.

The Synod recalled this unceasing work of the Holy Spirit, who in every age shows forth the richness of the practice of the evangelical counsels through a multiplicity of charisms. In this way too he makes ever present in the Church and in the world, in time and space, the mystery of Christ.

Monastic life in the East and the West

6. The Synod Fathers from the Eastern Catholic Churches and the representatives of the other Churches of the East emphasized the evangelical values of monastic life, which appeared at the dawn of Christianity and which still flourishes in their territories, especially in the Orthodox Churches.

From the first centuries of the Church, men and women have felt called to imitate the Incarnate Word who took on the condition of a servant. They have sought to follow him by living in a particularly radical way, through monastic profession, the demands flowing from baptismal participation in the Paschal Mystery of his Death and Resurrection. In this way, by becoming bearers of the Cross (staurophoroi), they have striven to become bearers of the Spirit (pneumatophoroi), authentically spiritual men and women, capable of endowing history with hidden fruitfulness by unceasing praise and intercession, by spiritual counsels and works of charity. In its desire to transfigure the world and life itself in expectation of the definitive vision of God's countenance, Eastern monasticism gives pride of place to conversion, self-renunciation and compunction of heart, the quest for hesychia or interior peace, ceaseless prayer, fasting and vigils, spiritual combat and silence, Paschal joy in the presence of the Lord and the expectation of his definitive coming, and the oblation of self and personal possessions, lived in the holy communion of the monastery or in the solitude of the hermitage. The West too from the first centuries of the Church has practised the monastic life and has experienced a great variety of expressions of it, both cenobitic and eremitical. In its present form, inspired above all by Saint Benedict, Western monasticism is the heir of the great number of men and women who, leaving behind life in the world, sought God and dedicated themselves to him, "preferring nothing to the love of Christ". The monks of today likewise strive to create a harmonious balance between the interior life and work in the evangelical commitment to conversion of life, obedience and stability, and in persevering dedication to meditation on God's word (lectio divina),

the celebration of the Liturgy and prayer. In the heart of the Church and the world, monasteries have been and continue to be eloquent signs of communion, welcoming abodes for those seeking God and the things of the spirit, schools of faith and true places of study, dialogue and culture for the building up of the life of the Church and of the earthly city itself, in expectation of the heavenly city.

The Order of Virgins; hermits and widows

7. It is a source of joy and hope to witness in our time a new flowering of the ancient Order of Virgins, known in Christian communities ever since apostolic times. Consecrated by the diocesan Bishop, these women acquire a particular link with the Church, which they are committed to serve while remaining in the world. Either alone or in association with others, they constitute a special eschatological image of the Heavenly Bride and of the life to come, when the Church will at last fully live her love for Christ the Bridegroom.

Men and women hermits, belonging to ancient Orders or new Institutes, or being directly dependent on the Bishop, bear witness to the passing nature of the present age by their inward and outward separation from the world. By fasting and penance, they show that man does not live by bread alone but by the word of God (cf. Mt 4:4). Such a life "in the desert" is an invitation to their contemporaries and to the ecclesial community itself never to lose sight of the supreme vocation, which is to be always with the Lord. Again being practised today is the consecration of widows, known since apostolic times (cf. 1 Tim 5:5, 9-10; 1 Cor 7:8), as well as the consecration of widowers. These women and men, through a vow of perpetual chastity as a sign of the Kingdom of God, consecrate their state of life in order to devote themselves to prayer and the service of the Church.

Institutes completely devoted to contemplation

8. Institutes completely devoted to contemplation, composed of either women or men, are for the Church a reason for pride and a source of heavenly graces. By their lives and mission, the members of these Institutes imitate Christ in his prayer on the mountain, bear witness to God's lordship over history and anticipate the glory which is to come.

In solitude and silence, by listening to the word of God, participating in divine worship, personal asceticism, prayer, mortification and the communion of fraternal love, they direct the whole of their lives and all their activities to the contemplation of God. In this way they offer the ecclesial community a singular testimony of the Church's love for her Lord, and they contribute, with hidden apostolic fruitfulness, to the growth of the People of God. Thus there is good reason to hope that the different forms of contemplative life will experience continued growth in the younger Churches as an evident sign that the Gospel has taken firm root, especially in those areas of the world where other religions predominate. This will make it possible to bear witness to the vitality of the traditions of Christian asceticism and mysticism and will contribute to interreligious dialogue.

Apostolic religious life

9. The West has also known, down the centuries, a variety of other expressions of religious life, in which countless persons, renouncing the world, have consecrated themselves to God through the public profession of the evangelical counsels in accordance with a specific charism and in a stable form of common life, for the sake of carrying out different forms of apostolic service to the People of God. Thus there arose the different families of Canons Regular, the Mendicant Orders, the Clerics Regular and in general the Religious Congregations of men and women devoted to apostolic and missionary activity and to the many different works inspired by Christian charity.

This is a splendid and varied testimony, reflecting the multiplicity of gifts bestowed by God on founders and foundresses who, in openness to the working of the Holy Spirit, successfully interpreted the signs of the times and responded wisely to new needs. Following in their footsteps, many other people have sought by word and deed to embody the Gospel in their own lives, bringing anew to their own times the living presence of Jesus, the Consecrated One par excellence, the One sent by the Father. In every age consecrated men and women must continue to be images of Christ the Lord, fostering through prayer a profound communion of mind with him (cf. Phil 2:5-11), so that their whole lives may be penetrated by an apostolic spirit and their apostolic work with contemplation.

Secular Institutes

10. The Holy Spirit, who wondrously fashions the variety of charisms, has given rise in our time to new expressions of consecrated life, which appear as a providential response to the new needs encountered by the Church today as she carries out her mission in the world.

One thinks in the first place of members of Secular Institutes seeking to live out their consecration to God in the world through the profession of the evangelical counsels in the midst of temporal realities; they wish in this way to be a leaven of wisdom and a witness of grace within cultural, economic and political life. Through their own specific blending of presence in the world and consecration, they seek to make present in society the newness and power of

Christ's Kingdom, striving to transfigure the world from within by the power of the Beatitudes. In this way, while they belong completely to God and are thus fully consecrated to his service, their activity in the ordinary life of the world contributes, by the power of the Spirit, to shedding the light of the Gospel on temporal realities. Secular Institutes, each in accordance with its specific nature, thus help to ensure that the Church has an effective presence in society. A valuable role is also played by Clerical Secular Institutes, in which priests who belong to the diocesan clergy, even when some of them are recognized as being incardinated in the Institute, consecrate themselves to Christ through the practice of the evangelical counsels in accordance with a specific charism. They discover in the spiritual riches of the Institute to which they belong great help for living more deeply the spirituality proper to the priesthood and thus they are enabled to be a leaven of communion and apostolic generosity among their fellow clergy.

Societies of Apostolic Life

11. Also worthy of special mention are Societies of Apostolic Life or of common life, composed of men or women. These pursue, each in its own particular way, a specific apostolic or missionary end. In many of them an explicit commitment to the evangelical counsels is made through sacred bonds officially recognized by the Church. Even in this case, however, the specific nature of their consecration distinguishes them from Religious Institutes and Secular Institutes. The specific identity of this form of life is to be preserved and promoted; in recent centuries it has produced many fruits of holiness and of the apostolate, especially in the field of charity and in the spread of the Gospel in the Missions.

New expressions of consecrated life

12. The perennial youth of the Church continues to be evident even today. In recent years, following the Second Vatican Council, new or renewed forms of the consecrated life have arisen. In many cases, these are Institutes similar to those already existing, but inspired by new spiritual and apostolic impulses. Their vitality must be judged by the authority of the Church, which has the responsibility of examining them in order to discern the authenticity of the purpose for their foundation and to prevent the proliferation of institutions similar to one another, with the consequent risk of a harmful fragmentation into excessively small groups. In other cases it is a question of new experiments which are seeking an identity of their own in the Church and awaiting official recognition from the Apostolic See, which alone has final judgment in these matters. These new forms of consecrated life now taking their place alongside the older ones bear witness to the constant attraction which the total gift of self to the Lord, the ideal of the apostolic community and the founding charisms continue to exert, even on the present generation. They also show how the gifts of the Holy Spirit complement one another. In this newness however the Spirit does not contradict himself. Proof of this is the fact that the new forms of consecrated life have not supplanted the earlier ones. Amid such wide variety the underlying unity has been successfully preserved, thanks to the one call to follow Jesus - chaste, poor and obedient - in the pursuit of perfect charity. This call, which is found in all the existing forms of consecrated life, must also mark those which present themselves as new.

Purpose of the Apostolic Exhortation

13. Gathering together the fruits of the Synod's labours, in this Apostolic Exhortation I wish to address the whole Church in order to offer not only to consecrated persons but also to the Bishops and the faithful the results of a stimulating exchange, guided by the Holy Spirit with his gifts of truth and love.

During these years of renewal, the consecrated life, like other ways of life in the Church, has gone through a difficult and trying period. It has been a period full of hopes, new experiments and proposals aimed at giving fresh vigour to the profession of the evangelical counsels. But it has also been a time of tension and struggle, in which well-meaning endeavours have not always met with positive results. The difficulties however must not lead to discouragement. Rather, we need to commit ourselves with fresh enthusiasm, for the Church needs the spiritual and apostolic contribution of a renewed and revitalized consecrated life. In this Post-Synodal Exhortation I wish to address religious communities and consecrated persons in the same spirit which inspired the letter sent by the Council of Jerusalem to the Christians of Antioch, and I am hopeful that it will meet with the same response: "When they read it, they rejoiced at the encouragement which it gave" (Acts 15:31). And not only this. I also hope to increase the joy of the whole People of God. As they become better acquainted with the consecrated life, they will be able with greater awareness to thank Almighty God for this great gift. In an attitude of heartfelt openness towards the Synod Fathers, I have carefully considered the valuable contributions made during the intense work of the Assembly, at which I made a point of being present throughout. During the Synod, I also sought to offer the entire People of God a number of systematic talks on the consecrated life in the Church. In them I presented anew the teachings found in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, which was an enlightening point of reference for subsequent doctrinal developments and for the reflections of the Synod during the busy weeks of its work. I am confident that the sons and daughters of the Church, and consecrated persons in particular, will receive this Exhortation with open hearts. At the same time, I hope that reflection will

continue and lead to a deeper understanding of the great gift of the consecrated life in its three aspects of consecration, communion and mission. I also hope that consecrated men and women, in full harmony with the Church and her Magisterium, will discover in this Exhortation further encouragement to face in a spiritual and apostolic manner the new challenges of our time.

CHAPTER I - CONFESSIO TRINITATIS

THE ORIGINS OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST AND OF THE TRINITY

Icon of the Transfigured Christ

14. The evangelical basis of consecrated life is to be sought in the special relationship which Jesus, in his earthly life, established with some of his disciples. He called them not only to welcome the Kingdom of God into their own lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own way of life.

Many of the baptized throughout history have been invited to live such a life "in the image of Christ". But this is possible only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit. For in such a life baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ through acceptance of the evangelical counsels, the first and essential of which is the sacred bond of chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. This special way of "following Christ", at the origin of which is always the initiative of the Father, has an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning: it expresses in a particularly vivid way the Trinitarian nature of the Christian life and it anticipates in a certain way that eschatological fulfilment towards which the whole Church is tending. In the Gospel, many of Christ's words and actions shed light on the meaning of this special vocation. But for an overall picture of its essential characteristics, it is singularly helpful to fix our gaze on Christ's radiant face in the mystery of the Transfiguration. A whole ancient spiritual tradition refers to this "icon" when it links the contemplative life to the prayer of Jesus "on the mountain." *ab ipso Domino familiarissime celebrata, ab eius discipulis ipso praesente concupita: cuius transfigurationis gloriam cum vidissent qui cum eo in monte sancto erant, continuo Petrus... optimum sibi iudicavit in hoc semper esse* (Ad Fratres de Monte Dei, I, 1: PL 184, 310).] Even the "active" dimensions of consecrated life can in a way be included here, for the Transfiguration is not only the revelation of Christ's glory but also a preparation for facing Christ's Cross. It involves both "going up the mountain" and "coming down the mountain". The disciples who have enjoyed this intimacy with the Master, surrounded for a moment by the splendour of the Trinitarian life and of the communion of saints, and as it were caught up in the horizon of eternity, are immediately brought back to daily reality, where they see "Jesus only", in the lowliness of his human nature, and are invited to return to the valley, to share with him the toil of God's plan and to set off courageously on the way of the Cross. "And he was transfigured before them..."

15. And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah". He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him". When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear". And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead" (Mt 17:1-9). The event of the Transfiguration marks a decisive moment in the ministry of Jesus. It is a revelatory event which strengthens the faith in the disciples' hearts, prepares them for the tragedy of the Cross and prefigures the glory of the Resurrection. This mystery is constantly relived by the Church, the people on its way to the eschatological encounter with its Lord. Like the three chosen disciples, the Church contemplates the transfigured face of Christ in order to be confirmed in faith and to avoid being dismayed at his disfigured face on the Cross. In both cases, she is the Bride before her Spouse, sharing in his mystery and surrounded by his light. This light shines on all the Church's children. All are equally called to follow Christ, to discover in him the ultimate meaning of their lives, until they are able to say with the Apostle: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21). But those who are called to the consecrated life have a special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word. For the profession of the evangelical counsels makes them a kind of sign and prophetic statement for the community of the brethren and for the world; consequently they can echo in a particular way the ecstatic words spoken by Peter: "Lord, it is well that we are here" (Mt 17:4). These words bespeak the Christocentric orientation of the whole Christian life. But they also eloquently express the radical nature of the vocation to the consecrated life: how good it is for us to be with you, to devote ourselves to you, to make you the one focus of our lives! Truly those who have been given the grace of this

special communion of love with Christ feel as it were caught up in his splendour: he is "the fairest of the sons of men" (Ps 45:2), the One beyond compare.

"This is my beloved Son": listen to him!

16. The three disciples caught up in ecstasy hear the Father's call to listen to Christ, to place all their trust in him, to make him the centre of their lives. The words from on high give new depth to the invitation by which Jesus himself, at the beginning of his public life, called them to follow him, to leave their ordinary lives behind and to enter into a close relationship to him. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which, in the consecrated life, makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels. The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ, lived within the Church.

In the unity of the Christian life, the various vocations are like so many rays of the one light of Christ, whose radiance "brightens the countenance of the Church." The laity, by virtue of the secular character of their vocation, reflect the mystery of the Incarnate Word particularly insofar as he is the Alpha and the Omega of the world, the foundation and measure of the value of all created things. Sacred ministers, for their part, are living images of Christ the Head and Shepherd who guides his people during this time of "already and not yet", as they await his coming in glory. It is the duty of the consecrated life to show that the Incarnate Son of God is the eschatological goal towards which all things tend, the splendour before which every other light pales, and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart. In the consecrated life, then, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one's whole heart, of loving him "more than father or mother, more than son or daughter" (cf. Mt 10:37) - for this is required of every disciple - but of living and expressing this by conforming one's whole existence to Christ in an all-encompassing commitment which foreshadows the eschatological perfection, to the extent that this is possible in time and in accordance with the different charisms. By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, "that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world." By embracing chastity, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only-Begotten Son who is one with the Father (cf. Jn 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ's poverty, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father, and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn 17:7, 10). By accepting, through the sacrifice of their own freedom, the mystery of Christ's filial obedience, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the One who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything. By this profound "configuration" to the mystery of Christ, the consecrated life brings about in a special way that *confessio Trinitatis* which is the mark of all Christian life; it acknowledges with wonder the sublime beauty of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and bears joyful witness to his loving concern for every human being.

I. IN PRAISE OF THE TRINITY

"A Patre ad Patrem": God's initiative

17. Contemplation of the glory of the Lord Jesus in the icon of the Transfiguration reveals to consecrated persons first of all the Father, the Creator and Giver of every good thing, who draws his creatures to himself (cf. Jn 6:44) with a special love and for a special mission. "This is my beloved Son: listen to him!" (cf. Mt 17:5). In response to this call and the interior attraction which accompanies it, those who are called entrust themselves to the love of God who wishes them to be exclusively at his service, and they consecrate themselves totally to him and to his plan of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34).

This is the meaning of the call to the consecrated life: it is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. Jn 15:16), who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion. The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to him all things present and future, and placing them in his hands. This is why, with Saint Thomas, we come to understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his or her complete self-offering, as being comparable to a genuine holocaust.

"Per Filium": in the footsteps of the Son

18. The Son, who is the way which leads to the Father (cf. Jn 14:6), calls all those whom the Father has given to him (cf. Jn 17:9) to make the following of himself the whole purpose of their lives. But of some, those called to the consecrated life, he asks a total commitment, one which involves leaving everything behind (cf. Mt 19:27) in order to live at his side and to follow him wherever he goes (cf. Rev 14:4).

In the countenance of Jesus, the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) and the reflection of the Father's glory (cf. Heb 1:3), we glimpse the depths of an eternal and infinite love which is at the very root of our being. Those who let themselves be seized by this love cannot help abandoning everything to follow him (cf. Mk 1:16-20; 2:14; 10:21, 28).

Like Saint Paul, they consider all else as loss "because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ", by comparison with which they do not hesitate to count all things as "refuse", in order that they "may gain Christ" (Phil 3:8). They strive to become one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life. This leaving of everything and following the Lord (cf. Lk 18:28) is a worthy programme of life for all whom he calls, in every age. The evangelical counsels, by which Christ invites some people to share his experience as the chaste, poor and obedient One, call for and make manifest in those who accept them an explicit desire to be totally conformed to him. Living "in obedience, with nothing of one's own and in chastity, "consecrated persons profess that Jesus is the model in whom every virtue comes to perfection. His way of living in chastity, poverty and obedience appears as the most radical way of living the Gospel on this earth, a way which may be called divine, for it was embraced by him, God and man, as the expression of his relationship as the Only-Begotten Son with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. This is why Christian tradition has always spoken of the objective superiority of the consecrated life. Nor can it be denied that the practice of the evangelical counsels is also a particularly profound and fruitful way of sharing in Christ's mission, in imitation of the example of Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple, who willingly put herself at the service of God's plan by the total gift of self. Every mission begins with the attitude expressed by Mary at the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

"In Spiritu": consecrated by the Holy Spirit

19. "A bright cloud overshadowed them" (Mt 17:5). A significant spiritual interpretation of the Transfiguration sees this cloud as an image of the Holy Spirit. Like the whole of Christian life, the call to the consecrated life is closely linked to the working of the Holy Spirit. In every age, the Spirit enables new men and women to recognize the appeal of such a demanding choice. Through his power, they relive, in a way, the experience of the Prophet Jeremiah: "You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced" (Jer 20:7). It is the Spirit who awakens the desire to respond fully; it is he who guides the growth of this desire, helping it to mature into a positive response and sustaining it as it is faithfully translated into action; it is he who shapes and moulds the hearts of those who are called, configuring them to Christ, the chaste, poor and obedient One, and prompting them to make his mission their own. By allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit on an endless journey of purification, they become, day after day, conformed to Christ, the prolongation in history of a special presence of the Risen Lord. With penetrating insight, the Fathers of the Church have called this spiritual path *philokalia*, or love of the divine beauty, which is the reflection of the divine goodness. Those who by the power of the Holy Spirit are led progressively into full configuration to Christ reflect in themselves a ray of the unapproachable light. During their earthly pilgrimage, they press on towards the inexhaustible Source of light. The consecrated life thus becomes a particularly profound expression of the Church as the Bride who, prompted by the Spirit to imitate her Spouse, stands before him "in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). The same Spirit, far from removing from the life of humanity those whom the Father has called, puts them at the service of their brothers and sisters in accordance with their particular state of life, and inspires them to undertake special tasks in response to the needs of the Church and the world, by means of the charisms proper to the various Institutes. Hence many different forms of the consecrated life have arisen, whereby the Church is "adorned by the various gifts of her children... like a bride made beautiful for her spouse (cf. Rev 21:2)" and is enriched by the means necessary for carrying out her mission in the world.

The evangelical counsels, gift of the Trinity

20. The evangelical counsels are thus above all a gift of the Holy Trinity. The consecrated life proclaims what the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit, brings about by his love, his goodness and his beauty. In fact, "the religious state reveals the transcendence of the Kingdom of God and its requirements over all earthly things. To all people it shows wonderfully at work within the Church the surpassing greatness of the force of Christ the King and the boundless power of the Holy Spirit." The first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world. To people's astonishment they respond by proclaiming the wonders of grace accomplished by the Lord in those whom he loves. To the degree that consecrated persons let themselves be guided by the Spirit to the heights of perfection they can exclaim: "I see the beauty of your grace, I contemplate its radiance, I reflect its light; I am caught up in its ineffable splendour; I am taken outside myself as I think of myself; I see how I was and what I have become. O wonder! I am vigilant, I am full of respect for myself, of reverence and of fear, as I would be were I before you; I do not know what to do, I am seized by fear, I do not know where to sit, where to go, where to put these members which are yours; in what deeds, in what works shall I use them, these amazing divine marvels!" The consecrated life thus becomes one of the tangible seals which the Trinity impresses upon history, so that people can sense with longing the attraction of divine beauty.

Reflection of Trinitarian life in the evangelical counsels

21. The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are in fact an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. By practising the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension which marks the whole of Christian life.

The chastity of celibates and virgins, as a manifestation of dedication to God with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34), is a reflection of the infinite love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving his life, the love "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren. Poverty proclaims that God is man's only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, "though he was rich... became poor" (2 Cor 8:9), it becomes an expression of that total gift of self which the three Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in his redemptive death. Obedience, practised in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father's will (cf. Jn 4:34), shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons. The consecrated life is thus called constantly to deepen the gift of the evangelical counsels with a love which grows ever more genuine and strong in the Trinitarian dimension: love for Christ, which leads to closeness with him; love for the Holy Spirit, who opens our hearts to his inspiration; love for the Father, the first origin and supreme goal of the consecrated life. The consecrated life thus becomes a confession and a sign of the Trinity, whose mystery is held up to the Church as the model and source of every form of Christian life. Even fraternal life, whereby consecrated persons strive to live in Christ with "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32), is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity. It proclaims the Father, who desires to make all of humanity one family. It proclaims the Incarnate Son, who gathers the redeemed into unity, pointing the way by his example, his prayer, his words and above all his death, which is the source of reconciliation for a divided and scattered humanity. It proclaims the Holy Spirit as the principle of unity in the Church, wherein he ceaselessly raises up spiritual families and fraternal communities.

Consecrated like Christ for the Kingdom of God

22. The consecrated life, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, "constitutes a closer imitation and an abiding re-enactment in the Church" of the way of life which Jesus, the supreme Consecrated One and missionary of the Father for the sake of his Kingdom, embraced and proposed to his disciples (cf. Mt 4:18-22; Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:10-11; Jn 15:16). In the light of Jesus' consecration, we can see in the initiative of the Father, the source of all holiness, the ultimate origin of the consecrated life. Jesus is the One whom "God anointed... with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38), the One "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn 10:36). Accepting his consecration by the Father, the Son in turn consecrates himself to the Father for the sake of humanity (cf. Jn 17:19). His life of virginity, obedience and poverty expresses his complete filial acceptance of the Father's plan (cf. Jn 10:30; 14:11). His perfect offering confers an aspect of consecration upon all the events of his earthly existence.

Jesus is the exemplar of obedience, who came down from heaven not to do his own will but the will of the One who sent him (cf. Jn 6:38; Heb 10:5, 7). He places his way of living and acting in the hands of the Father (cf. Lk 2:49). In filial obedience, he assumes the condition of a servant: he "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8). In this attitude of submissiveness to the Father, Christ lives his life as a virgin, even while affirming and defending the dignity and sanctity of married life. He thus reveals the sublime excellence and mysterious spiritual fruitfulness of virginity. His full acceptance of the Father's plan is also seen in his detachment from earthly goods: "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). The depth of his poverty is revealed in the perfect offering of all that is his to the Father. The consecrated life truly constitutes a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren. It is a living tradition of the Saviour's life and message.

II. BETWEEN EASTER AND FULFILMENT

From Tabor to Calvary

23. The dazzling event of the Transfiguration is a preparation for the tragic, but no less glorious, event of Calvary. Peter, James and John contemplate the Lord Jesus together with Moses and Elijah, with whom, according to the Evangelist Luke, Jesus speaks "of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (9:31). The eyes of the Apostles are therefore fixed upon Jesus who is thinking of the Cross (cf. Lk 9:43-45). There his virginal love for the Father and for all mankind will attain its highest expression. His poverty will reach complete self-emptying, his obedience the giving of his life.

The disciples are invited to contemplate Jesus raised up on the Cross, where, in his silence and solitude, "the Word come forth from silence" prophetically affirms the absolute transcendence of God over all created things; in his own flesh he conquers our sin and draws every man and every woman to himself, giving to all the new life of the

Resurrection (cf. Jn 12:32; 19:34, 37). It is in the contemplation of the Crucified Christ that all vocations find their inspiration. From this contemplation, together with the primordial gift of the Spirit, all gifts, and in particular the gift of the consecrated life, take their origin. After Mary, the Mother of Jesus, it is John who receives this gift. John is the disciple whom Jesus loved, the witness who together with Mary stood at the foot of the Cross (cf. Jn 19:26-27). His decision to consecrate himself totally is the fruit of the divine love which envelops him, sustains him and fills his heart. John, together with Mary, is among the first in a long line of men and women who, from the beginning of the Church until the end, are touched by God's love and feel called to follow the Lamb, once sacrificed and now alive, wherever he goes (cf. Rev 14:1-5).

The Paschal dimension of the consecrated life

24. In the different forms of life inspired by the Spirit throughout history, consecrated persons discover that the more they stand at the foot of the Cross of Christ, the more immediately and profoundly they experience the truth of God who is love. It is precisely on the Cross that the One who in death appears to human eyes as disfigured and without beauty, so much so that the bystanders cover their faces (cf. Is 53:2-3), fully reveals the beauty and power of God's love. Saint Augustine says: "Beautiful is God, the Word with God... He is beautiful in heaven, beautiful on earth; beautiful in the womb, beautiful in his parents' arms, beautiful in his miracles, beautiful in his sufferings; beautiful in inviting to life, beautiful in not worrying about death, beautiful in giving up his life and beautiful in taking it up again; he is beautiful on the Cross, beautiful in the tomb, beautiful in heaven. Listen to the song with understanding, and let not the weakness of the flesh distract your eyes from the splendour of his beauty." The consecrated life reflects the splendour of this love because, by its fidelity to the mystery of the Cross, it confesses that it believes and lives by the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this way it helps the Church to remain aware that the Cross is the superabundance of God's love poured out upon this world, and that it is the great sign of Christ's saving presence, especially in the midst of difficulties and trials. This is the testimony given constantly and with deeply admirable courage by a great number of consecrated persons, many of whom live in difficult situations, even suffering persecution and martyrdom. Their fidelity to the one Love is revealed and confirmed in the humility of a hidden life, in the acceptance of sufferings for the sake of completing in their own flesh "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col 1:24), in silent sacrifice and abandonment to God's holy will, and in serene fidelity even as their strength and personal authority wane. Fidelity to God also inspires devotion to neighbour, a devotion which consecrated persons live out not without sacrifice by constantly interceding for the needs of their brothers and sisters, generously serving the poor and the sick, sharing the hardships of others and participating in the concerns and trials of the Church.

Witnesses to Christ in the world

25. The Paschal Mystery is also the wellspring of the Church's missionary nature, which is reflected in the whole of the Church's life. It is expressed in a distinctive way in the consecrated life. Over and above the charisms proper to those Institutes which are devoted to the mission ad gentes or which are engaged in ordinary apostolic activity, it can be said that the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life. To the extent that consecrated persons live a life completely devoted to the Father (cf. Lk 2:49; Jn 4:34), held fast by Christ (cf. Jn 15:16; Gal 1:15-16) and animated by the Spirit (cf. Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:4), they cooperate effectively in the mission of the Lord Jesus (cf. Jn 20:21) and contribute in a particularly profound way to the renewal of the world.

The first missionary duty of consecrated persons is to themselves, and they fulfil it by opening their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit of Christ. Their witness helps the whole Church to remember that the most important thing is to serve God freely, through Christ's grace which is communicated to believers through the gift of the Spirit. Thus they proclaim to the world the peace which comes from the Father, the dedication witnessed to by the Son, and the joy which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Consecrated persons will be missionaries above all by continually deepening their awareness of having been called and chosen by God, to whom they must therefore direct and offer everything that they are and have, freeing themselves from the obstacles which could hinder the totality of their response. In this way they will become true signs of Christ in the world. Their lifestyle too must clearly show the ideal which they profess, and thus present itself as a living sign of God and as an eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel. The Church must always seek to make her presence visible in everyday life, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs. In this regard the Church has a right to expect a significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ. Since the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership in a particular Religious family, I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit, suitably adapted to the conditions of time and place. Where valid reasons of their apostolate call for it, Religious, in conformity with the norms of their Institute, may also dress in a simple and modest manner, with an appropriate symbol, in such a way that their consecration is recognizable. Institutes which from their origin or by provision of their Constitutions do not have a specific habit should ensure that the dress of their members corresponds in dignity and simplicity to the nature of their vocation.

Eschatological dimension of the consecrated life

26. Since the demands of the apostolate today are increasingly urgent, and since involvement in temporal affairs risks becoming ever more absorbing, it is particularly opportune to draw attention once more to the eschatological nature of the consecrated life.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt 6:21). The unique treasure of the Kingdom gives rise to desire, anticipation, commitment and witness. In the early Church, the expectation of the Lord's coming was lived in a particularly intense way. With the passing of the centuries, the Church has not ceased to foster this attitude of hope: she has continued to invite the faithful to look to the salvation which is waiting to be revealed, "for the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31; cf. 1 Pet 1:3-6). It is in this perspective that we can understand more clearly the role of consecrated life as an eschatological sign. In fact it has constantly been taught that the consecrated life is a foreshadowing of the future Kingdom. The Second Vatican Council proposes this teaching anew when it states that consecration better "foretells the resurrected state and the glory of the heavenly Kingdom." It does this above all by means of the vow of virginity, which tradition has always understood as an anticipation of the world to come, already at work for the total transformation of man. Those who have dedicated their lives to Christ cannot fail to live in the hope of meeting him, in order to be with him for ever. Hence the ardent expectation and desire to "be plunged into the Fire of Love which burns in them and which is none other than the Holy Spirit", an expectation and desire sustained by the gifts which the Lord freely bestows on those who yearn for the things that are above (cf. Col 3:1). Immersed in the things of the Lord, the consecrated person remembers that "here we have no lasting city" (Heb 13:14), for "our commonwealth is in heaven" (Phil 3:20). The one thing necessary is to seek God's "Kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33), with unceasing prayer for the Lord's coming.

Active expectation: commitment and watchfulness

27. "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20). This expectation is anything but passive: although directed towards the future Kingdom, it expresses itself in work and mission, that the Kingdom may become present here and now through the spirit of the Beatitudes, a spirit capable of giving rise in human society to effective aspirations for justice, peace, solidarity and forgiveness.

This is clearly shown by the history of the consecrated life, which has always borne abundant fruit even for this world. By their charisms, consecrated persons become signs of the Spirit pointing to a new future enlightened by faith and by Christian hope. Eschatological expectation becomes mission, so that the Kingdom may become ever more fully established here and now. The prayer "Come, Lord Jesus!" is accompanied by another: "Thy Kingdom come!" (Mt 6:10). Those who vigilantly await the fulfilment of Christ's promises are able to bring hope to their brothers and sisters who are often discouraged and pessimistic about the future. There is a hope founded on God's promise contained in the revealed word: the history of humanity is moving towards "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1), where the Lord "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). The consecrated life is at the service of this definitive manifestation of the divine glory, when all flesh will see the salvation of God (cf. Lk 3:6; Is 40:5). The Christian East emphasizes this dimension when it considers monks as angels of God on earth who proclaim the renewal of the world in Christ. In the West, monasticism is the celebration of memory and expectation: memory of the wonders God has wrought and expectation of the final fulfilment of our hope. Monasticism and the contemplative life are a constant reminder that the primacy of God gives full meaning and joy to human lives, because men and women are made for God, and their hearts are restless until they rest in him.

The Virgin Mary, model of consecration and discipleship

28. Mary is the one who, from the moment of her Immaculate Conception, most perfectly reflects the divine beauty. "All beautiful" is the title with which the Church invokes her. "The relationship with Mary most holy, which for every believer stems from his or her union with Christ, is even more pronounced in the life of consecrated persons... Mary's presence is of fundamental importance both for the spiritual life of each consecrated person and for the solidity, unity and progress of the whole community". Mary in fact is the sublime example of perfect consecration, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him. Chosen by the Lord, who wished to accomplish in her the mystery of the Incarnation, she reminds consecrated persons of the primacy of God's initiative. At the same time, having given her assent to the divine Word, made flesh in her, Mary is the model of the acceptance of grace by human creatures. Having lived with Jesus and Joseph in the hidden years of Nazareth, and present at her Son's side at crucial moments of his public life, the Blessed Virgin teaches unconditional discipleship and diligent service. In Mary, "the temple of the Holy Spirit, "all the splendour of the new creation shines forth. Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the "virginal and humble life" of Christ also means imitation of Mary's way of life. In the Blessed Virgin Mary, consecrated

persons also find a Mother who is altogether unique. Indeed, if the new motherhood conferred on Mary at Calvary is a gift for all Christians, it has a specific value for those who have completely consecrated their lives to Christ. "Behold your mother!" (Jn 19:27): Jesus' words to the disciple "whom he loved" (Jn 19:26) are particularly significant for the lives of consecrated persons. They, like John, are called to take the Blessed Virgin Mary to themselves (cf. Jn 19:27), loving her and imitating her in the radical manner which befits their vocation, and experiencing in return her special motherly love. The Blessed Virgin shares with them the love which enables them to offer their lives every day for Christ and to cooperate with him in the salvation of the world. Hence a filial relationship to Mary is the royal road to fidelity to one's vocation and a most effective help for advancing in that vocation and living it fully.

III. IN THE CHURCH AND FOR THE CHURCH

"It is well that we are here": the consecrated life in the mystery of the Church

29. In the episode of the Transfiguration, Peter speaks on behalf of the other Apostles: "It is well that we are here" (Mt 17:4). The experience of Christ's glory, though completely filling his mind and heart, does not set him apart but rather unites him more closely to the "we" of the Apostles.

This dimension of "we" invites us to consider the place which the consecrated life occupies in the mystery of the Church. In recent years, theological reflection on the nature of the consecrated life has deepened the new insights which emerged from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. In the light of that teaching it has been recognized that the profession of the evangelical counsels indisputably belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. This means that the consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature. This is clearly seen from the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is intimately connected with the mystery of Christ, and has the duty of making somehow present the way of life which Jesus himself chose and indicated as an absolute eschatological value. Jesus himself, by calling some men and women to abandon everything in order to follow him, established this type of life which, under the guidance of the Spirit, would gradually develop down the centuries into the various forms of the consecrated life. The idea of a Church made up only of sacred ministers and lay people does not therefore conform to the intentions of her divine Founder, as revealed to us by the Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament.

New and special consecration

30. In the Church's tradition religious profession is considered to be a special and fruitful deepening of the consecration received in Baptism, inasmuch as it is the means by which the close union with Christ already begun in Baptism develops in the gift of a fuller, more explicit and authentic configuration to him through the profession of the evangelical counsels. This further consecration, however, differs in a special way from baptismal consecration, of which it is not a necessary consequence. In fact, all those reborn in Christ are called to live out, with the strength which is the Spirit's gift, the chastity appropriate to their state of life, obedience to God and to the Church, and a reasonable detachment from material possessions: for all are called to holiness, which consists in the perfection of love. But Baptism in itself does not include the call to celibacy or virginity, the renunciation of possessions or obedience to a superior, in the form proper to the evangelical counsels. The profession of the evangelical counsels thus presupposes a particular gift of God not given to everyone, as Jesus himself emphasizes with respect to voluntary celibacy (cf. Mt 19:10-12). This call is accompanied, moreover, by a specific gift of the Holy Spirit, so that consecrated persons can respond to their vocation and mission. For this reason, as the liturgies of the East and West testify in the rite of monastic or religious profession and in the consecration of virgins, the Church invokes the gift of the Holy Spirit upon those who have been chosen and joins their oblation to the sacrifice of Christ. The profession of the evangelical counsels is also a development of the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation, but it goes beyond the ordinary demands of the consecration received in Confirmation by virtue of a special gift of the Spirit which opens the way to new possibilities and fruits of holiness and apostolic work. This can clearly be seen from the history of the consecrated life. As for priests who profess the evangelical counsels, experience itself shows that the Sacrament of Holy Orders finds a particular fruitfulness in this consecration, inasmuch as it requires and fosters a closer union with the Lord. The priest who professes the evangelical counsels is especially favoured in that he reproduces in his life the fullness of the mystery of Christ, thanks also to the specific spirituality of his Institute and the apostolic dimension of its proper charism. In the priest, in fact, the vocation to the priesthood and the vocation to the consecrated life converge in a profound and dynamic unity. Also of immeasurable value is the contribution made to the Church's life by religious priests completely devoted to contemplation. Especially in the celebration of the Eucharist they carry out an act of the Church and for the Church, to which they join the offering of themselves, in communion with Christ who offers himself to the Father for the salvation of the whole world.

Relationships between the different states of Christian life

31. The different ways of life which, in accordance with the plan of the Lord Jesus, make up the life of the Church have mutual relationships which merit consideration.

By virtue of their rebirth in Christ, all the faithful share a common dignity; all are called to holiness; all cooperate in the building up of the one Body of Christ, each in accordance with the proper vocation and gift which he or she has received from the Spirit (cf. Rom 12:3-8). The equal dignity of all members of the Church is the work of the Spirit, is rooted in Baptism and Confirmation and is strengthened by the Eucharist. But diversity is also a work of the Spirit. It is he who establishes the Church as an organic communion in the diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries. The vocations to the lay life, to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life can be considered paradigmatic, inasmuch as all particular vocations, considered separately or as a whole, are in one way or another derived from them or lead back to them, in accordance with the richness of God's gift. These vocations are also at the service of one another, for the growth of the Body of Christ in history and for its mission in the world. Everyone in the Church is consecrated in Baptism and Confirmation, but the ordained ministry and the consecrated life each presuppose a distinct vocation and a specific form of consecration, with a view to a particular mission. For the mission of the lay faithful, whose proper task is to "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God", the consecration of Baptism and Confirmation common to all members of the People of God is a sufficient foundation. In addition to this basic consecration, ordained ministers receive the consecration of ordination in order to carry on the apostolic ministry in time. Consecrated persons, who embrace the evangelical counsels, receive a new and special consecration which, without being sacramental, commits them to making their own - in chastity, poverty and obedience - the way of life practised personally by Jesus and proposed by him to his disciples. Although these different categories are a manifestation of the one mystery of Christ, the lay faithful have as their specific but not exclusive characteristic, activity in the world; the clergy, ministry; consecrated men and women, special conformity to Christ, chaste, poor and obedient.

The special value of the consecrated life

32. Within this harmonious constellation of gifts, each of the fundamental states of life is entrusted with the task of expressing, in its own way, one or other aspect of the one mystery of Christ. While the lay life has a particular mission of ensuring that the Gospel message is proclaimed in the temporal sphere, in the sphere of ecclesial communion an indispensable ministry is carried out by those in Holy Orders, and in a special way by Bishops. The latter have the task of guiding the People of God by the teaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of sacred power in the service of ecclesial communion, which is an organic communion, hierarchically structured. As a way of showing forth the Church's holiness, it is to be recognized that the consecrated life, which mirrors Christ's own way of life, has an objective superiority. Precisely for this reason, it is an especially rich manifestation of Gospel values and a more complete expression of the Church's purpose, which is the sanctification of humanity. The consecrated life proclaims and in a certain way anticipates the future age, when the fullness of the Kingdom of heaven, already present in its first fruits and in mystery, will be achieved, and when the children of the resurrection will take neither wife nor husband, but will be like the angels of God (cf. Mt 22:30). The Church has always taught the pre-eminence of perfect chastity for the sake of the Kingdom, and rightly considers it the "door" of the whole consecrated life. She also shows great esteem for the vocation to marriage, which makes spouses "witnesses to and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church, who signify and share in the love with which Christ has loved his Bride and because of which he delivered himself up on her behalf". In this perspective, common to all consecrated life, there are many different but complementary paths. Men and women Religious completely devoted to contemplation are in a special way an image of Christ praying on the mountain. Consecrated persons engaged in the active life manifest Christ "in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God to the multitudes, in his healing of the sick and the suffering, in his work of converting sinners to a better life, in his solicitude for youth and his goodness to all". Consecrated persons in Secular Institutes contribute in a special way to the coming of the Kingdom of God; they unite in a distinctive synthesis the value of consecration and that of being in the world. As they live their consecration in the world and from the world, "they strive to imbue everything with an evangelical spirit for the strengthening and growth of the Body of Christ". For this purpose they share in the Church's evangelizing mission through their personal witness of Christian living, their commitment to ordering temporal affairs according to God's plan, and their cooperation in service of the ecclesial community, in accordance with the secular way of life which is proper to them.

Bearing witness to the Gospel of the Beatitudes

33. A particular duty of the consecrated life is to remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel, by bearing "splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes". The consecrated life thus continually fosters in the People of God an awareness of the need to respond with holiness of life to the love of God poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), by reflecting in their conduct the sacramental consecration which is brought about by God's power in Baptism, Confirmation or Holy Orders. In fact it is necessary to pass from the holiness communicated in the sacraments to the holiness of daily life. The

consecrated life, by its very existence in the Church, seeks to serve the consecration of the lives of all the faithful, clergy and laity alike.

Nor must it be forgotten that consecrated persons themselves are helped by the witness of the other vocations to live fully and completely their union with the mystery of Christ and the Church in its many different dimensions. By virtue of this mutual enrichment, the mission of consecrated persons becomes more eloquent and effective: this mission is to remind their other brothers and sisters to keep their eyes fixed on the peace which is to come, and to strive for the definitive happiness found in God.

The living image of the Church as Bride

34. In the consecrated life, particular importance attaches to the spousal meaning, which recalls the Church's duty to be completely and exclusively devoted to her Spouse, from whom she receives every good thing. This spousal dimension, which is part of all consecrated life, has a particular meaning for women, who find therein their feminine identity and as it were discover the special genius of their relationship with the Lord.

A moving sign of this is seen in the New Testament passage which portrays Mary with the Apostles in the Upper Room, in prayerful expectation of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:13-14). We can see here a vivid image of the Church as Bride, fully attentive to her Bridegroom and ready to accept his gift. In Peter and the other Apostles there emerges above all the aspect of fruitfulness, as it is expressed in ecclesial ministry, which becomes an instrument of the Spirit for bringing new sons and daughters to birth through the preaching of the word, the celebration of the Sacraments and the giving of pastoral care. In Mary the aspect of spousal receptivity is particularly clear; it is under this aspect that the Church, through her perfect virginal life, brings divine life to fruition within herself. The consecrated life has always been seen primarily in terms of Mary - Virgin and Bride. This virginal love is the source of a particular fruitfulness which fosters the birth and growth of divine life in people's hearts. Following in the footsteps of Mary, the New Eve, consecrated persons express their spiritual fruitfulness by becoming receptive to the Word, in order to contribute to the growth of a new humanity by their unconditional dedication and their living witness. Thus the Church fully reveals her motherhood both in the communication of divine grace entrusted to Peter and in the responsible acceptance of God's gift, exemplified by Mary. God's people, for their part, find in the ordained ministry the means of salvation, and in the consecrated life the incentive to make a full and loving response through all the different forms of Christian service.

IV. GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS

A "transfigured" life: the call to holiness

35. "When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with fear" (Mt 17:6). In the episode of the Transfiguration, the Synoptic Gospels, with varying nuances, point out the fear which overcomes the disciples. Their fascination at the transfigured face of Christ does not prevent them from being fearful before the divine Majesty which overshadows them. Whenever human beings become aware of the glory of God, they also become aware of their own insignificance and experience a sense of fear. Such fear is salutary. It reminds man of God's perfection, and at the same time urges him on with a pressing call to "holiness".

All the sons and daughters of the Church, called by God to "listen to" Christ, necessarily feel a deep need for conversion and holiness. But, as the Synod emphasized, this need in the first place challenges the consecrated life. In fact the vocation of consecrated persons to seek first the Kingdom of God is first and foremost a call to complete conversion, in self-renunciation, in order to live fully for the Lord, so that God may be all in all. Called to contemplate and bear witness to the transfigured face of Christ, consecrated men and women are also called to a "transfigured" existence. The Final Report of the Second Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops made a significant observation in this regard: "Holy men and women have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult circumstances throughout the Church's history. Today we have a tremendous need of saints, for whom we must assiduously implore God. The Institutes of Consecrated Life, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, must be conscious of their special mission in today's Church, and we must encourage them in that mission". The Fathers of the Ninth Assembly of the Synod of Bishops echoed this conviction: "Throughout the Church's history, consecrated life has been a living presence of the Spirit's work, a kind of privileged milieu for absolute love of God and of neighbour, for witness to the divine plan of gathering all humanity into the civilization of love, the great family of the children of God". The Church has always seen in the profession of the evangelical counsels a special path to holiness. The very expressions used to describe it - the school of the Lord's service, the school of love and holiness, the way or state of perfection - indicate the effectiveness and the wealth of means which are proper to this form of evangelical life, and the particular commitment made by those who embrace it. It is not by chance that there have been so many consecrated persons down the centuries who have left behind eloquent testimonies of holiness and have undertaken particularly generous and demanding works of evangelization and service.

Faithfulness to the charism

36. In Christian discipleship and love for the person of Christ there are a number of points concerning the growth of holiness in the consecrated life which merit particular emphasis today.

In the first place, there is the need for fidelity to the founding charism and subsequent spiritual heritage of each Institute. It is precisely in this fidelity to the inspiration of the founders and foundresses, an inspiration which is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, that the essential elements of the consecrated life can be more readily discerned and more fervently put into practice. Fundamental to every charism is a threefold orientation. First, charisms lead to the Father, in the filial desire to seek his will through a process of unceasing conversion, wherein obedience is the source of true freedom, chastity expresses the yearning of a heart unsatisfied by any finite love, and poverty nourishes that hunger and thirst for justice which God has promised to satisfy (cf. Mt 5:6). Consequently the charism of each Institute will lead the consecrated person to belong wholly to God, to speak with God or about God, as is said of Saint Dominic, so that he or she can taste the goodness of the Lord (cf. Ps 34:8) in every situation. Secondly, the charisms of the consecrated life also lead to the Son, fostering an intimate and joyful communion of life with him, in the school of his generous service of God and neighbour. Thus the attitude of consecrated persons "is progressively conformed to Christ; they learn detachment from externals, from the tumult of the senses, from all that keeps man from that freedom which allows him to be grasped by the Spirit". As a result, consecrated persons are enabled to take up the mission of Christ, working and suffering with him in the spreading of his Kingdom. Finally, every charism leads to the Holy Spirit, insofar as it prepares individuals to let themselves be guided and sustained by him, both in their personal spiritual journeys and in their lives of communion and apostolic work, in order to embody that attitude of service which should inspire the true Christian's every choice. In fact it is this threefold relationship which emerges in every founding charism, though with the specific nuances of the various patterns of living. This is so because in every charism there predominates "a profound desire to be conformed to Christ to give witness to some aspect of his mystery". This specific aspect is meant to take shape and develop according to the most authentic tradition of the Institute, as present in its Rule, Constitutions and Statutes.

Creative fidelity

37. Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world. This invitation is first of all a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material and spiritual difficulties of daily life. But it is also a call to pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission, adapting forms, if need be, to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God's inspiration and to the Church's discernment. But all must be fully convinced that the quest for ever greater conformity to the Lord is the guarantee of any renewal which seeks to remain faithful to an Institute's original inspiration. In this spirit there is a pressing need today for every Institute to return to the Rule, since the Rule and Constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church. A greater regard for the Rule will not fail to offer consecrated persons a reliable criterion in their search for the appropriate forms of a witness which is capable of responding to the needs of the times without departing from an Institute's initial inspiration.

Prayer and asceticism: spiritual combat

38. The call to holiness is accepted and can be cultivated only in the silence of adoration before the infinite transcendence of God: "We must confess that we all have need of this silence, filled with the presence of him who is adored: in theology, so as to exploit fully its own sapiential and spiritual soul; in prayer, so that we may never forget that seeing God means coming down the mountain with a face so radiant that we are obliged to cover it with a veil (cf. Ex 34:33); in commitment, so that we will refuse to be locked in a struggle without love and forgiveness. All, believers and non-believers alike, need to learn a silence that allows the Other to speak when and how he wishes, and allows us to understand his words". In practice this involves great fidelity to liturgical and personal prayer, to periods devoted to mental prayer and contemplation, to Eucharistic adoration, to monthly retreats and to spiritual exercises.

There is also a need to rediscover the ascetic practices typical of the spiritual tradition of the Church and of the individual's own Institute. These have been and continue to be a powerful aid to authentic progress in holiness. Asceticism, by helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, is truly indispensable if consecrated persons are to remain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the Cross. It is also necessary to recognize and overcome certain temptations which sometimes, by diabolical deceit, present themselves under the appearance of good. Thus, for example, the legitimate need to be familiar with today's society in order to respond to its challenges can lead to a surrender to passing fashions, with a consequent lessening of spiritual fervour or a succumbing to discouragement. The possibility of a deeper spiritual formation might lead consecrated persons to feel somehow superior to other members of the faithful, while the urgent need for appropriate and necessary training can turn into a frantic quest for efficiency, as if apostolic service depended primarily on human means rather than on God. The praiseworthy desire to become close to the men and women of our day, believers and non-believers, rich and poor,

can lead to the adoption of a secularized lifestyle or the promotion of human values in a merely horizontal direction. Sharing in the legitimate aspirations of one's own nation or culture could lead to embracing forms of nationalism or accepting customs which instead need to be purified and elevated in the light of the Gospel. The path to holiness thus involves the acceptance of spiritual combat. This is a demanding reality which is not always given due attention today. Tradition has often seen an image of this spiritual combat in Jacob's wrestling with the mystery of God, whom he confronts in order to receive his blessing and to see him (cf. Gen 32:23-31). In this episode from the beginnings of biblical history, consecrated persons can recognize a symbol of the asceticism which they need in order to open their hearts to the Lord and to their brothers and sisters.

Fostering holiness

39. Today a renewed commitment to holiness by consecrated persons is more necessary than ever, also as a means of promoting and supporting every Christian's desire for perfection. "It is therefore necessary to inspire in all the faithful a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one's neighbour, especially the most needy". To the degree that they deepen their friendship with God, consecrated persons become better prepared to help their brothers and sisters through valuable spiritual activities such as schools of prayer, spiritual exercises and retreats, days of recollection, spiritual dialogue and direction. In this way people are helped to grow in prayer and will then be better able to discern God's will in their lives and to commit themselves to the courageous and sometimes heroic demands which faith makes of them. Consecrated persons "at the deepest level of their being... are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life, which is thirsty for the divine Absolute and called to holiness. It is to this holiness that they bear witness". The fact that all are called to become saints cannot fail to inspire more and more those who by their very choice of life have the mission of reminding others of that call.

"Rise, and have no fear": a renewed trust

40. "Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear" (Mt 17:7). Like the three Apostles in the episode of the Transfiguration, consecrated persons know from experience that their lives are not always marked by the fervour which makes us exclaim: "It is well that we are here" (Mt 17:4). But it is always a life "touched" by the hand of Christ, a life where his voice is heard, a life sustained by his grace.

"Rise, and have no fear". Obviously, the Master's encouragement is addressed to every Christian. All the more does it apply to those called to "leave everything" and thus to "risk everything" for Christ. This is particularly true whenever one descends from the "mountain" with the Master and sets off on the road which leads from Tabor to Calvary. When Luke relates that Moses and Elijah were speaking with Christ about his Paschal Mystery, it is significant that he uses the term "departure" (éxodos): "they spoke about his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (9:31). "Exodus" is a basic term in Revelation; it evokes the whole of salvation history and expresses the deep meaning of the Paschal Mystery. It is a theme particularly dear to the spirituality of the consecrated life and well expresses its meaning. It inevitably includes everything that pertains to the *mysterium Crucis*. But this difficult "exodus journey", when viewed from the perspective of Tabor, is seen to be a road situated between two lights: the anticipatory light of the Transfiguration and the definitive light of the Resurrection. From the standpoint of the Christian life as a whole, the vocation to the consecrated life is, despite its renunciations and trials, and indeed because of them, a path "of light" over which the Redeemer keeps constant watch: "Rise, and have no fear".

CHAPTER II - SIGNUM FRATERNITATIS

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A SIGN OF COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH

I. PERMANENT VALUES

In the image of the Trinity

41. During his earthly life, the Lord Jesus called those whom he wished in order to have them at his side and to train them to live, according to his example, for the Father and for the mission which he had received from the Father (cf. Mk 3:13-15). He thus inaugurated the new family which down the centuries would include all those ready to "do the will of God" (cf. Mk 3:32-35). After the Ascension, as a result of the gift of the Spirit, a fraternal community formed around the Apostles, gathered in the praise of God and in a concrete experience of communion (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). The life of that community and, even more, the experience of complete sharing with Christ lived out by the Twelve, have always been the model to which the Church has looked whenever she has sought to return to her original fervour and to resume with fresh evangelical vigour her journey through history. The Church is essentially a mystery of communion, "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit". The fraternal life seeks to

reflect the depth and richness of this mystery, taking shape as a human community in which the Trinity dwells, in order to extend in history the gifts of communion proper to the three divine Persons. Many are the settings and the ways in which fraternal communion is expressed in the life of the Church. The consecrated life can certainly be credited with having effectively helped to keep alive in the Church the obligation of fraternity as a form of witness to the Trinity. By constantly promoting fraternal love, also in the form of common life, the consecrated life has shown that sharing in the Trinitarian communion can change human relationships and create a new type of solidarity. In this way it speaks to people both of the beauty of fraternal communion and of the ways which actually lead to it. Consecrated persons live "for" God and "from" God, and precisely for this reason they are able to bear witness to the reconciling power of grace, which overcomes the divisive tendencies present in the human heart and in society.

Fraternal life in love

42. The fraternal life, understood as a life shared in love, is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion. It is practised with special care in Religious Institutes and in Societies of Apostolic Life, where community living acquires special significance. Nor is the dimension of fraternal communion alien to Secular Institutes, or even to forms of the consecrated life lived individually. Hermits, in their profound solitude, do not withdraw from ecclesial communion but serve that communion by their specific charism of contemplation. Consecrated virgins in the world live out their consecration in a special relationship of communion with the particular and universal Church. The same is true of consecrated widows and widowers.

All these people, by practising evangelical discipleship, commit themselves to fulfilling the Lord's "new commandment", to love one another as he has loved us (cf. Jn 13:34). Love led Christ to the gift of self, even to the supreme sacrifice of the Cross. So too, among his disciples, there can be no true unity without that unconditional mutual love which demands a readiness to serve others generously, a willingness to welcome them as they are, without "judging" them (cf. Mt 7:1-2), and an ability to forgive up to "seventy times seven" (Mt 18:22). Consecrated persons, who become "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32) through the love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), experience an interior call to share everything in common: material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable service: "In community life, the power of the Holy Spirit at work in one individual passes at the same time to all. Here not only does each enjoy his own gift, but makes it abound by sharing it with others; and each one enjoys the fruits of the other's gift as if they were his own". In community life, then, it should in some way be evident that, more than an instrument for carrying out a specific mission, fraternal communion is a God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord (cf. Mt 18:20). This comes about through the mutual love of all the members of the community, a love nourished by the word and by the Eucharist, purified in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and sustained by prayer for unity, the special gift of the Spirit to those who obediently listen to the Gospel. It is the Spirit himself who leads the soul to the experience of communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Jn 1:3), a communion which is the source of fraternal life. It is the Spirit who guides communities of the consecrated life in carrying out their mission of service to the Church and to all humanity, in accordance with their original inspiration. In this perspective, special importance attaches to Chapters (or similar meetings), whether particular or general, at which Institutes are called to elect Superiors according to the norms set out in their Constitutions, and to discern, in the light of the Spirit, the best ways to preserve and adapt their charism and their spiritual patrimony to changing historical and cultural situations.

The task of authority

43. In the consecrated life the role of Superiors, including local Superiors, has always been of great importance for the spiritual life and for mission. In these years of change and experimentation, the need to revise this office has sometimes been felt. But it should be recognized that those who exercise authority cannot renounce their obligation as those first responsible for the community, as guides of their brothers and sisters in the spiritual and apostolic life.

In an atmosphere strongly affected by individualism, it is not an easy thing to foster recognition and acceptance of the role which authority plays for the benefit of all. Nevertheless, its importance must be reaffirmed as essential for strengthening fraternal communion and in order not to render vain the obedience professed. While authority must be above all fraternal and spiritual, and while those entrusted with it must know how to involve their brothers and sisters in the decision-making process, it should still be remembered that the final word belongs to authority and, consequently, that authority has the right to see that decisions taken are respected.

The role of the elderly

44. Caring for the elderly and the sick has an important place in the fraternal life, especially at times like the present, when in some parts of the world the percentage of elderly consecrated persons is increasing. The care and concern which these persons deserve arises not only from a clear obligation of charity and gratitude but also from an awareness that their witness greatly serves the Church and their own Institutes, and that their mission continues to be worthwhile

and meritorious, even when for reasons of age or infirmity they have had to abandon their specific apostolate. The elderly and the sick have a great deal to give in wisdom and experience to the community, if only the community can remain close to them with concern and an ability to listen.

More than in any activity, the apostolate consists in the witness of one's own complete dedication to the Lord's saving will, a dedication nourished by the practice of prayer and of penance. The elderly are called in many ways to live out their vocation: by persevering prayer, by patient acceptance of their condition, and by their readiness to serve as spiritual directors, confessors or mentors in prayer.

In the image of the apostolic community

45. The fraternal life plays a fundamental role in the spiritual journey of consecrated persons, both for their constant renewal and for the full accomplishment of their mission in the world. This is evident from the theological motivations which sustain it, and is amply confirmed by experience. I therefore exhort consecrated men and women to commit themselves to strengthening their fraternal life, following the example of the first Christians in Jerusalem who were assiduous in accepting the teaching of the Apostles, in common prayer, in celebrating the Eucharist, and in sharing whatever goods of nature and grace they had (cf. Acts 2: 42-47). Above all I call upon men and women religious and members of Societies of Apostolic Life to show generous mutual love, expressing it in ways which are in keeping with the nature of each Institute, so that every community will be revealed as a luminous sign of the new Jerusalem, "the dwelling of God with men" (Rev 21:3).

The whole Church greatly depends on the witness of communities filled "with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52). She wishes to hold up before the world the example of communities in which solitude is overcome through concern for one another, in which communication inspires in everyone a sense of shared responsibility, and in which wounds are healed through forgiveness, and each person's commitment to communion is strengthened. The nature of the charism in communities of this kind directs their energies, sustains their fidelity and directs the apostolic work of all towards the one mission. If the Church is to reveal her true face to today's world, she urgently needs such fraternal communities, which, by their very existence, contribute to the new evangelization, inasmuch as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the "new commandment".

"Sentire cum Ecclesia"

46. A great task also belongs to the consecrated life in the light of the teaching about the Church as communion, so strongly proposed by the Second Vatican Council. Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion as "witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design". The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a spirituality of communion, promotes a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the Church to grow in depth and extension. The life of communion in fact "becomes a sign for all the world and a compelling force that leads people to faith in Christ... In this way communion leads to mission, and itself becomes mission"; indeed, "communion begets communion: in essence it is a communion that is missionary". In founders and foundresses we see a constant and lively sense of the Church, which they manifest by their full participation in all aspects of the Church's life, and in their ready obedience to the Bishops and especially to the Roman Pontiff. Against this background of love towards Holy Church, "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), we readily understand the devotion of Saint Francis of Assisi for "the Lord Pope", the daughterly outspokenness of Saint Catherine of Siena towards the one whom she called "sweet Christ on earth", the apostolic obedience and the *sentire cum Ecclesia* of Saint Ignatius Loyola, and the joyful profession of faith made by Saint Teresa of Avila: "I am a daughter of the Church". We can also understand the deep desire of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus: "In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love". These testimonies are representative of the full ecclesial communion which the Saints, founders and foundresses, have shared in diverse and often difficult times and circumstances. They are examples which consecrated persons need constantly to recall if they are to resist the particularly strong centrifugal and disruptive forces at work today. A distinctive aspect of ecclesial communion is allegiance of mind and heart to the Magisterium of the Bishops, an allegiance which must be lived honestly and clearly testified to before the People of God by all consecrated persons, especially those involved in theological research, teaching, publishing, catechesis and the use of the means of social communication. Because consecrated persons have a special place in the Church, their attitude in this regard is of immense importance for the whole People of God. Their witness of filial love will give power and forcefulness to their apostolic activity which, in the context of the prophetic mission of all the baptized, is generally distinguished by special forms of cooperation with the Hierarchy. In a specific way, through the richness of their charisms, consecrated persons help the Church to reveal ever more deeply her nature as the sacrament "of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind".

Fraternity in the universal Church

47. Consecrated persons are called to be a leaven of communion at the service of the mission of the universal Church by the very fact that the manifold charisms of their respective Institutes are granted by the Holy Spirit for the good of the entire Mystical Body, whose upbuilding they must serve (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-11). Significantly, "the more excellent

way" (1 Cor 12:31), the "greatest of all" (cf. 1 Cor 13:13), as the Apostle says, is charity, which brings all diversity into one and strengthens everyone to support one another in apostolic zeal. This, precisely, is the scope of the particular bond of communion which the different Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life have with the Successor of Peter in his ministry of unity and missionary universality. The history of spirituality amply illustrates this bond and shows its providential function both in safeguarding the specific identity of the consecrated life and in advancing the missionary expansion of the Gospel. The vigorous spread of the Gospel message, the firm rooting of the Church in so many areas of the world, and the Christian springtime which the young Churches are experiencing today, would be unthinkable - as the Synod Fathers observed - without the contribution of numerous Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Down the centuries they have maintained strong bonds of communion with the Successors of Peter, who found in them a generous readiness to devote themselves to the Church's missionary activity with an availability which, when necessary, went as far as heroism.

All this brings out the character of universality and communion proper to Institutes of Consecrated Life and to Societies of Apostolic Life. Because of their supra-diocesan character, grounded in their special relation to the Petrine ministry, they are also at the service of cooperation between the particular Churches, since they can effectively promote an "exchange of gifts" among them, and thus contribute to an inculturation of the Gospel which purifies, strengthens and ennobles the treasures found in the cultures of all peoples. Today too, the flowering of vocations to the consecrated life in the younger Churches demonstrates the ability of the consecrated life to make present in Catholic unity the needs of different peoples and cultures.

The consecrated life and the particular Church

48. Again, a significant role is played by consecrated persons within the particular Churches. On the basis of the Council's teaching on the Church as communion and mystery, and on the particular Churches as portions of the People of God in which "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative", this aspect of the consecrated life has been systematically explored and codified in various postconciliar documents. These texts bring out clearly the fundamental importance of cooperation between consecrated persons and Bishops for the organic development of diocesan pastoral life. The charisms of the consecrated life can greatly contribute to the building up of charity in the particular Churches.

The various ways of living the evangelical counsels are in fact the expression and fruit of spiritual gifts received by founders and foundresses. As such, they constitute an "experience of the Spirit, transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth". The identity of each Institute is bound up with a particular spirituality and apostolate, which takes shape in a specific tradition marked by objective elements. For this reason the Church is concerned that Institutes should grow and develop in accordance with the spirit of their founders and foundresses, and their own sound traditions. Consequently, each Institute is recognized as having a rightful autonomy, enabling it to follow its own discipline and to keep intact its spiritual and apostolic patrimony. It is the responsibility of local Ordinaries to preserve and safeguard this autonomy. Thus, Bishops are asked to welcome and esteem the charisms of the consecrated life, and to give them a place in the pastoral plans of the Diocese. They should have a particular concern for Institutes of diocesan right, which are entrusted to the special care of the local Bishop. A Diocese which lacked the consecrated life would not only be deprived of many spiritual gifts, of suitable places for people to seek God, of specific apostolic activities and pastoral approaches, but it would also risk a great weakening of that missionary spirit which is characteristic of the majority of Institutes. There is a duty then to respond to the gift of the consecrated life which the Spirit awakens in the particular Churches, by welcoming it with generosity and thanksgiving.

Fruitful and ordered ecclesial communion

49. The Bishop is the father and pastor of the particular Church in its entirety. It is his task to discern and respect individual charisms, and to promote and coordinate them. In his pastoral charity he will therefore welcome the charism of the consecrated life as a grace which is not restricted to any one Institute, but which benefits the whole Church. Bishops will thus seek to support and help consecrated persons, so that, in communion with the Church, they open themselves to spiritual and pastoral initiatives responding to the needs of our time, while remaining faithful to their founding charism. For their part, consecrated persons will not fail to cooperate generously with the particular Churches as much as they can and with respect for their own charism, working in full communion with the Bishop in the areas of evangelization, catechesis and parish life.

It is helpful to recall that, in coordinating their service to the universal Church with their service to the particular Churches, Institutes may not invoke rightful autonomy, or even the exemption which a number of them enjoy, in order to justify choices which actually conflict with the demands of organic communion called for by a healthy ecclesial life. Instead, the pastoral initiatives of consecrated persons should be determined and carried out in cordial and open dialogue between Bishops and Superiors of the different Institutes. Special attention by Bishops to the vocation and mission of Institutes, and respect by the latter for the ministry of Bishops, with ready acceptance of their concrete

pastoral directives for the life of the Diocese: these are two intimately linked expressions of that one ecclesial charity by which all work to build up the organic communion - charismatic and at the same time hierarchically structured - of the whole People of God.

A constant dialogue animated by charity

50. Constant dialogue between Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and Bishops is most valuable in order to promote mutual understanding, which is the necessary precondition for effective cooperation, especially in pastoral matters. Thanks to regular contacts of this kind, Superiors, both men and women, can inform Bishops about the apostolic undertakings which they are planning in Dioceses, in order to agree on the necessary practical arrangements. In the same way, it is helpful for delegates of the Conferences of Major Superiors to be invited to meetings of the Bishops' Conferences and, in turn, for delegates of the Episcopal Conferences to be invited to attend the Conferences of Major Superiors, following predetermined formats. It would be a great help if, where they do not yet exist, mixed commissions of Bishops and Major Superiors were set up at the national level for the joint study of problems of common interest. Likewise, better reciprocal knowledge will result if the theology and the spirituality of the consecrated life are made part of the theological preparation of diocesan priests, and if adequate attention to the theology of the particular Church and to the spirituality of the diocesan clergy is included in the formation of consecrated persons. Finally, it is reassuring to mention that, at the Synod, not only were there many interventions on the doctrine of communion, but great satisfaction was expressed for the experience of dialogue conducted in a climate of mutual trust and openness between the Bishops and the men and women religious present. This led to a desire that "this spiritual experience of communion and cooperation be extended to the whole Church", even after the Synod. It is my hope too that all will grow in the understanding and spirituality of communion.

Fraternity in a divided and unjust world

51. The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries, by opening or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially where today's world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence. Placed as they are within the world's different societies - societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity but uncertain about the ways to attain it - communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony.

Consecrated men and women are sent forth to proclaim, by the witness of their lives, the value of Christian fraternity and the transforming power of the Good News, which makes it possible to see all people as sons and daughters of God, and inspires a self-giving love towards everyone, especially the least of our brothers and sisters. Such communities are places of hope and of the discovery of the Beatitudes, where love, drawing strength from prayer, the wellspring of communion, is called to become a pattern of life and source of joy. In an age characterized by the globalization of problems and the return of the idols of nationalism, international Institutes especially are called to uphold and to bear witness to the sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures. In a climate of fraternity, an openness to the global dimension of problems will not detract from the richness of particular gifts, nor will the affirmation of a particular gift conflict with other gifts or with unity itself. International Institutes can achieve this effectively, inasmuch as they have to face in a creative way the challenge of inculturation, while at the same time preserving their identity.

Communion among different Institutes

52. Fraternal spiritual relations and mutual cooperation among different Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are sustained and nourished by the sense of ecclesial communion. Those who are united by a common commitment to the following of Christ and are inspired by the same Spirit cannot fail to manifest visibly, as branches of the one Vine, the fullness of the Gospel of love. Mindful of the spiritual friendship which often united founders and foundresses during their lives, consecrated persons, while remaining faithful to the character of their own Institute, are called to practise a fraternity which is exemplary and which will serve to encourage the other members of the Church in the daily task of bearing witness to the Gospel.

Saint Bernard's words about the various Religious Orders remain ever timely: "I admire them all. I belong to one of them by observance, but to all of them by charity. We all need one another: the spiritual good which I do not own and possess, I receive from others... In this exile, the Church is still on pilgrimage and is, in a certain sense, plural: she is a single plurality and a plural unity. All our diversities, which make manifest the richness of God's gifts, will continue to exist in the one house of the Father, which has many rooms. Now there is a division of graces; then there will be distinctions of glory. Unity, both here and there, consists in one and the same charity".

Coordinating bodies

53. A significant contribution to communion can be made by the Conferences of Major Superiors and by the Conferences of Secular Institutes. Encouraged and regulated by the Second Vatican Council and by subsequent documents, these bodies have as their principal purpose the promotion of the consecrated life within the framework of the Church's mission.

By means of these bodies, Institutes express the communion which unites them, and they seek the means to reinforce that communion, with respect and esteem for the uniqueness of their different charisms, which reflect the mystery of the Church and the richness of divine wisdom. I encourage Institutes of Consecrated Life to work together, especially in those countries where particularly difficult situations increase the temptation for them to withdraw into themselves, to the detriment of the consecrated life itself and of the Church. Rather, these Institutes should help one another in trying to discern God's plan in this troubled moment of history, in order better to respond to it with appropriate works of the apostolate. In the perspective of a communion open to the challenges of our time, Superiors, men and women, "working in harmony with the Bishops", should seek "to make use of the accomplishments of the best members of each Institute and to offer services which not only help to overcome eventual limits but which create a valid style of formation in consecrated life". exhort the Conferences of Major Superiors and the Conferences of Secular Institutes to maintain frequent and regular contacts with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, as a sign of their communion with the Holy See. An active and trusting relationship ought also to be maintained with the Episcopal Conference of each country. In the spirit of the document *Mutuae Relationes*, these contacts should be established on a stable basis, in order to provide for constant and timely coordination of initiatives as they come up. If all of this is done with perseverance and a spirit of faithful adherence to the directives of the Magisterium, the organizations which promote coordination and communion will prove to be particularly helpful in formulating solutions which avoid misunderstandings and tensions both on the theoretical and practical levels. In this way they will make a positive contribution not only to the growth of communion between Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Bishops, but also to the advancement of the mission of the particular Churches.

Communion and cooperation with the laity

54. In recent years, one of the fruits of the teaching on the Church as communion has been the growing awareness that her members can and must unite their efforts, with a view to cooperation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the Church's mission. This helps to give a clearer and more complete picture of the Church herself, while rendering more effective the response to the great challenges of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts.

Contacts with the laity, in the case of monastic or contemplative Institutes, take the form of a relationship that is primarily spiritual, while for Institutes involved in works of the apostolate these contacts also translate into forms of pastoral cooperation. Members of Secular Institutes, lay or clerical, relate to other members of the faithful at the level of everyday life. Today, often as a result of new situations, many Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes. We may say that, in the light of certain historical experiences such as those of the Secular or Third Orders, a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity.

For a renewed spiritual and apostolic dynamism

55. These new experiences of communion and cooperation should be encouraged for various reasons. They can in fact give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality beyond the confines of the Institute, which will then be in a position to ensure the continuity in the Church of the services typical of the Institute. Another positive consequence will be to facilitate more intense cooperation between consecrated persons and the laity in view of the Institute's mission. Moved by the examples of holiness of the consecrated members, lay men and women will experience at first hand the spirit of the evangelical counsels, and will thus be encouraged to live and bear witness to the spirit of the Beatitudes, in order to transform the world according to God's design. The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate. In whatever activity or ministry they are involved, consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate "the most precious gift: the spirit". For their part, the laity should offer Religious families the invaluable contribution of their "being in the world" and their specific service.

Associates and lay volunteers

56. A significant expression of lay people's sharing in the richness of the consecrated life is their participation in various Institutes under the new form of so-called associate members or, in response to conditions present in certain

cultures, as people who share fully for a certain period of time the Institute's community life and its particular dedication to contemplation or the apostolate. This should always be done in such a way that the identity of the Institute in its internal life is not harmed. His voluntary service, which draws from the richness of the consecrated life, should be held in great esteem; it is however necessary to provide proper formation so that, besides being competent, volunteers always have supernaturally motivated intentions and, in their projects, a strong sense of community and of the Church. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that initiatives involving lay persons at the decision-making level, in order to be considered the work of a specific Institute, must promote the ends of that Institute and be carried out under its responsibility. Therefore, if lay persons take on a directive role, they will be accountable for their actions to the competent Superiors. It is necessary for all this to be examined and regulated by special directives in each Institute, to be approved by higher authority; these directives should indicate the respective responsibilities of the Institute itself, of its communities, associate members and volunteers.

Consecrated persons, sent by their Superiors and remaining subject to them, can take part in specific forms of cooperation in lay initiatives, particularly in organizations and institutions which work with those on the margins of society and which have the purpose of alleviating human suffering. Such collaboration, if prompted and sustained by a clear and strong Christian identity and respectful of the particular character of the consecrated life, can make the radiant power of the Gospel shine forth brightly even in the darkest situations of human life. In recent years, many consecrated persons have become members of one or other of the ecclesial movements which have spread in our time. From these experiences, those involved usually draw benefit, especially in the area of spiritual renewal. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that in certain cases this involvement causes uneasiness and disorientation at the personal or community level, especially when these experiences come into conflict with the demands of the common life or of the Institute's spirituality. It is therefore necessary to take care that membership in these ecclesial movements does not endanger the charism or discipline of the Institute of origin, and that all is done with the permission of Superiors and with the full intention of accepting their decisions.

The dignity and role of consecrated women

57. The Church fully reveals her varied spiritual richness when she overcomes all discrimination and welcomes as a true blessing the gifts lavished by God upon both men and women, considering them in their equal dignity. By virtue of their dedication lived in fullness and in joy, consecrated women are called in a very special way to be signs of God's tender love towards the human race and to be special witnesses to the mystery of the Church, Virgin, Bride and Mother. This mission of theirs was noted by the Synod, in which many consecrated women participated and made their voices heard. Those voices were listened to and appreciated. Thanks also to their contribution, useful directions for the Church's life and her evangelizing mission have emerged. Certainly, the validity of many assertions relating to the position of women in different sectors of society and of the Church cannot be denied. It is equally important to point out that women's new self-awareness also helps men to reconsider their way of looking at things, the way they understand themselves, where they place themselves in history and how they interpret it, and the way they organize social, political, economic, religious and ecclesial life.

Having received from Christ a message of liberation, the Church has the mission to proclaim this message prophetically, promoting ways of thinking and acting which correspond to the mind of the Lord. In this context the consecrated woman, on the basis of her experience of the Church and as a woman in the Church, can help eliminate certain one-sided perspectives which do not fully recognize her dignity and her specific contribution to the Church's life and pastoral and missionary activity. Consecrated women therefore rightly aspire to have their identity, ability, mission and responsibility more clearly recognized, both in the awareness of the Church and in everyday life. Likewise, the future of the new evangelization, as of all other forms of missionary activity, is unthinkable without a renewed contribution from women, especially consecrated women.

New possibilities of presence and action

58. It is therefore urgently necessary to take certain concrete steps, beginning by providing room for women to participate in different fields and at all levels, including decision-making processes, above all in matters which concern women themselves.

Moreover, the formation of consecrated women, no less than that of men, should be adapted to modern needs and should provide sufficient time and suitable institutional opportunities for a systematic education, extending to all areas, from the theological-pastoral to the professional. Pastoral and catechetical formation, always important, is particularly relevant in view of the new evangelization, which calls for new forms of participation also on the part of women. Clearly, a more solid formation, while helping consecrated women to understand better their own gifts, cannot but encourage within the Church the reciprocity which is needed. In the field of theological, cultural and spiritual studies, much can be expected from the genius of women, not only in relation to specific aspects of feminine consecrated life, but also in understanding the faith in all its expressions. In this regard, the history of spirituality owes much to Saints like Teresa of Jesus and Catherine of Siena, the first two women to be given the title "Doctor of the

Church", and to so many other mystics for their exploration of the mystery of God and their analysis of his action in believers! The Church depends a great deal on consecrated women for new efforts in fostering Christian doctrine and morals, family and social life, and especially in everything that affects the dignity of women and respect for human life. In fact, "women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a new feminism' which rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination', in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation". Here is reason to hope that a fuller acknowledgement of the mission of women will provide feminine consecrated life with a heightened awareness of its specific role and increased dedication to the cause of the Kingdom of God. This will be expressed in many different works, such as involvement in evangelization, educational activities, participation in the formation of future priests and consecrated persons, animating Christian communities, giving spiritual support, and promoting the fundamental values of life and peace. To consecrated women and their extraordinary capacity for dedication, I once again express the gratitude and admiration of the whole Church, which supports them so that they will live their vocation fully and joyfully, and feel called to the great task of helping to educate the woman of today.

II. CONTINUITY IN THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT: FAITHFULNESS IN THE COURSE OF CHANGE

Cloistered nuns

59. The monastic life of women and the cloister deserve special attention because of the great esteem in which the Christian community holds this type of life, which is a sign of the exclusive union of the Church as Bride with her Lord, whom she loves above all things. Indeed, the life of cloistered nuns, devoted in a special way to prayer, to asceticism and diligent progress in the spiritual life, "is nothing other than a journey to the heavenly Jerusalem and an anticipation of the eschatological Church immutable in its possession and contemplation of God". In the light of this vocation and ecclesial mission, the cloister responds to the need, felt as paramount, to be with the Lord. Choosing an enclosed space where they will live their lives, cloistered nuns share in Christ's emptying of himself by means of a radical poverty, expressed in their renunciation not only of things but also of "space", of contacts, of so many benefits of creation. This particular way of offering up the "body" allows them to enter more fully into the Eucharistic mystery. They offer themselves with Jesus for the world's salvation. Their offering, besides its elements of sacrifice and expiation, takes on the aspect of thanksgiving to the Father, by sharing in the thanksgiving of the beloved Son. Rooted in this profound spiritual aspiration, the cloister is not only an ascetic practice of very great value but also a way of living Christ's Passover. From being an experience of "death", it becomes a superabundance of life, representing a joyful proclamation and prophetic anticipation of the possibility offered to every person and to the whole of humanity to live solely for God in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom 6:11). The cloister brings to mind that space in the heart where every person is called to union with the Lord. Accepted as a gift and chosen as a free response of love, the cloister is the place of spiritual communion with God and with the brethren, where the limitation of space and contacts works to the advantage of interiorizing Gospel values (cf. Jn 13:34; Mt 5:3, 8). Even in the simplicity of their life, cloistered communities, set like cities on a hilltop or lights on a lampstand (cf. Mt 5:14-15), visibly represent the goal towards which the entire community of the Church travels. "Eager to act and yet devoted to contemplation", the Church advances down the paths of time with her eyes fixed on the future restoration of all things in Christ, when she will appear "in glory with her Spouse (cf. Col 3:1-4)", and Christ will deliver "the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power... that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:24, 28). To these dear Sisters, therefore, I extend my gratitude and I encourage them to remain faithful to the cloistered life according to their particular charism. Thanks to their example, this way of life continues to draw many vocations, attracting people by the radical nature of a "spousal" existence dedicated totally to God in contemplation. As an expression of pure love which is worth more than any work, the contemplative life generates an extraordinary apostolic and missionary effectiveness. The Synod Fathers expressed great esteem for the cloistered life, while at the same time giving attention to requests made by some with respect to its concrete discipline. The Synod's suggestions in this regard and especially the desire that provision be made for giving Major Superiors more authority to grant dispensations from enclosure for just and sufficient reasons, will be carefully considered, in the light of the path of renewal already undertaken since the Second Vatican Council. In this way, the various forms and degrees of cloister - from papal and constitutional cloister to monastic cloister - will better correspond to the variety of contemplative Institutes and monastic traditions. As the Synod itself emphasized, associations and federations of monasteries are to be encouraged, as already recommended by Pope Pius XII and the Second Vatican Council, especially where there are no other effective forms of coordination or help, with a view to safeguarding and promoting the values of contemplative life. Such bodies, which must always respect the legitimate autonomy of monasteries, can in fact offer valuable help in adequately resolving common problems, such as appropriate renewal, initial and continuing formation, mutual economic support and even the reorganization of the monasteries themselves.

Religious brothers

60. According to the traditional doctrine of the Church, the consecrated life by its nature is neither lay nor clerical. For this reason the "lay consecration" of both men and women constitutes a state which in its profession of the evangelical counsels is complete in itself. Consequently, both for the individual and for the Church, it is a value in itself, apart from the sacred ministry.

Following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod expressed great esteem for the kind of consecrated life in which religious brothers provide valuable services of various kinds, inside or outside the community, participating in this way in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel and bearing witness to it with charity in everyday life. Indeed, some of these services can be considered ecclesial ministries, granted by legitimate authority. This requires an appropriate and integral formation: human, spiritual, theological, pastoral and professional. According to the terminology currently in use, Institutes which, by reason of their founders' design or by legitimate tradition, have a character and purpose which do not entail the exercise of Holy Orders are called "Lay Institutes". Nonetheless the Synod pointed out that this terminology does not adequately express the particular nature of the vocation of the members of these Religious Institutes. In fact, although they perform many works in common with the lay faithful, these men do so insofar as they are consecrated, and thereby express the spirit of total self-giving to Christ and the Church, in accordance with their specific charism. For this reason the Synod Fathers, in order to avoid ambiguity and confusion with the secular state of the lay faithful, proposed the term Religious Institutes of Brothers. This proposal is significant, especially when we consider that the term "brother" suggests a rich spirituality. "These Religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with him, 'the firstborn among many brothers' (Rom 8:29); brothers to one another, in mutual love and working together in the Church in the same service of what is good; brothers to everyone, in their witness to Christ's love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; brothers for a greater brotherhood in the Church". By living in a special way this aspect of Christian and consecrated life, Religious Brothers are an effective reminder to Religious Priests themselves of the fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ, to be lived among themselves and with every man and woman, and they proclaim to all the Lord's words: "And you are all brothers" (Mt 23:8). In these Religious Institutes of Brothers nothing prevents certain members from receiving Holy Orders for the priestly service of the religious community, provided that this is approved by the General Chapter. However, the Second Vatican Council does not give any explicit encouragement for this, precisely because it wishes Institutes of Brothers to remain faithful to their vocation and mission. The same holds true with regard to assuming the office of Superior, since that office reflects in a special way the nature of the Institute itself. The vocation of Brothers in what are known as "clerical" Institutes is different, since, according to the design of the founder or by reason of legitimate tradition, these Institutes presuppose the exercise of Holy Orders, are governed by clerics, and as such are approved by Church authority. In these Institutes the sacred ministry is constitutive of the charism itself and determines its nature, purpose and spirit. The presence of Brothers constitutes a different form of participation in an Institute's mission, through services rendered both within the community and in the apostolate, in collaboration with those who exercise the priestly ministry.

Mixed Institutes

61. Some Religious Institutes, which in the founder's original design were envisaged as a brotherhood in which all the members, priests and those who were not priests, were considered equal among themselves, have acquired a different form with the passing of time. It is necessary that these Institutes, known as "mixed", evaluate on the basis of a deeper understanding of their founding charism whether it is appropriate and possible to return to their original inspiration.

The Synod Fathers expressed the hope that in these Institutes all the Religious would be recognized as having equal rights and obligations, with the exception of those which stem from Holy Orders. A special Commission has been established to examine and resolve the problems connected with this issue; it is necessary to await this Commission's conclusions before coming to suitable decisions in accordance with what will be authoritatively determined.

New forms of the evangelical life

62. The Spirit, who at different times has inspired numerous forms of consecrated life, does not cease to assist the Church, whether by fostering in already existing Institutes a commitment to renewed faithfulness to the founding charism, or by giving new charisms to men and women of our own day so that they can start institutions responding to the challenges of our times. A sign of this divine intervention is to be found in the so-called new Foundations, which display new characteristics compared to those of traditional Foundations.

The originality of the new communities often consists in the fact that they are composed of mixed groups of men and women, of clerics and lay persons, of married couples and celibates, all of whom pursue a particular style of life. These communities are sometimes inspired by one or other traditional form adapted to the needs of modern society. Their commitment to the evangelical life also takes on different forms, while, as a general rule, they are all characterized by an intense aspiration to community life, poverty and prayer. Both clerics and lay persons share in the duties of governing according to the responsibilities assigned to them, and the apostolate focuses on the demands of the new evangelization. If, on one hand, there is reason to rejoice at the Holy Spirit's action, there is, on the other, a need for discernment regarding these charisms. A fundamental principle, when speaking of the consecrated life, is that the

specific features of the new communities and their styles of life must be founded on the essential theological and canonical elements proper to the consecrated life. This discernment is necessary at both the local and universal level, in order to manifest a common obedience to the one Spirit. In dioceses, Bishops should examine the witness of life and the orthodoxy of the founders of such communities, their spirituality, the ecclesial awareness shown in carrying out their mission, the methods of formation and the manner of incorporation into the community. They should wisely evaluate possible weaknesses, watching patiently for the sign of results (cf. Mt 7:16), so that they may acknowledge the authenticity of the charism. In a special way, Bishops are required to determine, according to clearly established criteria, the suitability of any members of these communities who wish to receive Holy Orders.orthy of praise are those forms of commitment which some Christian married couples assume in certain associations and movements. They confirm by means of a vow the obligation of chastity proper to the married state and, without neglecting their duties towards their children, profess poverty and obedience. They do so with the intention of bringing to the perfection of charity their love, already "consecrated" in the Sacrament of Matrimony. However, by reason of the above-mentioned principle of discernment, these forms of commitment cannot be included in the specific category of the consecrated life. This necessary clarification regarding the nature of such experiences in no way intends to underestimate this particular path of holiness, from which the action of the Holy Spirit, infinitely rich in gifts and inspirations, is certainly not absent. In view of such a wealth of gifts and creative energies, it seems appropriate to set up a Commission to deal with questions relating to new forms of consecrated life. The purpose of this Commission will be to determine criteria of authenticity which will help discernment and decision-making. Among its other tasks, this Commission will evaluate, in the light of the experience of recent decades, which new forms of consecration can, with pastoral prudence and to the advantage of all, be officially approved by Church authority, in order to be proposed to the faithful who are seeking a more perfect Christian life. New associations of evangelical life are not alternatives to already existing Institutions, which continue to hold the pre-eminent place assigned to them by tradition. Nonetheless, the new forms are also a gift of the Spirit, enabling the Church to follow her Lord in a constant outpouring of generosity, attentive to God's invitations revealed through the signs of the times. Thus the Church appears before the world with many forms of holiness and service, as "a kind of instrument or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of mankind". The older Institutes, many of which have been tested by the severest of hardships, which they have accepted courageously down the centuries, can be enriched through dialogue and an exchange of gifts with the Foundations appearing in our own day. In this way the vigour of the different forms of consecrated life, from the oldest to the most recent, as well as the vitality of the new communities, will renew faithfulness to the Holy Spirit, who is the source of communion and unceasing newness of life.

III. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Difficulties and future prospects

63. The changes taking place in society and the decrease in the number of vocations are weighing heavily on the consecrated life in some regions of the world. The apostolic works of many Institutes and their very presence in certain local Churches are endangered. As has already occurred at other times in history, there are Institutes which even run the risk of disappearing altogether. The universal Church is profoundly grateful for the great contribution which these Institutes have made to building her up through their witness and service. The trials of the present do not take away from their merits and the positive results of their efforts.

For other Institutes, there is the problem of reassessing their apostolate. This task, which is difficult and often painful, requires study and discernment in the light of certain criteria. For example, it is necessary to safeguard the significance of an Institute's own charism, to foster community life, to be attentive to the needs of both the universal and particular Church, to show concern for what the world neglects, and to respond generously and boldly to the new forms of poverty through concrete efforts, even if necessarily on a small scale, and above all in the most abandoned areas. The various difficulties stemming from the decline in personnel and apostolates must in no way lead to a loss of confidence in the evangelical vitality of the consecrated life, which will always be present and active in the Church. While individual Institutes have no claim to permanence, the consecrated life itself will continue to sustain among the faithful the response of love towards God and neighbour. Thus it is necessary to distinguish the historical destiny of a specific Institute or form of consecrated life from the ecclesial mission of the consecrated life as such. The former is affected by changing circumstances; the latter is destined to perdure. This is true of both the contemplative and apostolic forms of consecrated life. On the whole, under the ever creative guidance of the Spirit, the consecrated life is destined to remain a shining witness to the inseparable unity of love of God and love of neighbour. It appears as the living memory of the fruitfulness of God's love. New situations of difficulty are therefore to be faced with the serenity of those who know that what is required of each individual is not success, but commitment to faithfulness. What must be avoided at all costs is the actual breakdown of the consecrated life, a collapse which is not measured by a decrease in numbers but by a failure to cling steadfastly to the Lord and to personal vocation and mission. Rather, by persevering faithfully in the consecrated life, consecrated persons confess with great effectiveness before the world their unwavering trust in the Lord of history, in whose hands are the history and destiny of individuals, institutions and peoples, and therefore also

the realization in time of his gifts. Sad situations of crisis invite consecrated persons courageously to proclaim their faith in Christ's Death and Resurrection, that they may become a visible sign of the passage from death to life.

Fresh efforts in the promotion of vocations

64. The mission of the consecrated life, as well as the vitality of Institutes, undoubtedly depend on the faithful commitment with which consecrated persons respond to their vocation. But they have a future to the extent that still other men and women generously welcome the Lord's call. The problem of vocations is a real challenge which directly concerns the various Institutes but also involves the whole Church. Great spiritual and material energies are being expended in the sphere of vocational promotion, but the results do not always match expectations and efforts. Thus, while vocations to the consecrated life are flourishing in the young Churches and in those which suffered persecution at the hands of totalitarian regimes, they are lacking in countries traditionally rich in vocations, including vocations for the missions.

This difficult situation puts consecrated persons to the test. Sometimes they ask themselves: Have we perhaps lost the capacity to attract new vocations? They must have confidence in the Lord Jesus, who continues to call men and women to follow him. They must entrust themselves to the Holy Spirit, who inspires and bestows the charisms of the consecrated life. Therefore, while we rejoice in the action of the Spirit, who rejuvenates the Bride of Christ by enabling the consecrated life to flourish in many nations, we must also pray unceasingly to the Lord of the harvest, that he will send workers to his Church in order to meet the needs of the new evangelization (cf. Mt 9:37-38). Besides promoting prayer for vocations, it is essential to act, by means of explicit presentation and appropriate catechesis, with a view to encouraging in those called to the consecrated life that free, willing and generous response which carries into effect the grace of vocation. The invitation of Jesus, "Come and see" (Jn 1:39), is the golden rule of pastoral work for promoting vocations, even today. Following the example of founders and foundresses, this work aims at presenting the attraction of the person of the Lord Jesus and the beauty of the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel. A primary responsibility of all consecrated men and women is therefore to propose with courage, by word and example, the ideal of the following of Christ, and then to support the response to the Spirit's action in the heart of those who are called. After the enthusiasm of the first meeting with Christ, there comes the constant struggle of everyday life, a struggle which turns a vocation into a tale of friendship with the Lord. In view of this, the pastoral work of promoting vocations should make use of suitable help, such as spiritual direction, in order to nourish that personal response of love of the Lord which is the necessary condition for becoming disciples and apostles of his Kingdom. Moreover, if the flourishing of vocations evident in some parts of the world justifies optimism and hope, the lack of them in other areas must not lead either to discouragement or to the temptation to practise lax and unwise recruitment. The task of promoting vocations should increasingly express a joint commitment of the whole Church. It calls for the active collaboration of pastors, religious, families and teachers, as required in something which forms an integral part of the overall pastoral plan of every particular Church. In every Diocese there should be this common endeavour, which coordinates and promotes the efforts of everyone, not jeopardizing, but rather supporting, the vocational activity of each Institute. The effective cooperation of the whole People of God, with the support of Providence, cannot but give rise to an abundance of divine gifts. Christian solidarity should abound in meeting the needs of vocational formation in countries which are economically poorer. The recruitment of vocations in these countries should be carried out by the various Institutes in full accord with the Churches of the region, and on the basis of an active and long-term involvement in their pastoral life. The most authentic way to support the Spirit's action is for Institutes to invest their best resources generously in vocational work, especially by their serious involvement in working with youth.

Commitment to initial formation

65. The Synod Assembly paid special attention to the formation of those who wish to consecrate themselves to the Lord, and recognized its decisive importance. The primary objective of the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission. To say "yes" to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called. One's whole life must be open to the action of the Holy Spirit, travelling the road of formation with generosity, and accepting in faith the means of grace offered by the Lord and the Church. Formation should therefore have a profound effect on individuals, so that their every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God. Since the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in his total self-giving, this must also be the principal objective of formation. Formation is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father. If this is the purpose of the consecrated life, the manner of preparing for it should include and express the character of wholeness. Formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behaviour and intentions. Precisely because it aims at the transformation of the whole person, it is clear that the commitment to formation never ends. Indeed, at every stage of life, consecrated persons must be offered opportunities to grow in their commitment to the charism and mission of their Institute. For formation to be complete, it must include every aspect of Christian life. It

must therefore provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the harmonious integration of all its various aspects. Sufficient time should be reserved for initial formation, understood as a process of development which passes through every stage of personal maturity - from the psychological and spiritual to the theological and pastoral. In the case of those studying for the priesthood, this initial formation coincides with and fits well into a specific course of studies, as part of a broader formation programme.

The work of those responsible for formation

66. God the Father, through the unceasing gift of Christ and the Spirit, is the educator par excellence of those who consecrate themselves to him. But in this work he makes use of human instruments, placing more mature brothers and sisters at the side of those whom he calls. Formation then is a sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions the inner attitudes of the Son in the hearts of young men and women. Those in charge of formation must therefore be very familiar with the path of seeking God, so as to be able to accompany others on this journey. Sensitive to the action of grace, they will also be able to point out those obstacles which are less obvious. But above all they will disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished. They will combine the illumination of spiritual wisdom with the light shed by human means, which can be a help both in discerning the call and in forming the new man or woman, until they are genuinely free. The chief instrument of formation is personal dialogue, a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness which should take place regularly and with a certain frequency.

Because sensitive tasks are involved, the training of suitable directors of formation, who will fulfil their task in a spirit of communion with the whole Church, is very important. It will be helpful to establish appropriate structures for the training of those responsible for formation, preferably in places where they can be in contact with the culture in which their pastoral service will later be carried out. In the work of formation, the more solidly established Institutes should help those of more recent foundation by contributing some of their best members.

Formation in community and for the apostolate

67. Since formation must also have a communal dimension, the community is the chief place of formation in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Initiation into the hardships and joys of community life takes place in the community itself. Through the fraternal life each one learns to live with those whom God has put at his or her side, accepting their positive traits along with their differences and limitations. Each one learns to share the gifts received for the building up of all, because "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). At the same time, from the moment of initial formation, community life must disclose the essential missionary dimension of consecration. Thus, during the period of initial formation, Institutes of Consecrated Life do well to provide practical experiences which are prudently followed by the one responsible for formation, enabling candidates to test, in the context of the local culture, their skills for the apostolate, their ability to adapt and their spirit of initiative.

On the one hand, it is important for consecrated persons gradually to develop a critical judgement, based on the Gospel, regarding the positive and negative values of their own culture and of the culture in which they will eventually work. On the other hand, they must be trained in the difficult art of interior harmony, of the interaction between love of God and love of one's brothers and sisters; they must likewise learn that prayer is the soul of the apostolate, but also that the apostolate animates and inspires prayer.

The need for a complete and updated "ratio"

68. A definite period of formation extending up to final profession is recommended both for women's Institutes, and for men's Institutes as regards Religious Brothers. Essentially, this is also true for cloistered communities, which ought to set up suitable programmes, aimed at imparting a genuine preparation for the contemplative life and its particular mission in the Church.

The Synod Fathers earnestly asked all Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to draw up as soon as possible a ratio institutionis, that is, a formation programme inspired by their particular charism, presenting clearly and in all its stages the course to be followed in order to assimilate fully the spirituality of the respective Institute. The ratio responds to a pressing need today. On the one hand, it shows how to pass on the Institute's spirit so that it will be lived in its integrity by future generations, in different cultures and geographical regions; on the other hand, it explains to consecrated persons how to live that spirit in the different stages of life on the way to full maturity of faith in Christ. While it is true that the renewal of the consecrated life depends primarily on formation, it is equally certain that this training is, in turn, linked to the ability to establish a method characterized by spiritual and pedagogical wisdom, which will gradually lead those wishing to consecrate themselves to put on the mind of Christ the Lord. Formation is a dynamic process by means of which individuals are converted to the Word of God in the depths of their being and, at the same time, learn how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities. At a time when religious values are

increasingly being ignored by society, this plan of formation is doubly important: as a result of it, consecrated persons will not only continue to "see" God with the eyes of faith in a world which ignores his presence, but will also be effective in making his presence in some way "perceptible" through the witness of their charism.

Continuing formation

69. Continuing formation, whether in Institutes of apostolic or contemplative life, is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration. As mentioned above, the formation process is not limited to the initial phase. Due to human limitations, the consecrated person can never claim to have completely brought to life the "new creature" who, in every circumstance of life, reflects the very mind of Christ. Initial formation, then, should be closely connected with continuing formation, thereby creating a readiness on everyone's part to let themselves be formed every day of their lives. Consequently, it will be very important for every Institute to provide, as part of its ratio institutionis, a precise and systematic description of its plan of continuing formation. The chief purpose of this plan is to provide all consecrated persons with a programme which encompasses their whole life. None are exempt from the obligation to grow humanly and as Religious; by the same token, no one can be over-confident and live in self-sufficient isolation. At no stage of life can people feel so secure and committed that they do not need to give careful attention to ensuring perseverance in faithfulness; just as there is no age at which a person has completely achieved maturity.

In a constant search for faithfulness

70. There is a youthfulness of spirit which lasts through time; it arises from the fact that at every stage of life a person seeks and finds a new task to fulfil, a particular way of being, of serving and of loving. In the consecrated life the first years of full involvement in the apostolate are a critical stage, marked by the passage from a supervised life to a situation of full responsibility for one's work. It is important that young consecrated persons be supported and accompanied by a brother or sister who helps them to live to the full the freshness of their love and enthusiasm for Christ. The next stage can present the risk of routine, and the subsequent temptation to give in to disappointment because of meagre results. Middle-aged consecrated persons must therefore be helped, in the light of the Gospel and the charism of their Institute, to renew their original decision, and not confuse the completeness of their dedication with the degree of good results. This will enable them to give a fresh impulse and new motivations to their decision. This is the time to search for what is essential. The stage of maturity, while it brings personal growth, can also bring the danger of a certain individualism, accompanied either by a fear of not being in line with the times, or by forms of inflexibility, self-centredness or diminished enthusiasm. At this point continuing formation is aimed at helping not only to bring back a higher level of spiritual and apostolic life, but also at discovering the special characteristics of this stage of life. For at this time, after refining certain features of the personality, the gift of self is made to God more genuinely and with greater generosity; it extends to others with greater serenity and wisdom, as well as with greater simplicity and richness of grace. This is the gift and experience of spiritual fatherhood and motherhood. Advanced age poses new problems, which can be prepared for by a discerning programme of spiritual support. The gradual withdrawal from activity, sometimes caused by sickness or forced immobility, can be a very formative experience. Often a time of suffering, advanced age nonetheless offers to elderly consecrated persons the chance to be transformed by the Paschal experience, by being configured to the Crucified Christ who fulfils the Father's will in all things and abandons himself into the Father's hands, even to the surrendering of his spirit to him. This configuration represents a new way of living one's consecration, which is not tied to effectiveness in carrying out administrative responsibilities or apostolic work. When the moment finally comes for uniting oneself to the supreme hour of the Lord's Passion, the consecrated person knows that the Father is now bringing to completion the mysterious process of formation which began many years before. Death will then be awaited and prepared for as the supreme act of love and self-offering. It should be added that, independently of the different stages of life, any period can present critical situations due to external factors

- such as a change of place or assignment, difficulties in work or lack of success in the apostolate, misunderstandings and feelings of alienation - or resulting from more directly personal factors such as physical or mental illness, spiritual aridity, deaths, difficulties in interpersonal relations, strong temptations, crises of faith or identity, or feelings of uselessness. When fidelity becomes more difficult, the individual must be offered the support of greater trust and deeper love, at both the personal and community levels. At such times, the sensitive closeness of the Superior is most essential. Great comfort can also come from the valuable help of a brother or sister, whose concerned and caring presence can lead to a rediscovery of the meaning of the covenant which God originally established, and which he has no intention of breaking. The person undergoing such a trial will then accept purification and hardship as essential to the following of Christ Crucified. The trial itself will appear as a providential means of being formed by the Father's hands, and as a struggle which is not only psychological, carried out by the "I" in relation to itself and its weaknesses, but also religious, touched each day by the presence of God and the power of the Cross!

Dimensions of continuing formation

71. If the subject of formation is the individual at every stage of life, the object of formation is the whole person, called to seek and love God "with all one's heart, and with all one's soul, and with all one's might" (cf. Dt 6:5), and one's

neighbour as oneself (cf. Lev 19:18; Mt 22:37-39). Love of God and of the brethren is a powerful force which can ceaselessly inspire the process of growth and fidelity. Life in the Spirit is clearly of primary importance. Living in the Spirit, consecrated persons discover their own identity and find profound peace; they grow more attentive to the daily challenges of the word of God, and they allow themselves to be guided by the original inspiration of their Institute. Under the action of the Spirit, they resolutely keep times for prayer, silence and solitude, and they never cease to ask the Almighty for the gift of wisdom in the struggles of everyday life (cf. Wis 9:10).

The human and fraternal dimensions of the consecrated life call for self-knowledge and the awareness of personal limitations, so as to offer its members the inspiration and support needed on the path towards perfect freedom. In present-day circumstances, special importance must be given to the interior freedom of consecrated persons, their affective maturity, their ability to communicate with others, especially in their own community, their serenity of spirit, their compassion for those who are suffering, their love for the truth, and a correspondence between their actions and their words. The apostolic dimension opens the hearts and minds of consecrated persons and prepares them for constant effort in the apostolate, as the sign that it is the love of Christ which urges them on (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). In practice, this will involve updating the methods and objectives of apostolic works in fidelity to the spirit and aims of the founder or foundress and to subsequently emerging traditions, with continuous attention to changing historical and cultural conditions, at the general and local levels where the apostolate is carried out. The cultural and professional dimensions, based upon a solid theological training which provides the means for wise discernment, involve continual updating and special interest in the different areas to which each charism is directed. Consecrated persons must therefore keep themselves as intellectually open and adaptable as possible, so that the apostolate will be envisaged and carried out according to the needs of their own time, making use of the means provided by cultural progress. Finally, all these elements are united in the dimension of the charism proper to each Institute, as it were in a synthesis which calls for a constant deepening of one's own special consecration in all its aspects, not only apostolic but also ascetical and mystical. This means that each member should study diligently the spirit, history and mission of the Institute to which he or she belongs, in order to advance the personal and communal assimilation of its charism.

CHAPTER III - SERVITIUM CARITATIS

CONSECRATED LIFE: MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S LOVE IN THE WORLD

Consecrated for mission

72. In the image of Jesus, the beloved Son "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn 10:36), those whom God calls to follow him are also consecrated and sent into the world to imitate his example and to continue his mission. Fundamentally, this is true of every disciple. In a special way, however, it is true of those who, in the manner that characterizes the consecrated life, are called to follow Christ "more closely", and to make him the "all" of their lives. The task of devoting themselves wholly to "mission" is therefore included in their call; indeed, by the action of the Holy Spirit who is at the origin of every vocation and charism, consecrated life itself is a mission, as was the whole of Jesus' life. The profession of the evangelical counsels, which makes a person totally free for the service of the Gospel, is important also from this point of view. It can therefore be said that a sense of mission is essential to every Institute, not only those dedicated to the active apostolic life, but also those dedicated to the contemplative life.

Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge, this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all. Thus it can be said that consecrated persons are "in mission" by virtue of their very consecration, to which they bear witness in accordance with the ideal of their Institute. When the founding charism provides for pastoral activities, it is obvious that the witness of life and the witness of works of the apostolate and human development are equally necessary: both mirror Christ who is at one and the same time consecrated to the glory of the Father and sent into the world for the salvation of his brothers and sisters. Religious life, moreover, continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission. Thus, men and women religious will be all the more committed to the apostolate the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life, and the more ardent their involvement in the Institute's specific mission.

At the service of God and humanity

73. The consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity, as it is announced in Scripture and as it emerges from an attentive reading of the signs of God's providential action in history. This is the plan for the salvation and reconciliation of humanity (cf. Col 2:20-22). To carry out this service appropriately, consecrated persons must have a profound experience of God and be aware of the challenges of their time, understanding the profound theological meaning of these challenges through a discernment made with the help of the Spirit. In fact, it is often through historical events that we discern God's hidden call to work according to his plan by

active and effective involvement in the events of our time. Discerning the signs of the times, as the Council affirms, must be done in the light of the Gospel, so as to "respond to the perennial questions which people ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other". It is necessary, therefore, to be open to the interior promptings of the Holy Spirit, who invites us to understand in depth the designs of Providence. He calls consecrated men and women to present new answers to the new problems of today's world. These are divine pleas which only souls accustomed to following God's will in everything can assimilate faithfully and then translate courageously into choices which are consistent with the original charism and which correspond to the demands of the concrete historical situation. Faced with the many and pressing problems which sometimes seem to compromise or even overwhelm the consecrated life, those called to it cannot fail to feel the commitment to bear in their hearts and in their prayer the entire world's needs, while at the same time they work with zeal in the fields determined by the founding charism. Clearly, their dedication must be guided by supernatural discernment, which distinguishes what is of the Spirit from that which is contrary to him (cf. Gal 5:16-17, 22; 1 Jn 4:6). By means of fidelity to the Rules and Constitutions, this discernment safeguards full communion with the Church. In this way the consecrated life will not be limited to reading the signs of the times but will also contribute to elaborating and putting into effect new initiatives of evangelization for present-day situations. All this will be done in the certainty of faith that the Spirit can give satisfactory replies even to the most difficult questions. In this regard, we would do well to remember what the great champions of apostolic activity have always taught, namely, that we need to trust in God as if everything depended on him and, at the same time, to work generously as if everything depended on us.

Ecclesial cooperation and apostolic spirituality

74. Everything must be done in communion and dialogue with all other sectors of the Church. The challenges of evangelization are such that they cannot be effectively faced without the cooperation, both in discernment and action, of all the Church's members. It is difficult for individuals to provide a definitive answer; but such an answer can arise from encounter and dialogue. In particular, effective communion among those graced with different charisms will ensure both mutual enrichment and more fruitful results in the mission in hand. The experience of recent years widely confirms that "dialogue is the new name of charity", especially charity within the Church. Dialogue helps us to see the true implications of problems and allows them to be addressed with greater hope of success. The consecrated life, by the very fact that it promotes the value of fraternal life, provides a privileged experience of dialogue. It can therefore contribute to creating a climate of mutual acceptance in which the Church's various components, feeling that they are valued for what they are, come together in ecclesial communion in a more convinced manner, ready to undertake the great universal mission.

Institutes involved in one or other form of the apostolate must therefore foster a solid spirituality of action, seeing God in all things and all things in God. In fact, "it is necessary to know that, just as a well-ordered life tends to pass from the active to the contemplative, so the soul generally returns with profit from the contemplative life to the active life, in order more perfectly to sustain the active life with the flame ignited in contemplation. Thus, the active life ought to lead to contemplation and, sometimes, from what we see interiorly, contemplation should more effectively call us back to action". Jesus himself gave us the perfect example of how we can link communion with the Father to an intensely active life. Without a constant search for this unity, the danger of an interior breakdown, of confusion and discouragement, lurks always near. Today as yesterday, the close union between contemplation and action will allow the most difficult missions to be undertaken.

I. LOVE TO THE END

Loving with the heart of Christ

75. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper... Jesus rose... and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded" (Jn 13:1-2, 4-5).

In the washing of feet Jesus reveals the depth of God's love for humanity: in Jesus, God places himself at the service of human beings! At the same time, he reveals the meaning of the Christian life and, even more, of the consecrated life, which is a life of self-giving love, of practical and generous service. In its commitment to following the Son of Man, who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28), the consecrated life, at least in the best periods of its long history, has been characterized by this "washing of feet", that is, by service directed in particular to the poorest and neediest. If, on the one hand, the consecrated life contemplates the sublime mystery of the Word in the bosom of the Father (cf. Jn 1:1), on the other hand it follows the Word who became flesh (cf. Jn 1:14), lowering himself, humbling himself in order to serve others. Even today, those who follow Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels intend to go where Christ went and to do what he did. He continually calls new disciples to himself, both men and women, to communicate to them, by an outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), the divine agape, his way of loving, and to urge them thus to serve others in the humble gift of themselves, far from all self-interest. Peter, overcome by the light of the Transfiguration, exclaims: "Lord, it is well that we are here" (Mt 17:4), but he is invited to return to the byways of the world in order to

continue serving the Kingdom of God: "Come down, Peter! You wanted to rest up on the mountain: come down. Preach the word of God, be insistent both when it is timely and when it is not; reprove, exhort, give encouragement using all your forbearance and ability to teach. Work, spend yourself, accept even sufferings and torments, in order that, through the brightness and beauty of good works, you may possess in charity what is symbolized in the Lord's white garments". The fact that consecrated persons fix their gaze on the Lord's countenance does not diminish their commitment on behalf of humanity; on the contrary, it strengthens this commitment, enabling it to have an impact on history, in order to free history from all that disfigures it. The quest for divine beauty impels consecrated persons to care for the deformed image of God on the faces of their brothers and sisters, faces disfigured by hunger, faces disillusioned by political promises, faces humiliated by seeing their culture despised, faces frightened by constant and indiscriminate violence, the anguished faces of minors, the hurt and humiliated faces of women, the tired faces of migrants who are not given a warm welcome, the faces of the elderly who are without even the minimum conditions for a dignified life. The consecrated life thus shows, with the eloquence of works, that divine charity is the foundation and stimulus of freely-given and active love. Saint Vincent de Paul was deeply convinced of this when he explained to the Daughters of Charity this programme of life: "The spirit of the Society consists in giving yourselves to God in order to love our Lord and to serve him in the person of the materially and spiritually poor, in their houses and elsewhere, in order to teach poor young girls, children, in general anybody whom Divine Providence sends you". Today, among the possible works of charity, certainly the one which in a special way shows the world this love "to the end" is the fervent proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who do not yet know him, to those who have forgotten him, and to the poor in a preferential way. The specific contribution of the consecrated life to evangelization

76. The specific contribution of consecrated persons, both men and women, to evangelization is first of all the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters, in imitation of the Saviour who, out of love for humanity, made himself a servant. In the work of salvation, in fact, everything comes from sharing in the divine agape. Consecrated persons make visible, in their consecration and total dedication, the loving and saving presence of Christ, the One consecrated by the Father, sent in mission. Allowing themselves to be won over by him (cf. Phil 3:12), they prepare to become, in a certain way, a prolongation of his humanity. The consecrated life eloquently shows that the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers.

The first evangelization: proclaiming Christ to the nations

77. Those who love God, the Father of all, cannot fail to love their fellow human beings, whom they recognize as brothers and sisters. Precisely for this reason, they cannot remain indifferent to the fact that many men and women do not know the full manifestation of God's love in Christ. The result, in obedience to Christ's commandment, is the missionary drive *ad gentes*, which every committed Christian shares with the Church which is missionary by nature. This drive is felt above all by the members of Institutes, whether of the contemplative or of the active life. Consecrated persons, in fact, have the task of making present even among non-Christians Christ who is chaste, poor, obedient, prayerful and missionary. While remaining ever faithful to their charism they must know that they have a special share in the Church's missionary activity, in virtue of their interior consecration made to God. The desire so often expressed by Theresa of Lisieux, "to love you and make you loved", the ardent longing of Saint Francis Xavier that many, "meditating on what the Lord God will expect from them and from the talents he has given them, would be converted, using the right means and the spiritual exercises to know and feel within themselves the divine will, and so, adapting themselves more to that will than to their own inclinations, they would say: Lord, here I am, what do you want me to do? Lead me wherever you will", and other similar testimonies of countless holy men and women, manifest the unsuppressible missionary drive which distinguishes and ennobles the consecrated life.

Present in every part of the world

78. "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14): the members of every Institute should be able to repeat this truth with Saint Paul, because the task of the consecrated life is to work in every part of the world in order to consolidate and expand the Kingdom of Christ, bringing the proclamation of the Gospel even to the most far-off regions. In fact, the history of the missions testifies to the great contribution made by consecrated men and women to the evangelization of peoples: from ancient monastic Families to recent Foundations committed exclusively to the mission *ad gentes*, from Institutes of active life to those devoted to contemplation. Countless consecrated persons have given their whole lives in this primary activity of the Church, which is "essential and never-ending" because it is addressed to the growing number of those who do not know Christ.

Today too this duty continues to present a pressing call to Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life: they are expected to make the greatest possible contribution to the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. Also those Institutes which are being established and are at work in the younger Churches are invited to open themselves to the mission among non-Christians, inside and outside their own countries of origin. Despite the understandable difficulties which some of them will meet, it is good to remind everyone that just as "faith is strengthened when it is

given to others", so the mission strengthens the consecrated life, gives it new enthusiasm and new motivation, and elicits faithfulness. For its part, missionary activity offers ample room for all the different forms of the consecrated life. The Church's mission *ad gentes* offers consecrated women, religious brothers and members of Secular Institutes special and extraordinary opportunities for a particularly fruitful apostolate. The members of Secular Institutes, by their presence in fields more suited to the lay vocation, can engage in the valuable work of evangelizing all sectors of society, as well as the structures and the very laws which regulate it. Moreover, they can bear witness to Gospel values, living in contact with those who do not yet know Jesus, thus making a specific contribution to the mission. It should be emphasized that in countries where non-Christian religions are firmly established, the presence of the consecrated life is of great importance, whether through its educational, charitable and cultural activities, or through the witness of the contemplative life. For this reason the establishment of communities devoted to contemplation should be encouraged in the new Churches, since "the contemplative life belongs to the fullness of the Church's presence". It is necessary, then, to use appropriate means to foster an equitable distribution of the various forms of the consecrated life in order to give new momentum to evangelization, either by sending missionaries or by Institutes of Consecrated Life giving special help to poorer Dioceses.

The proclamation of Christ and inculturation

79. The proclamation of Christ "is the permanent priority of mission" and is directed towards conversion, that is, to full and sincere allegiance to Christ and his Gospel. In the context of missionary activity the process of inculturation and interreligious dialogue have a role to play. The challenge of inculturation ought to be taken up by consecrated persons as a call to fruitful cooperation with grace in facing cultural diversity. This presupposes serious personal preparation, mature gifts of discernment, faithful adherence to the indispensable criteria of doctrinal orthodoxy, moral integrity and ecclesial communion. Supported by the charism of their founders and foundresses, many consecrated persons have been able to approach cultures other than their own with the attitude of Jesus, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). With patient and courageous efforts to initiate dialogue, they have been successful in establishing contact with the most diverse peoples, proclaiming to all of them the way of salvation. Today too, many consecrated persons are looking for and are finding in the history of individuals and of entire peoples the traces of God's presence, a presence guiding all humanity towards the discernment of the signs of his saving will. Such a search proves to be advantageous for consecrated persons themselves: the values discovered in the different civilizations can in fact prompt them to deepen their own understanding of the Christian tradition of contemplation, community sharing, hospitality, respect for persons and attention to the environment.

A genuine inculturation requires attitudes similar to those of the Lord when he became man and walked among us in love and meekness. In this sense the consecrated life makes its members particularly well suited to face the complex work of inculturation, because it accustoms them to being detached from things, even from many features of their own culture. Applying themselves with these attitudes to the study and understanding of other cultures, consecrated persons can better discern the real values in them, and the best way to accept them and perfect them with the help of their own charism. However, it should not be forgotten that in many ancient cultures religious expression is so deeply ingrained that religion often represents the transcendent dimension of the culture itself. In this case true inculturation necessarily entails a serious and open interreligious dialogue, which "is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*" and "does not dispense from evangelization".

The inculturation of the consecrated life

80. For its part, the consecrated life itself is the bearer of Gospel values and, where it is authentically lived, it can make an innovative contribution in meeting the challenges of inculturation. As a sign of the primacy of God and his Kingdom, it can, through dialogue, elicit a positive reaction in people's consciences. If the consecrated life maintains its prophetic impact, it serves as a Gospel leaven within a culture, purifying and perfecting it. This is demonstrated by the lives of many Saints who in different periods of history were able to immerse themselves in their time without being overcome by it, but opening new paths to the people of their generation. The Gospel way of life is an important source for proposing a new cultural model. A great many founders and foundresses perceiving certain needs of their time, with all the limitations which they themselves recognized, have given these needs an answer which has become an innovative cultural proposal.

Communities of Religious Institutes and of Societies of Apostolic Life can, in fact, offer concrete and effective cultural proposals when they bear witness to the evangelical manner of practising mutual acceptance in diversity and of exercising authority, and when they give an example of sharing material and spiritual goods, of being truly international, of cooperating with other Institutes, and of listening to the men and women of our time. The manner of thinking and acting of those who follow Christ more closely gives rise to a true and proper point of reference for culture; it serves to point out all that is inhuman; it bears witness that God alone strengthens and perfects values. In turn, a genuine inculturation will help consecrated persons to live the radical nature of the Gospel according to the charism of their Institute and the character of the people with whom they come into contact. This fruitful relationship

can give rise to ways of life and pastoral approaches which can bring enrichment to the whole Institute, provided that they are consistent with the founding charism and with the unifying action of the Holy Spirit. In this process, which entails discernment, courage, dialogue and the challenge of the Gospel, a guarantee of being on the right path is offered by the Holy See, whose task it is to encourage the evangelization of cultures, as well as to authenticate developments and to sanction results in the area of inculturation. This is "a difficult and delicate task, since it raises the question of the Church's fidelity to the Gospel and the Apostolic Tradition amidst the constant evolution of cultures".

The new evangelization

81. If the great challenges which modern history poses to the new evangelization are to be faced successfully, what is needed above all is a consecrated life which is continually open to challenge by the revealed word and the signs of the times. The memory of the great evangelizers, both men and women, who were themselves profoundly evangelized, shows that in order to face the world of today it is necessary to have people who are lovingly dedicated to the Lord and his Gospel. "Consecrated persons, because of their specific vocation, are called to manifest the unity between self-evangelization and witness, between interior renewal and apostolic fervour, between being and acting, showing that dynamism arises always from the first element of each of these pairs". The new evangelization, like that of all times, will be effective if it proclaims from the rooftops what it has first lived in intimacy with the Lord. It calls for strong personalities, inspired by saintly fervour. The new evangelization demands that consecrated persons have a thorough awareness of the theological significance of the challenges of our time. These challenges must be weighed with careful joint discernment, with a view to renewing the mission. Courage in proclaiming the Lord Jesus must be accompanied by trust in Providence, which is at work in the world and which "orders everything, even human differences, for the greater good of the Church". Important elements enabling Institutes to play a successful part in new evangelization are fidelity to the founding charism, communion with all those who in the Church are involved in the same undertaking, especially the Bishops, and cooperation with all people of good will. All this requires a careful discernment of the calls which the Holy Spirit makes to each Institute, whether in areas where no great immediate progress is foreseen or in other areas where a consoling rebirth is anticipated. In every place and circumstance, consecrated persons should be zealous heralds of Jesus Christ, ready to respond with the wisdom of the Gospel to the questions posed today by the anxieties and the urgent needs of the human heart.

Preference for the poor and the promotion of justice

82. At the beginning of his ministry, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus announces that the Spirit has consecrated him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, to give sight back to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to declare a year of favour from the Lord (cf. Lk 4:16-19). Taking up the Lord's mission as her own, the Church proclaims the Gospel to every man and woman, committing herself to their integral salvation. But with special attention, in a true "preferential option", she turns to those who are in situations of greater weakness, and therefore in greater need. "The poor", in varied states of affliction, are the oppressed, those on the margin of society, the elderly, the sick, the young, any and all who are considered and treated as "the least".

The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option; but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor. For each Institute, according to its charism, this involves adopting a simple and austere way of life, both as individuals and as a community. Strengthened by this living witness and in ways consistent with their choice of life, and maintaining their independence vis-à-vis political ideologies, consecrated persons will be able to denounce the injustices committed against so many sons and daughters of God, and commit themselves to the promotion of justice in the society where they work. In this way, even in present circumstances, through the witness of countless consecrated persons, there will be a renewal of that dedication which was characteristic of the founders and foundresses who spent their lives serving the Lord in the poor. Christ "is poor on earth in the person of his poor... As God he is rich, as man he is poor. With his humanity he has gone up to heaven and, prosperous, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and yet, here on earth, still poor, he suffers hunger, thirst and nakedness". The Gospel is made effective through charity, which is the Church's glory and the sign of her faithfulness to the Lord. This is demonstrated by the whole history of the consecrated life, which can be considered a living exegesis of Jesus' words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Many Institutes, especially in modern times, were established precisely to address one or other of the needs of the poor. But even when such a purpose was not the determining factor, concern and care for the needy - expressed in prayer, assistance and hospitality - was always a normal part of every form of the consecrated life, even of the contemplative life. And how could it be otherwise, since the Christ encountered in contemplation is the same who lives and suffers in the poor? In this sense, the history of the consecrated life is rich with marvellous and sometimes ingenious examples. Saint Paulinus of Nola, after distributing his belongings to the poor in order to consecrate himself fully to God, built the cells of his monastery above a hospice for the poor. He rejoiced at the thought of this singular "exchange of gifts": the poor, whom he helped, strengthened

with their prayers the very "foundations" of his house, wholly dedicated to the praise of God. Saint Vincent de Paul, for his part, loved to say that, when one is obliged to leave prayer to attend to a poor person in need, that prayer is not really interrupted, because "one leaves God to serve God". Serving the poor is an act of evangelization and, at the same time, a seal of Gospel authenticity and a catalyst for permanent conversion in the consecrated life, since, as Saint Gregory the Great says, "when charity lovingly stoops to provide even for the smallest needs of our neighbour, then does it suddenly surge upwards to the highest peaks. And when in great kindness it bends to the most extreme needs, then with much vigour does it resume its soaring to the heights".

Care of the sick

83. Following a glorious tradition, a great number of consecrated persons, above all women, carry out their apostolate in the field of health care, according to the charism of their respective Institutes. Down the centuries, many consecrated persons have given their lives in service to victims of contagious diseases, confirming the truth that dedication to the point of heroism belongs to the prophetic nature of the consecrated life.

The Church looks with admiration and gratitude upon the many consecrated persons who, by caring for the sick and the suffering, contribute in a significant way to her mission. They carry on the ministry of mercy of Christ, who "went about doing good and healing all" (Acts 10:38). In the footsteps of the Divine Samaritan, physician of souls and bodies, and following the example of their respective founders and foundresses, those consecrated persons committed to this ministry by the charism of their Institute should persevere in their witness of love towards the sick, devoting themselves to them with profound understanding and compassion. They should give a special place in their ministry to the poorest and most abandoned of the sick, such as the elderly, and those who are handicapped, marginalized, or terminally ill, and to the victims of drug abuse and the new contagious diseases. Consecrated persons should encourage the sick themselves to offer their sufferings in communion with Christ, crucified and glorified for the salvation of all. Indeed they should strengthen in the sick the awareness of being able to carry out a pastoral ministry of their own through the specific charism of the Cross, by means of their prayer and their testimony in word and deed. Moreover, the Church reminds consecrated men and women that a part of their mission is to evangelize the health-care centres in which they work, striving to spread the light of Gospel values to the way of living, suffering and dying of the people of our day. They should endeavour to make the practice of medicine more human, and increase their knowledge of bioethics at the service of the Gospel of life. Above all therefore they should foster respect for the person and for human life from conception to its natural end, in full conformity with the moral teaching of the Church. For this purpose they should set up centres of formation and cooperate closely with those ecclesial bodies entrusted with the pastoral ministry of health care.

II. A PROPHETIC WITNESS IN THE FACE OF GREAT CHALLENGES

The prophetic character of the consecrated life

84. The prophetic character of the consecrated life was strongly emphasized by the Synod Fathers. It takes the shape of a special form of sharing in Christ's prophetic office, which the Holy Spirit communicates to the whole People of God. There is a prophetic dimension which belongs to the consecrated life as such, resulting from the radical nature of the following of Christ and of the subsequent dedication to the mission characteristic of the consecrated life. The sign value, which the Second Vatican Council acknowledges in the consecrated life, is expressed in prophetic witness to the primacy which God and the truths of the Gospel have in the Christian life. Because of this pre-eminence nothing can come before personal love of Christ and of the poor in whom he lives. The Patristic tradition has seen a model of monastic religious life in Elijah, courageous prophet and friend of God. He lived in God's presence and contemplated his passing by in silence; he interceded for the people and boldly announced God's will; he defended God's sovereignty and came to the defence of the poor against the powerful of the world (cf. 1 Kg 18-19). In the history of the Church, alongside other Christians, there have been men and women consecrated to God who, through a special gift of the Holy Spirit, have carried out a genuinely prophetic ministry, speaking in the name of God to all, even to the Pastors of the Church. True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history. Prophets feel in their hearts a burning desire for the holiness of God and, having heard his word in the dialogue of prayer, they proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin. Prophetic witness requires the constant and passionate search for God's will, for self-giving, for unflinching communion in the Church, for the practice of spiritual discernment and love of the truth. It is also expressed through the denunciation of all that is contrary to the divine will and through the exploration of new ways to apply the Gospel in history, in expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom.

Significance for the contemporary world

85. In our world, where it often seems that the signs of God's presence have been lost from sight, a convincing prophetic witness on the part of consecrated persons is increasingly necessary. In the first place this should entail the affirmation of the primacy of God and of eternal life, as evidenced in the following and imitation of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, who was completely consecrated to the glory of God and to the love of his brethren. The fraternal life is itself prophetic in a society which, sometimes without realizing it, has a profound yearning for a brotherhood which knows no borders. Consecrated persons are being asked to bear witness everywhere with the boldness of a prophet who is unafraid of risking even his life.

Prophecy derives a particularly persuasive power from consistency between proclamation and life. Consecrated persons will be faithful to their mission in the Church and the world, if they can renew themselves constantly in the light of the word of God. Thus will they be able to enrich the other faithful with the charismatic gifts they have received and, in turn, let themselves be challenged by the prophetic stimulus which comes from other sectors of the Church. In this exchange of gifts, guaranteed by full harmony with the Church's Magisterium and discipline, there will shine forth the action of the Holy Spirit who "gives [the Church] a unity of fellowship and service; he furnishes and directs her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic".

Faithfulness to the point of martyrdom

86. In this century, as in other periods of history, consecrated men and women have borne witness to Christ the Lord with the gift of their own lives. Thousands of them have been forced into the catacombs by the persecution of totalitarian regimes or of violent groups, or have been harassed while engaged in missionary activity, in action on behalf of the poor, in assisting the sick and the marginalized; yet they lived and continue to live their consecration in prolonged and heroic suffering, and often with the shedding of their blood, being perfectly configured to the Crucified Lord. The Church has already officially recognized the holiness of some of these men and women, honouring them as martyrs for Christ. They enlighten us by their example, they intercede that we may be faithful, and they await us in glory.

There is a widespread desire that the memory of so many witnesses to the faith will remain in the consciousness of the Church as an invitation to celebrate and imitate them. The Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life can contribute to this endeavour by gathering the names of all those consecrated persons who deserve to be inscribed in the Martyrology of the twentieth century, and by compiling testimonies about them.

The major challenges facing the consecrated life

87. The prophetic task of the consecrated life is brought into play by three major challenges addressed to the Church herself: they are the same challenges as ever, posed in new ways, and perhaps more radically, by contemporary society, at least in some parts of the world. These challenges relate directly to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, impelling the Church, and consecrated persons in particular, to clarify and testify to the profound anthropological significance of the counsels. The decision to follow the counsels, far from involving an impoverishment of truly human values, leads instead to their transformation. The evangelical counsels should not be considered as a denial of the values inherent in sexuality, in the legitimate desire to possess material goods or to make decisions for oneself. Insofar as these inclinations are based on nature, they are good in themselves. Human beings, however, weakened as they are by original sin, run the risk of acting on them in a way which transgresses the moral norms. The profession of chastity, poverty and obedience is a warning not to underestimate the wound of original sin and, while affirming the value of created goods, it relativizes them by pointing to God as the absolute good. Thus, while those who follow the evangelical counsels seek holiness for themselves, they propose, so to speak, a spiritual "therapy" for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created and in a certain way they make visible the living God. The consecrated life, especially in difficult times, is a blessing for human life and for the life of the Church.

The challenge of consecrated chastity

88. The first challenge is that of a hedonistic culture which separates sexuality from all objective moral norms, often treating it as a mere diversion and a consumer good and, with the complicity of the means of social communication, justifying a kind of idolatry of the sexual instinct. The consequences of this are before everyone's eyes: transgressions of every kind, with resulting psychic and moral suffering on the part of individuals and families. The reply of the consecrated life is above all in the joyful living of perfect chastity, as a witness to the power of God's love manifested in the weakness of the human condition. The consecrated person attests that what many have believed impossible becomes, with the Lord's grace, possible and truly liberating. Yes, in Christ it is possible to love God with all one's heart, putting him above every other love, and thus to love every creature with the freedom of God! This testimony is more necessary than ever today, precisely because it is so little understood by our world. It is offered to everyone

- young people, engaged couples, husbands and wives and Christian families - in order to show that the power of God's love can accomplish great things precisely within the context of human love. It is a witness which also meets a growing need for interior honesty in human relationships.

The consecrated life must present to today's world examples of chastity lived by men and women who show balance, self-mastery, an enterprising spirit, and psychological and affective maturity. Thanks to this witness, human love is offered a stable point of reference: the pure love which consecrated persons draw from the contemplation of Trinitarian love, revealed to us in Christ. Precisely because they are immersed in this mystery, consecrated persons feel themselves capable of a radical and universal love, which gives them the strength for the self-mastery and discipline necessary in order not to fall under the domination of the senses and instincts. Consecrated chastity thus appears as a joyful and liberating experience. Enlightened by faith in the Risen Lord and by the prospect of the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Rev 21:1), it offers a priceless incentive in the task of educating to that chastity which corresponds to other states of life as well.

The challenge of poverty

89. Another challenge today is that of a materialism which craves possessions, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest, and lacking any concern for the balance of natural resources. The reply of the consecrated life is found in the profession of evangelical poverty, which can be lived in different ways and is often expressed in an active involvement in the promotion of solidarity and charity. How many Institutes devote themselves to education, training and professional formation, preparing young people and those no longer young to become builders of their own future! How many consecrated persons give themselves without reserve in the service of the most disadvantaged people on earth! How many of them work to train future educators and leaders of society, so that they in turn will be committed to eliminating structures of oppression and to promoting projects of solidarity for the benefit of the poor! Consecrated persons fight to overcome hunger and its causes; they inspire the activities of voluntary associations and humanitarian organizations; and they work with public and private bodies to promote a fair distribution of international aid. Nations truly owe a great deal to these enterprising agents of charity, whose tireless generosity has contributed and continues to contribute greatly to making the world more human.

Evangelical poverty at the service of the poor

90. Even before being a service on behalf of the poor, evangelical poverty is a value in itself, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the poor Christ. Its primary meaning, in fact, is to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart. Precisely for this reason evangelical poverty forcefully challenges the idolatry of money, making a prophetic appeal as it were to society, which in so many parts of the developed world risks losing the sense of proportion and the very meaning of things. Thus, today more than in other ages, the call of evangelical poverty is being felt also among those who are aware of the scarcity of the planet's resources and who invoke respect for and the conservation of creation by reducing consumption, by living more simply and by placing a necessary brake on their own desires.

Consecrated persons are therefore asked to bear a renewed and vigorous evangelical witness to self-denial and restraint, in a form of fraternal life inspired by principles of simplicity and hospitality, also as an example to those who are indifferent to the needs of their neighbour. This witness will of course be accompanied by a preferential love for the poor and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected. There are many communities which live and work among the poor and the marginalized; they embrace their conditions of life and share in their sufferings, problems and perils. Outstanding pages in the history of evangelical solidarity and heroic dedication have been written by consecrated persons in these years of profound changes and great injustices, of hopes and disappointments, of striking victories and bitter defeats. And pages no less significant have been written and are still being written by very many other consecrated persons, who live to the full their life "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3) for the salvation of the world, freely giving of themselves, and spending their lives for causes which are little appreciated and even less extolled. In these various and complementary ways, the consecrated life shares in the radical poverty embraced by the Lord, and fulfils its specific role in the saving mystery of his Incarnation and redeeming Death.

The challenge of freedom in obedience

91. The third challenge comes from those notions of freedom which separate this fundamental human good from its essential relationship to the truth and to moral norms. In effect, the promotion of freedom is a genuine value, closely connected with respect for the human person. But who does not see the aberrant consequences of injustice and even violence, in the life of individuals and of peoples, to which the distorted use of freedom leads?

An effective response to this situation is the obedience which marks the consecrated life. In an especially vigorous way this obedience repropose the obedience of Christ to the Father and, taking this mystery as its point of departure,

testifies that there is no contradiction between obedience and freedom. Indeed, the Son's attitude discloses the mystery of human freedom as the path of obedience to the Father's will, and the mystery of obedience as the path to the gradual conquest of true freedom. It is precisely this mystery which consecrated persons wish to acknowledge by this particular vow. By obedience they intend to show their awareness of being children of the Father, as a result of which they wish to take the Father's will as their daily bread (cf. Jn 4:34), as their rock, their joy, their shield and their fortress (cf. Ps 18:2). Thus they show that they are growing in the full truth about themselves, remaining in touch with the source of their existence and therefore offering this most consoling message: "The lovers of your law have great peace; they never stumble" (Ps 118:165).

Carrying out together the Father's will

92. This testimony of consecration takes on special meaning in religious life because of the community dimension which marks it. The fraternal life is the privileged place in which to discern and accept God's will, and to walk together with one mind and heart. Obedience, enlivened by charity, unites the members of an Institute in the same witness and the same mission, while respecting the diversity of gifts and individual personalities. In community life which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, each individual engages in a fruitful dialogue with the others in order to discover the Father's will. At the same time, together they recognize in the one who presides an expression of the fatherhood of God and the exercise of authority received from God, at the service of discernment and communion. Life in community is thus the particular sign, before the Church and society, of the bond which comes from the same call and the common desire - notwithstanding differences of race and origin, language and culture - to be obedient to that call. Contrary to the spirit of discord and division, authority and obedience shine like a sign of that unique fatherhood which comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit, of the interior freedom of those who put their trust in God, despite the human limitations of those who represent him. Through this obedience, which some people make their rule of life, the happiness promised by Jesus to "those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28) is experienced and proclaimed for the good of all. Moreover, those who obey have the guarantee of truly taking part in the mission, of following the Lord and not pursuing their own desires or wishes. In this way we can know that we are guided by the Spirit of the Lord, and sustained, even in the midst of great hardships, by his steadfast hand (cf. Acts 20:22-23).

A decisive commitment to the spiritual life

93. One of the concerns frequently expressed at the Synod was that the consecrated life should be nourished from the wellspring of a sound and deep spirituality. This is a primary requirement, inscribed in the very essence of the consecrated life by the fact that, just as every other baptized person, and indeed even more so, those who profess the evangelical counsels must aspire with all their strength to the perfection of charity. This commitment is clearly evidenced in the many examples of holy founders and foundresses, and of so many consecrated persons who have borne faithful witness to Christ to the point of martyrdom. To tend towards holiness: this is in summary the programme of every consecrated life, particularly in the perspective of its renewal on the threshold of the Third Millennium. The starting point of such a programme lies in leaving everything behind for the sake of Christ (cf. Mt 4:18-22, 19:21, 27; Lk 5:11), preferring him above all things, in order to share fully in his Paschal Mystery.

Saint Paul understood this well when he said: "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:8, 10). This is the path marked out from the beginning by the Apostles, as testified to in the Christian tradition of the East and the West: "Those who now follow Jesus, leaving everything for his sake, remind us of the Apostles who, in answer to his invitation, gave up everything. As a result, it has become traditional to speak of religious life as *apostolica vivendi forma*". The same tradition has also emphasized in the consecrated life the aspect of a particular covenant with God, indeed of a spousal covenant with Christ, of which Saint Paul was a master by his example (cf. 1 Cor 7:7) and by his teaching, proposed under the Spirit's guidance (cf. 1 Cor 7:40). We may say that the spiritual life, understood as life in Christ or life according to the Spirit, presents itself as a path of increasing faithfulness, on which the consecrated person is guided by the Spirit and configured by him to Christ, in full communion of love and service in the Church. All these elements, which take shape in the different forms of the consecrated life, give rise to a specific spirituality, that is, a concrete programme of relations with God and one's surroundings, marked by specific spiritual emphases and choices of apostolate, which accentuate and re-present one or another aspect of the one mystery of Christ. When the Church approves a form of consecrated life or an Institute, she confirms that in its spiritual and apostolic charism are found all the objective requisites for achieving personal and communal perfection according to the Gospel. The spiritual life must therefore have first place in the programme of Families of consecrated life, in such a way that every Institute and community will be a school of true evangelical spirituality. Apostolic fruitfulness, generosity in love of the poor, and the ability to attract vocations among the younger generation depend on this priority and its growth in personal and communal commitment. It is precisely the spiritual quality of the consecrated life which can inspire the men and women of our day, who themselves are thirsting for absolute values. In this way the consecrated life will become an attractive witness.

Listening to the word of God

94. The word of God is the first source of all Christian spirituality. It gives rise to a personal relationship with the living God and with his saving and sanctifying will. It is for this reason that from the very beginning of Institutes of Consecrated Life, and in a special way in monasticism, what is called *lectio divina* has been held in the highest regard. By its means the word of God is brought to bear on life, on which it projects the light of that wisdom which is a gift of the Spirit. Although the whole of Sacred Scripture is "profitable for teaching" (2 Tim 3:16), and is "the pure and perennial source of spiritual life", the writings of the New Testament deserve special veneration, especially the Gospels, which are "the heart of all the Scriptures". It is therefore of great benefit for consecrated persons to meditate regularly on the Gospel texts and the New Testament writings which describe the words and example of Christ and Mary and the apostolica vivendi forma. Founders and foundresses were inspired by these texts in accepting their vocation and in discerning the charism and mission of their Institutes.

Meditation of the Bible in common is of great value. When practised according to the possibilities and circumstances of life in community, this meditation leads to a joyful sharing of the riches drawn from the word of God, thanks to which brothers or sisters grow together and help one another to make progress in the spiritual life. Indeed it would be helpful if this practice were also encouraged among other members of the People of God, priests and laity alike. This will lead, in ways proper to each person's particular gifts, to setting up schools of prayer, of spirituality and of prayerful reading of the Scriptures, in which God "speaks to people as friends (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar 3:38), so that he may invite and draw them into fellowship with himself".^s The Church's spiritual tradition teaches, meditation on God's word, and on the mysteries of Christ in particular, gives rise to fervour in contemplation and the ardour of apostolic activity. Both in contemplative and active religious life it has always been men and women of prayer, those who truly interpret and put into practice the will of God, who do great works. From familiarity with God's word they draw the light needed for that individual and communal discernment which helps them to seek the ways of the Lord in the signs of the times. In this way they acquire a kind of supernatural intuition, which allows them to avoid being conformed to the mentality of this world, but rather to be renewed in their own mind, in order to discern God's will about what is good, perfect and pleasing to him (cf. Rom 12:2).

In communion with Christ

95. An indispensable means of effectively sustaining communion with Christ is assuredly the Sacred Liturgy, and especially the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours.

In the first place, the Eucharist "contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself, our Passover and living bread, who, through his very flesh, made vital and vitalizing by the Holy Spirit, offers life" to the human family. This is the heart of the Church's life, and also of the consecrated life. How can those who are called, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, to choose Christ as the only meaning of their lives, not desire to establish an ever more profound communion with him by sharing daily in the Sacrament which makes him present, in the sacrifice which actualizes the gift of his love on Golgotha, the banquet which nourishes and sustains God's pilgrim people? By its very nature the Eucharist is at the centre of the consecrated life, both for individuals and for communities. It is the daily viaticum and source of the spiritual life for the individual and for the Institute. By means of the Eucharist all consecrated persons are called to live Christ's Paschal Mystery, uniting themselves to him by offering their own lives to the Father through the Holy Spirit. Frequent and prolonged adoration of Christ present in the Eucharist enables us in some way to relive Peter's experience at the Transfiguration: "It is well that we are here". In the celebration of the mystery of the Lord's Body and Blood, the unity and charity of those who have consecrated their lives to God are strengthened and increased. Alongside the Eucharist, and intimately connected with it, the Liturgy of the Hours, celebrated in union with the prayer of the Church, either in community or individually according to the nature of each Institute, expresses the call proper to consecrated persons to raise their hearts in praise and intercession. The Eucharist is also closely connected with the commitment to continual conversion and necessary purification which consecrated persons bring to maturity in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. By their frequent encounter with God's mercy, they purify and renew their hearts, and through the humble recognition of their sins achieve openness in their relationship with him. The joyful experience of sacramental forgiveness, on the journey shared with one's brothers and sisters, makes the heart eager to learn and encourages growth in faithfulness. Confident and humble recourse to spiritual direction is of great help on the path of fidelity to the Gospel, especially in the period of formation and at certain other times in life. Through it individuals are helped to respond with generosity to the movements of the Spirit, and to direct themselves resolutely towards holiness. Finally, I exhort all consecrated persons, according to their own traditions, to renew daily their spiritual union with the Blessed Virgin Mary, reliving with her the mysteries of her Son, especially by saying the Rosary.

III. SOME NEW FIELDS OF MISSION

Presence in the world of education

96. The Church has always recognized that education is an essential dimension of her mission. The Master of her inner life is the Holy Spirit, who penetrates the innermost depths of every human heart and knows the secret unfolding of history. The whole Church is enlivened by the Holy Spirit and with him carries out her educational work. Within the Church, however, consecrated persons have a specific duty. They are called to bring to bear on the world of education their radical witness to the values of the Kingdom, proposed to everyone in expectation of the definitive meeting with the Lord of history. Because of their special consecration, their particular experience of the gifts of the Spirit, their constant listening to the word of God, their practice of discernment, their rich heritage of pedagogical traditions built up since the establishment of their Institute, and their profound grasp of spiritual truth (cf. Eph 2:17), consecrated persons are able to be especially effective in educational activities and to offer a specific contribution to the work of other educators.

Equipped with this charism, consecrated persons can give life to educational undertakings permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, in which young people are helped to mature humanly under the action of the Spirit. In this way a community of learning becomes an experience of grace, where the teaching programme contributes to uniting into a harmonious whole the human and the divine, the Gospel and culture, faith and life. The history of the Church, from antiquity down to our own day, is full of admirable examples of consecrated persons who have sought and continue to seek holiness through their involvement in education, while at the same time proposing holiness as the goal of education. Indeed, many of them have achieved the perfection of charity through teaching. This is one of the most precious gifts which consecrated persons today can offer to young people, instructing them in a way that is full of love, according to the wise counsel of Saint John Bosco: "Young people should not only be loved, but should also know that they are loved".

Need for a renewed commitment in the field of education

97. With respectful sensitivity and missionary boldness, consecrated men and women should show that faith in Jesus Christ enlightens the whole enterprise of education, never disparaging human values but rather confirming and elevating them. Thus do consecrated persons become witnesses and instruments of the power of the Incarnation and the vitality of the Spirit. This task of theirs is one of the most significant manifestations of that motherhood which the Church, in the image of Mary, exercises on behalf of all her children. It is for this reason that the Synod emphatically urged consecrated persons to take up again, wherever possible, the mission of education in schools of every kind and level, and in Universities and Institutions of higher learning. Making my own the proposal of the Synod, I warmly invite members of Institutes devoted to education to be faithful to their founding charism and to their traditions, knowing that the preferential love for the poor finds a special application in the choice of means capable of freeing people from that grave form of poverty which is the lack of cultural and religious training. Because of the importance that Catholic and ecclesiastical universities and faculties have in the field of education and evangelization, Institutes which are responsible for their direction should be conscious of their responsibility. They should ensure the preservation of their unique Catholic identity in complete fidelity to the Church's Magisterium, all the while engaging in active dialogue with present-day cultural trends. Moreover, depending on the circumstances, the members of these Institutes and Societies should readily become involved in the educational structures of the State. Members of Secular Institutes in particular, because of their specific calling, are called to this kind of cooperation.

Evangelizing culture

98. Institutes of Consecrated Life have always had great influence in the formation and transmission of culture. This was true in the Middle Ages, when monasteries became places for the study of the cultural riches of the past, and for the development of a new humanistic and Christian culture. The same has happened every time the light of the Gospel has spread to new nations and peoples. Many consecrated persons have been promoters of culture, and frequently have studied and defended indigenous cultures. The need to contribute to the promotion of culture and to the dialogue between culture and faith is deeply felt in the Church today. Consecrated persons cannot fail to feel challenged by this pressing need. In their proclamation of the word of God, they too are called to discover the methods most suited to the needs of the different social groups and various professional categories, so that the light of Christ will penetrate all sectors of society and the leaven of salvation will transform society from within, fostering the growth of a culture imbued with Gospel values. At the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium, such a commitment will enable consecrated men and women to renew their response to the will of God, who reaches out to all those who, knowingly or not, are searching for the Truth and the Life (cf. Acts 17:27). But in addition to this service of others, within the consecrated life itself there is a need for a renewed and loving commitment to the intellectual life, for dedication to study as a means of integral formation and as a path of asceticism which is extraordinarily timely, in the face of present-day cultural diversity. A lessened commitment to study can have grave consequences for the apostolate, by giving rise to a sense of marginalization and inferiority, or encouraging superficiality and rash initiatives. With all

respect for the diversity of charisms and the actual resources of individual Institutes, the commitment to study cannot be limited to initial formation or to the gaining of academic degrees and professional qualifications. Rather, study is an expression of the unquenchable desire for an ever deeper knowledge of God, the source of light and all human truth. Consequently, a commitment to study does not isolate consecrated persons in an abstract intellectualism, or confine them within a suffocating narcissism; rather, it is an incentive to dialogue and cooperation, a training in the capacity for judgment, a stimulus to contemplation and prayer in the constant quest for the presence and activity of God in the complex reality of today's world. When they allow themselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, consecrated persons can broaden the horizons of narrow human aspirations and at the same time understand more deeply people and their life stories, going beyond the most obvious but often superficial aspects. Countless challenges are today emerging in the world of ideas, in new areas as well as those in which the consecrated life has traditionally been present. There is an urgent need to maintain fruitful contacts with all cultural realities, with a watchful and critical attitude, but also with confident attention to those who face the particular difficulties of intellectual work, especially when, in response to the unprecedented problems of our times, new efforts of analysis and synthesis have to be attempted. A serious and effective evangelization of these new areas where culture is developed and transmitted cannot take place without active cooperation with the laity involved in them.

Presence in the field of social communications

99. Just as in the past consecrated persons successfully used all kinds of means at the service of evangelization and skilfully met difficulties, today too they are challenged anew by the need to bear witness to the Gospel through the communications media. The media, thanks to impressive developments in technology, have reached every corner of the earth. Consecrated persons, especially those who have the institutional charism of working in this field, have a duty to learn the language of the media, in order to speak effectively of Christ to our contemporaries, interpreting their "joys and hopes, their griefs and anxieties", and thus contributing to the building up of a society in which all people sense that they are brothers and sisters making their way to God.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to be vigilant with regard to the distorted use of the media, especially given their extraordinary power of persuasion. The problems which can result for the consecrated life should not be ignored; instead they should be faced with careful discernment. The Church's response is above all educational: it aims at promoting a correct understanding of the dynamics underlying the media and a careful ethical assessment of their programmes, as well as the development of healthy habits in their use. In this work of education, aimed at training discerning listeners and expert communicators, consecrated persons are called to offer their specific witness regarding the relative nature of all created realities. In this way they help people to use the media wisely and in accordance with God's plan, but also to free themselves from an obsessive interest in "the form of this world which is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31). All efforts in this important new field of the apostolate should be encouraged, so that the Gospel of Christ may be proclaimed also through these modern means. The various Institutes should be ready to cooperate, by contributing resources and personnel, in order to implement joint projects in all sectors of social communications. Furthermore, consecrated persons, especially members of Secular Institutes, should willingly lend their help, wherever pastorally appropriate, for the religious formation of leaders and workers in the field of public and private social communications. This should be done in order to offset the inappropriate use of the media and to promote higher quality programmes, the contents of which will be respectful of the moral law and rich in human and Christian values.

IV. ENGAGED IN DIALOGUE WITH EVERYONE

At the service of Christian unity

100. Christ's prayer to the Father before his Passion, that his disciples may be one (cf. Jn 17: 21-23), lives on in the Church's prayer and activity. How can those called to the consecrated life not feel themselves involved? The wound of disunity still existing between believers in Christ and the urgent need to pray and work for the promotion of Christian unity were deeply felt at the Synod. The ecumenical sensitivity of consecrated persons is heightened also by the awareness that in other Churches and Ecclesial Communities monasticism has been preserved and is flourishing, as is the case in the Eastern Churches, and that there is a renewal of the profession of the evangelical counsels, as in the Anglican Communion and in the Communities of the Reformation.

The Synod emphasized the close connection between the consecrated life and the cause of ecumenism, and the urgent need for a more intense witness in this area. Since the soul of ecumenism is prayer and conversion, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life certainly have a special duty to foster this commitment. There is an urgent need for consecrated persons to give more space in their lives to ecumenical prayer and genuine evangelical witness, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit the walls of division and prejudice between Christians can be broken down.

Forms of ecumenical dialogue

101. Sharing of the lectio divina in the search for the truth, a participation in common prayer, in which the Lord assures us of his presence (cf. Mt 18:20), the dialogue of friendship and charity which makes us feel how pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity (cf. Ps 133), cordial hospitality shown to brothers and sisters of the various Christian confessions, mutual knowledge and the exchange of gifts, cooperation in common undertakings of service and of witness: these are among the many forms of ecumenical dialogue. They are actions pleasing to our common Father, which show the will to journey together towards perfect unity along the path of truth and love. Likewise, the knowledge of the history, doctrine, liturgy, and charitable and apostolic activity of other Christians cannot but help to make ecumenical activity ever more fruitful. I wish to encourage those Institutes which, either because they were founded for this purpose or because of a later calling, are dedicated to promoting Christian unity and therefore foster initiatives of study and concrete action. Indeed, no Institute of Consecrated Life should feel itself dispensed from working for this cause. My thoughts likewise turn to the Eastern Catholic Churches with the hope that also through the monastic life of both men and women - the flourishing of which is a grace to be constantly prayed for - they may help to bring about unity with the Orthodox Churches, through the dialogue of charity and the sharing of a common spirituality, itself the heritage of the undivided Church of the first millennium. In a special way, I entrust to the monasteries of contemplative life the spiritual ecumenism of prayer, conversion of heart, and charity. To this end I encourage their presence wherever Christian communities of different confessions live side by side, so that their total devotion to the "one thing needful" (cf. Lk 10:42) - to the worship of God and to intercession for the salvation of the world, together with their witness of evangelical life according to their special charisms - will inspire everyone to abide, after the image of the Trinity, in that unity which Jesus willed and asked of the Father for all his disciples.

Interreligious dialogue

102. Because "interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission", Institutes of Consecrated Life cannot exempt themselves from involvement also in this field, each in accordance with its own charism and following the directives of ecclesiastical authority. The first form of evangelization in relation to our brothers and sisters of other religions should be the testimony of a life of poverty, humility and chastity, imbued with fraternal love for all. At the same time, the freedom of spirit proper to the consecrated life will favour that "dialogue of life" which embodies a basic model of mission and of the proclamation of Christ's Gospel. In order to foster reciprocal knowledge, respect and charity, Religious Institutes can also promote appropriate forms of dialogue, marked by cordial friendship and mutual sincerity, with the monastic communities of other religions.

Another area for cooperation with men and women of different religious traditions is that of a shared concern for human life, extending from compassion for those who are suffering physically and spiritually to commitment to justice, peace and the protection of God's creation. In these areas, Institutes of active life especially will seek an understanding with members of other religions, through that "dialogue of action" which prepares the way for more profound exchanges. A particular field for successful common action with people of other religious traditions is that of efforts to promote the dignity of women. In view of the equality and authentic complementarity of men and women, a valuable service can be rendered above all by consecrated women. These and other ways in which consecrated persons are engaged in the service of interreligious dialogue require an appropriate training, both in initial formation and in continuing formation. They require study and research, since in this very delicate area a profound knowledge of Christianity and of other religions is needed, accompanied by solid faith and by spiritual and personal maturity.

Spirituality as a response to the search for the sacred and the desire for God

103. Because of the very nature of their choice, all who embrace the consecrated life, men and women alike, become privileged partners in the search for God which has always stirred the human heart and has led to the different forms of asceticism and spirituality. Today, in many places, this search is insistently emerging as a response to cultural forces which tend to marginalize the religious dimension of life, if not actually to deny it.

When consecrated persons live consistently and fully their freely assumed commitments, they are able to offer a response to the longings of their contemporaries, and can help to free them from solutions which are for the most part illusory and often involve a denial of the saving Incarnation of Christ (cf. 1 Jn 4:2-3), such as those proposed, for example, by the sects. By practising a personal and communal asceticism which purifies and transfigures their entire existence, they bear witness, against the temptation to self-centredness and sensuality, to the true nature of the search for God. They constitute a warning against confusing that search with a subtle search for self or a flight into gnosticism. Every consecrated person is committed to strengthening the interior life, which in no way involves withdrawal from reality or a turning in upon oneself. Listening in obedience to the word, of which the Church is the guardian and interpreter, the consecrated person points to Christ loved above all things and to the mystery of the Trinity as the response to the profound longings of the human heart and the ultimate goal of every religious journey sincerely open to transcendence. For this reason, consecrated persons are in duty bound to offer a generous welcome and spiritual support to all those who, moved by a thirst for God and a desire to live the demands of faith, turn to them.

CONCLUSION

Unbounded generosity

104. Many people today are puzzled and ask: What is the point of the consecrated life? Why embrace this kind of life, when there are so many urgent needs in the areas of charity and of evangelization itself, to which one can respond even without assuming the particular commitments of the consecrated life? Is the consecrated life not a kind of "waste" of human energies which might be used more efficiently for a greater good, for the benefit of humanity and the Church? These questions are asked more frequently in our day, as a consequence of a utilitarian and technocratic culture which is inclined to assess the importance of things and even of people in relation to their immediate "usefulness". But such questions have always existed, as is eloquently demonstrated by the Gospel episode of the anointing at Bethany: "Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment" (Jn 12:3). When Judas, using the needs of the poor as an excuse, complained about such waste, Jesus replied: "Let her alone!" (Jn 12:7). This is the perennially valid response to the question which many people, even in good faith, are asking about the relevance of the consecrated life: Could one not invest one's life in a more efficient and reasonable way for the betterment of society? This is how Jesus replies: "Let her alone!"

Those who have been given the priceless gift of following the Lord Jesus more closely consider it obvious that he can and must be loved with an undivided heart, that one can devote to him one's whole life, and not merely certain actions or occasional moments or activities. The precious ointment poured out as a pure act of love, and thus transcending all "utilitarian" considerations, is a sign of unbounded generosity, as expressed in a life spent in loving and serving the Lord, in order to devote oneself to his person and his Mystical Body. From such a life "poured out" without reserve there spreads a fragrance which fills the whole house. The house of God, the Church, today no less than in the past, is adorned and enriched by the presence of the consecrated life. What in people's eyes can seem a waste is, for the individuals captivated in the depths of their heart by the beauty and goodness of the Lord, an obvious response of love, a joyful expression of gratitude for having been admitted in a unique way to the knowledge of the Son and to a sharing in his divine mission in the world. "If any of God's children were to know and taste divine love, the uncreated God, the incarnate God, the God who endured suffering, the God who is the supreme good, they would give themselves completely to him, they would withdraw not only from other creatures but even from their very selves, and with all their being would love this God of love, to the point of being completely transformed into the God-man, who is the supreme Beloved".

The consecrated life in the service of the Kingdom of God

105. "What would become of the world if there were no Religious"? Beyond all superficial assessments of its usefulness, the consecrated life is important precisely in its being unbounded generosity and love, and this all the more so in a world which risks being suffocated in the whirlpool of the ephemeral. "Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted, and that the 'salt' of faith would lose its savour in a world undergoing secularization". The Church and society itself need people capable of devoting themselves totally to God and to others for the love of God.

The Church can in no way renounce the consecrated life, for it eloquently expresses her inmost nature as "Bride". In the consecrated life the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world finds fresh enthusiasm and power. There is a need for people able to show the fatherly face of God and the motherly face of the Church, people who spend their lives so that others can have life and hope. The Church needs consecrated persons who, even before committing themselves to the service of this or that noble cause, allow themselves to be transformed by God's grace and conform themselves fully to the Gospel. The whole Church finds in her hands this great gift and gratefully devotes herself to promoting it with respect, with prayer, and with the explicit invitation to accept it. It is important that Bishops, priests and deacons, convinced of the evangelical superiority of this kind of life, should strive to discover and encourage the seeds of vocation through preaching, discernment and wise spiritual guidance. All the faithful are asked to pray constantly for consecrated persons, that their fervour and their capacity to love may grow continually and thus contribute to spreading in today's society the fragrance of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 2:15). The whole Christian community - pastors, laity and consecrated persons - is responsible for the consecrated life, and for welcoming and supporting new vocations.

To young people

106. To you, young people, I say: if you hear the Lord's call, do not reject it! Dare to become part of the great movements of holiness which renowned saints have launched in their following of Christ. Cultivate the ideals proper to your age, but readily accept God's plan for you if he invites you to seek holiness in the consecrated life. Admire all God's works in the world, but be ready to fix your eyes on the things destined never to pass away.

The Third Millennium awaits the contribution of the faith and creativity of great numbers of young consecrated persons, that the world may be made more peaceful and able to welcome God and, in him, all his sons and daughters.

To families

107. I address you, Christian families. Parents, give thanks to the Lord if he has called one of your children to the consecrated life. It is to be considered a great honour - as it always has been - that the Lord should look upon a family and choose to invite one of its members to set out on the path of the evangelical counsels! Cherish the desire to give the Lord one of your children so that God's love can spread in the world. What fruit of conjugal love could be more beautiful than this?

We must remember that if parents do not live the values of the Gospel, the young man or woman will find it very difficult to discern the calling, to understand the need for the sacrifices which must be faced, and to appreciate the beauty of the goal to be achieved. For it is in the family that young people have their first experience of Gospel values and of the love which gives itself to God and to others. They also need to be trained in the responsible use of their own freedom, so that they will be prepared to live, as their vocation demands, in accordance with the loftiest spiritual realities. I pray that you, Christian families, united with the Lord through prayer and the sacramental life, will create homes where vocations are welcomed.

To men and women of good will

108. To all the men and women who are willing to listen to my voice, I wish to address an invitation to seek the paths which lead to the living and true God, including the path marked out by the consecrated life. Consecrated persons bear witness to the fact that "whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man". How many consecrated men and women have bent down, and continue to bend down, as Good Samaritans, over the countless wounds of the brothers and sisters whom they meet on their way!

Look at these people seized by Christ, who show that in self-mastery, sustained by grace and God's love, lies the remedy for the craving to possess, to seek pleasure, to dominate. Do not forget the charisms which have shaped remarkable "seekers of God" and benefactors of humanity, who have provided sure paths for those who seek God with a sincere heart. Consider the great number of saints who have flourished in this way of life; consider the good done to the world, in the past and in the present, by those who have devoted themselves to God! Does not this world of ours need joyful witnesses and prophets of the beneficent power of God's love? Does it not also need men and women who, by their lives and their work, are able to sow seeds of peace and fraternity?

To consecrated persons

109. But it is above all to you, consecrated women and men, that at the end of this Exhortation I appeal with trust: live to the full your dedication to God, so that this world may never be without a ray of divine beauty to lighten the path of human existence. Christians, immersed in the cares and concerns of this world but also called to holiness, need to discover in you purified hearts which in faith "see" God, people docile to the working of the Holy Spirit who resolutely press on in fidelity to the charism of their call and mission.

You know well that you have set out on a journey of continual conversion, of exclusive dedication to the love of God and of your brothers and sisters, in order to bear ever more splendid witness to the grace which transfigures Christian life. The world and the Church seek authentic witnesses to Christ. And the consecrated life is a gift which God offers in order that everyone can recognize the "one thing necessary" (cf. Lk 10:42). To bear witness to Christ by one's life, works and words is the particular mission of the consecrated life in the Church and in the world.

You know the one in whom you have put your trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:12): give him everything! Young people will not be deceived: when they come to you, they want to see what they do not see elsewhere. An immense task awaits you in the future: in a special way young consecrated persons, by witnessing to their consecration, can lead their contemporaries to a renewal of their lives. An impassioned love of Jesus Christ is a powerful attraction for those other young people whom Christ in his goodness is calling to follow him closely and for ever. Our contemporaries want to see in consecrated persons the joy which comes from being with the Lord. Consecrated women and men, old and young alike, live faithfully your commitment to God, in mutual edification and mutual support! Despite the difficulties you may occasionally encounter, and despite the lessening of esteem for the consecrated life in certain quarters, you have the task of once more inviting the men and women of our time to lift their eyes, not to let themselves be overwhelmed by everyday things, to let themselves be captivated by the fascination of God and of his Son's Gospel. Do not forget that you, in a very special way, can and must say that you not only belong to Christ but that "you have become Christ"!

Looking to the future

110. You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things.

Make your lives a fervent expectation of Christ; go forth to meet him like the wise virgins setting out to meet the Bridegroom. Be always ready, faithful to Christ, the Church, to your Institute and to the men and women of our time. In this way you will day by day be renewed in Christ, in order with his Spirit to build fraternal communities, to join him in

washing the feet of the poor, and to contribute in your own unique way to the transfiguration of the world. As it enters the new Millennium, may our world, entrusted to human hands, become ever more human and just, a sign and anticipation of the world to come, in which the Lord, humble and glorified, poor and exalted, will be the full and lasting joy for us and for our brothers and sisters, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Prayer to the Holy Trinity

111. Most Holy Trinity, blessed and the source of all blessedness, bless your sons and daughters whom you have called to praise the greatness of your love, your merciful goodness and your beauty.

Father Most Holy, sanctify the sons and daughters who have consecrated themselves to you, for the glory of your name. Enfold them with your power, enabling them to bear witness that you are the Origin of all things, the one Source of love and freedom. We thank you for the gift of the consecrated life, which in faith seeks you and in its universal mission invites all people to draw near to you. Jesus our Saviour, Incarnate Word, as you have entrusted your own way of life to those whom you have called, continue to draw to yourself men and women who will be, for the people of our time, dispensers of mercy, heralds of your return, living signs of the Resurrection and of its treasures of virginity, poverty and obedience. May no tribulation separate them from you and from your love! Holy Spirit, Love poured into our hearts, who grant grace and inspiration to our minds, the perennial Source of life, who bring to fulfilment the mission of Christ by means of many charisms, we pray to you for all consecrated persons. Fill their hearts with the deep certainty of having been chosen to love, to praise and to serve. Enable them to savour your friendship, fill them with your joy and consolation, help them to overcome moments of difficulty and to rise up again with trust after they have fallen; make them mirrors of the divine beauty. Give them the courage to face the challenges of our time and the grace to bring to all mankind the goodness and loving kindness of our Saviour Jesus Christ (cf. Tit 3:4).

Invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

112. Mary, image of the Church, the Bride without spot or wrinkle, which by imitating you "preserves with virginal purity an integral faith, a firm hope and a sincere charity", sustain consecrated persons on their journey towards the sole and eternal Blessedness.

To you, Virgin of the Visitation, do we entrust them, that they may go forth to meet human needs, to bring help, but above all to bring Jesus. Teach them to proclaim the mighty things which the Lord accomplishes in the world, that all peoples may extol the greatness of his name. Support them in their work for the poor, the hungry, those without hope, the little ones and all who seek your Son with a sincere heart. To you, our Mother, who desire the spiritual and apostolic renewal of your sons and daughters in a response of love and complete dedication to Christ, we address our confident prayer. You who did the will of the Father, ever ready in obedience, courageous in poverty and receptive in fruitful virginity, obtain from your divine Son that all who have received the gift of following him in the consecrated life may be enabled to bear witness to that gift by their transfigured lives, as they joyfully make their way with all their brothers and sisters towards our heavenly homeland and the light which will never grow dim. We ask you this, that in everyone and in everything glory, adoration and love may be given to the Most High Lord of all things, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, in the year 1996, the eighteenth of my Pontificate.

Post-Synodal
Apostolic Exhortation
Of The Holy Father
John Paul II
To The Bishops
Priests And Deacons
Men And Women Religious
And All The Lay Faithful
On The Church In Africa
And Its Evangelizing Mission
Towards The Year 2000

INTRODUCTION

1. The Church which is in Africa celebrated with joy and hope its faith in the Risen Christ during the four weeks of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. Memories of this event are still fresh in the minds of the whole Ecclesial Community.

Faithful to the tradition of the first centuries of Christianity in Africa, the Pastors of this Continent, in communion with the Successor of the Apostle Peter and members of the Episcopal College from other parts of the world, held a Synod which was intended to be an occasion of hope and resurrection, at the very moment when human events seemed to be tempting Africa to discouragement and despair.

The Synod Fathers, assisted by qualified representatives of the clergy, religious and laity, subjected to a detailed and realistic study the lights and shadows, the challenges and future prospects of evangelization in Africa on the threshold of the Third Millennium of the Christian faith.

The members of the Synodal Assembly asked me to bring to the attention of the whole Church the results of their reflections and prayers, discussions and exchanges.(1) With joy and gratitude to the Lord I accepted this request and today, at the very moment when, in communion with the Pastors and faithful of the Catholic Church in Africa, I begin the celebration phase of the Special Assembly for Africa, I am promulgating the text of this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, the result of an intense and prolonged collegial endeavour.

But before describing what developed in the course of the Synod, I consider it helpful to go back, if only briefly, over the various stages of an event of such decisive importance for the Church in Africa.

The Council

2. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council can certainly be considered, from the point of view of the history of salvation, as the cornerstone of the present century which is now rapidly approaching the Third Millennium. In the context of that great event, the Church of God in Africa experienced true moments of grace. Indeed, the idea of some form of meeting of the African Bishops to discuss the evangelization of the Continent dates back to the time of the Council. That historic event was truly the crucible of collegiality and a specific expression of the affective and effective communion of the worldwide Episcopate. At the Council, the Bishops sought to identify appropriate means of better sharing and making more effective their care for all the Churches (cf. 2 Cor 11:28), and for this purpose they began to plan suitable structures at the national, regional and continental level.

The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar

3. It is in such a climate that the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar present at the Council decided to establish their own General Secretariat with the task of coordinating their interventions, in order to present to the Council Fathers, as far as possible, a common point of view. This initial cooperation among the Bishops of Africa later became permanent in the creation in Kampala of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). This took place in July-August 1969, during the visit of Pope Paul VI to Uganda - the first of a Pope to Africa in modern times.

The convocation of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops

4. The General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops, held regularly from 1967 onwards, offered valuable opportunities for the Church in Africa to make its voice heard in the Church throughout the world. Thus, at the Second Ordinary General Assembly (1971), the Synod Fathers from Africa happily took the occasion offered them to appeal for greater

justice in the world. The Third Ordinary General Assembly (1974), on evangelization in the modern world, made possible a special study of the problems of evangelization in Africa. It was then that the Bishops of the Continent present at the Synod issued an important message entitled *Promoting Evangelization in Co-Responsibility*.⁽²⁾ Shortly afterwards, during the Holy Year of 1975, SECAM convoked its own plenary meeting in Rome, in order to examine the subject of evangelization.

5. Subsequently, from 1977 to 1983, some Bishops, priests, consecrated persons, theologians and lay people expressed a desire for an African Council or African Synod, which would have the task of evaluating evangelization in Africa vis-à-vis the great choices to be made regarding the Continent's future. I gladly welcomed and encouraged the idea of the "working together, in one form or another", of the whole African Episcopate in order "to study the religious problems that concern the whole Continent".⁽³⁾ SECAM thus studied ways and means of planning a continental meeting of this kind. A consultation of the Episcopal Conferences and of each Bishop of Africa and Madagascar was organized, after which I was able to convoke a Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. On 6 January 1989, the Solemnity of the Epiphany - the liturgical commemoration on which the Church renews her awareness of the universality of her mission and her consequent duty to bring the light of Christ to all peoples - I announced this "initiative of great importance for the Church", welcoming, as I said, the petitions often expressed for some time by the Bishops of Africa, priests, theologians and representatives of the laity, "in order to promote an organic pastoral solidarity within the entire African territory and nearby Islands".⁽⁴⁾

An event of grace

6. The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was an historic moment of grace: the Lord visited his people in Africa. Indeed, this Continent is today experiencing what we can call a sign of the times, an acceptable time, a day of salvation. It seems that the "hour of Africa" has come, a favourable time which urgently invites Christ's messengers to launch out into the deep and to cast their nets for the catch (cf. Lk 5:4). Just as at Christianity's beginning the minister of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, rejoiced at having received the faith through Baptism and went on his way bearing witness to Christ (cf. Acts 8:27-39), so today the Church in Africa, joyful and grateful for having received the faith, must pursue its evangelizing mission, in order to bring the peoples of the Continent to the Lord, teaching them to observe all that he has commanded (cf. Mt 28:20).

From the opening Solemn Eucharistic Liturgy which on 10 April 1994 I celebrated in Saint Peter's Basilica with thirty-five Cardinals, one Patriarch, thirty-nine Archbishops, one hundred forty-six Bishops and ninety priests, the Church, which is the Family of God ⁽⁵⁾ and the community of believers, gathered about the Tomb of Peter. Africa was present there, in its various rites, with the entire People of God: it rejoiced, expressing its faith in life to the sound of drums and other African musical instruments. On that occasion Africa felt that it was, in the words of Pope Paul VI, "a new homeland for Christ", ⁽⁶⁾ a land loved by the Eternal Father.⁽⁷⁾ That is why I myself greeted that moment of grace in the words of the Psalmist: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24).

Recipients of the Exhortation

7. In communion with the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, I wish to address this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation in the first place to Pastors and lay Catholics, and then to our brothers and sisters of other Christian Confessions, to those who profess the great monotheistic religions, in particular the followers of African traditional religion, and to all people of good will who in one way or another have at heart Africa's spiritual and material development or who hold in their hands the destiny of this great Continent.

First of all my thoughts naturally turn to the Africans themselves and to all who live on the Continent; I think especially of the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church: Bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians, members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, catechists and all those who make service of their brothers and sisters the ideal of their life. I wish to confirm them in their faith (cf. Lk 22:32) and to urge them to persevere in the hope which the Risen Christ gives, overcoming every temptation to discouragement.

Outline of the Exhortation

8. The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops examined thoroughly the topic which had been placed before it: "The Church in Africa and her evangelizing mission towards the Year 2000: 'You shall be my witnesses' (Acts 1:8)". This Exhortation will therefore endeavour to follow closely the same thematic framework. It will begin from the historic moment, a true *kairos*, in which the Synod was held, examining its objectives, preparation and celebration. It will consider the current situation of the Church in Africa, recalling the different phases of missionary commitment. It will then examine the various aspects of the evangelizing mission which the Church must take into account at the present time: evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace, and the means of social communication. A mention of the urgent tasks and challenges facing the Church in Africa on the eve of the Year 2000 will enable us to sketch out the tasks of Christ's witnesses in Africa, so that they will make a more effective

contribution to the building up of God's Kingdom. It will thus be possible at the end to describe the responsibilities of the Church in Africa as a missionary Church: a Church of mission which itself becomes missionary: "You shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

CHAPTER I - AN HISTORIC MOMENT OF GRACE

9. "This Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops is a providential event of grace, for which we must give praise and thanks to the Almighty and Merciful Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit".(8) It is with these words that the Fathers solemnly opened the discussion of the Synod's theme during the first General Congregation. On an earlier occasion, I had expressed a similar conviction, recognizing that "the Special Assembly is an ecclesial event of fundamental importance for Africa, a *kairos*, a moment of grace, in which God manifests his salvation. The whole Church is invited to live fully this time of grace, to accept and spread the Good News. The effort expended in preparation for the Synod will not only benefit the celebration of the Synod itself, but from this time on will work in favour of the local Churches which make their pilgrim way in Africa, whose faith and witness are being strengthened and are becoming increasingly mature".(9)

Profession of faith

10. This moment of grace was in the first place manifested in a solemn profession of faith. Gathered about the Tomb of Peter for the opening of the Special Assembly, the Synod Fathers proclaimed their faith, the faith of Peter who, in answer to Christ's question, "Do you also wish to go away?", replied: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:67-69). The Bishops of Africa, in whom the Catholic Church during those days found herself expressed in a special way at the Tomb of the Apostle, confirmed their steadfast belief that the greatness and mercy of the one God were manifested above all in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, the Son who is consubstantial with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit and who, in this Trinitarian unity, receives the fullness of honour and glory. This - the Fathers affirmed - is our faith; this is the faith of the Church; this is the faith of all the local Churches which everywhere in Africa are on pilgrimage towards the House of God.

This faith in Jesus Christ was manifested unceasingly, forcefully and unanimously in the interventions of the Synod Fathers throughout the meeting of the Special Assembly. In the strength of this faith, the Bishops of Africa entrusted their Continent to Christ the Lord, convinced that he alone, through his Gospel and his Church, can save Africa from its present difficulties and heal its many ills.(10)

11. At the same time, at the solemn opening of the Special Assembly, the Bishops of Africa publicly proclaimed their faith in the "unique Church of Christ, which in the Creed we avow as one, holy, catholic and apostolic".(11) These characteristics indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. She "does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities".(12)

All those privileged to be present at the celebration of the Special Assembly for Africa rejoiced to see how African Catholics are assuming ever greater responsibility in their local Churches and are seeking a deeper understanding of what it means to be both Catholic and African. The celebration of the Special Assembly showed to the whole world that the local Churches of Africa hold a rightful place in the communion of the Church, that they are entitled to preserve and to develop "their own traditions, without in any way lessening the primacy of the Chair of Peter. This Chair presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time it sees that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute towards it".(13)

Synod of Resurrection, Synod of Hope

12. By a singular design of Providence, the solemn inauguration of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops took place on the Second Sunday of Easter, at the end of the Easter Octave. The Synod Fathers, assembled in Saint Peter's Basilica on that day, were well aware that the joy of their Church flowed from the same event which had gladdened the Apostles' hearts on Easter Day (cf. Lk 24:40-41): the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They were deeply aware of the presence in their midst of the Risen Lord, who said to them as he had to his Apostles: "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:21, 26). They were also aware of his promise to remain with his Church for ever (cf. Mt 28:20), and therefore also throughout the duration of the Synodal Assembly. The Easter spirit in which the Special Assembly began its work, with its members united in celebrating their faith in the Risen Lord, spontaneously brought to mind the words which Jesus addressed to the Apostle Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn 20:29).

13. This was indeed a Synod of Resurrection and Hope, as the Synod Fathers joyfully and enthusiastically declared in the opening words of their Message to the People of God. They are words which I willingly make my own: "Like Mary Magdalene on the morning of the Resurrection, like the disciples at Emmaus with burning hearts and enlightened minds, the Special Synod for Africa, Madagascar and the Islands proclaims: Christ, our Hope, is risen. He has met us,

has walked along with us. He has explained the Scriptures to us. Here is what he said to us: 'I am the First and the Last, I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever and I hold the keys of death and of the abode of the dead' (Rev 1:17-18)... And as Saint John at Patmos during particularly difficult times received prophecies of hope for the People of God, we also announce a message of hope. At this time when so much fratricidal hate inspired by political interests is tearing our peoples apart, when the burden of the international debt and currency devaluation is crushing them, we, the Bishops of Africa, together with all the participants in this holy Synod, united with the Holy Father and with all our Brothers in the Episcopate who elected us, we want to say a word of hope and encouragement to you, Family of God in Africa, to you, the Family of God all over the world: Christ our Hope is alive; we shall live!" (14)

14. I exhort all God's People in Africa to accept with open hearts the message of hope addressed to them by the Synodal Assembly. During their discussions the Synod Fathers, fully aware that they were expressing the expectations not only of African Catholics but also those of all the men and women of the Continent, squarely faced the many evils which oppress Africa today. The Fathers explored at length and in all its complexity what the Church is called to do in order to bring about the desired changes, but they did so with an attitude free from pessimism or despair. Despite the mainly negative picture which today characterizes numerous parts of Africa, and despite the sad situations being experienced in many countries, the Church has the duty to affirm vigorously that these difficulties can be overcome. She must strengthen in all Africans hope of genuine liberation. In the final analysis, this confidence is based on the Church's awareness of God's promise, which assures us that history is not closed in upon itself but is open to God's Kingdom. This is why there is no justification for despair or pessimism when we think about the future of both Africa and any other part of the world.

Affective and effective collegiality

15. Before dealing with the different themes, I would like to state that the Synod of Bishops is an extremely beneficial instrument for fostering ecclesial communion. When towards the end of the Second Vatican Council Pope Paul VI established the Synod, he clearly indicated that one of its essential tasks would be to express and foster, under the guidance of the Successor of Peter, mutual communion between Bishops throughout the world.(15) The principle underlying the setting up of the Synod of Bishops is straightforward: the more the communion of the Bishops among themselves is strengthened, the more the communion of the Church as a whole is enriched. The Church in Africa testifies to the truth of these words, for it has experienced the enthusiasm and practical results which accompanied the preparations for the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted to it.

16. At my first meeting with the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, gathered to discuss the Special Assembly for Africa, I indicated the reason why it seemed appropriate to convoke this Assembly: the promotion of "an organic pastoral solidarity throughout Africa and the adjacent Islands".(16) With these words I wished to include the main goals and objectives which that Assembly would have to pursue. In order to clarify my expectations further, I added that the reflections in preparation for the Assembly "should cover all the important aspects of the life of the Church in Africa, and in particular should include evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, pastoral care in social areas and the means of social communication".(17)

17. During my Pastoral Visits in Africa, I frequently referred to the Special Assembly for Africa and to the principal aims for which it had been convoked. When I took part for the first time on African soil at a meeting of the Council of the Synod, I did not fail to emphasize my conviction that a Synodal Assembly cannot be reduced to a consultation on practical matters. Its true *raison d'être* is the fact that the Church can move forward only by strengthening communion among her members, beginning with her Pastors.(18)

Every Synodal Assembly manifests and develops solidarity between the heads of particular Churches in carrying out their mission beyond the boundaries of their respective Dioceses. The Second Vatican Council taught: "As lawful Successors of the Apostles and as members of the Episcopal College, Bishops should always realize that they are linked one to the other, and should show concern for all the Churches. For by divine institution and the requirement of their apostolic office, each one in concert with his fellow Bishops is responsible for the Church".(19)

18. The theme assigned to the Special Assembly - "The Church in Africa and her evangelizing mission towards the Year 2000. 'You shall be my witnesses' (Acts 1:8)" - expresses my desire that this Church should live the time leading up to the Great Jubilee as "a new Advent", a time of expectation and preparation. In fact I consider preparations for the Year 2000 as one of the keys for interpreting my Pontificate.(20)

The series of Synodal Assemblies which have taken place in the course of nearly thirty years - General Assemblies and Special Assemblies on a continental, regional or national level - are all part of preparing for the Great Jubilee. The fact that evangelization is the theme of all these Synodal Assemblies is meant to indicate how alive today is the Church's awareness of the salvific mission which she has received from Christ. This awareness is especially evident in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations devoted to evangelization, catechesis, the family, reconciliation and penance in the life of the Church and of all humanity, the vocation and mission of the lay faithful and the formation of priests.

In full communion with the universal Church

19. Right from the beginning of the preparations for the Special Assembly, it was my heartfelt desire, fully shared by the Council of the General Secretariat, to ensure that this Synod would be authentically and unequivocally African. At the same time, it was of fundamental importance that the Special Assembly should be celebrated in full communion with the universal Church. Indeed, the Assembly always kept in mind the needs of the universal Church. Likewise, when the time came to publish the Lineamenta, I invited my Brothers in the Episcopate and the whole People of God throughout the world to pray for the Special Assembly for Africa, and to feel that they were part of the activities being promoted in preparation for that event.

This Assembly, as I have often had occasion to say, was of profound significance for the universal Church, not only because of the great interest raised everywhere by its convocation, but also because of the very nature of ecclesial communion which transcends all boundaries of time and space. In fact the Special Assembly inspired many prayers and good works through which individuals and communities of the Church in the other continents accompanied the Synodal process. And how can we doubt that through the mystery of ecclesial communion the Synod was also supported by the prayers of the Saints in heaven?

When I directed that the first working session of the Special Assembly should take place in Rome, I did so in order to express even more clearly the communion which links the Church in Africa with the universal Church, and in order to emphasize the commitment of all the faithful to Africa.

20. The solemn Eucharistic concelebration for the opening of the Synod at which I presided in Saint Peter's Basilica highlighted the universality of the Church in a striking and deeply moving way. This universality, "which is not uniformity but rather communion in a diversity compatible with the Gospel", (21) was experienced by all the Bishops. They were aware of having been consecrated as members of the Body of Bishops which succeeds the College of the Apostles, not only for one Diocese but for the salvation of the whole world.(22)

I give thanks to Almighty God for the opportunity which he gave us to experience, through the Special Assembly, what genuine catholicity implies. "In virtue of this catholicity each individual part of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church".(23)

A relevant and credible message

21. According to the Synod Fathers, the main question facing the Church in Africa consists in delineating as clearly as possible what it is and what it must fully carry out, in order that its message may be relevant and credible.(24) All the discussions at the Assembly referred to this truly essential and fundamental need, which is a real challenge for the Church in Africa.

It is of course true "that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization: it is he who impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and it is he who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood".(25) After reaffirming this truth, the Special Assembly rightly went on to add that evangelization is also a mission which the Lord Jesus entrusted to his Church under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our cooperation is necessary through fervent prayer, serious reflection, suitable planning and the mobilization of resources.(26)

The Synod's debate on the relevance and credibility of the Church's message in Africa inescapably entailed consideration of the very credibility of the proclaimers of this message. The Synod Fathers faced the question directly, with genuine frankness and devoid of any complacency. Pope Paul VI had already addressed this question in memorable words when he stated: "It is often said nowadays that the present century thirsts for authenticity. Especially in regard to young people, it is said that they have a horror of the artificial or false and that they are searching above all for truth and honesty. These signs of the times should find us vigilant. Either tacitly or aloud - but always forcefully - we are being asked: Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? The witness of life has become more than ever an essential condition for real effectiveness in preaching. Precisely because of this we are, to a certain extent, responsible for the progress of the Gospel that we proclaim".(27)

That is why, with reference to the Church's evangelizing mission in the field of justice and peace, I have said: "Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social doctrine will gain credibility more immediately from witness of action than as a result of its internal logic and consistency".(28)

22. How can I fail to recall here that the Eighth Plenary Assembly of SECAM held in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1987, had already considered with remarkable clarity the question of the credibility and relevance of the Church's message in Africa? That same Assembly had declared that the credibility of the Church in Africa depended upon Bishops and priests who followed Christ's example and could give witness of an exemplary life; upon truly faithful men and women religious, authentic witnesses by their way of living the evangelical counsels; upon a dynamic laity, with deeply believing parents, educators conscious of their responsibilities and political leaders animated by a profound sense of morality.(29)

The Family of God in the Synodal process

23. Speaking to the members of the Council of the General Secretariat on 23 June 1989, I laid special emphasis on the involvement of the whole People of God, at all levels and especially in Africa, in the preparations for the Special Assembly. "If this Synod is prepared well, " I said, "it will be able to involve all levels of the Christian Community: individuals, small communities, parishes, Dioceses, and local, national and international bodies".(30)

Between the beginning of my Pontificate and the solemn inauguration of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, I paid a total of ten Pastoral Visits to Africa and Madagascar, going to thirty-six countries. On my Apostolic Visits after the convocation of the Special Assembly, the theme of the Synod and the need for all the faithful to prepare for the Synodal Assembly always figured prominently in my meetings with the People of God in Africa. I also took advantage of the *ad Limina* Visits of the Continent's Bishops in order to ask for the cooperation of everyone in the preparation of the Special Synod for Africa. In addition, on three separate occasions I held working sessions with the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod on African soil: at Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast (1990); at Luanda, Angola (1992); and at Kampala, Uganda (1993). All this was done in order to mobilize an active and harmonious participation by Africans in the preparation of the Synodal Assembly.

24. The presentation of the *Lineamenta* at the Ninth Plenary Assembly of SECAM in Lomé, Togo, on 25 July 1990, was undoubtedly a new and significant stage in the preparation of the Special Assembly. It can be said that with the publication of the *Lineamenta* preparations for the Synod began in earnest in all the particular Churches of Africa. The Assembly of SECAM in Lomé approved a Prayer for the Special Assembly and requested that it be recited both publicly and privately in every African parish until the actual celebration of the Synod. This initiative of SECAM was truly felicitous and did not pass unnoticed by the universal Church.

In order to make the *Lineamenta* more available, many Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses translated the document into their own languages, for example into Swahili, Arabic, Malagasy, etc. "Publications, conferences and symposia on the themes of the Synod were organized by various Episcopal Conferences, Institutes of Theology and Seminaries, Associations of Institutes of Consecrated Life, Dioceses, some important journals and periodicals, individual Bishops and theologians".(31)

25. I fervently thank Almighty God for the meticulous care with which the Synod's *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum Laboris* (32) were drawn up. It was a task accepted and carried out by Africans - Bishops and experts - beginning with the Ante-Preparatory Commission of the Synod which met in January and March 1989. This Commission was then replaced by the Council of the General Secretariat of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, established on 20 June 1989.

I am also deeply grateful to the working group which so carefully prepared the Eucharistic Liturgies for the opening and closing of the Synod. The group, which included theologians, liturgists and experts in African chants and musical instruments, ensured, in keeping with my wishes, that these celebrations would have a distinctly African character.

26. I must now add that the response of the African peoples to my appeal to them to share in the preparation of the Synod was truly admirable. The replies given to the *Lineamenta*, both within and beyond the African Ecclesial Communities, far exceeded every expectation. Many local Churches used the *Lineamenta* in order to mobilize the faithful and, from that time onwards, we can say that the results of the Synod were beginning to appear in a fresh commitment and renewed awareness among African Christians.(33)

Throughout the various phases of the preparation for the Special Assembly, many members of the Church in Africa - clergy, religious and laity - entered with exemplary dedication into the Synodal process, "walking together", placing their individual talents at the service of the Church, and fervently praying together for the Synod's success. More than once the Synod Fathers themselves noted, during the actual Synodal Assembly, that their work was made easier precisely by the "careful and meticulous preparation of the Synod, and the active involvement of the entire Church in Africa at all levels".(34)

God wills to save Africa

27. The Apostle of the Gentiles tells us that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:4-6). Since God, in fact, calls all people to one and the same divine destiny, "we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this Paschal Mystery".(35) God's redeeming love embraces the whole of humanity, every race, tribe and nation: thus it also embraces all the peoples of Africa. Divine Providence willed that Africa should be present during the Passion of Christ in the person of Simon of Cyrene, forced by the Roman soldiers to help the Lord to carry the Cross (cf. Mk 15:21).

28. The Liturgy of the Sixth Sunday of Easter in 1994, at the Solemn Eucharistic Celebration for the closing of the working session of the Special Assembly, provided me with the occasion to develop a meditation upon God's salvific plan for Africa. One of the Scriptural readings, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, recalled an event which can be understood as the first step in the Church's mission "ad gentes": it is the account of the visit made by Peter, at the bidding of the Holy Spirit, to the home of a Gentile, the centurion Cornelius. Until that time the Gospel had been

proclaimed mainly to the Jews. After considerable hesitation, Peter, enlightened by the Spirit, decided to go to the house of a Gentile. When he arrived, he discovered to his joyful surprise that the centurion was awaiting Christ and Baptism. The Acts of the Apostles says: "the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God" (10:45-46).

In the house of Cornelius the miracle of Pentecost was in a sense repeated. Peter then said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him... Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:34-35, 47).

Thus began the Church's mission ad gentes, of which Paul of Tarsus would become the principal herald. The first missionaries who reached the heart of Africa undoubtedly felt an astonishment similar to that experienced by the Christians of the Apostolic age at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

29. God's salvific plan for Africa is at the origin of the growth of the Church on the African Continent. But since by Christ's will the Church is by her nature missionary, it follows that the Church in Africa is itself called to play an active role in God's plan of salvation. For this reason I have often said that "the Church in Africa is a missionary Church and a mission Church".(36)

The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops had the task of examining appropriate ways and means whereby Africans would be better able to implement the mandate which the Risen Lord gave to his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

CHAPTER II - THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

I. Brief history of the continent's evangelization

30. On the opening day of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, the first meeting of this kind in history, the Synod Fathers recalled some of the marvels wrought by God in the course of Africa's evangelization. It is a history which goes back to the period of the Church's very birth. The spread of the Gospel has taken place in different phases. The first centuries of Christianity saw the evangelization of Egypt and North Africa. A second phase, involving the parts of the Continent south of the Sahara, took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A third phase, marked by an extraordinary missionary effort, began in the nineteenth century.

First phase

31. In a message to the Bishops and to all the peoples of Africa concerning the promotion of the religious, civil and social well-being of the Continent, my venerable Predecessor Paul VI recalled in memorable words the glorious splendour of Africa's Christian past: "We think of the Christian Churches of Africa whose origins go back to the times of the Apostles and are traditionally associated with the name and teaching of Mark the Evangelist. We think of their countless Saints, Martyrs, Confessors, and Virgins, and recall the fact that from the second to the fourth centuries Christian life in the North of Africa was most vigorous and had a leading place in theological study and literary production. The names of the great doctors and writers come to mind, men like Origen, Saint Athanasius, and Saint Cyril, leaders of the Alexandrian school, and at the other end of the North African coastline, Tertullian, Saint Cyprian and above all Saint Augustine, one of the most brilliant lights of the Christian world. We shall mention the great Saints of the desert, Paul, Anthony, and Pachomius, the first founders of the monastic life, which later spread through their example in both the East and the West. And among many others we want also to mention Saint Frumentius, known by the name of Abba Salama, who was consecrated Bishop by Saint Athanasius and became the first Apostle of Ethiopia".(37) During these first centuries of the Church in Africa, certain women also bore their own witness to Christ. Among them Saints Perpetua and Felicitas, Saint Monica and Saint Thecla are particularly deserving of mention.

"These noble examples, as also the saintly African Popes, Victor I, Melchiades and Gelasius I, belong to the common heritage of the Church, and the Christian writers of Africa remain today a basic source for deepening our knowledge of the history of salvation in the light of the Word of God. In recalling the ancient glories of Christian Africa, we wish to express our profound respect for the Churches with which we are not in full communion: the Greek Church of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Coptic Church of Egypt and the Church of Ethiopia, which share with the Catholic Church a common origin and the doctrinal and spiritual heritage of the great Fathers and Saints, not only of their own land, but of all the early Church. They have laboured much and suffered much to keep the Christian name alive in Africa through all the vicissitudes of history".(38) These Churches continue to give evidence down to our own times of the Christian vitality which flows from their Apostolic origins. This is especially true in Egypt, in Ethiopia and, until the seventeenth century, in Nubia. At that time a new phase of evangelization was beginning on the rest of the Continent.

Second phase

32. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the exploration of the African coast by the Portuguese was soon accompanied by the evangelization of the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. That endeavour included the regions of present-day Benin, São Tomé, Angola, Mozambique and Madagascar.

On Pentecost Sunday, 7 June 1992, for the commemoration of the five hundred years of the evangelization of Angola, I said in Luanda: "The Acts of the Apostles indicate by name the inhabitants of the places who participated directly in the birth of the Church and the work of the breath of the Holy Spirit. They all said: 'We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God' (Acts 2:11). Five hundred years ago the people of Angola were added to this chorus of languages. In that moment, in your African homeland the Pentecost of Jerusalem was renewed. Your ancestors heard the message of the Good News which is the language of the Spirit. Their hearts accepted this message for the first time, and they bowed their heads to the waters of the baptismal font in which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a person dies with Christ and is born again to new life in his Resurrection... It was certainly the same Spirit who moved those men of faith, the first missionaries, who in 1491 sailed into the mouth of the Zaire River, at Pinda, beginning a genuine missionary saga. It was the Holy Spirit, who works as he wills in people's hearts, who moved the great King of the Congo, Nzinga-a-Nkuwu, to ask for missionaries to proclaim the Gospel. It was the Holy Spirit who sustained the life of those four first Angolan Christians who, returning from Europe, testified to the Christian faith. After the first missionaries, many others came from Portugal and other European countries to continue, expand and strengthen the work that had been begun".(39)

A certain number of Episcopal Sees were erected during this period, and one of the first fruits of that missionary endeavour was the consecration in Rome, by Pope Leo X in 1518, of Don Henrique, the son of Don Alfonso I, King of the Congo, as Titular Bishop of Utica. Don Henrique thus became the first native Bishop of Black Africa.

It was during this period, in 1622, that my Predecessor Pope Gregory XV permanently erected the Congregation de Propaganda Fide for the purpose of better organizing and expanding the missions.

Because of various difficulties, the second phase of the evangelization of Africa came to an end in the eighteenth century, with the disappearance of practically all the missions south of the Sahara.

Third phase

33. The third phase of Africa's systematic evangelization began in the nineteenth century, a period marked by an extraordinary effort organized by the great apostles and promoters of the African mission. It was a period of rapid growth, as the statistics presented to the Synodal Assembly by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples clearly demonstrate.(40) Africa has responded with great generosity to Christ's call. In recent decades many African countries have celebrated the first centenary of the beginning of their evangelization. Indeed, the growth of the Church in Africa over the last hundred years is a marvelous work of divine grace.

The glory and splendour of the present period of Africa's evangelization are illustrated in a truly admirable way by the Saints whom modern Africa has given to the Church. Pope Paul VI eloquently expressed this when he canonized the Ugandan Martyrs in Saint Peter's Basilica on World Mission Day, 1964: "These African Martyrs add a new page to that list of victorious men and women that we call the martyrology, in which we find the most magnificent as well as the most tragic stories. The page that they add is worthy to take its place alongside those wonderful stories of ancient Africa... For from the Africa that was sprinkled with the blood of these Martyrs, the first of this new age (and, God willing, the last, so sublime, so precious was their sacrifice), there is emerging a free and redeemed Africa".(41)

34. The list of Saints that Africa gives to the Church, the list that is its greatest title of honour, continues to grow. How could we fail to mention, among the most recent, Blessed Clementine Anwarite, Virgin and Martyr of Zaire, whom I beatified on African soil in 1985, Blessed Victoria Rasoamanarivo of Madagascar, and Blessed Josephine Bakhita of the Sudan, also beatified during my Pontificate? And how can we not recall Blessed Isidore Bakanja, Martyr of Zaire, whom I had the privilege of raising to the honours of the altar in the course of the Special Assembly for Africa? "Other causes are reaching their final stages. The Church in Africa must furnish and write her own Martyrology, adding to the outstanding figures of the first centuries... the Martyrs and Saints of our own day".(42)

Faced with the tremendous growth of the Church in Africa over the last hundred years and the fruits of holiness that it has borne, there is only one possible explanation: all this is a gift of God, for no human effort alone could have performed this work in the course of such a relatively short period of time. There is however no reason for worldly triumphalism. In recalling the glorious splendour of the Church in Africa, the Synod Fathers only wished to celebrate God's marvellous deeds for Africa's liberation and salvation.

"This is the Lord's doing;

it is marvellous in our eyes" (Ps 118:23).

"He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Lk 1:49).

Homage to missionaries

35. The splendid growth and achievements of the Church in Africa are due largely to the heroic and selfless dedication of generations of missionaries. This fact is acknowledged by everyone. The hallowed soil of Africa is truly sown with the tombs of courageous heralds of the Gospel.

When the Bishops of Africa met in Rome for the Special Assembly, they were well aware of the debt of gratitude which their Continent owes to its ancestors in the faith.

In his Address to the inaugural Assembly of SECAM at Kampala, on 31 July 1969, Pope Paul VI spoke about this debt of gratitude: "By now, you Africans are missionaries to yourselves. The Church of Christ is well and truly planted in this blessed soil (cf. Ad Gentes, 6). One duty, however, remains to be fulfilled: we must remember those who, before you, and even today with you, have preached the Gospel in Africa; for Sacred Scripture admonishes us to 'Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life; and imitate their faith' (Heb 13:7). That is a history which we must not forget; it confers on the local Church the mark of its authenticity and nobility, its mark as 'apostolic'. That history is a drama of charity, heroism and sacrifice which makes the African Church great and holy from its very origins".(43)

36. The Special Assembly worthily fulfilled this debt of gratitude at its first General Congregation when it declared: "It is appropriate at this point to pay profound homage to the missionaries, men and women of all the Religious and Secular Institutes, as well as to all the countries which, during the almost two thousand years of the evangelization of the African Continent, devoted themselves, without counting the cost, to the task of transmitting the torch of the Christian faith... That is why we, the happy inheritors of this marvellous adventure, joyfully pay our debt of thanks to God on this solemn occasion".(44)

The Synod Fathers strongly reiterated their homage to the missionaries in their Message to the People of God, but they did not forget to pay tribute to the sons and daughters of Africa who served as co-workers of the missionaries, especially catechists and translators.(45)

37. It is thanks to the great missionary epic which took place on the African Continent, especially during the last two centuries, that we were able to meet in Rome in order to celebrate the Special Assembly for Africa. The seed sown at that time has borne much fruit. My Brothers in the Episcopate, who are sons of the peoples of Africa, are eloquent witnesses to this. Together with their priests, they now carry on their shoulders the major part of the work of evangelization. Signs of this fruitfulness are also the many sons and daughters of Africa who enter the older missionary Congregations or the new Institutes founded on African soil, taking into their own hands the torch of total consecration to the service of God and the Gospel.

Deeper roots and growth of the Church

38. The fact that in the course of almost two centuries the number of African Catholics has grown quickly is an outstanding achievement by any standard. In particular, the building up of the Church on the Continent is confirmed by facts such as the noteworthy and rapid increase in the number of ecclesiastical circumscriptions, the growth of a native clergy, of seminarians and candidates for Institutes of Consecrated Life, and the steady increase in the network of catechists, whose contribution to the spread of the Gospel among the African peoples is well known. Finally, of fundamental importance is the high percentage of indigenous Bishops who now make up the Hierarchy on the Continent.

The Synod Fathers identified many very significant accomplishments of the Church in Africa in the areas of inculturation and ecumenical dialogue.(46) The outstanding and meritorious achievements in the field of education are universally acknowledged.

Although Catholics constitute only fourteen per cent of the population of Africa, Catholic health facilities make up seventeen per cent of the health-care institutions of the entire Continent.

The initiatives boldly undertaken by the young Churches of Africa in order to bring the Gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) are certainly worthy of note. The missionary Institutes founded in Africa have grown in number, and have begun to supply missionaries not only for the countries of the Continent but also for other areas of the world. A slowly increasing number of African diocesan priests are beginning to make themselves available, for limited periods, as *fidei donum* priests in other needy Dioceses - in their own countries or abroad. The African provinces of Religious Institutes of pontifical right, both of men and of women, have also recorded a growth in membership. In this way the Church offers her ministry to the peoples of Africa; but she also accepts involvement in the "exchange of gifts" with other particular Churches which make up the People of God. All this manifests, in a tangible way, the maturity which the Church in Africa has attained: this is what made possible the celebration of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

What has become of Africa?

39. A little less than thirty years ago many African countries gained their independence from the colonial powers. This gave rise to great hopes with regard to the political, economic, social and cultural development of the African peoples. However, "in some countries the internal situation has unfortunately not yet been consolidated, and violence has had, or

in some cases still has, the upper hand. But this does not justify a general condemnation involving a whole people or a whole nation or, even worse, a whole continent".(47)

40. But what is the true overall situation of the African Continent today, especially from the point of view of the Church's evangelizing mission? In this regard the Synod Fathers first of all asked: "In a Continent full of bad news, how is the Christian message 'Good News' for our people? In the midst of an all-pervading despair, where lie the hope and optimism which the Gospel brings? Evangelization stands for many of those essential values which our Continent very much lacks: hope, peace, joy, harmony, love and unity".(48)

After correctly noting that Africa is a huge Continent where very diverse situations are found, and that it is necessary to avoid generalizations both in evaluating problems and suggesting solutions, the Synodal Assembly sadly had to say: "One common situation, without any doubt, is that Africa is full of problems. In almost all our nations, there is abject poverty, tragic mismanagement of available scarce resources, political instability and social disorientation. The results stare us in the face: misery, wars, despair. In a world controlled by rich and powerful nations, Africa has practically become an irrelevant appendix, often forgotten and neglected".(49)

41. For many Synod Fathers contemporary Africa can be compared to the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; he fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him and departed, leaving him half dead (cf. Lk 10:30-37). Africa is a Continent where countless human beings - men and women, children and young people - are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned. They are in dire need of Good Samaritans who will come to their aid.

For my part, I express the hope that the Church will continue patiently and tirelessly its work as a Good Samaritan. Indeed, for a long period certain regimes, which have now come to an end, were a great trial for Africans and weakened their ability to respond to situations: an injured person has to rediscover all the resources of his own humanity. The sons and daughters of Africa need an understanding presence and pastoral concern. They need to be helped to recoup their energies so as to put them at the service of the common good.

Positive values of African culture

42. Although Africa is very rich in natural resources, it remains economically poor. At the same time, it is endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole. The Synod Fathers highlighted some of these cultural values, which are truly a providential preparation for the transmission of the Gospel. They are values which can contribute to an effective reversal of the Continent's dramatic situation and facilitate that worldwide revival on which the desired development of individual nations depends.

Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these peoples, as is also the need for rites of purification and expiation.

43. In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God. "The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints? The peoples of Africa respect the life which is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life. They reject the idea that it can be destroyed, even when the so-called 'progressive civilizations' would like to lead them in this direction. And practices hostile to life are imposed on them by means of economic systems which serve the selfishness of the rich".(50) Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents and relatives within the family.

African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions.

Some choices of the African peoples

44. While the shadows and the dark side of the African situation described above can in no way be minimized, it is worth recalling here a number of positive achievements of the peoples of the Continent which deserve to be praised and encouraged. For example, the Synod Fathers in their Message to the People of God were pleased to mention the beginning of the democratic process in many African countries, expressing the hope that this process would be consolidated, and that all obstacles and resistance to the establishment of the rule of law would be promptly removed through the concerted action of all those involved and through their sense of the common good.(51)

The "winds of change" are blowing strongly in many parts of Africa, and people are demanding ever more insistently the recognition and promotion of human rights and freedoms. In this regard I note with satisfaction that the Church in Africa, faithful to its vocation, stands resolutely on the side of the oppressed and of voiceless and marginalized peoples. I strongly encourage it to continue to bear this witness. The preferential option for the poor is "a special form of

primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole Tradition of the Church bears witness... The motivating concern for the poor - who are in the very meaning of the term 'the Lord's poor' - must be translated at all levels into concrete actions, until it decisively attains a series of necessary reforms".(52)

45. In spite of its poverty and the meagre means at its disposal, the Church in Africa plays a leading role in what touches upon integral human development. Its remarkable achievements in this regard are often recognized by governments and international experts.

The Special Assembly for Africa expressed deep gratitude "to all Christians and to all men and women of good will who are working in the fields of assistance and health-care with Caritas and other development organizations".(53) The assistance which they, as Good Samaritans, give to the African victims of wars and disasters, to refugees and displaced persons, deserves the admiration, gratitude and support of all.

I feel it my duty to express heartfelt thanks to the Church in Africa for the role which it has played over the years as a promoter of peace and reconciliation in many situations of conflict, political turmoil and civil war.

II. Present-day problems of the Church in Africa

46. The Bishops of Africa are faced with two fundamental questions. How must the Church carry out her evangelizing mission as the Year 2000 approaches? How can African Christians become ever more faithful witnesses to the Lord Jesus? In order to provide adequate responses to these questions the Bishops, both before and during the Special Assembly, examined the major challenges that the Ecclesial Community in Africa must face today.

More profound evangelization

47. The primary and most fundamental fact noted by the Synod Fathers is the thirst for God felt by the peoples of Africa. In order not to disappoint this expectation, the members of the Church must first of all deepen their faith.(54) Indeed, precisely because she evangelizes, the Church must "begin by being evangelized herself".(55) She needs to meet the challenge raised by "this theme of the Church which is evangelized by constant conversion and renewal, in order to evangelize the world with credibility".(56)

The Synod recognized the urgency of proclaiming the Good News to the millions of people in Africa who are not yet evangelized. The Church certainly respects and esteems the non-Christian religions professed by very many Africans, for these religions are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. However, "neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ. On the contrary the Church holds that these multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ (cf. Eph 3:8) - riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth". (57)

48. The Synod Fathers rightly affirmed that "a serious concern for a true and balanced inculturation is necessary in order to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast evolving society".(58) During my visit to Malawi I made the same point: "I put before you today a challenge - a challenge to reject a way of living which does not correspond to the best of your traditions, and your Christian faith. Many people in Africa look beyond Africa for the so-called 'freedom of the modern way of life'. Today I urge you to look inside yourselves. Look to the riches of your own traditions, look to the faith which we are celebrating in this assembly. Here you will find genuine freedom - here you will find Christ who will lead you to the truth".(59)

Overcoming divisions

49. Another challenge identified by the Synod Fathers concerns the various forms of division which need to be healed through honest dialogue.(60) It has been rightly noted that, within the borders left behind by the colonial powers, the co-existence of ethnic groups with different traditions, languages, and even religions often meets obstacles arising from serious mutual hostility. "Tribal oppositions at times endanger if not peace, at least the pursuit of the common good of the society. They also create difficulties for the life of the Churches and the acceptance of Pastors from other ethnic groups".(61) This is why the Church in Africa feels challenged by the specific responsibility of healing these divisions. For the same reason the Special Assembly emphasized the importance of ecumenical dialogue with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and of dialogue with African traditional religion and Islam. The Fathers also considered the means to be used to achieve this goal.

Marriage and vocations

50. A major challenge emphasized almost unanimously by the Episcopal Conferences of Africa in their replies to the Lineamenta concerned Christian marriage and family life.(62) What is at stake is extremely serious: truly "the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family".(63)

Another fundamental responsibility which the Special Assembly highlighted is concern for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. It is necessary to discern them wisely, to provide competent directors and to oversee the quality of the formation offered. The fulfilment of the hope for a flowering of African missionary vocations depends on the attention given to the solution of this problem, a flowering that is required if the Gospel is to be proclaimed in every part of the Continent and beyond.

Social and political difficulties

51. "In Africa, the need to apply the Gospel to concrete life is felt strongly. How could one proclaim Christ on that immense Continent while forgetting that it is one of the world's poorest regions? How could one fail to take into account the anguished history of a land where many nations are still in the grip of famine, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability and the violation of human rights? This is all a challenge to evangelization".(64)

All the preparatory documents of the Synod, as well as the discussions in the Assembly, clearly showed that issues in Africa such as increasing poverty, urbanization, the international debt, the arms trade, the problem of refugees and displaced persons, demographic concerns and threats to the family, the liberation of women, the spread of AIDS, the survival of the practice of slavery in some places, ethnocentricity and tribal opposition figure among the fundamental challenges addressed by the Synod.

Intrusiveness of the mass media

52. Finally, the Special Assembly addressed the means of social communication, an issue which is of the greatest importance because it concerns both the instruments of evangelization and the means of spreading a new culture which needs to be evangelized.(65) The Synod Fathers were thus faced with the sad fact that "the developing nations, instead of becoming autonomous nations concerned with their own progress towards a just sharing in the goods and services meant for all, become parts of a machine, cogs on a gigantic wheel. This is often true also in the field of social communications which, being run by centres mostly in the northern hemisphere, do not always give due consideration to the priorities and problems of such countries or respect their cultural make-up. They frequently impose a distorted vision of life and of man, and thus fail to respond to the demands of true development".(66)

III. Formation of the agents of evangelization

53. With what resources will the Church in Africa succeed in meeting the challenges just mentioned? "The most important [resource], after the grace of Christ, is the people. The whole People of God in the theological understanding of *Lumen Gentium* - this People, which comprises the members of the Body of Christ in its entirety - has received the mandate, which is both an honour and a duty, to proclaim the Gospel... The whole community needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelization, each according to his or her specific role within the Church".(67) For this reason the Synod strongly emphasized the training of the agents of evangelization in Africa. I have already referred to the necessity of formation for candidates to the priesthood and those called to the consecrated life. The Assembly also paid due attention to the formation of the lay faithful, appropriately recognizing their indispensable role in the evangelization of Africa. In particular, the training of lay catechists received the emphasis which it rightly deserves.

54. A last question must be asked: Has the Church in Africa sufficiently formed the lay faithful, enabling them to assume competently their civic responsibilities and to consider socio-political problems in the light of the Gospel and of faith in God? This is certainly a task belonging to Christians: to bring to bear upon the social fabric an influence aimed at changing not only ways of thinking but also the very structures of society, so that they will better reflect God's plan for the human family. Consequently I have called for the thorough formation of the lay faithful, a formation which will help them to lead a fully integrated life. Faith, hope and charity must influence the actions of the true follower of Christ in every activity, situation and responsibility. Since "evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new", (68) Christians must be formed to live the social implications of the Gospel in such a way that their witness will become a prophetic challenge to whatever hinders the true good of the men and women of Africa and of every other continent.

CHAPTER III - EVANGELIZATION AND INCULTURATION

The Church's mission

55. "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). Such is the mandate that the Risen Christ, before returning to his Father, gave to his Apostles: "And they went forth and preached everywhere" (Mk 16:20).

"The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize".

(69) Born of the evangelizing mission of Jesus and the Twelve, she is in turn sent forth. "Depositary of the Good News to be proclaimed... having been sent and evangelized, the Church herself sends out evangelizers. She puts on their lips the saving Word".(70) Like the Apostle to the Gentiles, the Church can say: "I preach the Gospel... For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

The Church proclaims the Good News of Christ not only by the proclamation of the Word which she has received from the Lord, but also by the witness of life, thanks to which Christ's disciples bear witness to the faith, hope and love which dwell in them (cf. 1 Pet 2:15).

This testimony which the Christian bears to Christ and the Gospel can lead even to the supreme sacrifice: martyrdom (cf. Mk 8:35). For the Church and the Christian proclaim the One who is "a sign of contradiction" (cf. Lk 2:34). They preach "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). As I said earlier, besides honouring the illustrious Martyrs of the first centuries, Africa can glory in its Martyrs and Saints of the modern age.

The purpose of evangelization is "transforming humanity from within and making it new".(71) In and through the Only Son the relations of people with God, one another and all creation will be renewed. For this reason the proclamation of the Gospel can contribute to the interior transformation of all people of good will whose hearts are open to the Holy Spirit's action.

56. To bear witness to the Gospel in word and deed: this is the task which the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops received and which it now passes on to the Church of the Continent. "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8): this is the challenge. In Africa these should be the fruits of the Synod in every area of people's lives.

Born of the preaching of valiant missionary Bishops and priests, effectively assisted by "the ranks of men and women catechists, to whom missionary work among the nations owes so very much", (72) the Church in Africa, having become "a new homeland for Christ", (73) is now responsible for the evangelization of the Continent and the world. As my Predecessor Pope Paul VI said in Kampala: "Africans, you are now your own missionaries".(74) Because the vast majority of Africans have not yet heard the Good News of salvation, the Synod recommends that missionary vocations should be encouraged and asks that prayer, sacrifice and effective solidarity for the Church's missionary work be favoured and actively supported.(75)

Proclamation

57. "The Synod recalls that to evangelize is to proclaim by word and witness of life the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified, died and risen, the Way, the Truth and the Life".(76) To Africa, which is menaced on all sides by outbreaks of hatred and violence, by conflicts and wars, evangelizers must proclaim the hope of life rooted in the Paschal Mystery. It was precisely when, humanly speaking, Jesus' life seemed doomed to failure that he instituted the Eucharist, "the pledge of eternal glory", (77) in order to perpetuate in time and space his victory over death. That is why at a time when the African Continent is in some ways in a critical situation the Special Assembly for Africa wished to be "the Synod of Resurrection, the Synod of Hope... Christ our Hope is alive; we shall live!"(78) Africa is not destined for death, but for life!

It is therefore essential that "the new evangelization should be centred on a transforming encounter with the living person of Christ".(79) "The first proclamation ought to bring about this overwhelming and exhilarating experience of Jesus Christ who calls each one to follow him in an adventure of faith".(80) This task is made all the easier because "the African believes in God the Creator from his traditional life and religion and thus is also open to the full and definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ, God with us, Word made flesh. Jesus, the Good News, is God who saves the African... from oppression and slavery".(81)

Evangelization must reach "individual human beings and society in every aspect of their existence. It is therefore expressed in various activities, and particularly in those which the Synod examined: proclamation, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace and the means of social communication".(82)

For the full success of this mission, it must be ensured that "in evangelization prayer to the Holy Spirit will be stressed for a continuing Pentecost, where Mary, as at the first Pentecost, will have her place".(83) The power of the Holy Spirit guides the Church into all truth (cf. Jn 16:13), enabling her to go into the world in order to bear witness to Christ with confident resolve.

58. The Word that comes from the mouth of God is living and active, and never returns to him in vain (cf. Is 55:11; Heb 4:12-13). We must therefore proclaim that Word tirelessly, exhorting "in season and out of season... unflinching in patience and in teaching" (2 Tim 4:2). Entrusted first of all to the Church, the written Word of God is not "a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Pet 1:20), but is to be authentically interpreted by the Church.(84)

In order that the Word of God may be known, loved, pondered and preserved in the hearts of the faithful (cf. Lk 2:19, 51), greater efforts must be made to provide access to the Sacred Scriptures, especially through full or partial translations of the Bible, prepared as far as possible in cooperation with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and accompanied by studyguides for use in prayer and for study in the family and community. Also to be encouraged is the scriptural formation of clergy, religious, catechists and the laity in general; careful preparation of celebrations of the Word; promotion of the biblical apostolate with the help of the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar and the

encouragement of other similar structures at all levels. In brief, efforts must be made to try to put the Sacred Scriptures into the hands of all the faithful right from their earliest years.(85)

Urgent need for inculturation

59. On several occasions the Synod Fathers stressed the particular importance for evangelization of inculturation, the process by which "catechesis 'takes flesh' in the various cultures".(86) Inculturation includes two dimensions: on the one hand, "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity" and, on the other, "the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures".(87) The Synod considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the particular Churches, for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa.(88) It is "a requirement for evangelization", (89) "a path towards full evangelization", (90) and one of the greatest challenges for the Church on the Continent on the eve of the Third Millennium.(91)

Theological foundations

60. "But when the time had fully come" (Gal 4:4), the Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Only Son of God, "by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man".(92) This is the sublime mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, a mystery which took place in history: in clearly defined circumstances of time and space, amidst a people with its own culture, a people that God had chosen and accompanied throughout the entire history of salvation, in order to show through what he did for them what he intended to do for the whole human race.

Jesus Christ is the unmistakable proof of God's love for humanity (cf. Rom 5:8). By his life, his preaching of the Good News to the poor, his Passion, Death and glorious Resurrection, he brought about the remission of our sins and our reconciliation with God, his Father and, thanks to him, our Father too. The Word that the Church proclaims is precisely the Word of God made man, who is himself the subject and object of this Word. The Good News is Jesus Christ.

Just as "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14), so too the Good News, the Word of Jesus Christ proclaimed to the nations, must take root in the life-situation of the hearers of the Word. Inculturation is precisely this insertion of the Gospel message into cultures.(93) For the Incarnation of the Son of God, precisely because it was complete and concrete, (94) was also an incarnation in a particular culture.

61. Given the close and organic relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and the Word that the Church proclaims, the inculturation of the revealed message cannot but follow the "logic" proper to the Mystery of the Redemption. Indeed, the Incarnation of the Word is not an isolated moment but tends towards Jesus' "Hour" and the Paschal Mystery: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Jesus says: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). This emptying of self, this kenosis necessary for exaltation, which is the way of Christ and of each of his disciples (cf. Phil 2:6-9), sheds light on the encounter of cultures with Christ and his Gospel. "Every culture needs to be transformed by Gospel values in the light of the Paschal Mystery".(95)

It is by looking at the Mystery of the Incarnation and of the Redemption that the values and counter-values of cultures are to be discerned. Just as the Word of God became like us in everything but sin, so too the inculturation of the Good News takes on all authentic human values, purifying them from sin and restoring to them their full meaning.

Inculturation also has profound links with the Mystery of Pentecost. Thanks to the outpouring and action of the Spirit, who draws gifts and talents into unity, all the peoples of the earth when they enter the Church live a new Pentecost, profess in their own tongue the one faith in Jesus, and proclaim the marvels that the Lord has done for them. The Spirit, who on the natural level is the true source of the wisdom of peoples, leads the Church with a supernatural light into knowledge of the whole truth. In her turn the Church takes on the values of different cultures, becoming the "sponsa ornata monilibus suis", "the bride who adorns herself with her jewels" (cf. Is 61:10).

Criteria and areas of inculturation

62. Inculturation is a difficult and delicate task, since it raises the question of the Church's fidelity to the Gospel and the Apostolic Tradition amidst the constant evolution of cultures. Rightly therefore the Synod Fathers observed: "Considering the rapid changes in the cultural, social, economic and political domains, our local Churches must be involved in the process of inculturation in an ongoing manner, respecting the two following criteria: compatibility with the Christian message and communion with the universal Church... In all cases, care must be taken to avoid syncretism".(96)

"Inculturation is a movement towards full evangelization. It seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches them on the personal, cultural, economic and political levels so that they can live a holy life in total union with God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit".(97)

Thanking God for the fruits which the efforts at inculturation have already brought forth in the life of the Churches of the Continent, notably in the ancient Eastern Churches of Africa, the Synod recommended "to the Bishops and to the

Episcopal Conferences to take note that inculturation includes the whole life of the Church and the whole process of evangelization. It includes theology, liturgy, the Church's life and structures. All this underlines the need for research in the field of African cultures in all their complexity". Precisely for this reason the Synod invited Pastors "to exploit to the maximum the numerous possibilities which the Church's present discipline provides in this matter".(98)

The Church as God's Family

63. Not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the Church as God's Family as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa.(99) The Synod Fathers acknowledged it as an expression of the Church's nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.(100) The new evangelization will thus aim at building up the Church as Family, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations.(101) "It is earnestly to be hoped that theologians in Africa will work out the theology of the Church as Family with all the riches contained in this concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the Church".(102)

All this presupposes a profound study of the heritage of Scripture and Tradition which the Second Vatican Council presented in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This admirable text expounds the doctrine on the Church using images drawn from Sacred Scripture such as the Mystical Body, People of God, Temple of the Holy Spirit, Flock and Sheepfold, the House in which God dwells with man. According to the Council, the Church is the Bride of Christ, our Mother, the Holy City and the first fruits of the coming Kingdom. These images will have to be taken into account when developing, according to the Synod's recommendation, an ecclesiology focused on the idea of the Church as the Family of God.(103) It will then be possible to appreciate in all its richness and depth the statement which is the Dogmatic Constitution's point of departure: "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind".(104)

Areas of application

64. In practice, and without any prejudice to the traditions proper to either the Latin or Eastern Church, "inculturation of the liturgy, provided it does not change the essential elements, should be carried out so that the faithful can better understand and live liturgical celebrations".(105)

The Synod also reaffirmed that, when doctrine is hard to assimilate even after a long period of evangelization, or when its practice poses serious pastoral problems, especially in the sacramental life, fidelity to the Church's teaching must be maintained. At the same time, people must be treated with justice and true pastoral charity. Bearing this in mind, the Synod expressed the hope that the Episcopal Conferences, in cooperation with Universities and Catholic Institutes, would set up study commissions, especially for matters concerning marriage, the veneration of ancestors, and the spirit world, in order to examine in depth all the cultural aspects of problems from the theological, sacramental, liturgical and canonical points of view.(106)

Dialogue

65. "Openness to dialogue is the Christian's attitude inside the community as well as with other believers and with men and women of good will".(107) Dialogue is to be practised first of all within the family of the Church at all levels: between Bishops, Episcopal Conferences or Hierarchical Assemblies and the Apostolic See, between Conferences or Episcopal Assemblies of the different nations of the same continent and those of other continents, and within each particular Church between the Bishop, the presbyterate, consecrated persons, pastoral workers and the lay faithful; and also between different rites within the same Church. SECAM is to establish "structures and means which will ensure the exercise of this dialogue", (108) especially in order to foster an organic pastoral solidarity.

"United to Jesus Christ by their witness in Africa, Catholics are invited to develop an ecumenical dialogue with all their baptized brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations, in order that the unity for which Christ prayed may be achieved, and in order that their service to the peoples of the Continent may make the Gospel more credible in the eyes of those who are searching for God".(109) Such dialogue can be conducted through initiatives such as ecumenical translations of the Bible, theological study of various dimensions of the Christian faith or by bearing common evangelical witness to justice, peace and respect for human dignity. For this purpose care will be taken to set up national and diocesan commissions for ecumenism.(110) Together Christians are responsible for the witness to be borne to the Gospel on the Continent. Advances in ecumenism are also aimed at making this witness more effective.

66. "Commitment to dialogue must also embrace all Muslims of good will. Christians cannot forget that many Muslims try to imitate the faith of Abraham and to live the demands of the Decalogue".(111) In this regard the Message of the Synod emphasizes that the Living God, Creator of heaven and earth and the Lord of history, is the Father of the one great human family to which we all belong. As such, he wants us to bear witness to him through our respect for the

values and religious traditions of each person, working together for human progress and development at all levels. Far from wishing to be the one in whose name a person would kill other people, he requires believers to join together in the service of life in justice and peace.(112) Particular care will therefore be taken so that Islamic-Christian dialogue respects on both sides the principle of religious freedom with all that this involves, also including external and public manifestations of faith. (113)

Christians and Muslims are called to commit themselves to promoting a dialogue free from the risks of false irenicism or militant fundamentalism, and to raising their voices against unfair policies and practices, as well as against the lack of reciprocity in matters of religious freedom.(114)

67. With regard to African traditional religion, a serene and prudent dialogue will be able, on the one hand, to protect Catholics from negative influences which condition the way of life of many of them and, on the other hand, to foster the assimilation of positive values such as belief in a Supreme Being who is Eternal, Creator, Provident and Just Judge, values which are readily harmonized with the content of the faith. They can even be seen as a preparation for the Gospel, because they contain precious *semina Verbi* which can lead, as already happened in the past, a great number of people "to be open to the fullness of Revelation in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel".(115)

The adherents of African traditional religion should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided. For this purpose, suitable courses in African traditional religion should be given in houses of formation for priests and religious.(116)

Integral human development

68. Integral human development - the development of every person and of the whole person, especially of the poorest and most neglected in the community - is at the very heart of evangelization. "Between evangelization and human advancement - development and liberation - there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combatted and of justice to be restored. They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity: how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment of love without promoting in justice and peace the true, authentic advancement of man?"(117)

When the Lord Jesus began his public ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth, he chose the Messianic text of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah in order to shed light on his mission: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19; cf. Is 61:1-2).

The Lord thus considers himself as sent to relieve human misery and combat every kind of neglect. He came to liberate humanity; he came to take upon himself our infirmities and diseases. "The entire ministry of Jesus is marked by the concern he showed to all those around him who were affected by suffering: persons in mourning, paralytics, lepers, the blind, the deaf, the mute (cf. Mt 8:17)".(118) "It is impossible to accept that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world".(119) The liberation that evangelization proclaims "cannot be contained in the simple and restricted dimension of economics, politics, social or cultural life; it must envisage the whole man, in all his aspects, right up to and including his openness to the absolute, even the Divine Absolute".(120)

The Second Vatican Council says so well: "Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church does not only communicate divine life to men but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth, most of all by its healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the person, by the way in which it strengthens the seams of human society and imbues the everyday activity of men with a deeper meaning and importance. Thus through her individual members and her whole community, the Church believes she can contribute greatly towards making the family of man and its history more human".(121) The Church proclaims and begins to bring about the Kingdom of God after the example of Jesus, because "the Kingdom's nature... is one of communion among all human beings - with one another and with God".

(122) Thus "the Kingdom is the source of full liberation and total salvation for all people: with this in mind then, the Church walks and lives intimately bound in a real sense to their history".(123)

69. Human history finds its true meaning in the Incarnation of the Word of God, who is the foundation of restored human dignity. It is through Christ, the "image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (Col 1:15), that man is redeemed. "For by his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man".(124) How can we fail to exclaim with Saint Leo the Great: "Christian, recognize your dignity"?(125)

To proclaim Jesus Christ is therefore to reveal to people their inalienable dignity, received from God through the Incarnation of his Only Son. "Since it has been entrusted to the Church to reveal the mystery of God, who is the ultimate goal of man", continues the Second Vatican Council, "she opens up to man at the same time the meaning of his own existence, that is, the innermost truth about himself".(126)

Endowed with this extraordinary dignity, people should not live in sub-human social, economic, cultural and political conditions. This is the theological foundation of the struggle for the defence of personal dignity, for justice and social peace, for the promotion, liberation and integral human development of all people and of every individual. It is also for this reason that the development of peoples - within each nation and among nations - must be achieved in solidarity, as my Predecessor Pope Paul VI so well observed.(127) Precisely for this reason he could affirm: "The new name for peace is development".(128) It can thus rightly be stated that "integral development implies respect for human dignity and this can only be achieved in justice and peace".(129)

Becoming the voice of the voiceless

70. Strengthened by faith and hope in the saving power of Jesus, the Synod Fathers concluded their work by renewing their commitment to accept the challenge of being instruments of salvation in every area of the life of the peoples of Africa. "The Church", they declared, "must continue to exercise her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless", (130) so that everywhere the human dignity of every individual will be acknowledged, and that people will always be at the centre of all government programmes. The Synod "challenges the consciences of Heads of State and those responsible for the public domain to guarantee ever more the liberation and development of their peoples".(131) Only at this price is peace established between nations.

Evangelization must promote initiatives which contribute to the development and ennoblement of individuals in their spiritual and material existence. This involves the development of every person and of the whole person, considered not only individually but also and especially in the context of the common and harmonious development of all the members of a nation and of all the peoples of the world.(132)

Finally, evangelization must denounce and combat all that degrades and destroys the person. "The condemnation of evils and injustices is also part of that ministry of evangelization in the social field which is an aspect of the Church's prophetic role. But it should be made clear that proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation".(133)

Means of social communication

71. "From the beginning it has been a characteristic of God to want to communicate. This he does by various means. He has bestowed being upon every created thing, animate or inanimate. He enters into relationships with human beings in a very special way. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2)".(134) The Word of God is by nature word, dialogue and communication. He came to restore on the one hand communication and relations between God and humanity, and on the other hand those of people with one another.

The Synod paid great attention to the mass media under two important and complementary aspects: as a new and emerging cultural world and as a series of means serving communication. First of all, they constitute a new culture that has its own language and above all its own specific values and counter-values. For this reason, like any culture, the mass media need to be evangelized.(135)

Today in fact the mass media constitute not only a world but also a culture and civilization. And it is also to this world that the Church is sent to bring the Good News of salvation. The heralds of the Gospel must therefore enter this world in order to allow themselves to be permeated by this new civilization and culture for the purpose of learning how to make good use of them. "The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a 'global village'. The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large".(136)

Training in the use of the mass media is therefore a necessity not only for the preacher of the Gospel, who must master, among other things, the media style of communication but also for the reader, the listener and the viewer. Trained to understand this kind of communication, they must be able to make use of its contributions with discernment and a critical mind.

In Africa, where oral transmission is one of the characteristics of culture, such training is of capital importance. This same kind of communication must remind pastors, especially Bishops and priests, that the Church is sent to speak, to preach the Gospel in words and deeds. Thus she cannot remain silent, at the risk of failing in her mission, except in cases where silence itself would be a way of speaking and bearing witness. We must therefore always preach in season and out of season (cf. 2 Tim 4:2), in order to build up, in charity and truth.

CHAPTER IV - IN THE LIGHT OF THE THIRD CHRISTIAN MILLENNIUM

I. Present-Day Challenges

72. The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was convoked so that the whole Church of God on the Continent might reflect on its evangelizing mission in the light of the Third Millennium and prepare, as I have said, "an organic pastoral solidarity within the entire African territory and nearby Islands".

(137) Such a mission includes, as already mentioned, urgent tasks and challenges, due to the profound and rapid changes in African societies and to the effects of the emergence of a global civilization.

Need for Baptism

73. The first urgent task is of course evangelization itself. On the one hand, the Church must assimilate and live ever more fully the message which the Lord has entrusted to her. On the other hand, she must bear witness to this message and proclaim it to all who do not yet know Jesus Christ. It is indeed for them that the Lord said to the Apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

Just as at Pentecost, the goal of preaching the kerygma is to bring the hearer to metanoia and Baptism: "The proclamation of the word of God has Christian conversion as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith".(138) Conversion to Christ moreover "is joined to Baptism not only because of the Church's practice, but also by the will of Christ himself, who sent the Apostles to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them (cf. Mt 28:19). Conversion is also joined to Baptism because of the intrinsic need to receive the fullness of new life in Christ. As Jesus says to Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). In Baptism, in fact, we are born anew to the life of God's children, united to Jesus Christ and anointed in the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not simply a seal of conversion, a kind of external sign indicating conversion and attesting to it. Rather, it is a Sacrament which signifies and effects rebirth from the Spirit, establishes real and unbreakable bonds with the Blessed Trinity, and makes us members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church".(139) Therefore a journey of conversion that did not culminate in Baptism would stop half-way.

It is true that people of upright heart who, through no fault of their own have not been reached by the proclamation of the Gospel but who live in harmony with their conscience according to God's law, will be saved by Christ and in Christ. For every human being there is always an actual call from God, which is waiting to be acknowledged and received (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). It is precisely in order to facilitate this recognition and acceptance that Christ's disciples are required not to rest until the Good News of salvation has been brought to all.

Urgency of evangelization

74. The Name of Jesus Christ is the only one by which it has been decreed that we can be saved (cf. Acts 4:12). Because in Africa there are millions who are not yet evangelized, the Church is faced with the necessary and urgent task of proclaiming the Good News to all, and leading those who hear it to Baptism and the Christian life. "The urgency of missionary activity derives from the radical newness of life brought by Christ and lived by his followers. This new life is a gift from God, and people are asked to accept and develop it, if they wish to realize the fullness of their vocation in conformity to Christ".(140) This new life in the radical newness of the Gospel also involves certain breaks from the customs and culture of whatever people in the world, because the Gospel is never an internal product of a particular country but always comes "from outside", from on high. For the baptized the great challenge will always be that of leading a Christian life in conformity with the commitments of Baptism, the Sacrament which signifies death to sin and daily resurrection to new life (cf. Rom 6:4-5). Without this conformity, it will be difficult for Christ's disciples to be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Mt 5:13, 14). If the Church in Africa makes a vigorous and unhesitating commitment to this path, the Cross can be planted in every part of the Continent for the salvation of peoples not afraid to open their doors to the Redeemer.

Importance of formation

75. In all areas of Church life formation is of primary importance. People who have never had the chance to learn cannot really know the truths of faith, nor can they perform actions which they have never been taught. For this reason "the whole community needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelization, each according to his or her specific role within the Church".(141) This includes Bishops, priests, members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, members of Secular Institutes and all the lay faithful.

Missionary training has to have a special place. It is "the task of the local Church, assisted by missionaries and their Institutes, and by the personnel from the young Churches. This work must be seen not as peripheral but as central to the Christian life".(142)

The formation programme will especially include the training of the lay faithful, so that they will fully exercise their role of inspiring the temporal order - political, cultural, economic and social - with Christian principles, which is the specific task of the laity's vocation in the world. For this purpose competent and well motivated lay people need to be encouraged to enter politics.(143) By worthily carrying out the duties of public office they will be able to "advance the common good and prepare the way for the Gospel".(144)

Deepening the faith

76. The Church in Africa, in order to evangelize, must begin "by being evangelized herself... She needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the 'mighty works of God' ".(145)

In Africa today "formation in the faith... too often stops at the elementary stage, and the sects easily profit from this ignorance".(146) A serious deepening of the faith is thus urgently needed, because the rapid evolution of society has given rise to new challenges linked to the phenomena notably of family uprooting, urbanization, unemployment, materialistic seductions of all kinds, a certain secularization and an intellectual upheaval caused by the avalanche of insufficiently critical ideas spread by the media.(147)

The power of witness

77. Formation must aim to provide Christians not only with technical expertise in passing on more clearly the content of the faith but also with a profound personal conviction enabling them to bear effective witness to it in daily life. All those called to proclaim the Gospel will therefore seek to act with total docility to the Spirit, who "today, just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows himself to be possessed and led by him".(148) "Techniques of evangelization are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit. Even the most thorough preparation of the evangelizer has no effect without the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit the most convincing dialectic has no power over the human heart. Without him the most highly developed schemes on a sociological or psychological basis are quickly seen to be quite valueless".(149)

Genuine witness by believers is essential to the authentic proclamation of the faith in Africa today. In particular they should show the witness of sincere mutual love. " 'This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (Jn 17:3). The ultimate purpose of mission is to enable people to share in the communion which exists between the Father and the Son. The disciples are to live in unity with one another, remaining in the Father and the Son, so that the world may know and believe (cf. Jn 17:21-23). This is a very important missionary text. It makes us understand that we are missionaries above all because of what we are, a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries in word and deed".(150)

Inculturating the faith

78. By reason of its deep conviction that "the synthesis between culture and faith is not only a demand of culture but also of faith", because "a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived", (151) the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops considered inculturation a priority and an urgent task in the life of Africa's particular Churches. Only in this way can the Gospel be firmly implanted in the Continent's Christian communities. Following in the footsteps of the Second Vatican Council, (152) the Synod Fathers interpreted inculturation as a process that includes the whole of Christian existence - theology, liturgy, customs, structures - without of course compromising what is of divine right and the great discipline of the Church, confirmed in the course of centuries by remarkable fruits of virtue and heroism.(153)

The challenge of inculturation in Africa consists in ensuring that the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values. Inculturation of the faith in every area of Christian and human life is an arduous task which can only be carried out with the help of the Spirit of the Lord who leads the Church to the whole truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

A reconciled community

79. The challenge of dialogue is fundamentally the challenge of transforming relationships between individuals, nations and peoples in religious, political, economic, social and cultural life. It is the challenge of Christ's love for all people, a love that the disciple must reproduce in his own life: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

"Evangelization continues the dialogue of God with humanity and reaches its apex in the person of Jesus Christ".(154) Through the Cross he brought an end in himself to the hostility which divides people and keeps them apart (cf. Eph 2:16).

Despite the modern civilization of the "global village", in Africa as elsewhere in the world the spirit of dialogue, peace and reconciliation is far from dwelling in the hearts of everyone. Wars, conflicts and racist and xenophobic attitudes still play too large a role in the world of human relations.

The Church in Africa is aware that it has to become for all, through the witness borne by its own sons and daughters, a place of true reconciliation. Forgiven and mutually reconciled, these sons and daughters will thus be able to bring to the

world the forgiveness and reconciliation which Christ our Peace (cf. Eph 2:14) offers to humanity through his Church. Otherwise the world will look more and more like a battlefield, where only selfish interests count and the law of force prevails, the law which fatally distances humanity from the hoped-for civilization of love.

II. The Family

Evangelizing the family

80. "The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family".(155) Not only is the Christian family the first cell of the living ecclesial community, it is also the fundamental cell of society. In Africa in particular, the family is the foundation on which the social edifice is built. This is why the Synod considered the evangelization of the African family a major priority, if the family is to assume in its turn the role of active subject in view of the evangelization of families through families.

From the pastoral point of view, this is a real challenge, given the political, economic, social and cultural difficulties which African families must face as a result of the great changes which characterize contemporary society. While adopting the positive values of modernity, the African family must preserve its own essential values.

The Holy Family as a model

81. In this regard the Holy Family, which according to the Gospel (cf. Mt 2:14-15) lived for a time in Africa, is the "prototype and example for all Christian families" (156) and the model and spiritual source for every Christian family.(157)

To repeat the words of Pope Paul VI, pilgrim to the Holy Land: "The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus - the school of the Gospel... Here, in this school, one learns why it is necessary to have a spiritual rule of life, if one wishes to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become a disciple of Christ".(158) In his profound meditation on the mystery of Nazareth, Pope Paul VI invites us to learn a threefold lesson: of silence, of family life and of work. In the home of Nazareth each one lives his or her own mission in perfect harmony with the other members of the Holy Family.

Dignity and role of man and woman

82. The dignity of man and woman derives from the fact that when God created man, "in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Both man and woman are created "in the image of God", that is, endowed with intelligence and will and therefore with freedom. The account of our first parents' sin confirms this (cf. Gen 3). The Psalmist sings of man's incomparable dignity: "Yet you have made him little less than a god; with glory and honour you crowned him, gave him power over the works of your hand, put all things under his feet" (Ps 8:6-7).

Having both been created in the image of God, man and woman, although different, are essentially equal from the point of view of their humanity. "From the very beginning, both are persons, unlike the other living beings in the world about them. The woman is another 'I' in a common humanity", (159) and each is a help for the other (cf. Gen 2:18-25).

"In creating the human race 'male and female', God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity, endowing them with inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person".(160) The Synod deplored those African customs and practices "which deprive women of their rights and the respect due to them" (161) and asked the Church on the Continent to make every effort to foster the safeguarding of these rights.

Dignity and role of Marriage

83. God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8). "The communion between God and his people finds its definitive fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom who loves and gives himself as the Saviour of humanity, uniting it to himself as his Body. He reveals the original truth of marriage, the truth of the 'beginning', and, freeing man from his hardness of heart, he makes man capable of realizing this truth in its entirety. This revelation reaches its definitive fullness in the gift of love which the Word of God makes to humanity in assuming a human nature, and in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ makes of himself on the Cross for his Bride, the Church. In this sacrifice there is entirely revealed that plan which God has imprinted on the humanity of man and woman since their creation (cf. Eph 5:32-33); the Marriage of baptized persons thus becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal Covenant sanctioned in the Blood of Christ".(162)

The mutual love of baptized spouses makes present the love of Christ for his Church. As a sign of this love of Christ, Marriage is a Sacrament of the New Covenant: "Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the Sacrament makes them sharers. Of this salvation event Marriage, like every sacrament, is a memorial, actuation and prophecy".(163)

Marriage is therefore a state of life, a way of Christian holiness, a vocation which is meant to lead to the glorious resurrection and to the Kingdom, where "they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mt 22:30). Marriage thus demands an indissoluble love; thanks to this stability it can contribute effectively to the complete fulfilment of the spouses' baptismal vocation.

Saving the African family

84. Many interventions in the Synod Hall highlighted present-day threats to the African family. The concerns of the Synod Fathers were all the more justified in that the preparatory document of a United Nations Conference held in September 1994 in Cairo - on African soil - clearly seemed to wish to adopt resolutions contradicting many values of the African family. The Synod Fathers, accepting my concerns previously expressed to the Conference and to all the world's Heads of State, (164) launched an urgent appeal to safeguard the family. They pleaded: "Do not allow the African family to be ridiculed on its own soil! Do not allow the International Year of the Family to become the year of the destruction of the family!"(165)

The family as open to society

85. By its nature marriage, which has the special mission of perpetuating humanity, transcends the couple. In the same way, by its nature, the family extends beyond the individual household: it is oriented towards society. "The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself. Thus, far from being closed in on itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role".(166)

Along these lines, the Special Assembly for Africa affirmed that the goal of evangelization is to build up the Church as the Family of God, an anticipation on earth, though imperfect, of the Kingdom. The Christian families of Africa will thus become true "domestic churches", contributing to society's progress towards a more fraternal life. This is how African societies will be transformed through the Gospel!

CHAPTER V - "YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES" IN AFRICA

Witness and holiness

86. The challenges mentioned show how opportune the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was: the Church's task in Africa is immense; in order to face it everyone's cooperation is necessary. Witness is an essential element of this cooperation. Christ challenges his disciples in Africa and gives them the mandate which he gave to the Apostles on the day of his Ascension: "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8) in Africa.

87. The proclamation of the Good News by word and deed opens people's hearts to the desire for holiness, for being configured to Christ. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul addresses "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2). Preaching the Gospel also aims to build up the Church of God, in the light of the coming of the Kingdom, which Christ will hand over to the Father at the end of time (cf. 1 Cor 15:24).

"Entrance into the Kingdom of God demands a change of mentality (metanoia) and behaviour and a life of witness in word and deed, a life nourished in the Church by the reception of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, the Sacrament of salvation".(167)

Inculturation, through which the faith penetrates the life of individuals and their primary communities, is also a path to holiness. Just as in the Incarnation Christ assumed human nature in everything but sin, analogously through inculturation the Christian message assimilates the values of the society to which it is proclaimed, rejecting whatever is marked by sin. To the extent that an ecclesial community can integrate the positive values of a specific culture, inculturation becomes an instrument by which the community opens itself to the riches of Christian holiness. An inculturation wisely carried out purifies and elevates the cultures of the various peoples.

From this point of view the liturgy is called to play an important role. As an effective way of proclaiming and living the mysteries of salvation, the liturgy can make a valid contribution towards the elevation and enrichment of specific manifestations of the culture of a people. It will therefore be the task of competent authority to see to the inculturation of those liturgical elements which, following artistically worthy models, can be changed in the light of current norms.(168)

I. Agents of evangelization

88. Evangelization needs agents. For "how are men to call upon him [the Lord] in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14-15). The proclamation of the Gospel can be fully carried out only through the contribution of all believers at every level of the universal and local Church.

It is especially the concern of the local Church, entrusted to the responsibility of the Bishop, to coordinate the commitment to evangelization by gathering the faithful together, confirming them in the faith through the work of the priests and catechists, and supporting them in the fulfilment of their respective tasks. In order to accomplish this, the Diocese is to establish the necessary structures for getting together, dialogue and planning. By making use of these structures the Bishop will be able to guide in a suitable manner the work of priests, religious and laity, welcoming the gifts and charisms of each one, in order to put them at the service of an updated and clear-sighted plan of pastoral action. The different Councils provided for by the current norms of Canon Law are to be considered a great help in contributing to this end.

Vital Christian communities

89. Right from the beginning, the Synod Fathers recognized that the Church as Family cannot reach her full potential as Church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships. The Assembly described the characteristics of such communities as follows: primarily they should be places engaged in evangelizing themselves, so that subsequently they can bring the Good News to others; they should moreover be communities which pray and listen to God's Word, encourage the members themselves to take on responsibility, learn to live an ecclesial life, and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel. Above all, these communities are to be committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of the natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups.(169)

Laity

90. The laity are to be helped to become increasingly aware of their role in the Church, thereby fulfilling their particular mission as baptized and confirmed persons, according to the teaching of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (170) and the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*.(171) Lay people are to be trained for their mission through suitable centres and schools of biblical and pastoral formation. Similarly, Christians who occupy positions of responsibility are to be carefully prepared for political, economic and social tasks by means of a solid formation in the Church's social doctrine, so that in their places of work they will be faithful witnesses to the Gospel.(172)

Catechists

91. "The role of the catechist has been and remains a determinative force in the implantation and expansion of the Church in Africa. The Synod recommends that catechists not only receive a sound initial formation... but that they continue to receive doctrinal formation as well as moral and spiritual support".(173) Both Bishops and priests are to have their catechists at heart, seeing to it that they are guaranteed suitable living and working conditions so that they carry out their mission properly. In the midst of the Christian community the catechists' responsibility is to be acknowledged and held in respect.

The family

92. The Synod launched an explicit appeal for each African Christian family to become "a privileged place for evangelical witness", (174) a true "domestic church", (175) a community which believes and evangelizes, (176) a community in dialogue with God (177) and generously open to the service of humanity.(178) "It is in the heart of the family that parents are by word and example... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children".(179) "It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way 'by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life and self-denial and active charity'. Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and 'a school for human enrichment' ".(180)

Parents are to see to the Christian education of their children. With the practical help offered by strong, serene and committed Christian families, Dioceses will develop a programme for the family apostolate as part of their overall pastoral plan. The Christian family, as a "domestic Church" built on the solid cultural pillars and noble values of the African tradition of the family, is called upon to be a powerful nucleus of Christian witness in a society undergoing rapid and profound changes. The Synod felt this challenge with a particular urgency because the Church was then celebrating the Year of the Family with the rest of the international community.

Young people

93. The Church in Africa knows well that youth are not only the present but above all the future of humanity. It is thus necessary to help young people to overcome the obstacles thwarting their development: illiteracy, idleness, hunger, drugs.(181) In order to meet these challenges, young people themselves should be called upon to become the evangelizers of their peers. No one can do this better than they. The pastoral care of youth must clearly be a part of the overall pastoral plan of Dioceses and parishes, so that young people will be enabled to discover very early on the value of the gift of self, an essential means for the person to reach maturity.(182) In this regard, the celebration of World Youth Day is a privileged instrument for the pastoral care of youth, which favours their formation through prayer, study and reflection.

Consecrated men and women

94. "In the Church understood as the Family of God, consecrated life has the particular function not only of indicating to all the call to holiness but also of witnessing to fraternal life in community. Therefore, all who live the consecrated life are called to respond to their vocation in a spirit of communion and cooperation with the respective Bishops, clergy and laity".(183)

In the present-day circumstances of the mission in Africa, it is necessary to foster religious vocations to the contemplative and active life, above all choosing them with great discernment, and then seeing that they receive an integral human formation, as well as one which is solid in its spiritual and doctrinal, apostolic and missionary, biblical and theological dimensions. This formation is to be faithfully and regularly updated down through the years. With regard to the foundation of new Religious Institutes, great prudence and enlightened discernment are needed, and the criteria laid down by the Second Vatican Council and the canonical norms now in force are to be followed.(184) Once established, these Institutes are to be helped in acquiring juridical status and becoming autonomous in the management both of their own works and of their respective sources of income.

The Synodal Assembly, having stated that "Religious Institutes that do not have houses in Africa" are not authorized "to come seeking new vocations without prior dialogue with the local Ordinary", (185) then urged the leaders of the local Churches and of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life to foster dialogue among themselves, in order to create, in the spirit of the Church as Family, mixed groups for consultation which would serve as a witness to fraternity and as a sign of unity in the service of a common mission.(186) In this light, I have also accepted the request of the Synod Fathers to revise, if necessary, some points in the document *Mutuae Relationes*, (187) in order to define better the role of religious life in the local Church.(188)

Future priests

95. The Synod Fathers affirmed that "today more than ever there is need to form future priests in the true cultural values of their country, in a sense of honesty, responsibility and integrity. They shall be formed in such a manner that they will have the qualities of the representatives of Christ, of true servants and animators of the Christian community... solidly spiritual, ready to serve, dedicated to evangelization, capable of administering the goods of the Church efficiently and openly, and of living a simple life as befits their milieu".(189) While respecting the traditions proper to the Eastern Churches, seminarians "should acquire affective maturity and should be both clear in their minds and deeply convinced that for the priest celibacy is inseparable from chastity".(190) Moreover "they should receive adequate formation on the meaning and place of consecration to Christ in the priesthood".(191)

Deacons

96. Where pastoral conditions lend themselves to respect and understanding of this ancient ministry in the Church, Episcopal Conferences and Assemblies are to study the most suitable ways of promoting and encouraging the permanent diaconate "as an ordained ministry and also as an instrument of evangelization".

(192) Where deacons already exist they should be provided with an integrated and thorough programme of permanent formation.

Priests

97. Deeply grateful to all the priests - diocesan and members of Institutes - for the apostolic work they are doing and aware of the demands made by the evangelization of the peoples of Africa and Madagascar, the Synodal Assembly urged priests to live their "faithfulness to their vocation in the total gift of self to their mission and in full communion with their Bishop".(193) As for the Bishops, they are to see to the ongoing formation of priests, especially in the first years of their ministry, (194) helping them especially to deepen their understanding of sacred celibacy and to persevere in living it faithfully, recognizing "this surpassing gift which the Father has given them, and which the Lord praised so

openly. Let them keep in mind the great mysteries which are signified and fulfilled in it."(195) This formation programme is also to give particular attention to the wholesome values present in the priests' surroundings. It is appropriate moreover to mention that the Second Vatican Council encouraged among priests "a certain common life", that is some kind of community life in the different forms suggested by real personal and pastoral needs. This will contribute towards the growth of the spiritual and intellectual life, of apostolic and pastoral ministry, of charity and mutual support, especially with regard to priests who are elderly, sick or in difficulty.(196)

Bishops

98. The Bishops themselves will carefully pastor the Church which God obtained with the Blood of his own Son, fulfilling the responsibility entrusted to them by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 20:28). According to the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council, Bishops dedicated to carrying out "their Apostolic office as witnesses of Christ before all people" (197) are to exercise personally, in a spirit of trusting cooperation with the presbyterate and other pastoral workers, an irreplaceable service of unity in charity, carefully fulfilling their responsibilities of teaching, sanctifying and governing. Moreover they are regularly to update themselves theologically and to foster their spiritual life, taking part as much as possible in the sessions of renewal and formation organized by the Episcopal Conferences or the Apostolic See.(198) In particular, they should never forget the admonition of Pope Saint Gregory the Great, according to whom the Pastor is the light of his faithful above all through an exemplary moral conduct marked by holiness.(199)

II. Structures of Evangelization

99. It is a source of joy and comfort to note that "the laity are more and more engaged in the mission of the Church in Africa and Madagascar", thanks especially "to the dynamism of Catholic Action movements, apostolic associations and new spiritual movements".(200) The Synod Fathers requested that this thrust be pursued and developed among all the laity: adults, youth and children.

Parishes

100. By its nature the parish is the ordinary place where the faithful worship and live their Christian life. In it they can express and practise the initiatives which faith and Christian charity bring to the attention of the community of believers. The parish is the place which manifests the communion of various groups and movements, which find in it spiritual sustenance and material support. Priests and lay people will see to it that parish life is harmonious, expressing the Church as Family, where all devote "themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Movements and associations

101. A fraternal harmony which bears living witness to the Gospel will also be the goal of apostolic movements and religious associations. In them the lay faithful truly find a privileged opportunity to be the "leaven in the dough" (cf. Mt 13:33), especially in areas concerned with the administration of temporal goods according to God's plan and the struggle for the promotion of human dignity, justice and peace.

Schools

102. "Catholic schools are at one and the same time places of evangelization, well-rounded education, inculturation and initiation to the dialogue of life among young people of different religions and social backgrounds".(201) The Church in Africa and Madagascar should therefore make its own contribution to the fostering of "education for all" (202) in Catholic schools, without neglecting "the Christian education of pupils in non-Catholic schools. For university students there will be a programme of religious formation which corresponds to the level of studies".(203) These contributions presuppose the human, cultural and religious formation of the educators themselves.

Universities and Higher Institutes

103. "The Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes in Africa have a prominent role to play in the proclamation of the salvific Word of God. They are a sign of the growth of the Church insofar as their research integrates the truths and experiences of the faith and helps to internalize them. They serve the Church by providing trained personnel, by studying important theological and social questions for the benefit of the Church, by developing an African theology, by promoting the work of inculturation especially in liturgical celebration, by publishing books and publicizing Catholic truth, by undertaking assignments given by the Bishops and by contributing to a scientific study of cultures".(204)

In this time of generalized social upheaval on the Continent, the Christian faith can shed helpful light on African society. "Catholic cultural centres offer to the Church the possibility of presence and action in the field of cultural change. They constitute in effect public forums which allow the Church to make widely known, in creative dialogue, Christian convictions about man, woman, family, work, economy, society, politics, international life, the environment".(205) Thus they are places of listening, respect and tolerance.

Material means

104. Precisely in this context the Synod Fathers emphasized how necessary it is for each Christian community to be organized so that as far as possible it can provide for its own needs.(206) Besides qualified personnel, evangelization requires material and financial means, and Dioceses are often far from possessing them in sufficient measure. It is therefore urgent that the particular Churches in Africa have the objective of providing for their own needs as soon as possible, thereby assuring their self-sufficiency. Consequently, I earnestly invite the Episcopal Conferences, Dioceses and all the Christian communities of the Continent's Churches, insofar as it is within their competence, to see to it that this self-sufficiency becomes increasingly evident. At the same time, I call on sister Churches all over the world to be more generous to the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies so that, through their structures of assistance, they will be able to offer to poorer Dioceses economic assistance dedicated to projects that will generate resources, with a view to increasing the financial self-reliance of the Churches.(207) Lastly, we cannot forget that a Church is able to reach material and financial independence only if the people entrusted to it do not live in conditions of extreme poverty.

CHAPTER VI - BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Kingdom of justice and peace

105. The mandate that Jesus gave to his disciples at the moment of his Ascension into heaven is addressed to the Church of God in all times and places. The Church as the Family of God in Africa must bear witness to Christ also by promoting justice and peace on the Continent and throughout the world. The Lord says: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:9-10). The Church's witness must be accompanied by a firm commitment to justice and solidarity by each member of God's People. This is especially important for the lay faithful who hold public office, because such witness demands an abiding spiritual attitude and a way of life consistent with the Christian faith.

Ecclesial dimension of witness

106. The Synod Fathers drew attention to the ecclesial dimension of this witness and solemnly declared: "The Church must continue to play her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless".(208)

But to achieve this effectively, the Church, as a community of faith, must be an energetic witness to justice and peace in her structures and in the relationships among her members. The Message of the Synod courageously states: "The Churches in Africa are also aware that, insofar as their own internal affairs are concerned, justice is not always respected with regard to those men and women who are at their service. If the Church is to give witness to justice, she recognizes that whoever dares to speak to others about justice should also strive to be just in their eyes. It is necessary therefore to examine with care the procedures, the possessions and the life style of the Church".(209)

In what concerns the promotion of justice and especially the defence of fundamental human rights, the Church's apostolate cannot be improvised. Aware that in many African countries gross violations of human dignity and rights are being perpetrated, I ask the Episcopal Conferences to establish, where they do not yet exist, Justice and Peace Commissions at various levels. These will awaken Christian communities to their evangelical responsibilities in the defence of human rights.(210)

107. If the proclamation of justice and peace is an integral part of the task of evangelization, it follows that the promotion of these values should also be a part of the pastoral programme of each Christian community. That is why I urge that all pastoral agents are to be adequately trained for this apostolate. "The formation of clergy, religious and laity, imparted in the areas of their apostolate, should lay emphasis on the social teaching of the Church. Each person, according to his state of life, should be specially trained to know his rights and duties, the meaning and service of the common good, honest management of public goods and the proper manner of participating in political life, in order to be able to act in a credible manner in the face of social injustices".(211)

As a body organized within the community and the nation, the Church has both the right and the duty to participate fully in building a just and peaceful society with all the means at her disposal. Here we must mention the Church's apostolate in the areas of education, health care, social awareness and in other programmes of assistance. In the measure that these activities help to reduce ignorance, improve public health and promote a greater participation of all in solving the problems of society in a spirit of freedom and co-responsibility, the Church creates conditions for the progress of justice and peace.

The salt of the earth

108. In the pluralistic societies of our day, it is especially due to the commitment of Catholics in public life that the Church can exercise a positive influence. Whether they be professionals or teachers, businessmen or civil servants, law enforcement agents or politicians, Catholics are expected to bear witness to goodness, truth, justice and love of God in their daily life. "The task of the faithful lay person... is to be the salt of the earth and light of the world, especially in those places where only a lay person is able to render the Church present".(212)

Cooperation with other believers

109. The obligation to commit oneself to the development of peoples is not just an individual duty, and still less an individualistic one, as if it were possible to achieve this development through the isolated efforts of each person. It is a responsibility which obliges each and every man and woman, as well as societies and nations. In particular, it obliges the Catholic Church and the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, with which Catholics are willing to cooperate in this field.(213) In this sense, just as Catholics invite their Christian brothers and sisters to share in their initiatives, so, when they accept invitations offered to them, Catholics show that they are ready to cooperate in projects undertaken by other Christians. In the promotion of integral human development Catholics can also cooperate with the believers of other religions, as in fact they are already doing in various places.(214)

Good administration of public affairs

110. The Synod Fathers were unanimous in acknowledging that the greatest challenge for bringing about justice and peace in Africa consists in a good administration of public affairs in the two interrelated areas of politics and the economy. Certain problems have their roots outside the Continent and therefore are not entirely under the control of those in power or of national leaders. But the Synodal Assembly acknowledged that many of the Continent's problems are the result of a manner of governing often stained by corruption. A serious reawakening of conscience linked to a firm determination of will is necessary, in order to put into effect solutions which can no longer be put off.

Building the nation

111. On the political front, the arduous process of building national unity encounters particular problems in the Continent where most of the States are relatively young political entities. To reconcile profound differences, overcome longstanding ethnic animosities and become integrated into international life demands a high degree of competence in the art of governing. That is why the Synod prayed fervently to the Lord that there would arise in Africa holy politicians - both men and women - and that there would be saintly Heads of State, who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve rather than be served. (215)

The rule of law

112. The foundation of good government must be established on the sound basis of laws which protect the rights and define the obligations of the citizens.(216) I must note with great sadness that many African nations still labour under authoritarian and oppressive regimes which deny their subjects personal freedom and fundamental human rights, especially the freedom of association and of political expression, as well as the right to choose their governments by free and honest elections. Such political injustices provoke tensions which often degenerate into armed conflicts and internal wars, bringing with them serious consequences such as famine, epidemics and destruction, not to mention massacres and the scandal and tragedy of refugees. That is why the Synod rightly considered that an authentic democracy, which respects pluralism, "is one of the principal routes along which the Church travels together with the people... The lay Christian, engaged in the democratic struggle according to the spirit of the Gospel, is the sign of a Church which participates in the promotion of the rule of law everywhere in Africa".(217)

Administering the common patrimony

113. The Synod also called on African governments to establish the appropriate policies needed to increase economic growth and investment in order to create new jobs.(218) This involves the commitment to pursue sound economic policies, adopting the right priorities for the exploitation and distribution of often scarce national resources in such a way as to provide for people's basic needs, and to ensure an honest and equitable sharing of benefits and burdens. In particular, governments have the binding duty to protect the common patrimony against all forms of waste and embezzlement by citizens lacking public spirit or by unscrupulous foreigners. It is also the duty of governments to undertake suitable initiatives to improve the conditions of international commerce.

Africa's economic problems are compounded by the dishonesty of corrupt government leaders who, in connivance with domestic or foreign private interests, divert national resources for their own profit and transfer public funds to private accounts in foreign banks. This is plain theft, whatever the legal camouflage may be. I earnestly hope that international bodies and people of integrity in Africa and elsewhere will be able to investigate suitable legal ways of having these embezzled funds returned. In the granting of loans, it is important to make sure of the responsibility and forthrightness of the beneficiaries.(219)

The international dimension

114. As an Assembly of Bishops of the universal Church presided over by the Successor of Peter, the Synod furnished a providential occasion to evaluate positively the place and role of Africa in the universal Church and the world community. Since we live in a world that is increasingly interdependent, the destinies and problems of the different regions are linked together. As God's Family on earth, the Church should be the living sign and efficacious instrument of universal solidarity for building a world-wide community of justice and peace. A better world will come about only if it is built on the solid foundation of sound ethical and spiritual principles.

In the present world order, the African nations are among the most disadvantaged. Rich countries must become clearly aware of their duty to support the efforts of the countries struggling to rise from their poverty and misery. In fact, it is in the interest of the rich countries to choose the path of solidarity, for only in this way can lasting peace and harmony for humanity be ensured. Moreover, the Church in the developed countries cannot ignore the added responsibility arising from the Christian commitment to justice and charity. Because all men and women bear God's image and are called to belong to the same family redeemed by Christ's Blood, each individual should be guaranteed just access to the world's resources which God has put at the everyone's disposal.(220)

It is not hard to see the many practical implications of this. In the first place it involves working for improved socio-political relations among nations, ensuring greater justice and dignity for those countries which, after gaining independence, have been members of the international community for less time. A compassionate ear must also be lent to the anguished cries of the poor nations asking for help in areas of particular importance: malnutrition, the widespread deterioration in the standard of living, the insufficiency of means for educating the young, the lack of elementary health and social services with the resulting persistence of endemic diseases, the spread of the terrible scourge of AIDS, the heavy and often unbearable burden of international debt, the horror of fratricidal wars fomented by unscrupulous arms trafficking, the shameful and pitiable spectacle of refugees and displaced persons. These are some of the areas where prompt interventions are necessary and expedient, even if in the overall situation they seem to be inadequate.

I. Some worrisome problems

Restoring hope to youth

115. The economic situation of poverty has a particularly negative impact on the young. They embark on adult life with very little enthusiasm for a present riddled with frustrations and they look with still less hope to a future which to them seems sad and sombre. That is why they tend to flee the neglected rural areas and gather in cities which in fact do not have much more to offer them. Many of them go to foreign countries where, as if in exile, they live a precarious existence as economic refugees. With the Synod Fathers I feel the duty to plead their cause: it is urgently necessary to find a solution for their impatience to take part in the life of the nation and of the Church.(221)

But at the same time I also wish to appeal to the youth: Dear young people, the Synod asks you to take in hand the development of your countries, to love the culture of your people, and to work for its renewal with fidelity to your cultural heritage, through a sharpening of your scientific and technical expertise, and above all through the witness of your Christian faith.(222)

The scourge of AIDS

116. Against the background of widespread poverty and inadequate medical services the Synod considered the tragic scourge of AIDS which is sowing suffering and death in many parts of Africa. It noted the role played in the spread of this disease by irresponsible sexual behaviour and drafted this strong recommendation: "The companionship, joy, happiness and peace which Christian marriage and fidelity provide, and the safeguard which chastity gives, must be continuously presented to the faithful, particularly the young".(223)

The battle against AIDS ought to be everyone's battle. Echoing the voice of the Synod Fathers, I too ask pastoral workers to bring to their brothers and sisters affected by AIDS all possible material, moral and spiritual comfort. I urgently ask the world's scientists and political leaders, moved by the love and respect due to every human person, to use every means available in order to put an end to this scourge. "Beat your swords into ploughshares" (Is 2:4): no more wars!

117. The Synod incisively described the tragedy of wars which are tearing Africa apart: "For some decades now Africa has been the theatre of fratricidal wars which are decimating peoples and destroying their natural and cultural resources".(224) This very sad situation, in addition to causes external to Africa, also has internal causes such as "tribalism, nepotism, racism, religious intolerance and the thirst for power taken to the extreme by totalitarian regimes which trample with impunity the rights and dignity of the person. Peoples crushed and reduced to silence suffer as innocent and resigned victims all these situations of injustice".(225)

I cannot fail to join my voice to that of the members of the Synodal Assembly in order to deplore the situations of unspeakable suffering caused by so many conflicts now taking place or about to break out, and to ask all those who can do so to make every effort to put an end to such tragedies.

Together with the Synod Fathers, I likewise urge a serious commitment to foster on the Continent conditions of greater social justice and good government, in order thereby to prepare the ground for peace.

"If you want peace, work for justice".(226) It is much better - and also easier - to prevent wars than to try to stop them after they have broken out. It is time that peoples beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks (cf. Is 2:4).

118. The Church in Africa - especially through some of its leaders - has been in the front line of the search for negotiated solutions to the armed conflicts in many parts of the Continent. This mission of pacification must continue, encouraged by the Lord's promise in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9).

Those who foment wars in Africa by the arms trade are accomplices in abominable crimes against humanity. I make my own the Synod's recommendations on this subject. Having said that "the sale of arms is a scandal since it sows the seed of death", the Synod appealed to all countries that sell arms to Africa to stop doing so, and it asked African governments "to move away from huge military expenditures and put the emphasis on the education, health and well-being of their people".(227)

Africa must continue to seek peaceful and effective means so that military regimes will transfer authority to civilians. But it is also true that the military are called to play a distinctive role in the nation. Thus, while the Synod praised the "brothers in the military for the service that they assume in the name of our countries", (228) it immediately warned them forcefully that "they will have to answer before God for every act of violence against the lives of innocent people".(229)

Refugees and displaced persons

119. One of the most bitter fruits of wars and economic hardships is the sad phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons, a phenomenon which, as the Synod mentioned, has reached tragic dimensions. The ideal solution is the re-establishment of a just peace, reconciliation and economic development. It is therefore urgent that national, regional and international organizations should find equitable and long-lasting solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons.(230) In the meantime, since the Continent continues to suffer from the massive displacement of refugees, I make a pressing appeal that these people be given material help and offered pastoral support wherever they may be, whether in Africa or on other Continents.

The burden of the international debt

120. The question of the indebtedness of poor nations towards rich ones is a matter of great concern for the Church, as expressed in many official documents and interventions of the Holy See.(231)

Taking up the words of the Synod Fathers, I particularly feel it is my duty to urge "the Heads of State and their governments in Africa not to crush their peoples with internal and external debts".(232) I also make a pressing appeal to "the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and all foreign creditors to alleviate the crushing debts of the African nations".(233) Finally, I earnestly ask "the Episcopal Conferences of the industrialized countries to present this issue consistently to their governments and to the organizations concerned".(234) The situation of many African countries is so serious as to leave no room for attitudes of indifference and complacency.

Dignity of the African woman

121. One of the characteristic signs of our times is the growing awareness of women's dignity and of their specific role in the Church and in society at large. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).

I have repeatedly affirmed the fundamental equality and enriching complementarity that exist between man and woman.(235) The Synod applied these principles to the condition of women in Africa. Their rights and duties in building up the family and in taking full part in the development of the Church and society were strongly affirmed. With specific regard to the Church, women should be properly trained so that they can participate at appropriate levels in her apostolic activity.

The Church deplores and condemns, to the extent that they are still found in some African societies, all "the customs and practices which deprive women of their rights and the respect due to them".(236) It is recommended that Episcopal Conferences establish special commissions to study further women's problems in cooperation with interested government agencies, wherever this is possible.(237)

II. Communicating the good news

Following Christ, the Communicator "par excellence"

122. The Synod had much to say about social communications in the context of the evangelization of Africa, carefully taking into account present circumstances. The theological point of departure is Christ, the Communicator par excellence who shares with those who believe in him the truth, the life and the love which he shares with his Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. That is why "the Church is aware of her duty of fostering social communications ad intra and ad extra. The Church should promote communication from within through a better diffusion of information among her members".(238) This will put her in a more advantageous position to communicate to the world the Good News of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Traditional forms of communication

123. The traditional forms of social communication must never be underestimated. In many places in Africa they are still very useful and effective. Moreover, they are "less costly and more accessible".(239) These forms include songs and music, mimes and the theatre, proverbs and fables. As vehicles of the wisdom and soul of the people, they are a precious source of material and of inspiration for the modern media.

Evangelization of the world of the media

124. The modern mass media are not only instruments of communication, but also a world to be evangelized. In terms of the message they transmit, it is necessary to ensure that they propagate the good, the true and the beautiful. Echoing the preoccupation of the Synod Fathers I express my deep concern about the moral content of very many programmes with which the media flood the African Continent. In particular I warn against the pornography and violence which are inundating poor countries. In addition, the Synod rightly deplored "the very negative portrayal of the African in the media and called for its immediate cessation".(240)

Every Christian should be concerned that the communications media are a vehicle of evangelization. But Christians who are professionals in this sector have a special part to play. It is their duty to ensure that Christian principles influence the practice of the profession, including the technical and administrative sector. To enable them to exercise this role properly, they need to be provided with a wholesome human, religious and spiritual training.

Using the means of social communication

125. Today the Church has at her disposal a variety of means of social communication, traditional as well as modern. It is her duty to make the best possible use of them in order to spread the message of salvation. In the Church in Africa many obstacles impede easy access to these means, not the least of which is their high cost. Moreover, in many places government regulations impose undue control on them. Every possible effort should be made to remove these obstacles. The media, whether private or public, should serve all people without exception. Therefore I invite the particular Churches of Africa to do everything in their power to meet this objective.(241)

Cooperation and coordination in the mass media

126. The media, especially in their most modern forms, have a wide-ranging impact. Consequently, closer cooperation is needed in this area, in order to ensure more effective coordination at all levels: diocesan, national, continental and worldwide. In Africa, the Church has a great need for solidarity with sister Churches in the richer and technologically more advanced countries. Programmes of continental cooperation which already exist in Africa, such as the Pan African Episcopal Committee for Social Communications, should be encouraged and revitalized. As the Synod suggested, it is necessary to establish closer cooperation in other areas, such as professional training, structures of radio and television production, and stations that transmit to the whole Continent.(242)

CHAPTER VII - "YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH"

127. During the Special Assembly, the Synod Fathers thoroughly explored the overall situation in Africa, in order to encourage an ever more effective and credible witness to Christ in every local Church, every nation, every region, and in the entire African Continent. In all the discussions and recommendations made by the Special Assembly the

overriding concern was to bear witness to Christ. I found in them the spirit of what I had said in Africa to a group of Bishops: "By respecting, preserving and fostering the particular values and riches of your people's cultural heritage, you will be in a position to lead them to a better understanding of the mystery of Christ, which is also to be lived in the noble, concrete and daily experiences of African life. There is no question of adulterating the word of God, or of emptying the Cross of its power (cf. 1 Cor 1:17), but rather of bringing Christ into the very centre of African life and of lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself African".(243)

Open to mission

128. The Church in Africa is not called to bear witness to Christ only on the Continent; for to it the Risen Lord also says: "You shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). For this very reason, during their discussions of the Synod's theme, the Fathers carefully avoided every tendency to isolationism by the Church in Africa. At all times the Special Assembly kept in view the missionary mandate which the Church received from Christ: to bear witness to him in the whole world.(244) The Synod Fathers acknowledged God's call to Africa to play its full part, at the world level, in his plan for the salvation of the human race (cf. 1 Tim 2:4).

129. It is on account of this commitment to the Church's catholicity that the Lineamenta of the Special Assembly for Africa declared: "No particular Church, not even the poorest, can ever be dispensed from the obligation of sharing its personnel as well as its spiritual and temporal resources with other particular Churches and with the universal Church (cf. Acts 2:44-45)".(245) For its part, the Special Assembly strongly stressed Africa's responsibility for mission "to the ends of the earth" in the following words: "The prophetic phrase of Paul VI, 'You Africans are missionaries to yourselves', is to be understood as 'missionaries to the whole world'... An appeal is launched to the particular Churches of Africa for mission outside the confines of their own Dioceses".(246)

130. In gladly and gratefully endorsing this declaration of the Special Assembly, I wish to repeat to all my Brother Bishops in Africa what I said a few years ago: "The Church in Africa's obligation to be missionary to itself and to evangelize the Continent entails cooperation among the particular Churches in the context of each African country, among the various nations of the Continent and also of other continents. In this way Africa will be fully integrated in missionary activity".(247) In an earlier appeal addressed to all the particular Churches, both young and old, I already said that "the world is steadily growing more united, and the Gospel spirit must lead us to overcome cultural and nationalistic barriers, avoiding all isolationism". (248)

The bold determination manifested by the Special Assembly to engage the young Churches of Africa in mission "to the ends of the earth" reflects the desire to implement, as generously as possible, one of the important directives of the Second Vatican Council: "In order that this missionary zeal may flourish among their native members, it very fitting that the young Churches should participate as soon as possible in the universal missionary work of the Church. Let them send their own missionaries to proclaim the Gospel all over the world, even though they themselves are suffering from a shortage of clergy. For their communion with the universal Church reaches a certain measure of perfection when they themselves take an active part in missionary zeal towards other nations".(249)

Organic pastoral solidarity

131. At the beginning of this Exhortation I pointed out that in announcing the convocation of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops I had in mind the promotion of "an organic pastoral solidarity within the entire African territory and nearby Islands".(250) I am pleased to say that the Assembly kept this objective firmly in view. Discussions at the Synod revealed the Bishops' readiness and generosity for this pastoral solidarity and for sharing their resources with others, even when they themselves needed missionaries.

132. Specifically to my brother Bishops, who "are directly responsible, together with me, for the evangelization of the world, both as members of the College of Bishops and as Pastors of the particular Churches", (251) I wish to address a special word in this regard. In their daily ministry to the flock entrusted to them, they must never lose sight of the needs of the Church as a whole. As Catholic Bishops, they must feel the concern for all the Churches which burned in the Apostle's heart (cf. 2 Cor 11:28). Nor can they fail to express this concern, especially when they deliberate and decide together as members of their respective Episcopal Conferences. Through liaison bodies at the regional and continental levels, they are in a better position to discern and evaluate the pastoral needs surfacing in other parts of the world. The Bishops express their apostolic solidarity in a pre-eminent way through the Synod of Bishops: "among its affairs of general concern, it should give special consideration to missionary activity. For this is a supremely great and sacred task of the Church".(252)

133. The Special Assembly also rightly pointed out that, in order to achieve an overall pastoral solidarity in Africa, it is necessary to promote the renewal of priestly formation. The words of the Second Vatican Council can never be pondered enough: "The spiritual gift which priests received at their Ordination prepares them not for any limited and narrow mission but for the widest scope of the universal mission 'even to the very ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8)".(253)

That is why I have urged priests "to make themselves readily available to the Holy Spirit and the Bishop, to be sent to preach the Gospel beyond the borders of their own country. This will demand of them not only maturity in their vocation, but also an uncommon readiness to detach themselves from their own homeland, culture and family, and a special ability to adapt to other cultures, with understanding and respect for them". (254)

I am deeply grateful to God to learn that a growing number of African priests have been responding to the call to bear witness "to the ends of the earth". It is my ardent hope that this trend will be encouraged and strengthened in all the particular Churches of Africa.

134. It is also a source of great comfort to know that the Missionary Institutes which have been present in Africa for a long time are now "receiving more and more candidates from the young Churches which they founded", (255) thus enabling these same Churches to take part in the missionary activity of the universal Church. Similarly, I give thanks for the new Missionary Institutes which have been established on the Continent and are now sending their members ad gentes. This is a providential and marvellous development which shows the maturity and dynamism of the Church in Africa.

135. In a special way I would like to endorse the specific recommendation of the Synod Fathers that the four Pontifical Mission Aid Societies be established in every particular Church and in every country as a means of achieving an organic pastoral solidarity in favour of the mission "to the ends of the earth". These Societies, because they are under the auspices of the Pope and the Episcopal College, rightly have the first place, "since they are the means of imbuing Catholics from their very infancy with a genuinely universal and missionary outlook. They are the means for undertaking an effective collection of funds to subsidize all the missions, each according to its needs".(256) A significant result of their activity "is the fostering of lifelong vocations ad gentes, in both the older and younger Churches. I earnestly recommend that their promotional work be increasingly directed to this goal".(257)

Holiness and mission

136. The Synod reaffirmed that all the sons and daughters of Africa are called to holiness and to be witnesses to Christ throughout the world. "The lesson of history confirms that by the action of the Holy Spirit evangelization takes place above all through the witness of charity, the witness of holiness".(258) I therefore wish to repeat to all Christians in Africa what I wrote some years ago: "A missionary is really such only if he commits himself to the way of holiness... Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission... The renewed impulse to the mission ad gentes demands holy missionaries. It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and coordinate ecclesial resources, or delve deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith. What is needed is the encouragement of a new 'ardour for holiness' among missionaries and throughout the Christian community".(259)

As I did then, so again I address myself to the Christians of the young Churches in order to remind them of their responsibilities: "Today, you are the hope of this two-thousand-year-old Church of ours: being young in faith, you must be like the first Christians and radiate enthusiasm and courage. In a word, you must set yourselves on the path of holiness. Only thus can you be a sign of God in the world and re-live in your own countries the missionary epic of the early Church. You will also be a leaven of missionary spirit for the older Churches".(260)

137. The Church in Africa shares with the universal Church "the sublime vocation of realizing, first of all within herself, the unity of humankind over and above any ethnic, cultural, national, social or other divisions in order to signify precisely that such divisions are now obsolete, having been abolished by the Cross of Christ".(261) By responding to her vocation to be a redeemed and reconciled people in the midst of the world, the Church contributes to promoting the fraternal coexistence of all peoples, since she transcends the distinctions of race and nationality.

In view of the specific vocation entrusted to the Church by her Divine Founder, I earnestly call upon the Catholic Community in Africa to bear authentic witness before all humanity to the Christian universalism which has its source in the fatherhood of God. "All persons created by God have the same origin. Whatever may, throughout history, have been their dispersion or the accentuation of their differences, they are destined to form one sole family according to God's plan established 'in the beginning' ".(262) The Church in Africa is called to reach out in love to every human being, firmly believing that "by his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man".(263)

In particular, Africa ought to make its own special contribution to the ecumenical movement, an urgent task which, on the threshold of the Third Millennium, I have emphasized once more in my Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*.(264) Certainly the Church on the Continent can also play an important role in interreligious dialogue, above all by fostering close relations with Muslims and by promoting respect for the values of African traditional religion.

Putting solidarity into practice

138. In bearing witness to Christ "to the ends of the earth", the Church in Africa will no doubt be assisted by the conviction of the "positive and moral value of the growing awareness of interdependence among individuals and nations. The fact that men and women in various parts of the world feel personally affected by the injustices and

violations of human rights committed in distant countries, countries which perhaps they will never visit, is a further sign of a reality transformed into awareness, thus acquiring a moral connotation".(265)

It is my desire that Christians in Africa will become ever more aware of this interdependence among individuals and nations, and will be ready to respond to it by practising the virtue of solidarity. The fruit of solidarity is peace, an inestimable good for peoples and nations in every part of the world. For it is precisely by means of fostering and strengthening solidarity that the Church can make a specific and decisive contribution to a true culture of peace.

139. By entering into contact with all the peoples of the world through her dialogue with the various cultures, the Church brings them closer to one another, enabling each people to assume, in faith, the authentic values of others.

Ready to cooperate with all people of good will and with the international community, the Church in Africa does not seek advantages for itself. The solidarity which it expresses "seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimensions of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation".(266) The Church seeks to contribute to humanity's conversion, leading it to acceptance of God's salvific plan through her witness to the Gospel, accompanied by charitable work on behalf of the poor and the neediest. In so doing she never loses sight of the primacy of the transcendent and of those spiritual realities which are the first fruits of man's eternal salvation.

In their discussion on the Church's solidarity with peoples and nations, the Synod Fathers were at all times fully aware that "earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's Kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God".(267) Precisely for this reason the Church in Africa is convinced - as the work of the Special Assembly clearly demonstrated - that waiting for Christ's final return "can never be an excuse for lack of concern for people in their concrete personal situations and in their social, national and international life", (268) since these earthly conditions have a bearing upon humanity's pilgrimage towards eternity.

CONCLUSION

Towards the new Christian Millennium

140. Gathered around the Virgin Mary as at a new Pentecost, the members of the Special Assembly examined in depth the evangelizing mission of the Church in Africa on the threshold of the Third Millennium. At the conclusion of this PostSynodal Apostolic Exhortation in which I present the fruits of this Assembly to the Church in Africa, Madagascar and the adjacent Islands and to the whole Catholic Church, I give thanks to God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - who granted us the privilege of living the genuine "moment of grace" which the Synod was. I am deeply grateful to the People of God in Africa for all that they did for the Special Assembly. This Synod was prepared with zeal and enthusiasm, as can be seen from the answers to the questionnaire attached to the outline document (Lineamenta) and from the reflections gathered in the working document (Instrumentum Laboris). The Christian communities of Africa ardently prayed for the success of the work of the Special Synod, and it was abundantly blessed by the Lord.

141. Since the Synod was convoked in order to enable the Church in Africa to assume its evangelizing mission as effectively as possible in preparation for the Third Christian Millennium, with the present Exhortation I invite God's People in Africa - Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful - to set their faces resolutely towards the Great Jubilee which we shall celebrate a few years hence. For all the peoples of Africa the best preparation for the new Millennium must consist in a firm commitment to implement with great fidelity the decisions and orientations which, with the Apostolic authority of the Successor of Peter, I present in this Exhortation. They are decisions and orientations which can be traced back to the genuine heritage of the Church's teaching and discipline and in particular to the Second Vatican Council, the main source of inspiration for the Special Assembly for Africa.

142. My invitation to God's People in Africa to prepare themselves for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 is also meant to be a clarion call to Christian joy. "The great joy announced by the angel on Christmas night is truly for all the people (cf. Lk 2:10)... The Blessed Virgin Mary was the first to have received its announcement, from the Angel Gabriel, and her Magnificat was already the exultant hymn of all the humble. Whenever we say the Rosary, the joyful mysteries thus place us once more before the inexpressible event which is the centre and summit of history: the coming on earth of Emmanuel, God with us".(269)

It is the two thousandth Anniversary of that event of great joy which we are preparing to celebrate with the coming Great Jubilee. And so Africa, which "is also in a sense the 'second homeland' of Jesus, since as a small child, it was there that he sought refuge from Herod's cruelty", (270) is called to joy. At the same time, "everything ought to focus on the primary objective of the Jubilee: the strengthening of faith and of the witness of Christians".(271)

143. On account of the many difficulties, crises and conflicts which bring about so much suffering and misery on the Continent, some Africans are at times tempted to think that the Lord has abandoned them, that he has forgotten them (cf. Is 49:14)! "And God answers with the words of the great Prophet: 'Can a woman forget her own baby and not love the child she bore? Even if a mother should forget a child, I will never forget you. I have written your names on the palms of my hands' (Is 49:15-16). Yes, on the palms of Christ, pierced by the nails of the Crucifixion. The names of each one of you [Africans] is written on those palms. Therefore with full confidence we cry out: 'The Lord is our help and our shield. In him do our hearts find joy. We trust in his holy name' (Ps 28:7)".(272)

Prayer to Mary, Mother of the Church

144. In thanksgiving for the grace of this Synod, I appeal to Mary, Star of Evangelization and, as the Third Millennium draws near, to her I entrust Africa and its evangelizing mission. I turn to her with the thoughts and sentiments expressed in the prayer which my Brother Bishops composed at the close of the working session of the Synod in Rome:

O Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, thanks to you, on the day of the Annunciation, at the dawn of the new era, the whole human race with its cultures rejoiced in recognizing itself ready for the Gospel. On the eve of a new Pentecost for the Church in Africa, Madagascar and the adjacent Islands, the People of God with its Pastors turns to you and with you fervently prays: May the outpouring of the Holy Spirit make of the cultures of Africa places of communion in diversity, fashioning the peoples of this great Continent into generous sons and daughters of the Church which is the Family of the Father, the Brotherhood of the Son, the Image of the Trinity, the seed and beginning on earth of the eternal Kingdom which will come to its perfection in the City that has God as its Builder: the City of justice, love and peace.

Given at Yaoundé, in Cameroon, on 14 September, Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, in the year 1995, the seventeenth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

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Apostolic Letter
 Of The Supreme Pontiff
 John Paul II
 To The Bishops, Clergy And Faithful
 To Mark The Centenary
 Of Orientalium Dignitas
 Of Pope Leo XIII

Venerable Brothers,

Dear Sons and Daughters of the Church

1. The light of the East has illumined the universal Church, from the moment when "a rising sun" appeared above us (Lk 1:78): Jesus Christ, our Lord, whom all Christians invoke as the Redeemer of man and the hope of the world.

That light inspired my predecessor Pope Leo XIII to write the Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Dignitas* in which he sought to safeguard the significance of the Eastern traditions for the whole Church.(1)

On the centenary of that event and of the initiatives the Pontiff intended at that time as an aid to restoring unity with all the Christians of the East, I wish to send to the Catholic Church a similar appeal, which has been enriched by the knowledge and interchange which has taken place over the past century.

Since, in fact, we believe that the venerable and ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the heritage of Christ's Church, the first need for Catholics is to be familiar with that tradition, so as to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity in the best way possible for each.

Our Eastern Catholic brothers and sisters are very conscious of being the living bearers of this tradition, together with our Orthodox brothers and sisters. The members of the Catholic Church of the Latin tradition must also be fully acquainted with this treasure and thus feel, with the Pope, a passionate longing that the full manifestation of the Church's catholicity be restored to the Church and to the world, expressed not by a single tradition, and still less by one community in opposition to the other; and that we too may be granted a full taste of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church(2) which is preserved and grows in the life of the Churches of the East as in those of the West.

2. My gaze turns to the *Oriente Lumen* which shines from Jerusalem (cf. Is 60:1; Rev 21:10), the city where the Word of God, made man for our salvation, a Jew "descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8), died and rose again. In that holy city, when the day of Pentecost had come and "they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1), the Paraclete was sent upon Mary and the disciples. From there the Good News spread throughout the world because, filled with the Holy Spirit, "they spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). From there, from the mother of all the Churches, (3) the Gospel was preached to all nations, many of which boast of having had one of the Apostles as their first witness to the Lord.(4) In that city the most varied cultures and traditions were welcomed in the name of the one God (cf. Acts 2:9 - 11). In turning to it with nostalgia and gratitude, we find the strength and enthusiasm to intensify the quest for harmony in that genuine plurality of forms which remains the Church's ideal.(5)

3. A Pope, son of a Slav people, is particularly moved by the call of those peoples to whom the two saintly brothers Cyril and Methodius went. They were a glorious example of apostles of unity who were able to proclaim Christ in their search for communion between East and West amid the difficulties which sometimes set the two worlds against one another. Several times I have reflected on the example of their activity, (6) also addressing those who are their children in faith and culture.

These considerations now need to be broadened so as to embrace all the Eastern Churches, in the variety of their different traditions. My thoughts turn to our brothers and sisters of the Eastern Churches, in the wish that together we may seek the strength of an answer to the questions man is asking today in every part of the world. I intend to address their heritage of faith and life, aware that there can be no second thoughts about pursuing the path of unity, which is irreversible as the Lord's appeal for unity is irreversible. "Dearly beloved, we have this common task: we must say together from East and West: *Ne evacuetur Crux!* (cf. 1 Cor 1:17). The cross of Christ must not be emptied of its power because if the cross of Christ is emptied of its power, man no longer has roots, he no longer has prospects: he is destroyed! This is the cry of the end of the 20th century. It is the cry of Rome, of Moscow, of Constantinople. It is the cry of all Christendom: of the Americas, of Africa, of Asia, of everyone. It is the cry of the new evangelization."(7)

I am thinking of the Eastern Churches, as did many other Popes in the past, aware that the mandate to preserve the Church's unity and to seek Christian unity tirelessly wherever it was wounded was addressed to them. A particularly close link already binds us. We have almost everything in common;(8) and above all, we have in common the true longing for unity.

4. The cry of men and women today seeking meaning for their lives reaches all the Churches of the East and of the West. In this cry, we perceive the invocation of those who seek the Father whom they have forgotten and lost (cf. Lk 15:18 - 20; Jn 14:8). The women and men of today are asking us to show them Christ, who knows the Father and who has revealed him (cf. Jn 8:55; 14:8 - 11). Letting the world ask us its questions, listening with humility and tenderness, in full solidarity with those who express them, we are called to show in word and deed today the immense riches that our Churches preserve in the coffers of their traditions. We learn from the Lord himself, who would stop along the way to be with the people, who listened to them and was moved to pity when he saw them "like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36; cf. Mk 6:34). From him we must learn the loving gaze with which he reconciled men with the Father and with themselves, communicating to them that power which alone is able to heal the whole person.

This appeal calls on the Churches of the East and the West to concentrate on the essential: "We cannot come before Christ, the Lord of history, as divided as we have unfortunately been in the course of the second millennium. These divisions must give way to rapprochement and harmony; the wounds on the path of Christian unity must be healed."(9) Going beyond our own frailties, we must turn to him, the one Teacher, sharing in his death so as to purify ourselves from that jealous attachment to feelings and memories, not of the great things God has done for us, but of the human affairs of a past that still weighs heavily on our hearts. May the Spirit clarify our gaze so that together we may reach out to contemporary man who is waiting for the good news. If we make a harmonious, illuminating, life - giving response to the world's expectations and sufferings, we will truly contribute to a more effective proclamation of the Gospel among the people of our time.

I - KNOWING THE CHRISTIAN EAST: AN EXPERIENCE OF FAITH

5. "In the study of revealed truth East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and confessing divine things. It is hardly surprising, then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed them better. In such cases, these various theological formulations are often to be considered complementary rather than conflicting."(10)

Pondering over the questions, aspirations and experiences I have mentioned, my thoughts turn to the Christian heritage of the East. I do not intend to describe that heritage or to interpret it: I listen to the Churches of the East, which I know are living interpreters of the treasure of tradition they preserve. In contemplating it, before my eyes appear elements of great significance for fuller and more thorough understanding of the Christian experience. These elements are capable of giving a more complete Christian response to the expectations of the men and women of today. Indeed, in comparison to any other culture, the Christian East has a unique and privileged role as the original setting where the Church was born. The Christian tradition of the East implies a way of accepting, understanding and living faith in the Lord Jesus. In this sense it is extremely close to the Christian tradition of the West, which is born of and nourished by the same faith. Yet it is legitimately and admirably distinguished from the latter, since Eastern Christians have their own way of perceiving and understanding, and thus an original way of living their relationship with the Savior. Here, with respect and trepidation, I want to approach the act of worship which these Churches express, rather than to identify this or that specific theological point which has emerged down the centuries in the polemical debates between East and West.

From the beginning, the Christian East has proved to contain a wealth of forms capable of assuming the characteristic features of each individual culture, with supreme respect for each particular community. We can only thank God with deep emotion for the wonderful variety with which he has allowed such a rich and composite mosaic of different tesserae to be formed.

6. Certain features of the spiritual and theological tradition, common to the various Churches of the East mark their sensitivity to the forms taken by the transmission of the Gospel in Western lands. The Second Vatican Council summarized them as follows: "Everyone knows with what love the Eastern Christians celebrate the sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharistic mystery, source of the Church's life and pledge of future glory. In this mystery the faithful, united with their bishops, have access to God the Father through the Son, the Word made flesh who suffered and was glorified, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And so, made 'sharers of the divine nature' (2 Pt 1:4) they enter into communion with the most holy Trinity."(11)

These features describe the Eastern outlook of the Christian. His or her goal is participation in the divine nature through communion with the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In this view the Father's "monarchy" is outlined as well as the concept of salvation according to the divine plan, as it is presented by Eastern theology after Saint Irenaeus of Lyons and which spread among the Cappadocian Fathers.(12)

Participation in Trinitarian life takes place through the liturgy and in a special way through the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the glorified body of Christ, the seed of immortality.(13) In divinization and particularly in the sacraments, Eastern theology attributes a very special role to the Holy Spirit: through the power of the Spirit who dwells in man deification already begins on earth; the creature is transfigured and God's kingdom inaugurated.

The teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers on divinization passed into the tradition of all the Eastern Churches and is part of their common heritage. This can be summarized in the thought already expressed by Saint Irenaeus at the end of

the second century: God passed into man so that man might pass over to God.(14) This theology of divinization remains one of the achievements particularly dear to Eastern Christian thought.(15)

On this path of divinization, those who have been made "most Christ-like" by grace and by commitment to the way of goodness go before us: the martyrs and the saints.(16) And the Virgin Mary occupies an altogether special place among them. From her the shoot of Jesse sprang (cf. Is 11:1). Her figure is not only the Mother who waits for us, but the Most Pure, who - the fulfillment of so many Old Testament prefigurations - is an icon of the Church, the symbol and anticipation of humanity transfigured by grace, the model and the unfailing hope for all those who direct their steps towards the heavenly Jerusalem.(17)

Although strongly emphasizing Trinitarian realism and its unfolding in sacramental life, the East associates faith in the unity of the divine nature with the fact that the divine essence is unknowable. The Eastern Fathers always assert that it is impossible to know what God is; one can only know that he is, since he revealed himself in the history of salvation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.(18)

This sense of the inexpressible divine reality is reflected in liturgical celebration, where the sense of mystery is so strongly felt by all the faithful of the Christian East.

"Moreover, in the East are to be found the riches of those spiritual traditions which are given expression in monastic life especially. From the glorious times of the holy Fathers that monastic spirituality flourished in the East which later flowed over into the Western world, and there provided a source from which Latin monastic life took its rise and has often drawn fresh vigor ever since. Therefore, it is earnestly recommended that Catholics avail themselves more often of the spiritual riches of the Eastern Fathers which lift up the whole man to the contemplation of the divine mysteries."(19)

Gospel, Churches and Culture

7. As I have pointed out at other times, one of the first great values embodied particularly in the Christian East is the attention given to peoples and their cultures, so that the Word of God and his praise may resound in every language. I reflected on this topic in the Encyclical Letter *Slavorum Apostoli*, where I noted that Cyril and Methodius "desired to become similar in every aspect to those to whom they were bringing the Gospel; they wished to become a part of those peoples and to share their lot in everything";(20) "it was a question of a new method of catechesis."(21)

In doing this, they expressed an attitude widespread in the Christian East: "By incarnating the Gospel in the native culture of the peoples which they were evangelizing, Saints Cyril and Methodius were especially meritorious for the formation and development of that same culture, or rather of many cultures."(22) They combined respect and consideration for individual cultures with a passion for the universality of the Church, which they tirelessly strove to achieve. The attitude of the two brothers from Thessalonica is representative in Christian antiquity of a style typical of many churches: revelation is proclaimed satisfactorily and becomes fully understandable when Christ speaks the tongues of the various peoples, and they can read scripture and sing the liturgy in their own language with their own expressions, as though repeating the marvels of Pentecost.

At a time when it is increasingly recognized that the right of every people to express themselves according to their own heritage of culture and thought is fundamental, the experience of the individual Churches of the East is offered to us as an authoritative example of successful inculturation.

From this model we learn that if we wish to avoid the recurrence of particularism as well as of exaggerated nationalism, we must realize that the proclamation of the Gospel should be deeply rooted in what is distinctive to each culture and open to convergence in a universality, which involves an exchange for the sake of mutual enrichment.

Between memory and expectation

8. Today we often feel ourselves prisoners of the present. It is as though man had lost his perception of belonging to a history which precedes and follows him. This effort to situate oneself between the past and the future, with a grateful heart for the benefits received and for those expected, is offered by the Eastern Churches in particular, with a clear-cut sense of continuity which takes the name of Tradition and of eschatological expectation.

Tradition is the heritage of Christ's Church. This is a living memory of the Risen One met and witnessed to by the Apostles who passed on his living memory to their successors in an uninterrupted line, guaranteed by the apostolic succession through the laying on of hands, down to the bishops of today. This is articulated in the historical and cultural patrimony of each Church, shaped by the witness of the martyrs, fathers and saints, as well as by the living faith of all Christians down the centuries to our own day. It is not an unchanging repetition of formulas, but a heritage which preserves its original, living kerygmatic core. It is Tradition that preserves the Church from the danger of gathering only changing opinions, and guarantees her certitude and continuity.

When the uses and customs belonging to each Church are considered as absolutely unchangeable, there is a sure risk of Tradition losing that feature of a living reality which grows and develops, and which the Spirit guarantees precisely because it has something to say to the people of every age. As Scripture is increasingly understood by those who read it, (23) every other element of the Church's living heritage is increasingly understood by believers and is enriched by

new contributions, in fidelity and in continuity.(24) Only a religious assimilation, in the obedience of faith, of what the Church calls "Tradition" will enable Tradition to be embodied in different cultural and historical situations and conditions.(25) Tradition is never pure nostalgia for things or forms past, nor regret for lost privileges, but the living memory of the Bride, kept eternally youthful by the Love that dwells within her.

If Tradition puts us in continuity with the past, eschatological expectation opens us to God's future. Each Church must struggle against the temptation to make an absolute of what it does, and thus to celebrate itself or abandon itself to sorrow. But time belongs to God, and whatever takes place in time can never be identified with the fullness of the Kingdom, which is always a free gift. The Lord Jesus came to die for us and rose from the dead, while creation, saved through hope, is still suffering its birth pangs (cf. Rom 8:22). The Lord himself will return to give the cosmos to the Father (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). The Church invokes this return, and the monk and the religious are its privileged witnesses.

The East expresses in a living way the reality of tradition and expectation. All its liturgy, in particular, is a commemoration of salvation and an invocation of the Lord's return. And if Tradition teaches the Churches fidelity to what give birth to them, eschatological expectation urges them to be what they have not yet fully become, what the Lord wants them to become, and thus to seek ever new ways of fidelity, overcoming pessimism because they are striving for the hope of God who does not disappoint.

We must show people the beauty of memory, the power that comes to us from the Spirit and makes us witnesses because we are children of witnesses; we must make them taste the wonderful things the Spirit has wrought in history; we must show that it is precisely Tradition which has preserved them, thus giving hope to those who, even without seeing their efforts to do good crowned by success, know that someone else will bring them to fulfillment; therefore man will feel less alone, less enclosed in the narrow corner of his own individual achievement.

Monasticism as a model of baptismal life

9. I would now like to look at the vast panorama of Eastern Christianity from a specific vantage point which affords a view of many of its features: monasticism.

In the East, monasticism has retained great unity. It did not experience the development of different kinds of apostolic life as in the West. The various expressions of monastic life, from the strictly cenobitic, as conceived by Pachomius or Basil, to the rigorously eremitic, as with Anthony or Macarius of Egypt, correspond more to different stages of the spiritual journey than to the choice between different states of life. In any event, whatever form they take, they are all based on monasticism.

Moreover, in the East, monasticism was not seen merely as a separate condition, proper to a precise category of Christians, but rather as a reference point for all the baptized, according to the gifts offered to each by the Lord; it was presented as a symbolic synthesis of Christianity.

When God's call is total, as it is in the monastic life, then the person can reach the highest point that sensitivity, culture and spirituality are able to express. This is even more true for the Eastern Churches, for which monasticism was an essential experience and still today is seen to flourish in them, once persecution is over and hearts can be freely raised to heaven. The monastery is the prophetic place where creation becomes praise of God and the precept of concretely lived charity becomes the ideal of human coexistence; it is where the human being seeks God without limitation or impediment, becoming a reference point for all people, bearing them in his heart and helping them to seek God.

I would also like to mention the splendid witness of nuns in the Christian East. This witness has offered an example of giving full value in the Church to what is specifically feminine, even breaking through the mentality of the time. During recent persecutions, especially in Eastern European countries, when many male monasteries were forcibly closed, female monasticism kept the torch of the monastic life burning. The nun's charism, with its own specific characteristics, is a visible sign of that motherhood of God to which Sacred Scripture often refers.

Therefore I will look to monasticism in order to identify those values which I feel are very important today for expressing the contribution of the Christian East to the journey of Christ's Church towards the Kingdom. While these aspects are at times neither exclusive to monasticism nor to the Eastern heritage, they have frequently acquired a particular connotation in themselves. Besides, we are not seeking to make the most of exclusivity, but of the mutual enrichment in what the one Spirit has inspired in the one Church of Christ.

Monasticism has always been the very soul of the Eastern Churches: the first Christian monks were born in the East and the monastic life was an integral part of the Eastern lumen passed on to the West by the great Fathers of the undivided Church.(26)

The strong common traits uniting the monastic experience of the East and the West make it a wonderful bridge of fellowship, where unity as it is lived shines even more brightly than may appear in the dialogue between the Churches. Between Word and Eucharist

10. Monasticism shows in a special way that life is suspended between two poles: the Word of God and the Eucharist. This means that even in its eremitical forms, it is always a personal response to an individual call and, at the same time, an ecclesial and community event.

The Starting point for the monk is the Word of God, a Word who calls, who invites, who personally summons, as happened to the Apostles. When a person is touched by the Word obedience is born, that is, the listening which changes

life. Every day the monk is nourished by the bread of the Word. Deprived of it, he is as though dead and has nothing left to communicate to his brothers and sisters because the Word is Christ, to whom the monk is called to be conformed.

Even while he chants with his brothers the prayer that sanctifies time, he continues his assimilation of the Word. The very rich liturgical hymnody, of which all the Churches of the Christian East can be justly proud, is but the continuation of the Word which is read, understood, assimilated and finally sung: those hymns are largely sublime paraphrases of the biblical text, filtered and personalized through the individual's experience and that of the community.

Standing before the abyss of divine mercy, the monk can only proclaim the awareness of his own radical poverty, which immediately becomes a plea for help and a cry of rejoicing on account of an even more generous salvation, since from the abyss of his own wretchedness such salvation is unthinkable.(27) This is why the plea for forgiveness and the glorification of God form a substantial part of liturgical prayer. The Christian is immersed in wonder at this paradox, the latest of an infinite series, all magnified with gratitude in the language of the liturgy: the Immense accepts limitation; a virgin gives birth; through death, he who is life conquers death forever; in the heights of heaven, a human body is seated at the right hand of the Father.

The Eucharist is the culmination of this prayer experience, the other pole indissolubly bound to the Word, as the place where the Word becomes Flesh and Blood, a heavenly experience where this becomes an event.

In the Eucharist, the Church's inner nature is revealed, a community of those summoned to the synaxis to celebrate the gift of the One who is offering and offered: participating in the Holy Mysteries, they become "kinsmen"(28) of Christ, anticipating the experience of divinization in the now inseparable bond linking divinity and humanity in Christ.

But the Eucharist is also what anticipates the relationship of men and things to the heavenly Jerusalem. In this way it reveals its eschatological nature completely: as a living sign of this expectation, the monk continues and brings to fulfillment in the liturgy the invocation of the Church, the Bride who implores the Bridegroom's return in a maranatha constantly repeated, not only in words, but with the whole of his life.

A liturgy for the whole man and for the whole cosmos

11. In the liturgical experience, Christ the Lord is the light which illumines the way and reveals the transparency of the cosmos, precisely as in Scripture. The events of the past find in Christ their meaning and fullness, and creation is revealed for what it is: a complex whole which finds its perfection, its purpose in the liturgy alone. This is why the liturgy is heaven on earth, and in it the Word who became flesh imbues matter with a saving potential which is fully manifest in the sacraments: there, creation communicates to each individual the power conferred on it by Christ. Thus the Lord, immersed in the Jordan, transmits to the waters a power which enables them to become the bath of baptismal rebirth.(29)

Within this framework, liturgical prayer in the East shows a great aptitude for involving the human person in his or her totality: the mystery is sung in the loftiness of its content, but also in the warmth of the sentiments it awakens in the heart of redeemed humanity. In the sacred act, even bodiliness is summoned to praise, and beauty, which in the East is one of the best loved names expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured, (30) appears everywhere: in the shape of the church, in the sounds, in the colors, in the lights, in the scents. The lengthy duration of the celebrations, the repeated invocations, everything expresses gradual identification with the mystery celebrated with one's whole person. Thus the prayer of the Church already becomes participation in the heavenly liturgy, an anticipation of the final beatitude.

This total involvement of the person in his rational and emotional aspects, in "ecstasy" and in immanence, is of great interest and a wonderful way to understand the meaning of created realities: these are neither an absolute nor a den of sin and iniquity. In the liturgy, things reveal their own nature as a gift offered by the Creator to humanity: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31). Though all this is marked by the tragedy of sin, which weighs down matter and obscures its clarity, the latter is redeemed in the Incarnation and becomes fully "theophoric," that is, capable of putting us in touch with the Father. This property is most apparent in the holy mysteries, the sacraments of the Church.

Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act, whereby the human body is disclosed in its inner nature as a temple of the Spirit and is united with the Lord Jesus, who himself took a body for the world's salvation. This does not mean, however, an absolute exaltation of all that is physical, for we know well the chaos which sin introduced into the harmony of the human being. The liturgy reveals that the body, through the mystery of the Cross, is in the process of transfiguration, pneumatization: on Mount Tabor Christ showed his body radiant, as the Father wants it to be again.

Cosmic reality also is summoned to give thanks because the whole universe is called to recapitulation in Christ the Lord. This concept expresses a balanced and marvelous teaching on the dignity, respect and purpose of creation and of the human body in particular. With the rejection of all dualism and every cult of pleasure as an end in itself, the body becomes a place made luminous by grace and thus fully human.

To those who seek a truly meaningful relationship with themselves and with the cosmos, so often disfigured by selfishness and greed, the liturgy reveals the way to the harmony of the new man, and invites him to respect the

Eucharistic potential of the created world. That world is destined to be assumed in the Eucharist of the Lord, in his Passover, present in the sacrifice of the altar.

A clear look at self - discovery

12. The monk turns his gaze to Christ, God and man. In the disfigured face of Christ, the man of sorrow, he sees the prophetic announcement of the transfigured face of the Risen Christ. To the contemplative eye, Christ reveals himself as he did to the women of Jerusalem, who had gone up to contemplate the mysterious spectacle on Calvary. Trained in this school, the monk becomes accustomed to contemplating Christ in the hidden recesses of creation and in the history of mankind, which is then understood from the standpoint of identification with the whole Christ.

This gaze progressively conformed to Christ thus learns detachment from externals, from the tumult of the senses, from all that keeps man from that freedom which allows him to be grasped by the Spirit. Walking this path, he is reconciled with Christ in a constant process of conversion: in the awareness of his own sin and of his distance from the Lord which becomes heartfelt remorse, a symbol of his own baptism in the salutary water of tears; in silence and inner quiet, which is sought and given, where he learns to make his heart beat in harmony with the rhythm of the Spirit, eliminating all duplicity and ambiguity. This process of becoming ever more moderate and sparing, more transparent to himself, can cause him to fall into pride and intransigence if he comes to believe that these are the fruits of his own ascetic efforts. Spiritual discernment in continuous purification then makes him humble and meek, aware that he can perceive only some aspects of that truth which fills him, because it is the gift of the Spouse, who alone is fulfillment and happiness.

To the person who is seeking the meaning of life, the East offers this school which teaches one to know oneself and to be free and loved by that Jesus who says: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). He tells those who seek inner healing to go on searching: if their intention is upright and their way is honest, in the end the Father's face will let itself be recognized, engraved as it is in the depths of the human heart.

A father in the Spirit

13. A monk's way is not generally marked by personal effort alone. He turns to a spiritual father to whom he abandons himself with filial trust, in the certainty that God's tender and demanding fatherhood is manifested in him. This figure gives Eastern monasticism an extraordinary flexibility: through the spiritual father's intervention the way of each monk is in fact strongly personalized in the times, rhythms and ways of seeking God. Precisely because the spiritual father is the harmonizing link, monasticism is permitted the greatest variety of cenobitic and eremitical expressions. Monasticism in the East has thus been able to fulfill the expectations of each church in the various periods of its history.(31)

In this quest, the East in particular teaches that there are brothers and sisters to whom the Spirit has granted the gift of spiritual guidance. They are precious points of reference, for they see things with the loving gaze with which God looks at us. It is not a question of renouncing one's own freedom, in order to be looked after by others. It is benefiting from the knowledge of the heart, which is a true charism, in order to be helped, gently and firmly, to find the way of truth. Our world desperately needs such spiritual guides. It has frequently rejected them, for they seemed to lack credibility or their example appeared out of date and scarcely attractive to current sensitivities. Nevertheless, it is having a hard time finding new ones, and so suffers in fear and uncertainty, without models or reference points. He who is a father in the spirit, if he really is such -- and the people of God have always shown their ability to recognize him -- will not make others equal to himself, but will help them find the way to the Kingdom.

Of course, the wonderful gift of male and female monastic life, which safeguards the gift of guidance in the Spirit and calls for appropriate recognition, has also been given to the West. In this context and wherever grace has inspired these precious means of interior growth, may those in charge foster this gift and use it to good advantage, and may all avail themselves of it. Thus they will experience the great comfort and support of fatherhood in the Spirit on their journey of faith.(32)

Communion and service

14. Precisely in gradual detachment from those worldly things which stand in the way of communion with his Lord, the monk finds the world a place where the beauty of the Creator and the love of the Redeemer are reflected. In his prayers the monk utters an epiclesis of the Spirit on the world and is certain that he will be heard, for this is a sharing in Christ's own prayer. Thus he feels rising within himself a deep love for humanity, that love which Eastern prayer so often celebrates as an attribute of God, the friend of men who did not hesitate to offer his Son so that the world might be saved. In this attitude the monk is sometimes enabled to contemplate that world already transfigured by the deifying action of Christ, who died and rose again.

Whatever path the Spirit has in store for him, the monk is always essentially the man of communion. Since antiquity this name has also indicated the monastic style of cenobitic life. Monasticism shows us how there is no true vocation that is not born of the Church and for the Church. This is attested by the experience of so many monks who, within their cells, pray with an extraordinary passion, not only for the human person but for every creature, in a ceaseless cry, that all may be converted to the saving stream of Christ's love. This path of inner liberation in openness to the Other makes the monk a man of charity. In the school of Paul the Apostle, who showed that love is the fulfilling of the law (cf. Rom 13:10), Eastern monastic communion has always been careful to guarantee the superiority of love over every law.

This communion is revealed first and foremost in service to one's brothers in monastic life, but also to the Church community, in forms which vary in time and place, ranging from social assistance to itinerant preaching. The Eastern Churches have lived this endeavor with great generosity, starting with evangelization, the highest service that the Christian can offer his brother, followed by many other forms of spiritual and ministerial service. Indeed it can be said that monasticism in antiquity - and at various times in subsequent ages too - has been the privileged means for the evangelization of peoples.

A person in relationship

15. The monk's life is evidence of the unity that exists in the East between spirituality and theology: the Christian, and the monk in particular, more than seeking abstract truths, knows that his Lord alone is Truth and Life, but also knows that he is the Way, (cf. Jn 14:6) to reach both; knowledge and participation are thus a single reality: from the person to the God who is three Persons through the Incarnation of the Word of God.

The East helps us to express the Christian meaning of the human person with a wealth of elements. It is centered on the Incarnation, from which creation itself draws light. In Christ, true God and true man, the fullness of the human vocation is revealed. In order for man to become God, the Word took on humanity. Man, who constantly experiences the bitter taste of his limitations and sin, does not then abandon himself to recrimination or to anguish, because he knows that within himself the power of divinity is at work. Humanity was assumed by Christ without separation from his divine nature and without confusion, (33) and man is not left alone to attempt, in a thousand often frustrated ways, an impossible ascent to heaven. There is a tabernacle of glory, which is the most holy person of Jesus the Lord, where the divine and the human meet in an embrace that can never be separated. The Word became flesh, like us in everything except sin.

He pours divinity into the sick heart of humanity, and imbuing it with the Father's Spirit enables it to become God through grace.

But if this has revealed the Son to us, then it is given us to approach the mystery of the Father, principle of communion in love. The Most Holy Trinity appears to us then as a community of love: to know such a God means to feel the urgent need for him to speak to the world, to communicate himself; and the history of salvation is nothing but the history of God's love for the creature he has loved and chosen, wanting it to be "according to the icon of the Icon" - as the insight of the Eastern Fathers expresses it(34) - that is, molded in the image of the Image, which is the Son, brought to perfect communion by the sanctifier, the Spirit of love. Even when man sins, this God seeks him and loves him, so that the relationship may not be broken off and love may continue to flow. And God loves man in the mystery of the Son, who let himself be put to death on the Cross by a world that did not recognize him, but has been raised up again by the Father as an eternal guarantee that no one can destroy love, for anyone who shares in it is touched by God's glory: it is this man transformed by love whom the disciples contemplated on Tabor, the man whom we are all called to be.

An adoring silence

16. Nevertheless this mystery is continuously veiled, enveloped in silence, (35) lest an idol be created in place of God. Only in a progressive purification of the knowledge of communion, will man and God meet and recognize in an eternal embrace their unending connaturality of love.

Thus is born what is called the apophatism of the Christian East: the more man grows in the knowledge of God, the more he perceives him as an inaccessible mystery, whose essence cannot be grasped. This should not be confused with an obscure mysticism in which man loses himself in enigmatic, impersonal realities. On the contrary, the Christians of the East turn to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, living persons tenderly present, to whom they utter a solemn and humble, majestic and simple liturgical doxology. But they perceive that one draws close to this presence above all by letting oneself be taught an adoring silence, for at the culmination of the knowledge and experience of God is his absolute transcendence. This is reached through the prayerful assimilation of scripture and the liturgy more than by systematic meditation.

In the humble acceptance of the creature's limits before the infinite transcendence of a God who never ceases to reveal himself as God - Love, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in the joy of the Holy Spirit, I see expressed the attitude of prayer and the theological method which the East prefers and continues to offer all believers in Christ.

We must confess that we all have need of this silence, filled with the presence of him who is adored: in theology, so as to exploit fully its own sapiential and spiritual soul; in prayer, so that we may never forget that seeing God means coming down the mountain with a face so radiant that we are obliged to cover it with a veil (cf. Ex 34:33), and that our gatherings may make room for God's presence and avoid self-celebration; in preaching, so as not to delude ourselves that it is enough to heap word upon word to attract people to the experience of God; in commitment, so that we will refuse to be locked in a struggle without love and forgiveness. This is what man needs today; he is often unable to be silent for fear of meeting himself, of feeling the emptiness that asks itself about meaning; man who deafens himself with noise. All, believers and non-believers alike, need to learn a silence that allows the Other to speak when and how he wishes, and allows us to understand his words.

II - FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ENCOUNTER

17. Thirty years have passed since the bishops of the Catholic Church, meeting in council in the presence of many brothers from other churches and ecclesial communities, listened to the voice of the Spirit as he shed light on deep truths about the nature of the Church, showing that all believers in Christ were far closer than they could imagine, all journeying towards the one Lord, all sustained and supported by his grace. An ever more pressing invitation to unity emerged at that point.

Since then, much ground has been covered in reciprocal knowledge. This has increased our respect and has frequently enabled us to pray to the one Lord together and to pray for one another, on a path of love that is already a pilgrimage of unity.

After the important steps taken by Pope Paul VI, I have wished the path of mutual knowledge in charity to be continued. I can testify to the deep love that the fraternal meeting with so many heads and representatives of churches and ecclesial communities has given me in recent years. Together we have shared our concerns and expectations, together we have called for union between our churches and peace for the world. Together we have felt more responsible for the common good, not only as individuals, but in the name of the Christians whose pastors the Lord has made us. Sometimes urgent appeals from other churches, threatened or stricken with violence and abuse, have reached this See of Rome. It has sought to open its heart to them all. As soon as he could, the Bishop of Rome has raised his voice for them, so that people of goodwill might hear the cry of those suffering brothers and sisters of ours.

"Among the sins which require a greater commitment to repentance and conversion should certainly be counted those which have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People. In the course of the thousand years now drawing to a close, even more than in the first millennium, ecclesial communion has been painfully wounded, 'a fact for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame.'(36) Such wounds openly contradict the will of Christ and are a cause of scandal to the world. These sins of the past unfortunately still burden us and remain ever present temptations. It is necessary to make amends for them and earnestly to beseech Christ's forgiveness."(37)

The sin of our separation is very serious: I feel the need to increase our common openness to the Spirit who calls us to conversion, to accept and recognize others with fraternal respect, to make fresh, courageous gestures, able to dispel any temptation to turn back. We feel the need to go beyond the degree of communion we have reached.

18. Every day I have a growing desire to go over the history of the Churches in order to write, at last, a history of our unity and thus return to the time when, after the death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Gospel spread to the most varied cultures and a most fruitful exchange began which still today is evidenced in the liturgies of the Churches. Despite difficulties and differences, the letters of the Apostles (cf. 2 Cor 9:11 - 14) and of the Fathers(38) show very close, fraternal links between the Churches in a full communion of faith, with respect for their specific features and identity. The common experience of martyrdom, and meditation on the acts of the martyrs of every church, sharing in the doctrine of so many holy teachers of the faith, in deep exchange and sharing, strengthen this wonderful feeling of unity.(39) The development of different experiences of ecclesial life did not prevent Christians, through mutual relations, from continuing to feel certain that they were at home in any Church, because praise of the one Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, rose from them all, in a marvelous variety of languages and melodies; all were gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist, the heart and model for the community regarding not only spirituality and the moral life, but also the Church's very structure, in the variety of ministries and services under the leadership of the Bishop, successor of the Apostles.(40) The first councils are an eloquent witness to this enduring unity in diversity.(41) Even when certain dogmatic misunderstandings became reinforced -- often magnified by the influence of political and cultural factors -- leading to sad consequences in relations between the Churches, the effort to call for and to promote the unity of the Church remained alive. When the ecumenical dialogue first began, the Holy Spirit enabled us to be strengthened in our common faith, a perfect continuation of the apostolic kerygma, and for this we thank God with all our heart.(42) Although in the first centuries of the Christian era conflicts were already slowly starting to emerge within the body of the Church, we cannot forget that unity between Rome and Constantinople endured for the whole of the first millennium, despite difficulties. We have increasingly learned that it was not so much an historical episode or a mere question of pre-eminence that tore the fabric of unity, as it was a progressive estrangement, so that the other's diversity was no longer perceived as a common treasure, but as incompatibility. Even when the second millennium experienced a hardening of the polemics and the separation, with mutual ignorance and prejudice increasing all the

more, nonetheless constructive meetings between church leaders desirous of intensifying relations and fostering exchanges did not cease, nor did the holy efforts of men and women who, recognizing the setting of one group against the other as a grave sin, and being in love with unity and charity, attempted in many ways to promote the search for communion by prayer, study and reflection, and by open and cordial interaction.(43) All this praiseworthy work was to converge in the reflections of the Second Vatican Council and to be symbolized in the abrogation of the reciprocal excommunications of 1054 by Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I.(44)

19. The way of charity is experiencing new moments of difficulty following the recent events which have involved Central and Eastern Europe. Christian brothers and sisters who together had suffered persecution are regarding one another with suspicion and fear just when prospects and hopes of greater freedom are appearing: is this not a new, serious risk of sin which we must all make every effort to overcome - if we want the peoples who are seeking the God of love to be able to find him more easily - instead of being scandalized anew by our wounds and conflicts. When, on Good Friday 1994, His Holiness Bartholomew I, Patriarch of Constantinople, offered the Church of Rome his meditations on the Way of the Cross, I recalled this communion in the recent experience of martyrdom: "...We are united in these martyrs from Rome, from the 'Hill of Crosses,' the Solovets Islands and so many other extermination camps. We are united against the background of these martyrs; we cannot fail to be united."(45)

Thus it is urgently necessary to become aware of this most serious responsibility: today we can cooperate in proclaiming the Kingdom or we can become the upholders of new divisions. May the Lord open our hearts, convert our minds and inspire in us concrete, courageous steps, capable if necessary of breaking through clichés, easy resignation or stalemate. If those who want to be first are called to become the servants of all, then the primacy of love will be seen to grow from the courage of this charity. I pray the Lord to inspire, first of all in myself, and in the bishops of the Catholic Church, concrete actions as a witness to this inner certitude. The deepest nature of the Church demands it. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, the sacrament of communion, we find in the Body and Blood we share the sacrament and the call to our unity.

(46) How can we be fully credible if we stand divided before the Eucharist, if we cannot live our sharing in the same Lord whom we are called to proclaim to the world? In view of our reciprocal exclusion from the Eucharist, we feel our poverty and the need to make every effort so that the day may come when we will partake together of the same bread and the same cup.(47) Then the Eucharist will once again be fully perceived as a prophecy of the Kingdom, and these words from a very ancient eucharistic prayer will resound with full truth: "Just as this broken bread, once scattered on the hills and gathered up, became one, so may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom."(48)

Experiences of unity

20. Particularly significant anniversaries encourage us to turn our thoughts with affection and reverence to the Eastern Churches. First of all, as has been said, the centenary of the Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Dignitas*. Since that time a journey began which has led, among other things, in 1917, to the creation of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches(49) and the foundation of the Pontifical Oriental Institute(50) by Pope Benedict XV. Subsequently, on June 5, 1960, John XXIII founded the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.(51) In recent times, on October 18, 1990, I promulgated the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, (52) in order to safeguard and to promote the specific features of the Eastern heritage.

These are signs of an attitude that the Church of Rome has always felt was an integral part of the mandate entrusted by Jesus Christ to the Apostle Peter: to confirm his brothers in faith and unity (cf. Lk 22:32). Attempts in the past had their limits, deriving from the mentality of the times and the very understanding of the truths about the Church. But here I would like to reassert that this commitment is rooted in the conviction that Peter (cf. Mt 19:17 - 19) intends to place himself at the service of a Church united in charity. "Peter's task is to search constantly for ways that will help preserve unity. Therefore he must not create obstacles but must open up paths. Nor is this in any way at odds with the duty entrusted to him by Christ: 'strengthen your brothers in the faith' (cf. Lk 22:32). It is significant that Christ said these words precisely at the moment when Peter was about to deny him. It was as if the Master himself wanted to tell Peter: 'Remember that you are weak, that you, too, need endless conversion. You are able to strengthen others only insofar as you are aware of your own weakness. I entrust to you as your responsibility the truth, the great truth of God, meant for man's salvation, but this truth cannot be preached or put into practice except by loving.' *Veritatem facere in caritate* (To live the truth in love; cf. Eph 4:15); this is what is always necessary."(53) Today we know that unity can be achieved through the love of God only if the Churches want it together, in full respect for the traditions of each and for necessary autonomy. We know that this can take place only on the basis of the love of Churches which feel increasingly called to manifest the one Church of Christ, born from one Baptism and from one Eucharist, and which want to be sisters.(54) As I had occasion to say: "the Church of Christ is one. If divisions exist, that is one thing; they must be overcome, but the Church is one, the Church of Christ between East and West can only be one, one and united."(55)

Of course, in today's outlook it appears that true union is possible only in total respect for the other's dignity without claiming that the whole array of uses and customs in the Latin Church is more complete or better suited to showing the fullness of correct doctrine; and again, that this union must be preceded by an awareness of communion that permeates

the whole Church and is not limited to an agreement among leaders. Today we are conscious - and this has frequently been reasserted - that unity will be achieved how and when the Lord desires, and that it will require the contribution of love's sensitivity and creativity, perhaps even going beyond the forms already tried in history.(56)

21. The Eastern Churches which entered into full communion with Rome wished to be an expression of this concern, according to the degree of maturity of the ecclesial awareness of the time.(57) In entering into catholic communion, they did not at all intend to deny their fidelity to their own tradition, to which they have borne witness down the centuries with heroism and often by shedding their blood. And if sometimes, in their relations with the Orthodox Churches, misunderstandings and open opposition have arisen, we all know that we must ceaselessly implore divine mercy and a new heart capable of reconciliation over and above any wrong suffered or inflicted.

It has been stressed several times that the full union of the Catholic Eastern Churches with the Church of Rome which has already been achieved must not imply a diminished awareness of their own authenticity and originality.(58) Wherever this occurred, the Second Vatican Council has urged them to rediscover their full identity, because they have "the right and the duty to govern themselves according to their own special disciplines. For these are guaranteed by ancient tradition, and seem to be better suited to the customs of their faithful and to the good of their souls."(59) These Churches carry a tragic wound, for they are still kept from full communion with the Eastern Orthodox Churches despite sharing in the heritage of their fathers. A constant, shared conversion is indispensable for them to advance resolutely and energetically towards mutual understanding. And conversion is also required of the Latin Church, that she may respect and fully appreciate the dignity of Eastern Christians, and accept gratefully the spiritual treasures of which the Eastern Catholic Churches are the bearers, to the benefit of the entire catholic communion;(60) that she may show concretely, far more than in the past, how much she esteems and admires the Christian East and how essential she considers its contribution to the full realization of the Church's universality.

Meeting one another, getting to know one another, working together

22. I have a keen desire that the words which Saint Paul addressed from the East to the faithful of the Church of Rome may resound today on the lips of Christians of the West with regard to their brothers and sisters of the Eastern Churches: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world" (Rom 1:8). The Apostle of the Gentiles then immediately and enthusiastically stated his intention: "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom 1:11 - 12). Here, the dynamic of our meeting is wonderfully portrayed: knowledge of the treasures of others' faith - which I have just tried to describe - spontaneously produces the incentive for a new and more intimate meeting between brothers and sisters, which will be a true and sincere mutual exchange. It is an incentive which the Spirit constantly inspires in the Church and which becomes more insistent precisely in the moments of greatest difficulty.

23. I am also well aware that at this time certain tensions between the Church of Rome and some of the Eastern Churches are making the path of mutual esteem more difficult with regard to future communion. Several times this See of Rome has made a point of issuing directives favoring the common progress of all the Churches at so important a time for the life of the world, especially in Eastern Europe, where dramatic events of recent history have often prevented the Eastern Churches from properly fulfilling the mandate of evangelization which they nevertheless felt keenly.(61) Situations of greater freedom are offering them fresh opportunities today, although the means available to them are limited because of difficult circumstances in the countries where they are active. I would like forcefully to affirm that the communities of the West are ready to encourage in every way - and many are already working along these lines - the intensification of this ministry of "diakonia," making available to such Churches the experience acquired in the years when charity was more freely exercised. Woe to us if the abundance of some were to produce the humiliation of others or a sterile and scandalous rivalry. On their part, Western communities will make it their duty above all to share, where possible, service projects with their brothers and sisters in the Eastern Churches, or to assist in bringing to successful conclusion all that the latter are doing to help their people. In any case, in territories where both are present, the Western communities will never show an attitude which could appear disrespectful of the exhausting efforts which the Eastern Churches are making, efforts which are all the more to their credit, given the precariousness of the resources available to them.

To extend gestures of common charity to one another and jointly to those in need will appear as an act with immediate impact. To avoid this or even to witness to the contrary, will make all those who observe us think that every commitment to a rapprochement in charity between the Churches is merely an abstract statement, without conviction or concreteness.

I feel that the Lord's call to work in every way to ensure that all believers in Christ will witness together to their own faith is fundamental, especially in the territories where the children of the Catholic Church - Latin and Eastern - and children of the Orthodox Churches live together in large numbers. After their common martyrdom suffered for Christ under the oppression of atheist regimes, the time has come to suffer, if necessary, in order never to fail in the witness of charity among Christians, for even if we gave our body to be burned but had not charity, it would serve no purpose (cf. 1 Cor 13:3) We must pray intensely that the Lord will soften our minds and hearts, and grant us patience and meekness.

24. I believe that one important way to grow in mutual understanding and unity consists precisely in improving our knowledge of one another. The children of the Catholic Church already know the ways indicated by the Holy See for achieving this: to know the liturgy of the Eastern Churches;(62) to deepen their knowledge of the spiritual traditions of the Fathers and Doctors of the Christian East, (63) to follow the example of the Eastern Churches for the inculturation of the Gospel message; to combat tensions between Latins and Orientals and to encourage dialogue between Catholics and the Orthodox; to train in specialized institutions theologians, liturgists, historians and canonists for the Christian East, who in turn can spread knowledge of the Eastern Churches; to offer appropriate teaching on these subjects in seminaries and theological faculties, especially to future priests.(64) These remain very sound recommendations on which I intend to insist with particular force.

25. In addition to knowledge, I feel that meeting one another regularly is very important. In this regard, I hope that monasteries will make a particular effort, precisely because of the unique role played by monastic life within the Churches and because of the many unifying aspects of the monastic experience, and therefore of spiritual awareness, in the East and in the West. Another form of meeting consists in welcoming Orthodox professors and students to the Pontifical Universities and other Catholic academic institutions. We will continue to do all we can to extend this welcome on a wider scale. May God also bless the founding and development of places designed precisely to offer hospitality to our brothers of the East, including such places in this city of Rome where the living, shared memory of the leaders of the Apostles and of so many martyrs is preserved.

It is important that meetings and exchanges should involve Church communities in the broadest forms and ways. We know for example how positive inter - parish activities such as "twinning" can be for mutual cultural and spiritual enrichment, and also for the exercise of charity.

I judge very positively the initiatives of joint pilgrimages to places where holiness is particularly expressed in remembering men and women who in every age have enriched the Church with the sacrifice of their lives. In this direction it would also be a highly significant act to arrive at a common recognition of the holiness of those Christians who, in recent decades, particularly in the countries of Eastern Europe, have shed their blood for the one faith in Christ.

26. A particular thought goes to the lands of the diaspora where many faithful of the Eastern Churches who have left their countries of origin are living in a mainly Latin environment. These places, where peaceful contact is easier within a pluralist society, could be an ideal environment for improving and intensifying cooperation between the Churches in training future priests and in pastoral and charitable projects, also for the benefit of the Orientals' countries of origin.

I particularly urge the Latin Ordinaries in these countries to study attentively, grasp thoroughly and apply faithfully the principles issued by this Holy See concerning ecumenical cooperation(65) and the pastoral care of the faithful of the Eastern Catholic Churches, especially when they lack their own hierarchy.

I invite the Eastern Catholic Bishops and clergy to collaborate closely with the Latin Ordinaries for an effective apostolate which is not fragmented, especially when their jurisdiction covers immense territories where the absence of cooperation means, in effect, isolation. The Eastern Catholic Bishops will not neglect any means of encouraging an atmosphere of brotherhood, sincere mutual esteem and cooperation with their brothers in the Churches with which we are not yet united in full communion, especially with those who belong to the same ecclesial tradition.

Where in the West there are no Eastern priests to look after the faithful of the Eastern Catholic Churches, Latin Ordinaries and their co - workers should see that those faithful grow in the awareness and knowledge of their own tradition, and they should be invited to cooperate actively in the growth of the Christian community by making their own particular contribution.

27. With regard to monasticism, in consideration of its Importance in Eastern Christianity, we would like it to flourish once more in the Eastern Catholic Churches, and that support be given to all those who feel called to work for its revitalization.(66) In fact, in the East an intrinsic link exists between liturgical prayer, spiritual tradition and the monastic life, For this reason precisely, a well - trained and motivated renewal of monastic life could mean true ecclesial fruitfulness for them as well. Nor should it be thought that this would diminish the effectiveness of the pastoral ministry which in fact will be strengthened by such a vigorous spirituality, and thus will find once more its ideal place. This hope also concerns the territories of the Eastern diaspora, where the presence of Eastern monasteries would give greater stability to the Eastern Churches in those countries, and would make a valuable contribution to the religious life of Western Christians.

Journeying together toward the "Orientale Lumen"

28. In conducting this letter, my thoughts turn to my beloved brothers and sisters the Patriarchs, Bishops, Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the men and women of the Eastern Churches.

On the threshold of the third millennium we all hear in our Sees the cry of those oppressed by the burden of grave threats, but who, perhaps even without realizing it, long to know what God in his love intended. These people feel that a ray of light, if it is welcomed, is capable of dispelling the shadows which cover the horizon of the Father's tenderness. Mary, "Mother of the star that never sets,"(67) "dawn of the mystical day,"(68) "rising of the sun of glory,"(69) shows us the Orientale Lumen.

Every day in the East the sun of hope rises again, the light that restores life to the human race. It is from the East, according to a lovely image, that our Savior will come again (cf. Mt 24:27).

For us, the men and women of the East are a symbol of the Lord who comes again. We cannot forget them, not only because we love them as brothers and sisters redeemed by the same Lord, but also because a holy nostalgia for the centuries lived in the full communion of faith and charity urges us and reproaches us for our sins and our mutual misunderstandings: we have deprived the world of a joint witness that could, perhaps, have avoided so many tragedies and even changed the course of history.

We are painfully aware that we cannot yet share in the same Eucharist. Now that the millennium is drawing to a close and our gaze turns to the rising Sun, with gratitude we find these men and women before our eyes and in our heart.

The echo of the Gospel - the words that do not disappoint - continues to resound with force, weakened only by our separation: Christ cries out but man finds it hard to hear his voice because we fail to speak with one accord. We listen together to the cry of those who want to hear God's entire Word. The words of the West need the words of the East, so that God's word may ever more clearly reveal its unfathomable riches. Our words will meet for ever in the heavenly Jerusalem, but we ask and wish that this meeting be anticipated in the holy Church which is still on her way towards the fullness of the Kingdom.

May God shorten the time and distance. May Christ, the Orientale Lumen, soon, very soon, grant us to discover that in fact, despite so many centuries of distance, we were very close, because together -- perhaps without knowing it -- we were walking towards the one Lord, and thus towards one another.

May the people of the third millennium be able to enjoy this discovery, finally achieved by a word that is harmonious and thus fully credible, proclaimed by brothers and sisters who love one another and thank one another for the riches which they exchange. Thus shall we offer ourselves to God with the pure hands of reconciliation, and the people of the world will have one more well - founded reason to believe and to hope.

With these wishes I impart my Blessing to all.

From the Vatican, on May 2, the liturgical memorial of Saint Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, in the year 1995, the seventeenth of my Pontificate.

NOTES

1. Cf. Leonis XIII Acta, 14 (1894), 358-370. The Pope recalls the esteem and the concrete help which the Holy See has given the Eastern Churches, and its willingness to safeguard their specific qualities; in addition, cf. Apostolic Letter Praeclara gratulationis (June 20, 1894), l.c., 195-214, Encyclical Letter Christi Nomen (December 24, 1894), l.c., 405-409.
2. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 1; Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 17.
3. Saint Augustine notes in this regard: "From where did the Church spread? From Jerusalem," In *Epistulam Iohannis*, II, 2: PL 35, 1990.
4. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23; Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14.
5. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.
6. Cf. Apostolic Letter *Egregiae Virtutis* (December 31, 1980): AAS 73 (1981), 258-262; Encyclical Letter *Slavorum Apostoli* (June 2, 1985), 12-14: AAS 77, (1985), 792-796.
7. Address after the Way of the Cross, Good Friday (April 1, 1994), 3: AAS 87, (1995), 88.
8. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14-18.
9. Address to the Extraordinary Consistory (June 13, 1994): *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 13-14, 1994), p. 5.
10. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 17.
11. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15.
12. Cf. Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V, 36, 2: SCh 153/2, 461; Saint Basil, *Treatise on the Holy Spirit*, XV, 36: PG 32, 132; XVII, 43, l.c., 148; XVIII, 47, l.c., 153.
13. Cf. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Discourse*, XXXVII: PG 45, 97.
14. Cf. *Against Heresies* III, 10, 2: SCh 211/2, 121; III, 18, 7, l.c., 365; III, 19, 1, l.c., 375; IV, 20, 4: SCh 100/2, 635; IV, 33, 4, l.c., 811; V, Pref., SCh 153/2, 15.
15. Grafted on Christ, "men become gods and children of God...the dust is raised to such a degree of glory that it is now equal in honor and godliness to the divine nature" Nicholas Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, I: PG 150, 505.
16. Cf. Saint John Damascene, *On Images*, I, 19: PG 94, 1249.
17. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, (March 25, 1987), 31-34: AAS 79 (1987), 402-406; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15.
18. Cf. Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II, 28, 3-6: SCh 294, 274-284; Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*: PG 44, 377; Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Holy Easter*, or. XLV, 3ff.; PG 36, 625-630.
19. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15.

20. No. 9: AAS 77 (1985), 789 - 790
21. Ibid., 11, l.c., 791
22. Ibid., 21, l.c., 802 - 803
23. "Divina eloquia cum legente crescunt": Saint Gregory the Great In Ezekiel, I, VII, 8: PL 76, 843
24. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 8.
25. Cf. International Theological Commission, Interpretationis Problema (October 1989), II, 1 - 2: Enchiridion Vaticanum 11, pp. 1717 - 1719.
26. The Life of Anthony written by Saint Athanasius had a great influence in the West: PG 26, 835 - 977. Among others, Saint Augustine refers to it in his Confessions, VIII, 6: CSEL 33, 181 - 182. The translations of works by the Eastern Fathers, including the Rules of St. Basil: PG 31, 889 - 1305. The History of the Monks of Egypt PG 441 - 456, and the Apophthegmata of the Desert Fathers: PG 65, 72 - 440 marked Western monasticism. Cf. Guillaume De Saint Thierry Epistula ad Fratres de Monte Dei: SCh 223, 130 - 384.
27. Cf. for example, Saint Basil, Short Rule: PG 31, 1079 - 1305; Saint John Chrysostom, On Compunction: PG 47, 391 - 422; Homilies on Matthew, hom. XV, 3: PG 57, 225 - 228; Saint Gregory of Nyssa, On the Beatitudes, hom. 3: PG 44, 1219 - 1232.
28. Cf. Nicholas Cabasilas, Life in Christ, IV: PG 150, 584 - 585; Cyril of Alexandria, Treatise on John, 11: PG 74, 561; *ibid.*, 12, l.c., 564; Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, Homily LXXXII, 5: PG 58, 743 - 744.
29. Cf. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Discourse XXXIX: PG 36, 335 - 360.
30. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, The Pedagogue, III, 1, 1: SCh 158, 12.
31. For example, Anthony's experiences are significant. Cf. Saint Athanasius, Life of Anthony, 15: PG 26, 865; Saint Pachomius, Les vies coptes de saint Pakhôme et ses successeurs, ed. L. Th. Lefort, Louvain 1943, p. 3; and the witness of Evagrius of Pontus, Practical Treatise, 100: SCh 171, 710.
32. Cf. John Paul II, Homily to Religious, (February 2, 1988), 6: AAS 80 (1988), 1111.
33. Cf. Symbolum Chalcedonense, DS 301 - 302.
34. Cf. Saint Irenaeus, Against Heresies V, 16, 2: SCh 153/2, 217; IV, 33, 4: SCh 100/2, 811; Saint Athanasius, Against the Gentiles, 2 - 3 and 34: PG 25, 5 - 8 and 68 - 69; The Incarnation of the Word, 12 - 13: SCh 18, 228 - 231.
35. Silence (*hesychia*) is an essential component of Eastern monastic spirituality. Cf. The Life and Sayings of the Desert Fathers: PG 65, 72 - 456; Evagrius of Pontus, The Foundations of Monastic Life: PG 40, 1252 - 1264.
36. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.
37. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, (November 10, 1994), 34: AAS 87 (1995), 26.
38. Cf. Saint Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. Funk, I, 60 - 144; Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Letters, l.c., 172 - 252; Saint Polycarp, Letter to the Philippians, l.c., 266 - 282.
39. Cf. Saint Irenaeus, Against Heresies I, 10, 2: SCh 264/2, 158 - 160.
40. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 26; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41; Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15.
41. Cf. John Paul II, Letter A *Concilio Constantinopolitano* (March 25, 1981), 2: AAS 73 (1981), 515; Apostolic Letter *Duodecimum Saeculum*, (December 4, 1987, 2 and 4: AAS 80 (1988), 242.243 - 244.
42. Cf. John Paul II, Homily in St. Peter's Basilica, in the presence of Demetrius I, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch (December 6, 1987), 3: AAS 80 (1988), 713 - 714.
43. Cf. for example, Anselm of Havelberg, Dialogues PL 188, 1139 - 1248.
44. Cf. *Tomos Agapis*, Vatican - Phanar (1958 - 1970), Rome - Estambul, 1971, pp. 278 - 295.
45. Address after the Way of the Cross on Good Friday (April 1, 1994): AAS 87 (1995), 87.
46. Cf. Roman Missal, Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, prayer over the gifts; *ibid.*, Eucharistic Prayer III; Saint Basil, Alexandrian Anaphora, ed. E. Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, I, Frankfurt, 1847, p. 68.
47. Cf. Paul VI, Message to the Mechitarists (September 8, 1977): *Insegnamenti* 15 (1977), 812.
48. *Didache*, IX, 4: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F.X. Funk, I, 22.
49. Cf. *Motu proprio Dei Providentis* (May 1, 1917): AAS 9 (1917), 529 - 531.
50. Cf. *Motu proprio Orientis Catholici* (October 15, 1917), l.c., 531 - 533.
51. Cf. *Motu proprio Supremo Dei Nutu*, (June 5, 1960), 9: AAS 52 (1960), 435 - 436.
52. Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones* (October 18, 1990): AAS 82 (1990), 1033 - 1044.
53. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* New York 1994, pp. 154 - 155.
54. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14.
55. Cf. Greeting to the Faculty of the Pontifical Oriental Institute (December 12, 1993): *L'Osservatore Romano*, December 13 - 14, 1993, p. 4.
56. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Catholic Eastern Church *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 30.
57. Cf. John Paul II, Message *Magnum Baptismi Donum* (February 14, 1988), 4: AAS 80 (1988), 991 - 992.
58. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 24.
59. *Ibid.*, 5.

60. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 17; John Paul II, Address to the Extraordinary Consistory (June 13, 1994): *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 13 -14, 1994. P. 5.
61. Cf. John Paul II, Letter to the Bishops of the European Continent (May 31, 1991): AAS 84 (1992), 163 - 168; as well as: General Principles and Practical Norms for Coordinating the Evangelizing Activity and Ecumenical Commitment of the Catholic Church in Russia and in the Other Countries of the C.I.S., (published by the Pontifical Commission for Russia on June 1, 1992).
62. Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, Instruction *In Ecclesiasticam Futurorum*, (June 3, 1979), 48: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 6, p. 1080.
63. Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, Instruction *Inspectis Dierum* (November 10, 1989): AAS 82 (1990), 607 - 636.
64. Congregation for Catholic Education, Circular Letter *En égard au développement* (January 6, 1987), 9 - 14: *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 16, 1987, p. 6
65. Cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism, V, AAS 85 (1993), 1096 - 1119.
66. Cf. Message of the Ordinary General synod of Bishops, VII: "Appeal to Religious of the Eastern Churches" (October 27, 1994): *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 29, 1994, p. 7
67. Horologion, Akathistos Hymn to the Most Holy Mother of God, Ikos 5.
68. Ibid.
69. Horologion, Sunday compline (1st tone) in the Byzantine liturgy.

**Apostolic Letter
 Of His Holiness
 Pope John Paul II
 To The Bishops, Clergy
 And Lay Faithful
 On Preparation
 For The Jubilee Of The Year 2000**

To the Bishops,
 Priests and Deacons,
 Men and Women Religious
 and all the Lay Faithful

1. As the third millennium of the new era draws near, our thoughts turn spontaneously to the words of the Apostle Paul: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Gal 4:4). The fullness of time coincides with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, of the Son who is of one being with the Father, and with the mystery of the Redemption of the world. In this passage, Saint Paul emphasizes that the Son of God was born of woman, born under the Law, and came into the world in order to redeem all who were under the Law, so that they might receive adoption as sons and daughters. And he adds: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!' " His conclusion is truly comforting: "So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir" (Gal 4:6-7).

Paul's presentation of the mystery of the Incarnation contains the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity and the continuation of the Son's mission in the mission of the Holy Spirit. The Incarnation of the Son of God, his conception and birth, is the prerequisite for the sending of the Holy Spirit. This text of Saint Paul thus allows the fullness of the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation to shine forth.

I - "JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY"
 (Heb 13:8)

2. In his Gospel Luke has handed down to us a concise narrative of the circumstances of Jesus' birth: "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled... And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (2:1, 3-7).

Thus was fulfilled what the Angel Gabriel foretold at the Annunciation, when he spoke to the Virgin of Nazareth in these words: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (1:28). Mary was troubled by these words, and so the divine messenger quickly added: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High... The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (1:32-33, 35). Mary's reply to the angel was unhesitating: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (1:38). Never in human history did so much depend, as it did then, upon the consent of one human creature.(1)

3. John, in the Prologue of his Gospel, captures in one phrase all the depth of the mystery of the Incarnation. He writes: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (1:14). For John, the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, of one being with the Father, took place in the conception and birth of Jesus. The Evangelist speaks of the Word who in the beginning was with God, and through whom everything which exists was made; the Word in whom was life, the life which was the light of men (cf. 1:1-4). Of the Only-Begotten Son, God from God, the Apostle Paul writes that he is "the first-born of all creation" (Col 1:15). God created the world through the Word. The Word is Eternal Wisdom; the Thought and Substantial Image of God; "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb 1:3). Eternally begotten and eternally loved by the Father, as God from God and Light from Light, he is the principle and archetype of everything created by God in time.

The fact that in the fullness of time the Eternal Word took on the condition of a creature gives a unique cosmic value to the event which took place in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Thanks to the Word, the world of creatures appears as a "cosmos", an ordered universe. And it is the same Word who, by taking flesh, renews the cosmic order of creation.

The Letter to the Ephesians speaks of the purpose which God had set forth in Christ, "as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:9-10).

4. Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one Mediator between God and men, and there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (cf. Acts 4:12). As we read in the Letter to the Ephesians: "in him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the richness of his grace, which he has lavished upon us. For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight... his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:7-10). Christ, the Son who is of one being with the Father, is therefore the one who reveals God's plan for all creation, and for man in particular. In the memorable phrase of the Second Vatican Council, Christ "fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear".(2) He shows us this calling by revealing the mystery of the Father and his love. As the image of the invisible God, Christ is the perfect man who has restored to the children of Adam the divine likeness which had been deformed by sin. In his human nature, free from all sin and assumed into the divine Person of the Word, the nature shared by all human beings is raised to a sublime dignity: "By his incarnation the Son of God united himself in some sense with every man. He laboured with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted with a human will, and loved with a human heart. Born of Mary the Virgin he truly became one of us and, sin apart, was like us in every way".(3)

5. This "becoming one of us" on the part of the Son of God took place in the greatest humility, so it is no wonder that secular historians, caught up by more stirring events and by famous personages, first made only passing, albeit significant, references to him. Such references to Christ are found for example in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, a work compiled in Rome between the years 93 and 94 by the historian Flavius Josephus, (4) and especially in the *Annals of Tacitus*, written between the years 115 and 120, where, reporting the burning of Rome in the year 64, falsely attributed by Nero to the Christians, the historian makes an explicit reference to Christ "executed by order of the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius".(5) Suetonius too, in his biography of the Emperor Claudius, written around 121, informs us that the Jews were expelled from Rome because "under the instigation of a certain Chrestus they stirred up frequent riots".(6) This passage is generally interpreted as referring to Jesus Christ, who had become a source of contention within Jewish circles in Rome. Also of importance as proof of the rapid spread of Christianity is the testimony of Pliny the Younger, the Governor of Bithynia, who reported to the Emperor Trajan, between the years 111 and 113, that a large number of people was accustomed to gather "on a designated day, before dawn, to sing in alternating choirs a hymn to Christ as to a God".(7)

But the great event which non-Christian historians merely mention in passing takes on its full significance in the writings of the New Testament. These writings, although documents of faith, are no less reliable as historical testimonies, if we consider their references as a whole. Christ, true God and true man, the Lord of the cosmos, is also the Lord of history, of which he is "the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev 1:8; 21:6), "the beginning and the end" (Rev 21:6). In him the Father has spoken the definitive word about mankind and its history. This is expressed in a concise and powerful way by the Letter to the Hebrews: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (1:1-2).

6. Jesus was born of the Chosen People, in fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham and constantly recalled by the Prophets. The latter spoke in God's name and in his place. The economy of the Old Testament, in fact, was essentially ordered to preparing and proclaiming the coming of Christ, the Redeemer of the universe, and of his Messianic Kingdom. The books of the Old Covenant are thus a permanent witness to a careful divine pedagogy.(8) In Christ this pedagogy achieves its purpose: Jesus does not in fact merely speak "in the name of God" like the Prophets, but he is God himself speaking in his Eternal Word made flesh. Here we touch upon the essential point by which Christianity differs from all the other religions, by which man's search for God has been expressed from earliest times. Christianity has its starting-point in the Incarnation of the Word. Here, it is not simply a case of man seeking God, but of God who comes in Person to speak to man of himself and to show him the path by which he may be reached. This is what is proclaimed in the Prologue of John's Gospel: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (1:18). The Incarnate Word is thus the fulfilment of the yearning present in all the religions of mankind: this fulfilment is brought about by God himself and transcends all human expectations. It is the mystery of grace.

In Christ, religion is no longer a "blind search for God" (cf. Acts 17:27) but the response of faith to God who reveals himself. It is a response in which man speaks to God as his Creator and Father, a response made possible by that one Man who is also the consubstantial Word in whom God speaks to each individual person and by whom each individual person is enabled to respond to God. What is more, in this Man all creation responds to God. Jesus Christ is the new beginning of everything. In him all things come into their own; they are taken up and given back to the Creator from whom they first came. Christ is thus the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion. Just as God in Christ speaks to humanity of himself, so in Christ all humanity and the whole of creation speaks of itself to God—indeed, it gives itself to God. Everything thus returns to its origin. Jesus Christ is the recapitulation of everything (cf. Eph 1:10) and at the same time the fulfilment of all things in God: a fulfilment which is the glory of God. The religion founded upon Jesus Christ is a religion of glory; it is a newness of life for the

praise of the glory of God (cf. Eph 1:12). All creation is in reality a manifestation of his glory. In particular, man (vivens homo) is the epiphany of God's glory, man who is called to live by the fullness of life in God.

7. In Jesus Christ God not only speaks to man but also seeks him out. The Incarnation of the Son of God attests that God goes in search of man. Jesus speaks of this search as the finding of a lost sheep (cf. Lk 15:1-7). It is a search which begins in the heart of God and culminates in the Incarnation of the Word. If God goes in search of man, created in his own image and likeness, he does so because he loves him eternally in the Word, and wishes to raise him in Christ to the dignity of an adoptive son. God therefore goes in search of man who is his special possession in a way unlike any other creature. Man is God's possession by virtue of a choice made in love: God seeks man out, moved by his fatherly heart.

Why does God seek man out? Because man has turned away from him, hiding himself as Adam did among the trees of the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3:8-10). Man allowed himself to be led astray by the enemy of God (cf. Gen 3:13). Satan deceived man, persuading him that he too was a god, that he, like God, was capable of knowing good and evil, ruling the world according to his own will without having to take into account the divine will (cf. Gen 3:5). Going in search of man through his Son, God wishes to persuade man to abandon the paths of evil which lead him farther and farther afield. "Making him abandon" those paths means making man understand that he is taking the wrong path; it means overcoming the evil which is everywhere found in human history. Overcoming evil: this is the meaning of the Redemption. This is brought about in the sacrifice of Christ, by which man redeems the debt of sin and is reconciled to God. The Son of God became man, taking a body and soul in the womb of the Virgin, precisely for this reason: to become the perfect redeeming sacrifice. The religion of the Incarnation is the religion of the world's Redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, wherein lies victory over evil, over sin and over death itself. Accepting death on the Cross, Christ at the same time reveals and gives life, because he rises again and death no longer has power over him.

8. The religion which originates in the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, is the religion of "dwelling in the heart of God", of sharing in God's very life. Saint Paul speaks of this in the passage already quoted: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' " (Gal 4:6). Man cries out like Christ himself, who turned to God "with loud cries and tears" (Heb 5:7), especially in Gethsemane and on the Cross: man cries out to God just as Christ cried out to him, and thus he bears witness that he shares in Christ's sonship through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father has sent in the name of the Son, enables man to share in the inmost life of God. He also enables man to be a son, in the likeness of Christ, and an heir of all that belongs to the Son (cf. Gal 4:7). In this consists the religion of "dwelling in the inmost life of God", which begins with the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Holy Spirit, who searches the depths of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:10), leads us, all mankind, into these depths by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ.

II - THE JUBILEE OF THE YEAR 2000

9. Speaking of the birth of the Son of God, Saint Paul places this event in the "fullness of time" (cf. Gal 4:4). Time is indeed fulfilled by the very fact that God, in the Incarnation, came down into human history. Eternity entered into time: what "fulfilment" could be greater than this? What other "fulfilment" would be possible? Some have thought in terms of certain mysterious cosmic cycles in which the history of the universe, and of mankind in particular, would constantly repeat itself. True, man rises from the earth and returns to it (cf. Gen 3:19): this is an immediately evident fact. Yet in man there is an irrepressible longing to live forever. How are we to imagine a life beyond death? Some have considered various forms of reincarnation: depending on one's previous life, one would receive a new life in either a higher or lower form, until full purification is attained. This belief, deeply rooted in some Eastern religions, itself indicates that man rebels against the finality of death. He is convinced that his nature is essentially spiritual and immortal.

Christian revelation excludes reincarnation, and speaks of a fulfilment which man is called to achieve in the course of a single earthly existence. Man achieves this fulfilment of his destiny through the sincere gift of self, a gift which is made possible only through his encounter with God. It is in God that man finds full self-realization: this is the truth revealed by Christ. Man fulfils himself in God, who comes to meet him through his Eternal Son. Thanks to God's coming on earth, human time, which began at Creation, has reached its fullness. "The fullness of time" is in fact eternity, indeed, it is the One who is eternal, God himself. Thus, to enter into "the fullness of time" means to reach the end of time and to transcend its limits, in order to find time's fulfilment in the eternity of God.

10. In Christianity time has a fundamental importance. Within the dimension of time the world was created; within it the history of salvation unfolds, finding its culmination in the "fullness of time" of the Incarnation, and its goal in the glorious return of the Son of God at the end of time. In Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, time becomes a dimension of God, who is himself eternal. With the coming of Christ there begin "the last days" (cf. Heb 1:2), the "last hour" (cf. 1 Jn 2:18), and the time of the Church, which will last until the Parousia.

From this relationship of God with time there arises the duty to sanctify time. This is done, for example, when individual times, days or weeks, are dedicated to God, as once happened in the religion of the Old Covenant, and as happens still, though in a new way, in Christianity. In the liturgy of the Easter Vigil the celebrant, as he blesses the candle which symbolizes the Risen Christ, proclaims: "Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega, all time belongs to him, and all the ages, to him be glory and power through every age for ever". He says these words as he inscribes on the candle the numerals of the current year. The meaning of this rite is clear: it

emphasizes the fact that Christ is the Lord of time; he is its beginning and its end; every year, every day and every moment are embraced by his Incarnation and Resurrection, and thus become part of the "fullness of time". For this reason, the Church too lives and celebrates the liturgy in the span of a year. The solar year is thus permeated by the liturgical year, which in a certain way reproduces the whole mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, beginning from the First Sunday of Advent and ending on the Solemnity of Christ the King, Lord of the Universe and Lord of History. Every Sunday commemorates the day of the Lord's Resurrection.

11. Against this background, we can understand the custom of Jubilees, which began in the Old Testament and continues in the history of the Church. Jesus of Nazareth, going back one day to the synagogue of his home town, stood up to read (cf. Lk 4:16-30). Taking the book of the Prophet Isaiah, he read this passage: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (61:1-2).

The Prophet was speaking of the Messiah. "Today", Jesus added, "this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21), thus indicating that he himself was the Messiah foretold by the Prophet, and that the long-expected "time" was beginning in him. The day of salvation had come, the "fullness of time". All Jubilees point to this "time" and refer to the Messianic mission of Christ, who came as the one "anointed" by the Holy Spirit, the one "sent by the Father". It is he who proclaims the good news to the poor. It is he who brings liberty to those deprived of it, who frees the oppressed and gives back sight to the blind (cf. Mt 11:4-5; Lk 7:22). In this way he ushers in "a year of the Lord's favour", which he proclaims not only with his words but above all by his actions. The Jubilee, "a year of the Lord's favour", characterizes all the activity of Jesus; it is not merely the recurrence of an anniversary in time.

12. The words and deeds of Jesus thus represent the fulfilment of the whole tradition of Jubilees in the Old Testament. We know that the Jubilee was a time dedicated in a special way to God. It fell every seventh year, according to the Law of Moses: this was the "sabbatical year", during which the earth was left fallow and slaves were set free. The duty to free slaves was regulated by detailed prescriptions contained in the Books of Exodus (23:10-11), Leviticus (25:1-28) and Deuteronomy (15:1-6). In other words, these prescriptions are found in practically the whole of biblical legislation, which is thus marked by this very specific characteristic. In the sabbatical year, in addition to the freeing of slaves the Law also provided for the cancellation of all debts in accordance with precise regulations. And all this was to be done in honour of God. What was true for the sabbatical year was also true for the jubilee year, which fell every fifty years. In the jubilee year, however, the customs of the sabbatical year were broadened and celebrated with even greater solemnity. As we read in Leviticus: "You shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family" (25:10). One of the most significant consequences of the jubilee year was the general "emancipation" of all the dwellers on the land in need of being freed. On this occasion every Israelite regained possession of his ancestral land, if he happened to have sold it or lost it by falling into slavery. He could never be completely deprived of the land, because it belonged to God; nor could the Israelites remain for ever in a state of slavery, since God had "redeemed" them for himself as his exclusive possession by freeing them from slavery in Egypt.

13. The prescriptions for the jubilee year largely remained ideals-more a hope than an actual fact. They thus became a propheta futuri insofar as they foretold the freedom which would be won by the coming Messiah. Even so, on the basis of the juridical norms contained in these prescriptions a kind of social doctrine began to emerge, which would then more clearly develop beginning with the New Testament. The jubilee year was meant to restore equality among all the children of Israel, offering new possibilities to families which had lost their property and even their personal freedom. On the other hand, the jubilee year was a reminder to the rich that a time would come when their Israelite slaves would once again become their equals and would be able to reclaim their rights. At the times prescribed by Law, a jubilee year had to be proclaimed, to assist those in need. This was required by just government. Justice, according to the Law of Israel, consisted above all in the protection of the weak, and a king was supposed to be outstanding in this regard, as the Psalmist says: "He delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy" (Ps 72:12-13). The foundations of this tradition were strictly theological, linked first of all with the theology of Creation and with that of Divine Providence. It was a common conviction, in fact, that to God alone, as Creator, belonged the "dominium altum"-lordship over all Creation and over the earth in particular (cf. Lev 25:23). If in his Providence God had given the earth to humanity, that meant that he had given it to everyone. Therefore the riches of Creation were to be considered as a common good of the whole of humanity. Those who possessed these goods as personal property were really only stewards, ministers charged with working in the name of God, who remains the sole owner in the full sense, since it is God's will that created goods should serve everyone in a just way. The jubilee year was meant to restore this social justice. The social doctrine of the Church, which has always been a part of Church teaching and which has developed greatly in the last century, particularly after the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, is rooted in the tradition of the jubilee year.

14. What needs to be emphasized, however, is what Isaiah expresses in the words "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". For the Church, the Jubilee is precisely this "year of the Lord's favour", a year of the remission of sins and of the punishments due to them, a year of reconciliation between disputing parties, a year of manifold conversions and of sacramental and extra-sacramental penance. The tradition of jubilee years involves the granting of indulgences on a

larger scale than at other times. Together with Jubilees recalling the mystery of the Incarnation, at intervals of a hundred, fifty and twenty-five years, there are also Jubilees which commemorate the event of the Redemption: the Cross of Christ, his death on Golgotha and the Resurrection. On these occasions, the Church proclaims "a year of the Lord's favour", and she tries to ensure that all the faithful can benefit from this grace. That is why Jubilees are celebrated not only "in Urbe" but also "extra Urbem": traditionally the latter took place the year after the celebration "in Urbe".

15. In the lives of individuals, Jubilees are usually connected with the date of birth; but other anniversaries are also celebrated, such as those of Baptism, Confirmation, First Communion, Priestly or Episcopal Ordination, and the Sacrament of Marriage. Some of these anniversaries have parallels in the secular world, but Christians always give them a religious character. In fact, in the Christian view, every Jubilee—the twenty-fifth of Marriage or Priesthood, known as "silver", the fiftieth, known as "golden", or the sixtieth, known as "diamond"—is a particular year of favour for the individual who has received one or other of the Sacraments. What we have said about individuals with regard to jubilees can also be applied to communities or institutions. Thus we celebrate the centenary or the millennium of the foundation of a town or city. In the Church, we celebrate the jubilees of parishes and dioceses. All these personal and community Jubilees have an important and significant role in the lives of individuals and communities.

In view of this, the two thousand years which have passed since the Birth of Christ (prescinding from the question of its precise chronology) represent an extraordinarily great Jubilee, not only for Christians but indirectly for the whole of humanity, given the prominent role played by Christianity during these two millennia. It is significant that the calculation of the passing years begins almost everywhere with the year of Christ's coming into the world, which is thus the centre of the calendar most widely used today. Is this not another sign of the unparalleled effect of the Birth of Jesus of Nazareth on the history of mankind?

16. The term "Jubilee" speaks of joy; not just an inner joy but a jubilation which is manifested outwardly, for the coming of God is also an outward, visible, audible and tangible event, as Saint John makes clear (cf. 1 Jn 1:1). It is thus appropriate that every sign of joy at this coming should have its own outward expression. This will demonstrate that the Church rejoices in salvation. She invites everyone to rejoice, and she tries to create conditions to ensure that the power of salvation may be shared by all. Hence the Year 2000 will be celebrated as the Great Jubilee.

With regard to its content, this Great Jubilee will be, in a certain sense, like any other. But at the same time it will be different, greater than any other. For the Church respects the measurements of time: hours, days, years, centuries. She thus goes forward with every individual, helping everyone to realize how each of these measurements of time is imbued with the presence of God and with his saving activity. In this spirit the Church rejoices, gives thanks and asks forgiveness, presenting her petitions to the Lord of history and of human consciences.

Among the most fervent petitions which the Church makes to the Lord during this important time, as the eve of the new millennium approaches, is that unity among all Christians of the various confessions will increase until they reach full communion. I pray that the Jubilee will be a promising opportunity for fruitful cooperation in the many areas which unite us; these are unquestionably more numerous than those which divide us. It would thus be quite helpful if, with due respect for the programmes of the individual Churches and Communities, ecumenical agreements could be reached with regard to the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee. In this way the Jubilee will bear witness even more forcefully before the world that the disciples of Christ are fully resolved to reach full unity as soon as possible in the certainty that "nothing is impossible with God".

III - PREPARATION FOR THE GREAT JUBILEE

17. In the Church's history every jubilee is prepared for by Divine Providence. This is true also of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. With this conviction, we look today with a sense of gratitude and yet with a sense of responsibility at all that has happened in human history since the Birth of Christ, particularly the events which have occurred between the years 1000 and 2000. But in a very particular way, we look with the eyes of faith to our own century, searching out whatever bears witness not only to man's history but also to God's intervention in human affairs.

18. From this point of view we can affirm that the Second Vatican Council was a providential event, whereby the Church began the more immediate preparation for the Jubilee of the Second Millennium. It was a Council similar to earlier ones, yet very different; it was a Council focused on the mystery of Christ and his Church and at the same time open to the world. This openness was an evangelical response to recent changes in the world, including the profoundly disturbing experiences of the Twentieth Century, a century scarred by the First and Second World Wars, by the experience of concentration camps and by horrendous massacres. All these events demonstrate most vividly that the world needs purification; it needs to be converted.

The Second Vatican Council is often considered as the beginning of a new era in the life of the Church. This is true, but at the same time it is difficult to overlook the fact that the Council drew much from the experiences and reflections of the immediate past, especially from the intellectual legacy left by Pius XII. In the history of the Church, the "old" and the "new" are always closely interwoven. The "new" grows out of the "old", and the "old" finds a fuller expression in

the "new". Thus it was for the Second Vatican Council and for the activity of the Popes connected with the Council, starting with John XXIII, continuing with Paul VI and John Paul I, up to the present Pope.

What these Popes have accomplished during and since the Council, in their Magisterium no less than in their pastoral activity, has certainly made a significant contribution to the preparation of that new springtime of Christian life which will be revealed by the Great Jubilee, if Christians are docile to the action of the Holy Spirit.

19. The Council, while not imitating the sternness of John the Baptist who called for repentance and conversion on the banks of the Jordan (cf. Lk 3:1-7), did show something of the Prophet of old, pointing out with fresh vigour to the men and women of today that Jesus Christ is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), the Redeemer of humanity and the Lord of history. During the Council, precisely out of a desire to be fully faithful to her Master, the Church questioned herself about her own identity, and discovered anew the depth of her mystery as the Body and the Bride of Christ. Humbly heeding the word of God, she reaffirmed the universal call to holiness; she made provision for the reform of the liturgy, the "origin and summit" of her life; she gave impetus to the renewal of many aspects of her life at the universal level and in the local Churches; she strove to promote the various Christian vocations, from those of the laity to those of Religious, from the ministry of deacons to that of priests and Bishops; and in a particular way she rediscovered episcopal collegiality, that privileged expression of the pastoral service carried out by the Bishops in communion with the Successor of Peter. On the basis of this profound renewal, the Council opened itself to Christians of other denominations, to the followers of other religions and to all the people of our time. No Council had ever spoken so clearly about Christian unity, about dialogue with non-Christian religions, about the specific meaning of the Old Covenant and of Israel, about the dignity of each person's conscience, about the principle of religious liberty, about the different cultural traditions within which the Church carries out her missionary mandate, and about the means of social communication.

20. The Council's enormously rich body of teaching and the striking new tone in the way it presented this content constitute as it were a proclamation of new times. The Council Fathers spoke in the language of the Gospel, the language of the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. In the Council's message God is presented in his absolute lordship over all things, but also as the One who ensures the authentic autonomy of earthly realities.

The best preparation for the new millennium, therefore, can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church. It was with the Second Vatican Council that, in the broadest sense of the term, the immediate preparations for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 were really begun. If we look for an analogy in the liturgy, it could be said that the yearly Advent liturgy is the season nearest to the spirit of the Council. For Advent prepares us to meet the One who was, who is and who is to come (cf. Rev 4:8).

21. Part of the preparation for the approach of the Year 2000 is the series of Synods begun after the Second Vatican Council: general Synods together with continental, regional, national and diocesan Synods. The theme underlying them all is evangelization, or rather the new evangelization, the foundations of which were laid down in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI, issued in 1975 following the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. These Synods themselves are part of the new evangelization: they were born of the Second Vatican Council's vision of the Church. They open up broad areas for the participation of the laity, whose specific responsibilities in the Church they define. They are an expression of the strength which Christ has given to the entire People of God, making it a sharer in his own Messianic mission as Prophet, Priest and King. Very eloquent in this regard are the statements of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. The preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000 is thus taking place throughout the whole Church, on the universal and local levels, giving her a new awareness of the salvific mission she has received from Christ. This awareness is particularly evident in the Post-Synodal Exhortations devoted to the mission of the laity, the formation of priests, catechesis, the family, the value of penance and reconciliation in the life of the Church and of humanity in general, as well as in the forth coming one to be devoted to the consecrated life.

22. Special tasks and responsibilities with regard to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 belong to the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. In a certain sense, all the Popes of the past century have prepared for this Jubilee. With his programme to renew all things in Christ, Saint Pius X tried to forestall the tragic developments which arose from the international situation at the beginning of this century. The Church was aware of her duty to act decisively to promote and defend the basic values of peace and justice in the face of contrary tendencies in our time. The Popes of the period before the Council acted with firm commitment, each in his own way: Benedict XV found himself faced with the tragedy of the First World War; Pius XI had to contend with the threats of totalitarian systems or systems which did not respect human freedom in Germany, in Russia, in Italy, in Spain, and even earlier still in Mexico. Pius XII took steps to counter the very grave injustice brought about by a total contempt for human dignity at the time of the Second World War. He also provided enlightened guidelines for the birth of a new world order after the fall of the previous political systems.

Furthermore, in the course of this century the Popes, following in the footsteps of Leo XIII, systematically developed the themes of Catholic social doctrine, expounding the characteristics of a just system in the area of relations between labour and capital. We may recall the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pius XI, the numerous interventions of Pius XII, the Encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* of John XXIII, the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* and

the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* of Paul VI. I too have frequently dealt with this subject: I specifically devoted the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* to the importance of human labour, while in *Centesimus Annus* I wished to reaffirm the relevance, one hundred years later, of the doctrine presented in *Rerum Novarum*. In my Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* I had earlier offered a systematic reformulation of the Church's entire social doctrine against the background of the East-West confrontation and the danger of nuclear war. The two elements of the Church's social doctrine—the safeguarding of human dignity and rights in the sphere of a just relation between labour and capital and the promotion of peace—were closely joined in this text. The Papal Messages of 1 January each year, begun in 1968 in the pontificate of Paul VI, are also meant to serve the cause of peace.

23. Since the publication of the very first document of my Pontificate, I have spoken explicitly of the Great Jubilee, suggesting that the time leading up to it be lived as "a new Advent".(9) This theme has since reappeared many times, and was dwelt upon at length in the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*.(10) In fact, preparing for the Year 2000 has become as it were a hermeneutical key of my Pontificate. It is certainly not a matter of indulging in a new millenarianism, as occurred in some quarters at the end of the first millennium; rather, it is aimed at an increased sensitivity to all that the Spirit is saying to the Church and to the Churches (cf. *Rev* 2:7 ff.), as well as to individuals through charisms meant to serve the whole community. The purpose is to emphasize what the Spirit is suggesting to the different communities, from the smallest ones, such as the family, to the largest ones, such as nations and international organizations, taking into account cultures, societies and sound traditions. Despite appearances, humanity continues to await the revelation of the children of God, and lives by this hope, like a mother in labour, to use the image employed so powerfully by Saint Paul in his Letter to the Romans (cf. 8:19-22).

24. Papal Journeys have become an important element in the work of implementing the Second Vatican Council. Begun by John XXIII on the eve of the Council with a memorable pilgrimage to Loreto and Assisi (1962), they notably increased under Paul VI who, after first visiting the Holy Land (1964), undertook nine other great apostolic journeys which brought him into direct contact with the peoples of the different continents.

The current Pontificate has widened this programme of travels even further, starting with Mexico, on the occasion of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate held in Puebla in 1979. In that same year, there was also the trip to Poland for the Jubilee of the nine hundredth anniversary of the death of Saint Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr.

The successive stages of these travels are well known. Papal journeys have become a regular occurrence, taking in the particular Churches in every continent and showing concern for the development of ecumenical relationships with Christians of various denominations. Particularly important in this regard were the visits to Turkey (1979), Germany (1980), England, Scotland and Wales (1982), Switzerland (1984), the Scandinavian countries (1989), and most recently the Baltic countries (1993).

At present, it is my fervent wish to visit Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Middle East: Lebanon, Jerusalem and the Holy Land. It would be very significant if in the Year 2000 it were possible to visit the places on the road taken by the People of God of the Old Covenant, starting from the places associated with Abraham and Moses, through Egypt and Mount Sinai, as far as Damascus, the city which witnessed the conversion of Saint Paul.

25. In preparing for the Year 2000, the individual Churches have their own role to play, as they celebrate with their own Jubilees significant stages in the salvation history of the various peoples. Among these regional or local Jubilees, events of great importance have included the millennium of the Baptism of Rus' in 1988 (11) as also the five hundredth anniversary of the beginning of evangelization in America (1492). Besides events of such wide-ranging impact, we may recall others which, although not of universal importance, are no less significant: for example, the millennium of the Baptism of Poland in 1966 and of the Baptism of Hungary in 1968, together with the six hundredth anniversary of the Baptism of Lithuania in 1987. There will soon also be celebrated the 1500th anniversary of the Baptism of Clovis (496), king of the Franks, and the 1400th anniversary of the arrival of Saint Augustine in Canterbury (597), marking the beginning of the evangelization of the Anglo-Saxon world.

As far as Asia is concerned, the Jubilee will remind us of the Apostle Thomas, who, according to tradition, brought the proclamation of the Gospel at the very beginning of the Christian era to India, where missionaries from Portugal would not arrive until about the year 1500. The current year also marks the seventh centenary of the evangelization of China (1294), and we are preparing to commemorate the spread of missionary work in the Philippines with the erection of the Metropolitan See of Manila (1595). We likewise look forward to the fourth centenary of the first martyrs in Japan (1597).

In Africa, where the first proclamation of the Gospel also dates back to Apostolic times, together with the 1650th anniversary of the episcopal consecration of the first Bishop of the Ethiopians, Saint Frumentius (c. 340), and the five hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the evangelization of Angola in the ancient Kingdom of the Congo (1491), nations such as Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic, Burundi and Burkina Faso are celebrating the centenaries of the arrival of the first missionaries in their respective territories. Other African nations have recently celebrated such centenaries.

And how can we fail to mention the Eastern Churches, whose ancient Patriarchates are so closely linked to the apostolic heritage and whose venerable theological, liturgical and spiritual traditions constitute a tremendous wealth which is the common patrimony of the whole of Christianity? The many jubilee celebrations in these Churches, and in

the Communities which acknowledge them as the origin of their own apostolicity, recall the journey of Christ down the centuries, leading to the Great Jubilee at the end of the second millennium.

Seen in this light, the whole of Christian history appears to us as a single river, into which many tributaries pour their waters. The Year 2000 invites us to gather with renewed fidelity and ever deeper communion along the banks of this great river: the river of Revelation, of Christianity and of the Church, a river which flows through human history starting from the event which took place at Nazareth and then at Bethlehem two thousand years ago. This is truly the "river" which with its "streams", in the expression of the Psalm, "make glad the city of God" (46:4).

26. The Holy Years celebrated in the latter part of this century have also prepared for the Year 2000. The Holy Year proclaimed by Paul VI in 1975 is still fresh in our memory. The celebration of 1983 as the Year of Redemption followed along the same lines. The Marian Year 1986/87 perhaps struck a more resounding chord; it was eagerly awaited and profoundly experienced in the individual local Churches, especially at the Marian Shrines around the world. The Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, issued on that occasion, drew attention to the Council's teaching on the presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church: two thousand years ago the Son of God was made man by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. The Marian Year was as it were an anticipation of the Jubilee, and contained much of what will find fuller expression in the Year 2000.

27. It would be difficult not to recall that the Marian Year took place only shortly before the events of 1989. Those events remain surprising for their vastness and especially for the speed with which they occurred. The Eighties were years marked by a growing danger from the "Cold War". 1989 ushered in a peaceful resolution which took the form, as it were, of an "organic" development. In the light of this fact, we are led to recognize a truly prophetic significance in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*: everything that Pope Leo XIII wrote there about Communism was borne out by these events, as I emphasized in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*.⁽¹²⁾ In the unfolding of those events one could already discern the invisible hand of Providence at work with maternal care: "Can a woman forget her infant...?" (Is 49:15).

After 1989 however there arose new dangers and threats. In the countries of the former Eastern bloc, after the fall of Communism, there appeared the serious threat of exaggerated nationalism, as is evident from events in the Balkans and other neighbouring areas. This obliges the European nations to make a serious examination of conscience, and to acknowledge faults and errors, both economic and political, resulting from imperialist policies carried out in the previous and present centuries vis-à-vis nations whose rights have been systematically violated.

28. In the wake of the Marian Year, we are now observing the Year of the Family, a celebration which is closely connected with the mystery of the Incarnation and with the very history of humanity. Thus there is good cause to hope that the Year of the Family, inaugurated at Nazareth, will become, like the Marian Year, another significant stage in preparation for the Great Jubilee.

With this in view, I wrote a Letter to Families, the purpose of which was to restate the substance of the Church's teaching on the family, and to bring this teaching, so to speak, into every home. At the Second Vatican Council, the Church recognized her duty to promote the dignity of marriage and the family.⁽¹³⁾ The Year of the Family is meant to help make the Council's teaching in this regard a reality. Each family, in some way, should be involved in the preparation for the Great Jubilee. Was it not through a family, the family of Nazareth, that the Son of God chose to enter into human history?

IV - IMMEDIATE PREPARATION

29. Against the background of this sweeping panorama a question arises: can we draw up a specific programme of initiatives for the immediate preparation of the Great Jubilee? In fact, what has been said above already includes some elements of such a programme.

A more detailed plan of specific events will call for widespread consultation, in order for it not to be artificial and difficult to implement in the particular Churches, which live in such different conditions. For this reason, I wished to consult the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and especially the Cardinals.

I am grateful to the members of the College of Cardinals who met in Extraordinary Consistory on 13-14 June 1994, considered numerous proposals and suggested helpful guidelines. I also thank my Brothers in the Episcopate who in various ways communicated valuable ideas, which I have kept carefully in mind while writing this Apostolic Letter.

30. The first recommendation which clearly emerged from the consultation regards the period of preparation. Only a few years now separate us from the Year 2000: it seemed fitting to divide this period into two phases, reserving the strictly preparatory phase for the last three years. It was thought that the accumulation of many activities over the course of a longer period of preparation would detract from its spiritual intensity.

It was therefore considered appropriate to approach the historic date with a first phase, which would make the faithful aware of general themes, and then to concentrate the direct and immediate preparation into a second phase consisting of a three-year period wholly directed to the celebration of the mystery of Christ the Saviour.

a) First Phase

31. The first phase will therefore be of an ante-preparatory character; it is meant to revive in the Christian people an awareness of the value and meaning of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 in human history. As a commemoration of the Birth of Christ, the Jubilee is deeply charged with Christological significance.

In keeping with the unfolding of the Christian faith in word and Sacrament, it seems important, even in this special anniversary, to link the structure of memorial with that of celebration, not limiting commemoration of the event only to ideas but also making its saving significance present through the celebration of the Sacraments. The Jubilee celebration should confirm the Christians of today in their faith in God who has revealed himself in Christ, sustain their hope which reaches out in expectation of eternal life, and rekindle their charity in active service to their brothers and sisters.

During the first stage (1994 to 1996) the Holy See, through a special Committee established for this purpose, will suggest courses of reflection and action at the universal level. A similar commitment to promoting awareness will be carried out in a more detailed way by corresponding Commissions in the local Churches. In a way, it is a question of continuing what was done in the period of remote preparation and at the same time of coming to a deeper appreciation of the most significant aspects of the Jubilee celebration.

32. A Jubilee is always an occasion of special grace, "a day blessed by the Lord". As has already been noted, it is thus a time of joy. The Jubilee of the Year 2000 is meant to be a great prayer of praise and thanksgiving, especially for the gift of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of the Redemption which he accomplished. In the Jubilee Year Christians will stand with the renewed wonder of faith before the love of the Father, who gave his Son, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). With a profound sense of commitment, they will likewise express their gratitude for the gift of the Church, established by Christ as "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind".(14) Their thanksgiving will embrace the fruits of holiness which have matured in the life of all those many men and women who in every generation and every period of history have fully welcomed the gift of Redemption.

Nevertheless, the joy of every Jubilee is above all a joy based upon the forgiveness of sins, the joy of conversion. It therefore seems appropriate to emphasize once more the theme of the Synod of Bishops in 1984: penance and reconciliation.(15) That Synod was an event of extraordinary significance in the life of the post-conciliar Church. It took up the ever topical question of conversion ("metanoia"), which is the pre-condition for reconciliation with God on the part of both individuals and communities.

33. Hence it is appropriate that, as the Second Millennium of Christianity draws to a close, the Church should become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel and, instead of offering to the world the witness of a life inspired by the values of faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting which were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal.

Although she is holy because of her incorporation into Christ, the Church does not tire of doing penance: before God and man she always acknowledges as her own her sinful sons and daughters. As *Lumen Gentium* affirms: "The Church, embracing sinners to her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal".(16)

The Holy Door of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 should be symbolically wider than those of previous Jubilees, because humanity, upon reaching this goal, will leave behind not just a century but a millennium. It is fitting that the Church should make this passage with a clear awareness of what has happened to her during the last ten centuries. She cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act. Acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges and prepares us to meet them.

34. Among the sins which require a greater commitment to repentance and conversion should certainly be counted those which have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People. In the course of the thousand years now drawing to a close, even more than in the first millennium, ecclesial communion has been painfully wounded, a fact "for which, at times, men of both sides were to blame".(17) Such wounds openly contradict the will of Christ and are a cause of scandal to the world.(18) These sins of the past unfortunately still burden us and remain ever present temptations. It is necessary to make amends for them, and earnestly to beseech Christ's forgiveness.

In these last years of the millennium, the Church should invoke the Holy Spirit with ever greater insistence, imploring from him the grace of Christian unity. This is a crucial matter for our testimony to the Gospel before the world. Especially since the Second Vatican Council many ecumenical initiatives have been undertaken with generosity and commitment: it can be said that the whole activity of the local Churches and of the Apostolic See has taken on an ecumenical dimension in recent years. The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity has become an important catalyst in the movement towards full unity.

We are all however aware that the attainment of this goal cannot be the fruit of human efforts alone, vital though they are. Unity, after all, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. We are asked to respond to this gift responsibly, without compromise in our witness to the truth, generously implementing the guidelines laid down by the Council and in subsequent documents of the Holy See, which are also highly regarded by many Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

This then is one of the tasks of Christians as we make our way to the Year 2000. The approaching end of the second millennium demands of everyone an examination of conscience and the promotion of fitting ecumenical initiatives, so that we can celebrate the Great Jubilee, if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium. As everyone recognizes, an enormous effort is needed in this regard. It is essential not only to continue along the path of dialogue on doctrinal matters, but above all to be more committed to prayer for Christian unity. Such prayer has become much more intense after the Council, but it must increase still more, involving an ever greater number of Christians, in unison with the great petition of Christ before his Passion: "Father... that they also may all be one in us" (Jn 17:21).

35. Another painful chapter of history to which the sons and daughters of the Church must return with a spirit of repentance is that of the acquiescence given, especially in certain centuries, to intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth.

It is true that an accurate historical judgment cannot prescind from careful study of the cultural conditioning of the times, as a result of which many people may have held in good faith that an authentic witness to the truth could include suppressing the opinions of others or at least paying no attention to them. Many factors frequently converged to create assumptions which justified intolerance and fostered an emotional climate from which only great spirits, truly free and filled with God, were in some way able to break free. Yet the consideration of mitigating factors does not exonerate the Church from the obligation to express profound regret for the weaknesses of so many of her sons and daughters who sullied her face, preventing her from fully mirroring the image of her crucified Lord, the supreme witness of patient love and of humble meekness. From these painful moments of the past a lesson can be drawn for the future, leading all Christians to adhere fully to the sublime principle stated by the Council: "The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it wins over the mind with both gentleness and power".(19)

36. Many Cardinals and Bishops expressed the desire for a serious examination of conscience above all on the part of the Church of today. On the threshold of the new Millennium Christians need to place themselves humbly before the Lord and examine themselves on the responsibility which they too have for the evils of our day. The present age in fact, together with much light, also presents not a few shadows.

How can we remain silent, for example, about the religious indifference which causes many people today to live as if God did not exist, or to be content with a vague religiosity, incapable of coming to grips with the question of truth and the requirement of consistency? To this must also be added the widespread loss of the transcendent sense of human life, and confusion in the ethical sphere, even about the fundamental values of respect for life and the family. The sons and daughters of the Church too need to examine themselves in this regard. To what extent have they been shaped by the climate of secularism and ethical relativism? And what responsibility do they bear, in view of the increasing lack of religion, for not having shown the true face of God, by having "failed in their religious, moral, or social life"? (20)

It cannot be denied that, for many Christians, the spiritual life is passing through a time of uncertainty which affects not only their moral life but also their life of prayer and the theological correctness of their faith. Faith, already put to the test by the challenges of our times, is sometimes disoriented by erroneous theological views, the spread of which is abetted by the crisis of obedience vis-à-vis the Church's Magisterium.

And with respect to the Church of our time, how can we not lament the lack of discernment, which at times became even acquiescence, shown by many Christians concerning the violation of fundamental human rights by totalitarian regimes? And should we not also regret, among the shadows of our own day, the responsibility shared by so many Christians for grave forms of injustice and exclusion? It must be asked how many Christians really know and put into practice the principles of the Church's social doctrine. An examination of conscience must also consider the reception given to the Council, this great gift of the Spirit to the Church at the end of the second millennium. To what extent has the word of God become more fully the soul of theology and the inspiration of the whole of Christian living, as *Dei Verbum* sought? Is the liturgy lived as the "origin and summit" of ecclesial life, in accordance with the teaching of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*? In the universal Church and in the particular Churches, is the ecclesiology of communion described in *Lumen Gentium* being strengthened? Does it leave room for charisms, ministries, and different forms of participation by the People of God, without adopting notions borrowed from democracy and sociology which do not reflect the Catholic vision of the Church and the authentic spirit of Vatican II? Another serious question is raised by the nature of relations between the Church and the world. The Council's guidelines-set forth in *Gaudium et Spes* and other documents-of open, respectful and cordial dialogue, yet accompanied by careful discernment and courageous witness to the truth, remain valid and call us to a greater commitment.

37. The Church of the first millennium was born of the blood of the martyrs: "Sanguis martyrum - semen christianorum".(21) The historical events linked to the figure of Constantine the Great could never have ensured the development of the Church as it occurred during the first millennium if it had not been for the seeds sown by the martyrs and the heritage of sanctity which marked the first Christian generations. At the end of the second millennium, the Church has once again become a Church of martyrs. The persecutions of believers -priests, Religious and laity-has caused a great sowing of martyrdom in different parts of the world. The witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants, as Pope Paul VI pointed out in his Homily for the Canonization of the Ugandan Martyrs.(22)

This witness must not be forgotten. The Church of the first centuries, although facing considerable organizational difficulties, took care to write down in special martyrologies the witness of the martyrs. These martyrologies have been constantly updated through the centuries, and the register of the saints and the blessed bears the names not only of those who have shed their blood for Christ but also of teachers of the faith, missionaries, confessors, bishops, priests, virgins, married couples, widows and children.

In our own century the martyrs have returned, many of them nameless, "unknown soldiers" as it were of God's great cause. As far as possible, their witness should not be lost to the Church. As was recommended in the Consistory, the local Churches should do everything possible to ensure that the memory of those who have suffered martyrdom should be safeguarded, gathering the necessary documentation. This gesture cannot fail to have an ecumenical character and expression. Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us. The martyrologium of the first centuries was the basis of the veneration of the Saints. By proclaiming and venerating the holiness of her sons and daughters, the Church gave supreme honour to God himself; in the martyrs she venerated Christ, who was at the origin of their martyrdom and of their holiness. In later times there developed the practice of canonization, a practice which still continues in the Catholic Church and in the Orthodox Churches. In recent years the number of canonizations and beatifications has increased. These show the vitality of the local Churches, which are much more numerous today than in the first centuries and in the first millennium. The greatest homage which all the Churches can give to Christ on the threshold of the third millennium will be to manifest the Redeemer's all-powerful presence through the fruits of faith, hope and charity present in men and women of many different tongues and races who have followed Christ in the various forms of the Christian vocation.

It will be the task of the Apostolic See, in preparation for the Year 2000, to update the martyrologies for the universal Church, paying careful attention to the holiness of those who in our own time lived fully by the truth of Christ. In particular, there is a need to foster the recognition of the heroic virtues of men and women who have lived their Christian vocation in marriage. Precisely because we are convinced of the abundant fruits of holiness in the married state, we need to find the most appropriate means for discerning them and proposing them to the whole Church as a model and encouragement for other Christian spouses.

38. A further need emphasized by the Cardinals and Bishops is that of Continental Synods, following the example of those already held for Europe and Africa. The last General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate accepted, in agreement with the Bishops of North America, the proposal for a Synod for the Americas on the problems of the new evangelization in both parts of the same continent, so different in origin and history, and on issues of justice and of international economic relations, in view of the enormous gap between North and South.

Another plan for a continent-wide Synod will concern Asia, where the issue of the encounter of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions is a pressing one. This is a great challenge for evangelization, since religious systems such as Buddhism or Hinduism have a clearly soteriological character. There is also an urgent need for a Synod on the occasion of the Great Jubilee in order to illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions. With sincere esteem, the Church regards the elements of truth found in those religions as a reflection of the Truth which enlightens all men and women.(23) "Ecce natus est nobis Salvator mundi": in the Year 2000 the proclamation of this truth should resound with renewed power.

Also for Oceania a Regional Synod could be useful. In this region there arises the question, among others, of the Aboriginal People, who in a unique way evoke aspects of human prehistory. In this Synod a matter not to be overlooked, together with other problems of the region, would be the encounter of Christianity with the most ancient forms of religion, profoundly marked by a monotheistic orientation.

b) Second Phase

39. On the basis of this vast programme aimed at creating awareness, it will then be possible to begin the second phase, the strictly preparatory phase. This will take place over the span of three years, from 1997 to 1999. The thematic structure of this three-year period, centred on Christ, the Son of God made man, must necessarily be theological, and therefore Trinitarian.

Year One: Jesus Christ

40. The first year, 1997, will thus be devoted to reflection on Christ, the Word of God, made man by the power of the Holy Spirit. The distinctly Christological character of the Jubilee needs to be emphasized, for it will celebrate the Incarnation and coming into the world of the Son of God, the mystery of salvation for all mankind. The general theme proposed by many Cardinals and Bishops for this year is: "Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and for ever" (cf. Heb 13:8).

Among the Christological themes suggested in the Consistory the following stand out: a renewed appreciation of Christ, Saviour and Proclaimer of the Gospel, with special reference to the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, where the theme of Christ's mission of preaching the Good News and the theme of the Jubilee are interwoven; a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation and of Jesus' birth from the Virgin Mary; the necessity of faith in Christ

for salvation. In order to recognize who Christ truly is, Christians, especially in the course of this year, should turn with renewed interest to the Bible, "whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids".(24) In the revealed text it is the Heavenly Father himself who comes to us in love and who dwells with us, disclosing to us the nature of his only-begotten Son and his plan of salvation for humanity.(25)

41. The commitment, mentioned earlier, to make the mystery of salvation sacramentally present can lead, in the course of the year, to a renewed appreciation of Baptism as the basis of Christian living, according to the words of the Apostle: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). The Catechism of the Catholic Church, for its part, recalls that Baptism constitutes "the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church".(26) From an ecumenical point of view, this will certainly be a very important year for Christians to look together to Christ the one Lord, deepening our commitment to become one in him, in accordance with his prayer to the Father. This emphasis on the centrality of Christ, of the word of God and of faith ought to inspire interest among Christians of other denominations and meet with a favourable response from them.

42. Everything ought to focus on the primary objective of the Jubilee: the strengthening of faith and of the witness of Christians. It is therefore necessary to inspire in all the faithful a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one's neighbour, especially the most needy.

The first year therefore will be the opportune moment for a renewed appreciation of catechesis in its original meaning as "the Apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42) about the person of Jesus Christ and his mystery of salvation. In this regard, a detailed study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church will prove of great benefit, for the Catechism presents "faithfully and systematically... the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and the authentic Magisterium, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Fathers, Doctors and Saints of the Church, to allow for a better knowledge of the Christian mystery and for enlivening the faith of the People of God".(27) To be realistic, we need to enlighten the consciences of the faithful concerning errors regarding the person of Christ, clarifying objections against him and against the Church.

43. The Blessed Virgin who will be as it were "indirectly" present in the whole preparatory phase, will be contemplated in this first year especially in the mystery of her Divine Motherhood. It was in her womb that the Word became flesh! The affirmation of the central place of Christ cannot therefore be separated from the recognition of the role played by his Most Holy Mother. Veneration of her, when properly understood, can in no way take away from "the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator".(28) Mary in fact constantly points to her Divine Son and she is proposed to all believers as the model of faith which is put into practice. "Devotedly meditating on her and contemplating her in the light of the Word made man, the Church with reverence enters more intimately into the supreme mystery of the Incarnation and becomes ever increasingly like her Spouse".(29)

Year Two: the Holy Spirit

44. 1998, the second year of the preparatory phase, will be dedicated in a particular way to the Holy Spirit and to his sanctifying presence within the Community of Christ's disciples. "The great Jubilee at the close of the second Millennium...", I wrote in the Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, "has a pneumatological aspect, since the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished 'by the power of the Holy Spirit'. It was ? brought about' by that Spirit-consubstantial with the Father and the Son-who, in the absolute mystery of the Triune God, is the Person-love, the uncreated gift, who is the eternal source of every gift that comes from God in the order of creation, the direct principle and, in a certain sense, the subject of God's self-communication in the order of grace. The mystery of the Incarnation constitutes the climax of this giving, this divine self-communication".(30)

The Church cannot prepare for the new millennium "in any other way than in the Holy Spirit. What was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit 'in the fullness of time' can only through the Spirit's power now emerge from the memory of the Church".(31)

The Spirit, in fact, makes present in the Church of every time and place the unique Revelation brought by Christ to humanity, making it alive and active in the soul of each individual: "The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

45. The primary tasks of the preparation for the Jubilee thus include a renewed appreciation of the presence and activity of the Spirit, who acts within the Church both in the Sacraments, especially in Confirmation, and in the variety of charisms, roles and ministries which he inspires for the good of the Church: "There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, distributes his different gift for the welfare of the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11). Among these gifts stands out the grace given to the Apostles. To their authority, the Spirit himself subjected even those who were endowed with charisms (cf. 1 Cor 14). Giving the body unity through himself and through his power and through the internal cohesion of its members, this same Spirit produces and urges love among the believers".(32)

In our own day too, the Spirit is the principal agent of the new evangelization. Hence it will be important to gain a renewed appreciation of the Spirit as the One who builds the Kingdom of God within the course of history and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, stirring people's hearts and quickening in our world the seeds of the full salvation which will come at the end of time.

46. In this eschatological perspective, believers should be called to a renewed appreciation of the theological virtue of hope, which they have already heard proclaimed "in the word of the truth, the Gospel" (Col 1:5). The basic attitude of hope, on the one hand encourages the Christian not to lose sight of the final goal which gives meaning and value to life, and on the other, offers solid and profound reasons for a daily commitment to transform reality in order to make it correspond to God's plan.

As the Apostle Paul reminds us: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved" (Rom 8:22-24). Christians are called to prepare for the Great Jubilee of the beginning of the Third Millennium by renewing their hope in the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God, preparing for it daily in their hearts, in the Christian community to which they belong, in their particular social context, and in world history itself.

There is also need for a better appreciation and understanding of the signs of hope present in the last part of this century, even though they often remain hidden from our eyes. In society in general, such signs of hope include: scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice wherever they have been violated, a desire for reconciliation and solidarity among different peoples, particularly in the complex relationship between the North and the South of the world. In the Church, they include a greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to the cause of Christian unity and the increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture.

47. The reflection of the faithful in the second year of preparation ought to focus particularly on the value of unity within the Church, to which the various gifts and charisms bestowed upon her by the Spirit are directed. In this regard, it will be opportune to promote a deeper understanding of the ecclesiological doctrine of the Second Vatican Council as contained primarily in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This important document has expressly emphasized that the unity of the Body of Christ is founded on the activity of the Spirit, guaranteed by the Apostolic Ministry and sustained by mutual love (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-8). This catechetical enrichment of the faith cannot fail to bring the members of the People of God to a more mature awareness of their own responsibilities, as well as to a more lively sense of the importance of ecclesial obedience.(33)

48. Mary, who conceived the Incarnate Word by the power of the Holy Spirit and then in the whole of her life allowed herself to be guided by his interior activity, will be contemplated and imitated during this year above all as the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness, a woman of hope who, like Abraham, accepted God's will "hoping against hope" (cf. Rom 4:18). Mary gave full expression to the longing of the poor of Yahweh and is a radiant model for those who entrust themselves with all their hearts to the promises of God.

Year Three: God the Father

49. 1999, the third and final year of preparation, will be aimed at broadening the horizons of believers, so that they will see things in the perspective of Christ: in the perspective of the "Father who is in heaven" (cf. Mt 5:45), from whom the Lord was sent and to whom he has returned (cf. Jn 16:28).

"This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). The whole of the Christian life is like a great pilgrimage to the house of the Father, whose unconditional love for every human creature, and in particular for the "prodigal son" (cf. Lk 15:11-32), we discover anew each day. This pilgrimage takes place in the heart of each person, extends to the believing community and then reaches to the whole of humanity.

The Jubilee, centred on the person of Christ, thus becomes a great act of praise to the Father: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1:3-4).

50. In this third year the sense of being on a "journey to the Father" should encourage everyone to undertake, by holding fast to Christ the Redeemer of man, a journey of authentic conversion. This includes both a "negative" aspect, that of liberation from sin, and a "positive" aspect, that of choosing good, accepting the ethical values expressed in the natural law, which is confirmed and deepened by the Gospel. This is the proper context for a renewed appreciation and more intense celebration of the Sacrament of Penance in its most profound meaning. The call to conversion as the indispensable condition of Christian love is particularly important in contemporary society, where the very foundations of an ethically correct vision of human existence often seem to have been lost.

It will therefore be necessary, especially during this year, to emphasize the theological virtue of charity, recalling the significant and lapidary words of the First Letter of John: "God is love" (4:8, 16). Charity, in its twofold reality as love of God and neighbour is the summing up of the moral life of the believer. It has in God its source and its goal.

51. From this point of view, if we recall that Jesus came to "preach the good news to the poor" (Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22), how can we fail to lay greater emphasis on the Church's preferential option for the poor and the outcast? Indeed, it has to be said that a commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee. Thus, in the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations. The Jubilee can also offer an opportunity for reflecting on other challenges of our time, such as the difficulties of dialogue between different cultures and the problems connected with respect for women's rights and the promotion of the family and marriage.

52. Recalling that "Christ... by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear", (34) two commitments should characterize in a special way the third preparatory year: meeting the challenge of secularism and dialogue with the great religions.

With regard to the former, it will be fitting to broach the vast subject of the crisis of civilization, which has become apparent especially in the West, which is highly developed from the standpoint of technology but is interiorly impoverished by its tendency to forget God or to keep him at a distance. This crisis of civilization must be countered by the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty, which find their full attainment in Christ.

53. On the other hand, as far as the field of religious awareness is concerned, the eve of the Year 2000 will provide a great opportunity, especially in view of the events of recent decades, for interreligious dialogue, in accordance with the specific guidelines set down by the Second Vatican Council in its Declaration *Nostra Aetate* on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions.

In this dialogue the Jews and the Muslims ought to have a pre-eminent place. God grant that as a confirmation of these intentions it may also be possible to hold joint meetings in places of significance for the great monotheistic religions.

In this regard, attention is being given to finding ways of arranging historic meetings in places of exceptional symbolic importance like Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Mount Sinai as a means of furthering dialogue with Jews and the followers of Islam, and to arranging similar meetings elsewhere with the leaders of the great world religions. However, care will always have to be taken not to cause harmful misunderstandings, avoiding the risk of syncretism and of a facile and deceptive irenicism.

54. In this broad perspective of commitments, Mary Most Holy, the highly favoured daughter of the Father, will appear before the eyes of believers as the perfect model of love towards both God and neighbour. As she herself says in the *Canticle of the Magnificat*, great things were done for her by the Almighty, whose name is holy (cf. Lk 1:49). The Father chose her for a unique mission in the history of salvation: that of being the Mother of the long-awaited Saviour. The Virgin Mary responded to God's call with complete openness: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38). Her motherhood, which began in Nazareth and was lived most intensely in Jerusalem at the foot of the Cross, will be felt during this year as a loving and urgent invitation addressed to all the children of God, so that they will return to the house of the Father when they hear her maternal voice: "Do whatever Christ tells you" (cf. Jn 2:5).

c) Approaching the Celebration

55. A separate chapter will be the actual celebration of the Great Jubilee, which will take place simultaneously in the Holy Land, in Rome and in the local Churches throughout the world. Especially in this phase, the phase of celebration, the aim will be to give glory to the Trinity, from whom everything in the world and in history comes and to whom everything returns. This mystery is the focus of the three years of immediate preparation: from Christ and through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, to the Father. In this sense the Jubilee celebration makes present in an anticipatory way the goal and fulfilment of the life of each Christian and of the whole Church in the Triune God.

But since Christ is the only way to the Father, in order to highlight his living and saving presence in the Church and the world, the International Eucharistic Congress will take place in Rome, on the occasion of the Great Jubilee. The Year 2000 will be intensely Eucharistic: in the Sacrament of the Eucharist the Saviour, who took flesh in Mary's womb twenty centuries ago, continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life.

The ecumenical and universal character of the Sacred Jubilee can be fittingly reflected by a meeting of all Christians. This would be an event of great significance, and so, in order to avoid misunderstandings, it should be properly presented and carefully prepared, in an attitude of fraternal cooperation with Christians of other denominations and traditions, as well as of grateful openness to those religions whose representatives might wish to acknowledge the joy shared by all the disciples of Christ.

One thing is certain: everyone is asked to do as much as possible to ensure that the great challenge of the Year 2000 is not overlooked, for this challenge certainly involves a special grace of the Lord for the Church and for the whole of humanity.

V - "JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME... FOR EVER" (Heb 13:8)

56. The Church has endured for 2000 years. Like the mustard seed in the Gospel, she has grown and become a great tree, able to cover the whole of humanity with her branches (cf. Mt 13:31-32). The Second Vatican Council, in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, thus addresses the question of membership in the Church and the call of all people to belong to the People of God: "All are called to be part of this Catholic unity of the new People of God... And there belong to it or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful as well as all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, which by the grace of God is called to salvation".(35) Pope Paul VI, in the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* illustrates how all mankind is involved in the plan of God, and emphasizes the various circles of the dialogue of salvation.(36)

Continuing this approach, we can also appreciate more clearly the Gospel parable of the leaven (cf. Mt 13:33): Christ, like a divine leaven, always and ever more fully penetrates the life of humanity, spreading the work of salvation accomplished in the Paschal Mystery. What is more, he embraces within his redemptive power the whole past history of the human race, beginning with the first Adam.(37) The future also belongs to him: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8). For her part the Church "seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ himself under the lead of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served".(38)

57. Therefore, ever since the apostolic age, the Church's mission has continued without interruption within the whole human family. The first evangelization took place above all in the region of the Mediterranean. In the course of the first millennium, missions setting out from Rome and Constantinople brought Christianity to the whole continent of Europe. At the same time they made their way to the heart of Asia, as far as India and China. The end of the fifteenth century marked both the discovery of America and the beginning of the evangelization of that great continent, North and South. Simultaneously, while the sub-Saharan coasts of Africa welcomed the light of Christ, Saint Francis Xavier, Patron of the Missions, reached Japan. At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, a layman, Andrew Kim, brought Christianity to Korea. In the same period the proclamation of the Gospel reached Indochina, as well as Australia and the Islands of the Pacific.

The nineteenth century witnessed vast missionary activity among the peoples of Africa. All these efforts bore fruit which has lasted up to the present day. The Second Vatican Council gives an account of this in the Decree *Ad Gentes* on Missionary Activity. After the Council the question of missionary work was dealt with in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, in the light of the problems of the missions in these final years of our century. In the future too, the Church must continue to be missionary: indeed missionary outreach is part of her very nature. With the fall of the great anti-Christian systems in Europe, first of Nazism and then of Communism, there is urgent need to bring once more the liberating message of the Gospel to the men and women of Europe.(39) Furthermore, as the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* affirms, the modern world reflects the situation of the Areopagus of Athens, where Saint Paul spoke(40). Today there are many "areopagi", and very different ones: these are the vast sectors of contemporary civilization and culture, of politics and economics. The more the West is becoming estranged from its Christian roots, the more it is becoming missionary territory, taking the form of many different "areopagi".

58. The future of the world and the Church belongs to the younger generation, to those who, born in this century, will reach maturity in the next, the first century of the new millennium. Christ expects great things from young people, as he did from the young man who asked him: "What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16). I have referred to the remarkable answer which Jesus gave to him, in the recent Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, as I did earlier, in 1985, in my Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World. Young people, in every situation, in every region of the world, do not cease to put questions to Christ: they meet him and they keep searching for him in order to question him further. If they succeed in following the road which he points out to them, they will have the joy of making their own contribution to his presence in the next century and in the centuries to come, until the end of time: "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and for ever".

59. In conclusion, it is helpful to recall the words of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny. Nor has any other name under heaven been given to man by which it is fitting for him to be saved. She likewise holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history. The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are so many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and for ever. Hence in the light of Christ, the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of every creature, the Council wishes to speak to all men in order to illuminate the mystery of man and to cooperate in finding the solution to the outstanding problems of our time".(41)

While I invite the faithful to raise to the Lord fervent prayers to obtain the light and assistance necessary for the preparation and celebration of the forthcoming Jubilee, I exhort my Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the ecclesial communities entrusted to them to open their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit. He will not fail to arouse enthusiasm and lead people to celebrate the Jubilee with renewed faith and generous participation.

I entrust this responsibility of the whole Church to the maternal intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. She, the Mother of Fairest Love, will be for Christians on the way to the Great Jubilee of the Third Millennium the Star which safely guides their steps to the Lord. May the unassuming Young Woman of Nazareth, who two thousand years ago

offered to the world the Incarnate Word, lead the men and women of the new millennium towards the One who is "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9).

With these sentiments I impart to all my Blessing.

From the Vatican, on 10 November in the year 1994, the seventeenth of my Pontificate.

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**Apostolic Letter
Of John Paul II
To The Bishops
Of The Catholic Church
On Reserving Priestly Ordination
To Men Alone**

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. Priestly ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic Church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone. This tradition has also been faithfully maintained by the Oriental Churches.

When the question of the ordination of women arose in the Anglican Communion, Pope Paul VI, out of fidelity to his office of safeguarding the Apostolic Tradition, and also with a view to removing a new obstacle placed in the way of Christian unity, reminded Anglicans of the position of the Catholic Church: "She holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church."(1)

But since the question had also become the subject of debate among theologians and in certain Catholic circles, Paul VI directed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to set forth and expound the teaching of the Church on this matter. This was done through the Declaration *Inter Insigniores*, which the Supreme Pontiff approved and ordered to be published.(2)

2. The Declaration recalls and explains the fundamental reasons for this teaching, reasons expounded by Paul VI, and concludes that the Church "does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination."(3) To these fundamental reasons the document adds other theological reasons which illustrate the appropriateness of the divine provision, and it also shows clearly that Christ's way of acting did not proceed from sociological or cultural motives peculiar to his time. As Paul VI later explained: "The real reason is that, in giving the Church her fundamental constitution, her theological anthropology-thereafter always followed by the Church's Tradition- Christ established things in this way."(4)

In the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, I myself wrote in this regard: "In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner. In doing so, he exercised the same freedom with which, in all his behavior, he emphasized the dignity and the vocation of women, without conforming to the prevailing customs and to the traditions sanctioned by the legislation of the time."(5)

In fact the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles attest that this call was made in accordance with God's eternal plan; Christ chose those whom he willed (cf. Mk 3:13-14; Jn 6:70), and he did so in union with the Father, "through the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:2), after having spent the night in prayer (cf. Lk 6:12). Therefore, in granting admission to the ministerial priesthood, (6) the Church has always acknowledged as a perennial norm her Lord's way of acting in choosing the twelve men whom he made the foundation of his Church (cf. Rv 21:14). These men did not in fact receive only a function which could thereafter be exercised by any member of the Church; rather they were specifically and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself (cf. Mt 10:1, 7-8; 28:16-20; Mk 3:13-16; 16:14-15). The Apostles did the same when they chose fellow workers(7) who would succeed them in their ministry.(8) Also included in this choice were those who, throughout the time of the Church, would carry on the Apostles' mission of representing Christ the Lord and Redeemer.(9)

3. Furthermore, the fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe.

The presence and the role of women in the life and mission of the Church, although not linked to the ministerial priesthood, remain absolutely necessary and irreplaceable. As the Declaration *Inter Insigniores* points out, "the Church desires that Christian women should become fully aware of the greatness of their mission: today their role is of capital importance both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the true face of the Church."(10)

The New Testament and the whole history of the Church give ample evidence of the presence in the Church of women, true disciples, witnesses to Christ in the family and in society, as well as in total consecration to the service of God and of the Gospel. "By defending the dignity of women and their vocation, the Church has shown honor and gratitude for those women who-faithful to the Gospel-have shared in every age in the apostolic mission of the whole People of God.

They are the holy martyrs, virgins and mothers of families, who bravely bore witness to their faith and passed on the Church's faith and tradition by bringing up their children in the spirit of the Gospel."(11)

Moreover, it is to the holiness of the faithful that the hierarchical structure of the Church is totally ordered. For this reason, the Declaration Inter Insigniores recalls: "the only better gift, which can and must be desired, is love (cf. 1 Cor 12 and 13). The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers but the saints."(12)

4. Although the teaching that priestly ordination is to be reserved to men alone has been preserved by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the Magisterium in its more recent documents, at the present time in some places it is nonetheless considered still open to debate, or the Church's judgment that women are not to be admitted to ordination is considered to have a merely disciplinary force.

Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.

Invoking an abundance of divine assistance upon you, venerable brothers, and upon all the faithful, I impart my apostolic blessing.

From the Vatican, on May 22, the Solemnity of Pentecost, in the year 1994, the sixteenth of my Pontificate.

NOTES

1. Paul VI, Response to the Letter of His Grace the Most Reverend Dr. F.D. Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, concerning the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood (November 30, 1975); AAS 68 (1976), 599.
2. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration Inter Insigniores on the question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (October 15, 1976): AAS 69 (1977), 98-116.
3. Ibid., 100.
4. Paul VI, Address on the Role of Women in the Plan of Salvation (January 30, 1977): Insegnamenti, XV (1977), 111. Cf. Also John Paul II Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles laici (December 30, 1988), n. 51: AAS 81 (1989), 393-521; Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1577.
5. Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem (August 15, 1988), n. 26: AAS 80 (1988), 1715.
6. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium, n. 28 Decree Presbyterorum Ordinis, n. 2b.
7. Cf. 1 Tm 3:1-13; 2 Tm 1:6; Ti 1:5-9.
8. Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1577.
9. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, nn. 20, 21.
10. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration Inter Insigniores, n. 6: AAS 69 (1977), 115-116.
11. Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem, n. 27: AAS 80 (1988), 1719.
12. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration Inter Insigniores n. 6: AAS 69 (1977), 115.

John Paul II
Supreme Pontiff
Apostolic Constitution
Universi Dominici Gregis
On The Vacancy
Of The Apostolic See
And The Election
Of The Roman Pontiff

John Paul, Bishop
 Servant Of The Servants Of God
 For Perpetual Remembrance

The Shepherd of the Lord's whole flock is the Bishop of the Church of Rome, where the Blessed Apostle Peter, by sovereign disposition of divine Providence, offered to Christ the supreme witness of martyrdom by the shedding of his blood. It is therefore understandable that the lawful apostolic succession in this See, with which "because of its great pre-eminence every Church must agree",¹ has always been the object of particular attention.

Precisely for this reason, down the centuries the Supreme Pontiffs have deemed it their special duty, as well as their specific right, to establish fitting norms to regulate the orderly election of their Successor. Thus, also in more recent times, my Predecessors Saint Pius X,² Pius XI,³ Pius XII,⁴ John XXIII⁵ and lastly Paul VI,⁶ each with the intention of responding to the needs of the particular historical moment, issued wise and appropriate regulations in order to ensure the suitable preparation and orderly gathering of the electors charged, at the vacancy of the Apostolic See, with the important and weighty duty of electing the Roman Pontiff.

If I too now turn to this matter, it is certainly not because of any lack of esteem for those norms, for which I have great respect and which I intend for the most part to confirm, at least with regard to their substance and the basic principles which inspired them. What leads me to take this step is awareness of the Church's changed situation today and the need to take into consideration the general revision of Canon Law which took place, to the satisfaction of the whole Episcopate, with the publication and promulgation first of the Code of Canon Law and subsequently of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. In conformity with this revision, itself inspired by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, I then took up the reform of the Roman Curia in the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*.⁷ Furthermore, Canon 335 of the Code of Canon Law, restated in Canon 47 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, makes clear the need to issue and constantly update the specific laws regulating the canonical provision for the Roman See, when for any reason it becomes vacant.

While keeping in mind present-day requirements, I have been careful, in formulating the new discipline, not to depart in substance from the wise and venerable tradition already established.

It is in fact an indisputable principle that the Roman Pontiff has the right to define and adapt to changing times the manner of designating the person called to assume the Petrine succession in the Roman See. This regards, first of all, the body entrusted with providing for the election of the Roman Pontiff: based on a millennial practice sanctioned by specific canonical norms and confirmed by an explicit provision of the current Code of Canon Law (Canon 349), this body is made up of the College of Cardinals of Holy Roman Church. While it is indeed a doctrine of faith that the power of the Supreme Pontiff derives directly from Christ, whose earthly Vicar he is,⁸ it is also certain that this supreme power in the Church is granted to him "by means of lawful election accepted by him, together with episcopal consecration".⁹ A most serious duty is thus incumbent upon the body responsible for this election. Consequently the norms which regulate its activity need to be very precise and clear, so that the election itself will take place in a most worthy manner, as befits the office of utmost responsibility which the person elected will have to assume, by divine mandate, at the moment of his assent.

Confirming therefore the norm of the current Code of Canon Law (cf. Canon 349), which reflects the millennial practice of the Church, I once more affirm that the College of electors of the Supreme Pontiff is composed solely of the Cardinals of Holy Roman Church. In them one finds expressed in a remarkable synthesis the two aspects which characterize the figure and office of the Roman Pontiff: Roman, because identified with the Bishop of the Church in Rome and thus closely linked to the clergy of this City, represented by the Cardinals of the presbyteral and diaconal titles of Rome, and to the Cardinal Bishops of the suburbicarian Sees; Pontiff of the universal Church, because called to represent visibly the unseen Pastor who leads his whole flock to the pastures of eternal life. The universality of the Church is clearly expressed in the very composition of the College of Cardinals, whose members come from every continent.

In the present historical circumstances, the universality of the Church is sufficiently expressed by the College of one hundred and twenty electors, made up of Cardinals coming from all parts of the world and from very different cultures.

I therefore confirm that this is to be the maximum number of Cardinal electors, while at the same time indicating that it is in no way meant as a sign of less respect that the provision laid down by my predecessor Pope Paul VI has been retained, namely, that those Cardinals who celebrate their eightieth birthday before the day when the Apostolic See becomes vacant do not take part in the election.¹⁰ The reason for this provision is the desire not to add to the weight of such venerable age the further burden of responsibility for choosing the one who will have to lead Christ's flock in ways adapted to the needs of the times. This does not however mean that the Cardinals over eighty years of age cannot take part in the preparatory meetings of the Conclave, in conformity with the norms set forth below. During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, and especially during the election of the Supreme Pontiff, they in particular should lead the People of God assembled in the Patriarchal Basilicas of Rome and in other churches in the Dioceses throughout the world, supporting the work of the electors with fervent prayers and supplications to the Holy Spirit and imploring for them the light needed to make their choice before God alone and with concern only for the "salvation of souls, which in the Church must always be the supreme law".¹¹

It has been my wish to give particular attention to the age-old institution of the Conclave, the rules and procedures of which have been established and defined by the solemn ordinances of a number of my Predecessors. A careful historical examination confirms both the appropriateness of this institution, given the circumstances in which it originated and gradually took definitive shape, and its continued usefulness for the orderly, expeditious and proper functioning of the election itself, especially in times of tension and upheaval.

Precisely for this reason, while recognizing that theologians and canonists of all times agree that this institution is not of its nature necessary for the valid election of the Roman Pontiff, I confirm by this Constitution that the Conclave is to continue in its essential structure; at the same time, I have made some modifications in order to adapt its procedures to present-day circumstances. Specifically, I have considered it appropriate to decree that for the whole duration of the election the living-quarters of the Cardinal electors and of those called to assist in the orderly process of the election itself are to be located in suitable places within Vatican City State. Although small, the State is large enough to ensure within its walls, with the help of the appropriate measures indicated below, the seclusion and resulting concentration which an act so vital to the whole Church requires of the electors.

At the same time, in view of the sacredness of the act of election and thus the need for it to be carried out in an appropriate setting where, on the one hand, liturgical actions can be readily combined with juridical formalities, and where, on the other, the electors can more easily dispose themselves to accept the interior movements of the Holy Spirit, I decree that the election will continue to take place in the Sistine Chapel, where everything is conducive to an awareness of the presence of God, in whose sight each person will one day be judged.

I further confirm, by my apostolic authority, the duty of maintaining the strictest secrecy with regard to everything that directly or indirectly concerns the election process itself. Here too, though, I have wished to simplify the relative norms, reducing them to their essentials, in order to avoid confusion, doubts and even eventual problems of conscience on the part of those who have taken part in the election.

Finally, I have deemed it necessary to revise the form of the election itself in the light of the present-day needs of the Church and the usages of modern society. I have thus considered it fitting not to retain election by acclamation quasi ex inspiratione, judging that it is no longer an apt means of interpreting the thought of an electoral college so great in number and so diverse in origin. It also appeared necessary to eliminate election per compromissum, not only because of the difficulty of the procedure, evident from the unwieldy accumulation of rules issued in the past, but also because by its very nature it tends to lessen the responsibility of the individual electors who, in this case, would not be required to express their choice personally.

After careful reflection I have therefore decided that the only form by which the electors can manifest their vote in the election of the Roman Pontiff is by secret ballot, in accordance with the rules set forth below. This form offers the greatest guarantee of clarity, straightforwardness, simplicity, openness and, above all, an effective and fruitful participation on the part of the Cardinals who, individually and as a group, are called to make up the assembly which elects the Successor of Peter.

With these intentions, I promulgate the present Apostolic Constitution containing the norms which, when the Roman See becomes vacant, are to be strictly followed by the Cardinals whose right and duty it is to elect the Successor of Peter, the visible Head of the whole Church and the Servant of the servants of God.

PART ONE - THE VACANCY OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE

CHAPTER I

THE POWERS OF THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS DURING THE VACANCY OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE

1. During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, the College of Cardinals has no power or jurisdiction in matters which pertain to the Supreme Pontiff during his lifetime or in the exercise of his office; such matters are to be reserved completely and exclusively to the future Pope. I therefore declare null and void any act of power or jurisdiction

pertaining to the Roman Pontiff during his lifetime or in the exercise of his office which the College of Cardinals might see fit to exercise, beyond the limits expressly permitted in this Constitution.

2. During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, the government of the Church is entrusted to the College of Cardinals solely for the dispatch of ordinary business and of matters which cannot be postponed (cf. No. 6), and for the preparation of everything necessary for the election of the new Pope. This task must be carried out in the ways and within the limits set down by this Constitution: consequently, those matters are to be absolutely excluded which, whether by law or by practice, come under the power of the Roman Pontiff alone or concern the norms for the election of the new Pope laid down in the present Constitution.

3. I further establish that the College of Cardinals may make no dispositions whatsoever concerning the rights of the Apostolic See and of the Roman Church, much less allow any of these rights to lapse, either directly or indirectly, even though it be to resolve disputes or to prosecute actions perpetrated against these same rights after the death or valid resignation of the Pope.¹² All the Cardinals are obliged to defend these rights.

4. During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, laws issued by the Roman Pontiffs can in no way be corrected or modified, nor can anything be added or subtracted, nor a dispensation be given even from a part of them, especially with regard to the procedures governing the election of the Supreme Pontiff. Indeed, should anything be done or even attempted against this prescription, by my supreme authority I declare it null and void.

5. Should doubts arise concerning the prescriptions contained in this Constitution, or concerning the manner of putting them into effect, I decree that all power of issuing a judgment in this regard belongs to the College of Cardinals, to which I grant the faculty of interpreting doubtful or controverted points. I also establish that should it be necessary to discuss these or other similar questions, except the act of election, it suffices that the majority of the Cardinals present should concur in the same opinion.

6. In the same way, should there be a problem which, in the view of the majority of the assembled Cardinals, cannot be postponed until another time, the College of Cardinals may act according to the majority opinion.

CHAPTER II

THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE CARDINALS IN PREPARATION FOR THE ELECTION OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF

7. While the See is vacant, there are two kinds of Congregations of the Cardinals: General Congregations, which include the whole College and are held before the beginning of the election, and Particular Congregations. All the Cardinals who are not legitimately impeded must attend the General Congregations, once they have been informed of the vacancy of the Apostolic See. Cardinals who, by virtue of No. 33 of this Constitution, do not enjoy the right of electing the Pope are granted the faculty of not attending these General Congregations, should they prefer.

The Particular Congregation is made up of the Cardinal Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church and three Cardinals, one from each Order, chosen by lot from among the Cardinal electors already present in Rome. The office of these Cardinals, called Assistants, ceases at the conclusion of the third full day, and their place is taken by others, also chosen by lot and having the same term of office, also after the election has begun.

During the time of the election, more important matters are, if necessary, dealt with by the assembly of the Cardinal electors, while ordinary affairs continue to be dealt with by the Particular Congregation of Cardinals. In the General and Particular Congregations, during the vacancy of the Apostolic See, the Cardinals are to wear the usual black cassock with piping and the red sash, with skull-cap, pectoral cross and ring.

8. The Particular Congregations are to deal only with questions of lesser importance which arise on a daily basis or from time to time. But should there arise more serious questions deserving fuller examination, these must be submitted to the General Congregation. Moreover, anything decided, resolved or refused in one Particular Congregation cannot be revoked, altered or granted in another; the right to do this belongs solely to the General Congregation, and by a majority vote.

9. The General Congregations of Cardinals are to be held in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican or, if circumstances demand it, in another place judged more suitable by the Cardinals. At these Congregations the Dean of the College presides or, should he be absent or lawfully impeded, the Subdean. If one or both of these, in accordance with No. 33 of this Constitution, no longer enjoy the right of electing the Pope, the assembly of the Cardinal electors will be presided over by the senior Cardinal elector, according to the customary order of precedence.

10. Votes in the Congregations of Cardinals, when more important matters are concerned, are not to be expressed by word of mouth but in a way which ensures secrecy.

11. The General Congregations preceding the beginning of the election, which are therefore called "preparatory", are to be held daily, beginning on the day which shall be fixed by the Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church and the senior Cardinal of each of the three Orders among the electors, and including the days on which the funeral rites for the deceased Pope are celebrated. In this way the Cardinal Camerlengo can hear the opinion of the College and communicate whatever is considered necessary or appropriate, while the individual Cardinals can express their views on possible problems, ask for explanations in case of doubt and make suggestions.

12. In the first General Congregations provision is to be made for each Cardinal to have available a copy of this Constitution and at the same time to have an opportunity to raise questions about the meaning and the implementation of its norms. The part of the present Constitution regarding the vacancy of the Apostolic See should also be read aloud. At the same time the Cardinals present are to swear an oath to observe the prescriptions contained herein and to maintain secrecy. This oath, which shall also be taken by Cardinals who arrive late and subsequently take part in these Congregations, is to be read aloud by the Cardinal Dean or by whoever else presides over the College by virtue of No. 9 of this Constitution, in the presence of the other Cardinals and according to the following formula: We, the Cardinals of Holy Roman Church, of the Order of Bishops, of Priests and of Deacons, promise, pledge and swear, as a body and individually, to observe exactly and faithfully all the norms contained in the Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, and to maintain rigorous secrecy with regard to all matters in any way related to the election of the Roman Pontiff or those which, by their very nature, during the vacancy of the Apostolic See, call for the same secrecy.

Next, each Cardinal shall add: And I, N. Cardinal N., so promise, pledge and swear. And, placing his hand on the Gospels, he will add: So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I now touch with my hand.

13. In one of the Congregations immediately following, the Cardinals, on the basis of a prearranged agenda, shall take the more urgent decisions regarding the beginning of the election. In other words:

- a) they shall fix the day, hour and manner in which the body of the deceased Pope shall be brought to the Vatican Basilica in order to be exposed for the homage of the faithful;
- b) they shall make all necessary arrangements for the funeral rites of the deceased Pope, to be celebrated for nine consecutive days, determining when they are to begin, in such a way that burial will take place, except for special reasons, between the fourth and sixth day after death;
- c) they shall see to it that the Commission, made up of the Cardinal Camerlengo and the Cardinals who had formerly held the offices of Secretary of State and President of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State, ensures that the rooms of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* are made ready for the suitable lodging of the Cardinal electors, that rooms suitable for those persons mentioned in No. 46 of the present Constitution are also made ready, and that all necessary arrangements are made to prepare the Sistine Chapel so that the election process can be carried out in a smooth and orderly manner and with maximum discretion, according to the provisions laid down in this Constitution;
- d) they shall entrust to two ecclesiastics known for their sound doctrine, wisdom and moral authority the task of presenting to the Cardinals two well-prepared meditations on the problems facing the Church at the time and on the need for careful discernment in choosing the new Pope; at the same time, without prejudice to the provisions of No. 52 of this Constitution, they shall fix the day and the time when the first of these meditations is to be given;
- e) they shall approve - at the proposal of the Administration of the Apostolic See or, within its competence, of the *Governatorato* of Vatican City State - expenses incurred from the death of the Pope until the election of his successor;
- f) they shall read any documents left by the deceased Pope for the College of Cardinals;
- g) they shall arrange for the destruction of the Fisherman's Ring and of the lead seal with which Apostolic Letters are despatched;
- h) they shall make provision for the assignment of rooms by lot to the Cardinal electors;
- i) they shall set the day and hour of the beginning of the voting process.

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING CERTAIN OFFICES DURING THE VACANCY OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE

14. According to the provisions of Article 6 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, 13 at the death of the Pope all the heads of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia - the Cardinal Secretary of State and the Cardinal Prefects, the Archbishop Presidents, together with the members of those Dicasteries - cease to exercise their office. An exception is made for the Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church and the Major Penitentiary, who continue to exercise their ordinary functions, submitting to the College of Cardinals matters that would have had to be referred to the Supreme Pontiff.

Likewise, in conformity with the Apostolic Constitution *Vicariae Potestatis* (No. 2 § 1), 14 the Cardinal Vicar General for the Diocese of Rome continues in office during the vacancy of the Apostolic See, as does the Cardinal Archpriest of the Vatican Basilica and Vicar General for Vatican City for his jurisdiction.

15. Should the offices of Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church or of Major Penitentiary be vacant at the time of the Pope's death, or should they become vacant before the election of his successor, the College of Cardinals shall as soon as possible elect the Cardinal, or Cardinals as the case may be, who shall hold these offices until the election of the new Pope. In each of the two cases mentioned, election takes place by a secret vote of all the Cardinal electors present, with the use of ballots distributed and collected by the Masters of Ceremonies. The ballots are then opened in the presence of the Camerlengo and of the three Cardinal Assistants, if it is a matter of electing the Major Penitentiary; if it is a matter of electing the Camerlengo, they are opened in the presence of the said three Cardinals and of the Secretary of the College of Cardinals. Whoever receives the greatest number of votes shall be elected and shall ipso facto enjoy all the relevant faculties. In the case of an equal number of votes, the Cardinal belonging to the higher Order or, if both are in the same Order, the one first created a Cardinal, shall be appointed. Until the Camerlengo is elected, his functions are

carried out by the Dean of the College or, if he is absent or lawfully impeded, by the Subdean or by the senior Cardinal according to the usual order of precedence, in conformity with No. 9 of this Constitution, who can without delay take the decisions that circumstances dictate.

16. If during the vacancy of the Apostolic See the Vicar General for the Diocese of Rome should die, the Vicegerent in office at the time shall also exercise the office proper to the Cardinal Vicar in addition to the ordinary vicarious jurisdiction which he already holds.¹⁵ Should there not be a Vicegerent, the Auxiliary Bishop who is senior by appointment will carry out his functions.

17. As soon as he is informed of the death of the Supreme Pontiff, the Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church must officially ascertain the Pope's death, in the presence of the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations, of the Cleric Prelates of the Apostolic Camera and of the Secretary and Chancellor of the same; the latter shall draw up the official death certificate. The Camerlengo must also place seals on the Pope's study and bedroom, making provision that the personnel who ordinarily reside in the private apartment can remain there until after the burial of the Pope, at which time the entire papal apartment will be sealed; he must notify the Cardinal Vicar for Rome of the Pope's death, whereupon the latter shall inform the People of Rome by a special announcement; he shall notify the Cardinal Archpriest of the Vatican Basilica; he shall take possession of the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican and, either in person or through a delegate, of the Palaces of the Lateran and of Castel Gandolfo, and exercise custody and administration of the same; he shall determine, after consulting the heads of the three Orders of Cardinals, all matters concerning the Pope's burial, unless during his lifetime the latter had made known his wishes in this regard; and he shall deal, in the name of and with the consent of the College of Cardinals, with all matters that circumstances suggest for safeguarding the rights of the Apostolic See and for its proper administration. During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, the Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church has the duty of safeguarding and administering the goods and temporal rights of the Holy See, with the help of the three Cardinal Assistants, having sought the views of the College of Cardinals, once only for less important matters, and on each occasion when more serious matters arise.

18. The Cardinal Major Penitentiary and his Officials, during the vacancy of the Apostolic See, can carry out the duties laid down by my Predecessor Pius XI in the Apostolic Constitution *Quae Divinitus* of 25 March 1935, 16 and by myself in the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*.¹⁷

19. The Dean of the College of Cardinals, for his part, as soon as he has been informed of the Pope's death by the Cardinal Camerlengo or the Prefect of the Papal Household, shall inform all the Cardinals and convoke them for the Congregations of the College. He shall also communicate news of the Pope's death to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See and to the Heads of the respective Nations.

20. During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, the Substitute of the Secretariat of State, the Secretary for Relations with States and the Secretaries of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia remain in charge of their respective offices, and are responsible to the College of Cardinals.

21. In the same way, the office and attendant powers of Papal Representatives do not lapse.

22. The Almoner of His Holiness will also continue to carry out works of charity in accordance with the criteria employed during the Pope's lifetime. He will be dependent upon the College of Cardinals until the election of the new Pope.

23. During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, all the civil power of the Supreme Pontiff concerning the government of Vatican City State belongs to the College of Cardinals, which however will be unable to issue decrees except in cases of urgent necessity and solely for the time in which the Holy See is vacant. Such decrees will be valid for the future only if the new Pope confirms them.

CHAPTER IV

FACULTIES OF THE DICASTERIES OF THE ROMAN CURIA DURING THE VACANCY OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE

24. During the period of vacancy, the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, with the exception of those mentioned in No. 26 of this Constitution, have no faculty in matters which, *Sede plena*, they can only deal with or carry out *facto verbo cum Sanctissimo* or *ex Audientia Sanctissimi* or *vigore specialium et extraordinarium facultatum* which the Roman Pontiff is accustomed to grant to the Prefects, Presidents or Secretaries of those Dicasteries.

25. The ordinary faculties proper to each Dicastery do not, however, cease at the death of the Pope. Nevertheless, I decree that the Dicasteries are only to make use of these faculties for the granting of favours of lesser importance, while more serious or controverted matters, if they can be postponed, shall be exclusively reserved to the future Pope. If such matters admit of no delay (as for example in the case of dispensations which the Supreme Pontiff usually grants in *articulo mortis*), they can be entrusted by the College of Cardinals to the Cardinal who was Prefect until the Pope's death, or to the Archbishop who was then President, and to the other Cardinals of the same Dicastery, to whose examination the deceased Supreme Pontiff would probably have entrusted them. In such circumstances, they will be able to decide *per modum provisionis*, until the election of the Pope, what they judge to be most fitting and appropriate for the preservation and defence of ecclesiastical rights and traditions.

26. The Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura and the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, during the vacancy of the Holy See, continue to deal with cases in accordance with their proper laws, with due regard for the prescriptions of Article 18, paragraphs 1 and 3 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*.18

CHAPTER V

THE FUNERAL RITES OF THE ROMAN PONTIFF

27. After the death of the Roman Pontiff, the Cardinals will celebrate the funeral rites for the repose of his soul for nine consecutive days, in accordance with the *Ordo Exsequiarum Romani Pontificis*, the norms of which, together with those of the *Ordo Rituum Conclavis*, they are to observe faithfully.

28. If burial takes place in the Vatican Basilica, the relevant official document is drawn up by the Notary of the Chapter of the Basilica or by the Canon Archivist. Subsequently, a delegate of the Cardinal Camerlengo and a delegate of the Prefect of the Papal Household shall separately draw up documents certifying that burial has taken place. The former shall do so in the presence of the members of the Apostolic Camera and the latter in the presence of the Prefect of the Papal Household.

29. If the Roman Pontiff should die outside Rome, it is the task of the College of Cardinals to make all necessary arrangements for the dignified and reverent transfer of the body to the Basilica of Saint Peter's in the Vatican.

30. No one is permitted to use any means whatsoever in order to photograph or film the Supreme Pontiff either on his sickbed or after death, or to record his words for subsequent reproduction. If after the Pope's death anyone should wish to take photographs of him for documentary purposes, he must ask permission from the Cardinal Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church, who will not however permit the taking of photographs of the Supreme Pontiff except attired in pontifical vestments.

31. After the burial of the Supreme Pontiff and during the election of the new Pope, no part of the private apartment of the Supreme Pontiff is to be lived in.

32. If the deceased Supreme Pontiff has made a will concerning his belongings, bequeathing letters and private documents, and has named an executor thereof, it is the responsibility of the latter to determine and execute, in accordance with the mandate received from the testator, matters concerning the private property and writings of the deceased Pope. The executor will give an account of his activities only to the new Supreme Pontiff.

PART TWO - THE ELECTION OF THE ROMAN PONTIFF

CHAPTER I

THE ELECTORS OF THE ROMAN PONTIFF

33. The right to elect the Roman Pontiff belongs exclusively to the Cardinals of Holy Roman Church, with the exception of those who have reached their eightieth birthday before the day of the Roman Pontiff's death or the day when the Apostolic See becomes vacant. The maximum number of Cardinal electors must not exceed one hundred and twenty. The right of active election by any other ecclesiastical dignitary or the intervention of any lay power of whatsoever grade or order is absolutely excluded.

34. If the Apostolic See should become vacant during the celebration of an Ecumenical Council or of a Synod of Bishops being held in Rome or in any other place in the world, the election of the new Pope is to be carried out solely and exclusively by the Cardinal electors indicated in No. 33, and not by the Council or the Synod of Bishops. For this reason I declare null and void acts which would in any way temerarily presume to modify the regulations concerning the election or the college of electors. Moreover, in confirmation of the provisions of Canons 340 and 347 § 2 of the Code of Canon Law and of Canon 53 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches in this regard, a Council or Synod of Bishops, at whatever point they have reached, must be considered immediately suspended *ipso iure*, once notification is received of the vacancy of the Apostolic See. Therefore without any delay all meetings, congregations or sessions must be interrupted, and the preparation of any decrees or canons, together with the promulgation of those already confirmed, must be suspended, under pain of nullity of the same. Neither the Council nor the Synod can continue for any reason, even though it be most serious or worthy of special mention, until the new Pope, canonically elected, orders their resumption or continuation.

35. No Cardinal elector can be excluded from active or passive voice in the election of the Supreme Pontiff, for any reason or pretext, with due regard for the provisions of No. 40 of this Constitution.

36. A Cardinal of Holy Roman Church who has been created and published before the College of Cardinals thereby has the right to elect the Pope, in accordance with the norm of No. 33 of the present Constitution, even if he has not yet received the red hat or the ring, or sworn the oath. On the other hand, Cardinals who have been canonically deposed or who with the consent of the Roman Pontiff have renounced the cardinal-ate do not have this right. Moreover, during the period of vacancy the College of Cardinals cannot readmit or rehabilitate them.

37. I furthermore decree that, from the moment when the Apostolic See is lawfully vacant, the Cardinal electors who are present must wait fifteen full days for those who are absent; the College of Cardinals is also granted the faculty to defer, for serious reasons, the beginning of the election for a few days more. But when a maximum of twenty days have elapsed from the beginning of the vacancy of the See, all the Cardinal electors present are obliged to proceed to the election.

38. All the Cardinal electors, convoked for the election of the new Pope by the Cardinal Dean, or by another Cardinal in his name, are required, in virtue of holy obedience, to obey the announcement of convocation and to proceed to the place designated for this purpose, unless they are hindered by sickness or by some other grave impediment, which however must be recognized as such by the College of Cardinals.

39. However, should any Cardinal electors arrive *re integra*, that is, before the new Pastor of the Church has been elected, they shall be allowed to take part in the election at the stage which it has reached.

40. If a Cardinal with the right to vote should refuse to enter Vatican City in order to take part in the election, or subsequently, once the election has begun, should refuse to remain in order to discharge his office, without manifest reason of illness attested to under oath by doctors and confirmed by the majority of the electors, the other Cardinals shall proceed freely with the election, without waiting for him or readmitting him. If on the other hand a Cardinal elector is constrained to leave Vatican City because of illness, the election can proceed without asking for his vote; if however he desires to return to the place of the election, once his health is restored or even before, he must be readmitted.

Furthermore, if a Cardinal elector leaves Vatican City for some grave reason, acknowledged as such by the majority of the electors, he can return, in order once again to take part in the election.

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE OF THE ELECTION AND THOSE ADMITTED TO IT BY REASON OF THEIR OFFICE

41. The Conclave for the election of the Supreme Pontiff shall take place within the territory of Vatican City, in determined areas and buildings, closed to unauthorized persons in such a way as to ensure suitable accommodation for the Cardinal electors and all those legitimately called to cooperate in the orderly functioning of the election.

42. By the time fixed for the beginning of the election of the Supreme Pontiff, all the Cardinal electors must have been assigned and must have taken up suitable lodging in the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, recently built in Vatican City.

If reasons of health, previously confirmed by the appropriate Congregation of Cardinals, require that a Cardinal elector should have a nurse in attendance, even during the period of the election, arrangements must be made to provide suitable accommodation for the latter.

43. From the beginning of the electoral process until the public announcement that the election of the Supreme Pontiff has taken place, or in any case until the new Pope so disposes, the rooms of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, and in particular the Sistine Chapel and the areas reserved for liturgical celebrations are to be closed to unauthorized persons, by the authority of the Cardinal Camerlengo and with the outside assistance of the Substitute of the Secretariat of State, in accordance with the provisions set forth in the following Numbers.

During this period, the entire territory of Vatican City and the ordinary activity of the offices located therein shall be regulated in a way which permits the election of the Supreme Pontiff to be carried out with due privacy and freedom. In particular, provision shall be made to ensure that no one approaches the Cardinal electors while they are being transported from the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* to the Apostolic Vatican Palace.

44. The Cardinal electors, from the beginning of the election until its conclusion and the public announcement of its outcome, are not to communicate - whether by writing, by telephone or by any other means of communication - with persons outside the area where the election is taking place, except in cases of proven and urgent necessity, duly acknowledged by the Particular Congregation mentioned in No. 7. It is also the competence of the Particular Congregation to recognize the necessity and urgency of any communication with their respective offices on the part of the Cardinal Major Penitentiary, the Cardinal Vicar General for the Diocese of Rome and the Cardinal Archpriest of the Vatican Basilica.

45. Anyone not indicated in No. 46 below and who, while legitimately present in Vatican City in accordance with No. 43 of this Constitution, should happen to meet one of the Cardinal electors during the time of the election, is absolutely forbidden to engage in conversation of any sort, by whatever means and for whatever reason, with that Cardinal.

46. In order to meet the personal and official needs connected with the election process, the following individuals must be available and therefore properly lodged in suitable areas within the confines mentioned in No. 43 of this Constitution: the Secretary of the College of Cardinals, who acts as Secretary of the electoral assembly; the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations with two Masters of Ceremonies and two Religious attached to the Papal Sacristy; and an ecclesiastic chosen by the Cardinal Dean or by the Cardinal taking his place, in order to assist him in his duties.

There must also be available a number of priests from the regular clergy for hearing confessions in the different languages, and two medical doctors for possible emergencies.

Appropriate provisions must also be made beforehand for a suitable number of persons to be available for preparing and serving meals and for housekeeping.

All the persons indicated here must receive prior approval from the Cardinal Camerlengo and the three Cardinal Assistants.

47. All the persons listed in No. 46 of this Constitution who in any way or at any time should come to learn anything from any source, directly or indirectly, regarding the election process, and in particular regarding the voting which took place in the election itself, are obliged to maintain strict secrecy with all persons extraneous to the College of Cardinal electors: accordingly, before the election begins, they shall take an oath in the form and using the formula indicated in No. 48.

48. At a suitable time before the beginning of the election, the persons indicated in No. 46 of this Constitution, having been duly warned about the meaning and extent of the oath which they are to take, shall, in the presence of the Cardinal Camerlengo or another Cardinal delegated by him, and of two Masters of Ceremonies, swear and sign the oath according to the following formula:

I, N.N., promise and swear that, unless I should receive a special faculty given expressly by the newly-elected Pontiff or by his successors, I will observe absolute and perpetual secrecy with all who are not part of the College of Cardinal electors concerning all matters directly or indirectly related to the ballots cast and their scrutiny for the election of the Supreme Pontiff.

I likewise promise and swear to refrain from using any audio or video equipment capable of recording anything which takes place during the period of the election within Vatican City, and in particular anything which in any way, directly or indirectly, is related to the process of the election itself. I declare that I take this oath fully aware that an infraction thereof will make me subject to the spiritual and canonical penalties which the future Supreme Pontiff will see fit to adopt, in accordance with Canon 1399 of the Code of Canon Law.

So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I touch with my hand.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING OF THE ELECTION

49. When the funeral rites for the deceased Pope have been celebrated according to the prescribed ritual, and everything necessary for the regular functioning of the election has been prepared, on the appointed day - and thus on the fifteenth day after the death of the Pope or, in conformity with the provisions of No. 37 of the present Constitution, not later than the twentieth - the Cardinal electors shall meet in the Basilica of Saint Peter's in the Vatican, or elsewhere, should circumstances warrant it, in order to take part in a solemn Eucharistic celebration with the Votive Mass Pro Eligendo Papa.¹⁹ This celebration should preferably take place at a suitable hour in the morning, so that in the afternoon the prescriptions of the following Numbers of this Constitution can be carried out.

50. From the Pauline Chapel of the Apostolic Palace, where they will assemble at a suitable hour in the afternoon, the Cardinal electors, in choir dress, and invoking the assistance of the Holy Spirit with the chant of the Veni Creator, will solemnly process to the Sistine Chapel of the Apostolic Palace, where the election will be held.

51. Retaining the essential elements of the Conclave, but modifying some less important elements which, because of changed circumstances, no longer serve their original purpose, I establish and decree by the present Constitution that the election of the Supreme Pontiff, in conformity with the prescriptions contained in the following Numbers, is to take place exclusively in the Sistine Chapel of the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican. The Sistine Chapel is therefore to remain an absolutely enclosed area until the conclusion of the election, so that total secrecy may be ensured with regard to everything said or done there in any way pertaining, directly or indirectly, to the election of the Supreme Pontiff.

It will therefore be the responsibility of the College of Cardinals, operating under the authority and responsibility of the Camerlengo, assisted by the Particular Congregation mentioned in No. 7 of the present Constitution, and with the outside assistance of the Substitute of the Secretariat of State, to make all prior arrangements for the interior of the Sistine Chapel and adjacent areas to be prepared, so that the orderly election and its privacy will be ensured.

In a special way, careful and stringent checks must be made, with the help of trustworthy individuals of proven technical ability, in order to ensure that no audiovisual equipment has been secretly installed in these areas for recording and transmission to the outside.

52. When the Cardinal electors have arrived in the Sistine Chapel, in accordance with the provisions of No. 50, and still in the presence of those who took part in the solemn procession, they shall take the oath, reading aloud the formula indicated in No. 53.

The Cardinal Dean, or the Cardinal who has precedence by order and seniority in accordance with the provisions of No. 9 of the present Constitution, will read the formula aloud; then each of the Cardinal electors, touching the Holy Gospels, will read and recite the formula, as indicated in the following Number.

When the last of the Cardinal electors has taken the oath, the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations will give the order *Extra omnes*, and all those not taking part in the Conclave must leave the Sistine Chapel.

The only ones to remain in the Chapel are the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations and the ecclesiastic previously chosen to preach to the Cardinal electors the second meditation, mentioned in No. 13 d), concerning the grave duty incumbent on them and thus on the need to act with right intention for the good of the Universal Church, *solum Deum prae oculis habentes*.

53. In conformity with the provisions of No. 52, the Cardinal Dean or the Cardinal who has precedence by order and seniority, will read aloud the following formula of the oath:

We, the Cardinal electors present in this election of the Supreme Pontiff promise, pledge and swear, as individuals and as a group, to observe faithfully and scrupulously the prescriptions contained in the Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, *Universi Dominici Gregis*, published on 22 February 1996. We likewise promise, pledge and swear that whichever of us by divine disposition is elected Roman Pontiff will commit himself faithfully to carrying out the *munus Petrinum* of Pastor of the Universal Church and will not fail to affirm and defend strenuously the spiritual and temporal rights and the liberty of the Holy See. In a particular way, we promise and swear to observe with the greatest fidelity and with all persons, clerical or lay, secrecy regarding everything that in any way relates to the election of the Roman Pontiff and regarding what occurs in the place of the election, directly or indirectly related to the results of the voting; we promise and swear not to break this secret in any way, either during or after the election of the new Pontiff, unless explicit authorization is granted by the same Pontiff; and never to lend support or favour to any interference, opposition or any other form of intervention, whereby secular authorities of whatever order and degree or any group of people or individuals might wish to intervene in the election of the Roman Pontiff.

Each of the Cardinal electors, according to the order of precedence, will then take the oath according to the following formula:

And I, N. Cardinal N., do so promise, pledge and swear. Placing his hand on the Gospels, he will add: So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I touch with my hand.

54. When the ecclesiastic who gives the meditation has concluded, he leaves the Sistine Chapel together with the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations. The Cardinal electors, after reciting the prayers found in the relative *Ordo*, listen to the Cardinal Dean (or the one taking his place), who begins by asking the College of electors whether the election can begin, or whether there still remain doubts which need to be clarified concerning the norms and procedures laid down in this Constitution. It is not however permitted, even if the electors are unanimously agreed, to modify or replace any of the norms and procedures which are a substantial part of the election process, under penalty of the nullity of the same deliberation.

If, in the judgment of the majority of the electors, there is nothing to prevent the election process from beginning, it shall start immediately, in accordance with the procedures indicated in this Constitution.

CHAPTER IV

OBSERVANCE OF SECRECY ON ALL MATTERS CONCERNING THE ELECTION

55. The Cardinal Camerlengo and the three Cardinal Assistants *pro tempore* are obliged to be especially vigilant in ensuring that there is absolutely no violation of secrecy with regard to the events occurring in the Sistine Chapel, where the voting takes place, and in the adjacent areas, before, as well as during and after the voting.

In particular, relying upon the expertise of two trustworthy technicians, they shall make every effort to preserve that secrecy by ensuring that no audiovisual equipment for recording or transmitting has been installed by anyone in the areas mentioned, and particularly in the Sistine Chapel itself, where the acts of the election are carried out.

Should any infraction whatsoever of this norm occur and be discovered, those responsible should know that they will be subject to grave penalties according to the judgment of the future Pope.

56. For the whole duration of the election, the Cardinal electors are required to refrain from written correspondence and from all conversations, including those by telephone or radio, with persons who have not been duly admitted to the buildings set aside for their use.

Such conversations shall be permitted only for the most grave and urgent reasons, confirmed by the Particular Congregation of Cardinals mentioned in No. 7.

It shall therefore be the duty of the Cardinal electors to make necessary arrangements, before the beginning of the election, for the handling of all non-deferrable official or personal business, so that there will be no need for conversations of this sort to take place.

57. The Cardinal electors are likewise to refrain from receiving or sending messages of any kind outside Vatican City; naturally it is prohibited for any person legitimately present in Vatican City to deliver such messages. It is specifically

prohibited to the Cardinal electors, for the entire duration of the election, to receive newspapers or periodicals of any sort, to listen to the radio or to watch television.

58. Those who, in accordance with the prescriptions of No. 46 of the present Constitution, carry out any functions associated with the election, and who directly or indirectly could in any way violate secrecy - whether by words or writing, by signs or in any other way - are absolutely obliged to avoid this, lest they incur the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae* reserved to the Apostolic See.

59. In particular, the Cardinal electors are forbidden to reveal to any other person, directly or indirectly, information about the voting and about matters discussed or decided concerning the election of the Pope in the meetings of Cardinals, both before and during the time of the election. This obligation of secrecy also applies to the Cardinals who are not electors but who take part in the General Congregations in accordance with No. 7 of the present Constitution.

60. I further order the Cardinal electors, *graviter onerata ipsorum conscientia*, to maintain secrecy concerning these matters also after the election of the new Pope has taken place, and I remind them that it is not licit to break the secret in any way unless a special and explicit permission has been granted by the Pope himself.

61. Finally, in order that the Cardinal electors may be protected from the indiscretion of others and from possible threats to their independence of judgment and freedom of decision, I absolutely forbid the introduction into the place of the election, under whatsoever pretext, or the use, should they have been introduced, of technical instruments of any kind for the recording, reproducing or transmitting of sound, visual images or writing.

CHAPTER V

THE ELECTION PROCEDURE

62. Since the forms of election known as *per acclamationem seu inspirationem* and *per compromissum* are abolished, the form of electing the Roman Pontiff shall henceforth be *per scrutinium* alone.

I therefore decree that for the valid election of the Roman Pontiff two thirds of the votes are required, calculated on the basis of the total number of electors present.

Should it be impossible to divide the number of Cardinals present into three equal parts, for the validity of the election of the Supreme Pontiff one additional vote is required.

63. The election is to begin immediately after the provisions of No. 54 of the present Constitution have been duly carried out.

Should the election begin on the afternoon of the first day, only one ballot is to be held; then, on the following days, if no one was elected on the first ballot, two ballots shall be held in the morning and two in the afternoon. The voting is to begin at a time which shall have been determined earlier, either in the preparatory Congregations or during the election period, but in accordance with the procedures laid down in Nos. 64ff of the present Constitution.

64. The voting process is carried out in three phases. The first phase, which can be called the pre-scrutiny, comprises: 1) the preparation and distribution of the ballot papers by the Masters of Ceremonies, who give at least two or three to each Cardinal elector; 2) the drawing by lot, from among all the Cardinal electors, of three Scrutineers, of three persons charged with collecting the votes of the sick, called for the sake of *brevity Infirmarii*, and of three Revisers; this drawing is carried out in public by the junior Cardinal Deacon, who draws out nine names, one after another, of those who shall carry out these tasks; 3) if, in the drawing of lots for the Scrutineers, *Infirmarii* and Revisers, there should come out the names of Cardinal electors who because of infirmity or other reasons are unable to carry out these tasks, the names of others who are not impeded are to be drawn in their place. The first three drawn will act as Scrutineers, the second three as *Infirmarii* and the last three as Revisers.

65. For this phase of the voting process the following norms must be observed: 1) the ballot paper must be rectangular in shape and must bear in the upper half, in print if possible, the words *Eligo in Summum Pontificem*; on the lower half there must be a space left for writing the name of the person chosen; thus the ballot is made in such a way that it can be folded in two; 2) the completion of the ballot must be done in secret by each Cardinal elector, who will write down legibly, as far as possible in handwriting that cannot be identified as his, the name of the person he chooses, taking care not to write other names as well, since this would make the ballot null; he will then fold the ballot twice; 3) during the voting, the Cardinal electors are to remain alone in the Sistine Chapel; therefore, immediately after the distribution of the ballots and before the electors begin to write, the Secretary of the College of Cardinals, the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations and the Masters of Ceremonies must leave the Chapel. After they have left, the junior Cardinal Deacon shall close the door, opening and closing it again each time this is necessary, as for example when the *Infirmarii* go to collect the votes of the sick and when they return to the Chapel.

66. The second phase, the scrutiny proper, comprises: 1) the placing of the ballots in the appropriate receptacle; 2) the mixing and counting of the ballots; 3) the opening of the votes. Each Cardinal elector, in order of precedence, having completed and folded his ballot, holds it up so that it can be seen and carries it to the altar, at which the Scrutineers stand and upon which there is placed a receptacle, covered by a plate, for receiving the ballots. Having reached the altar, the Cardinal elector says aloud the words of the following oath: I call as my witness Christ the Lord who will be

my judge, that my vote is given to the one who before God I think should be elected. He then places the ballot on the plate, with which he drops it into the receptacle. Having done this, he bows to the altar and returns to his place.

If any of the Cardinal electors present in the Chapel is unable to go to the altar because of infirmity, the last of the Scrutineers goes to him. The infirm elector, having pronounced the above oath, hands the folded ballot to the Scrutineer, who carries it in full view to the altar and omitting the oath, places it on the plate, with which he drops it into the receptacle.

67. If there are Cardinal electors who are sick and confined to their rooms, referred to in Nos. 41ff of this Constitution, the three Infirmarii go to them with a box which has an opening in the top through which a folded ballot can be inserted. Before giving the box to the Infirmarii, the Scrutineers open it publicly, so that the other electors can see that it is empty; they are then to lock it and place the key on the altar. The Infirmarii, taking the locked box and a sufficient number of ballot papers on a small tray, then go, duly accompanied, to the Domus Sanctae Marthae to each sick elector, who takes a ballot, writes his vote in secret, folds the ballot and, after taking the above-mentioned oath, puts it through the opening in the box. If any of the electors who are sick is unable to write, one of the three Infirmarii or another Cardinal elector chosen by the sick man, having taken an oath before the Infirmarii concerning the observance of secrecy, carries out the above procedure. The Infirmarii then take the box back into the Chapel, where it shall be opened by the Scrutineers after the Cardinals present have cast their votes. The Scrutineers then count the ballots in the box and, having ascertained that their number corresponds to the number of those who are sick, place them one by one on the plate and then drop them all together into the receptacle. In order not to prolong the voting process unduly, the Infirmarii may complete their own ballots and place them in the receptacle immediately after the senior Cardinal, and then go to collect the votes of the sick in the manner indicated above while the other electors are casting their votes.

68. After all the ballots of the Cardinal electors have been placed in the receptacle, the first Scrutineer shakes it several times in order to mix them, and immediately afterwards the last Scrutineer proceeds to count them, picking them out of the urn in full view and placing them in another empty receptacle previously prepared for this purpose. If the number of ballots does not correspond to the number of electors, the ballots must all be burned and a second vote taken at once; if however their number does correspond to the number of electors, the opening of the ballots then takes place in the following manner.

69. The Scrutineers sit at a table placed in front of the altar. The first of them takes a ballot, unfolds it, notes the name of the person chosen and passes the ballot to the second Scrutineer, who in his turn notes the name of the person chosen and passes the ballot to the third, who reads it out in a loud and clear voice, so that all the electors present can record the vote on a sheet of paper prepared for that purpose. He himself writes down the name read from the ballot. If during the opening of the ballots the Scrutineers should discover two ballots folded in such a way that they appear to have been completed by one elector, if these ballots bear the same name they are counted as one vote; if however they bear two different names, neither vote will be valid; however, in neither of the two cases is the voting session annulled.

When all the ballots have been opened, the Scrutineers add up the sum of the votes obtained by the different names and write them down on a separate sheet of paper. The last Scrutineer, as he reads out the individual ballots, pierces each one with a needle through the word *Eligo* and places it on a thread, so that the ballots can be more securely preserved. After the names have been read out, the ends of the thread are tied in a knot, and the ballots thus joined together are placed in a receptacle or on one side of the table.

70. There then follows the third and last phase, also known as the post-scrutiny, which comprises: 1) the counting of the votes; 2) the checking of the same; 3) the burning of the ballots.

The Scrutineers add up all the votes that each individual has received, and if no one has obtained two thirds of the votes on that ballot, the Pope has not been elected; if however it turns out that someone has obtained two thirds of the votes, the canonically valid election of the Roman Pontiff has taken place.

In either case, that is, whether the election has occurred or not, the Revisers must proceed to check both the ballots and the notes made by the Scrutineers, in order to make sure that these latter have performed their task exactly and faithfully.

Immediately after the checking has taken place, and before the Cardinal electors leave the Sistine Chapel, all the ballots are to be burnt by the Scrutineers, with the assistance of the Secretary of the Conclave and the Masters of Ceremonies who in the meantime have been summoned by the junior Cardinal Deacon. If however a second vote is to take place immediately, the ballots from the first vote will be burned only at the end, together with those from the second vote.

71. In order that secrecy may be better observed, I order each and every Cardinal elector to hand over to the Cardinal Camerlengo or to one of the three Cardinal Assistants any notes which he may have in his possession concerning the results of each ballot. These notes are to be burnt together with the ballots.

I further lay down that at the end of the election the Cardinal Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church shall draw up a document, to be approved also by the three Cardinal Assistants, declaring the result of the voting at each session. This document is to be given to the Pope and will thereafter be kept in a designated archive, enclosed in a sealed envelope, which may be opened by no one unless the Supreme Pontiff gives explicit permission.

72. Confirming the dispositions of my Predecessors, Saint Pius X, 20 Pius XII 21 and Paul VI, 22 I decree that - except for the afternoon of the entrance into the Conclave - both in the morning and in the afternoon, after a ballot which does not result in an election, the Cardinal electors shall proceed immediately to a second one, in which they are to express

their vote anew. In this second ballot all the formalities of the previous one are to be observed, with the difference that the electors are not bound to take a new oath or to choose new Scrutineers, Infirmarii and Revisers. Everything done in this regard for the first ballot will be valid for the second one, without the need for any repetition.

73. Everything that has been laid down above concerning the voting procedures must be diligently observed by the Cardinal electors in all the ballots, which are to take place each day, in the morning and in the afternoon, after the celebration of the sacred rites or prayers laid down in the *Ordo Rituum Conclavis*.

74. In the event that the Cardinal electors find it difficult to agree on the person to be elected, after balloting has been carried out for three days in the form described above (in Nos. 62ff) without result, voting is to be suspended for a maximum of one day in order to allow a pause for prayer, informal discussion among the voters, and a brief spiritual exhortation given by the senior Cardinal in the Order of Deacons. Voting is then resumed in the usual manner, and after seven ballots, if the election has not taken place, there is another pause for prayer, discussion and an exhortation given by the senior Cardinal in the Order of Priests. Another series of seven ballots is then held and, if there has still been no election, this is followed by a further pause for prayer, discussion and an exhortation given by the senior Cardinal in the Order of Bishops. Voting is then resumed in the usual manner and, unless the election occurs, it is to continue for seven ballots.

75. If the balloting does not result in an election, even after the provisions of No. 74 have been fulfilled, the Cardinal electors shall be invited by the Camerlengo to express an opinion about the manner of proceeding. The election will then proceed in accordance with what the absolute majority of the electors decides.

Nevertheless, there can be no waiving of the requirement that a valid election takes place only by an absolute majority of the votes or else by voting only on the two names which in the ballot immediately preceding have received the greatest number of votes; also in this second case only an absolute majority is required.

76. Should the election take place in a way other than that prescribed in the present Constitution, or should the conditions laid down here not be observed, the election is for this very reason null and void, without any need for a declaration on the matter; consequently, it confers no right on the one elected.

77. I decree that the dispositions concerning everything that precedes the election of the Roman Pontiff and the carrying out of the election itself must be observed in full, even if the vacancy of the Apostolic See should occur as a result of the resignation of the Supreme Pontiff, in accordance with the provisions of Canon 333 § 2 of the Code of Canon Law and Canon 44 § 2 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.

CHAPTER VI

MATTERS TO BE OBSERVED OR AVOIDED IN THE ELECTION OF THE ROMAN PONTIFF

78. If - God forbid - in the election of the Roman Pontiff the crime of simony were to be perpetrated, I decree and declare that all those guilty thereof shall incur excommunication *latae sententiae*. At the same time I remove the nullity or invalidity of the same simoniacal provision, in order that - as was already established by my Predecessors - the validity of the election of the Roman Pontiff may not for this reason be challenged.²³

79. Confirming the prescriptions of my Predecessors, I likewise forbid anyone, even if he is a Cardinal, during the Pope's lifetime and without having consulted him, to make plans concerning the election of his successor, or to promise votes, or to make decisions in this regard in private gatherings.

80. In the same way, I wish to confirm the provisions made by my Predecessors for the purpose of excluding any external interference in the election of the Supreme Pontiff. Therefore, in virtue of holy obedience and under pain of excommunication *latae sententiae*, I again forbid each and every Cardinal elector, present and future, as also the Secretary of the College of Cardinals and all other persons taking part in the preparation and carrying out of everything necessary for the election, to accept under any pretext whatsoever, from any civil authority whatsoever, the task of proposing the veto or the so-called *exclusiva*, even under the guise of a simple desire, or to reveal such either to the entire electoral body assembled together or to individual electors, in writing or by word of mouth, either directly and personally or indirectly and through others, both before the election begins and for its duration. I intend this prohibition to include all possible forms of interference, opposition and suggestion whereby secular authorities of whatever order and degree, or any individual or group, might attempt to exercise influence on the election of the Pope.

81. The Cardinal electors shall further abstain from any form of pact, agreement, promise or other commitment of any kind which could oblige them to give or deny their vote to a person or persons. If this were in fact done, even under oath, I decree that such a commitment shall be null and void and that no one shall be bound to observe it; and I hereby impose the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae* upon those who violate this prohibition. It is not my intention however to forbid, during the period in which the See is vacant, the exchange of views concerning the election.

82. I likewise forbid the Cardinals before the election to enter into any stipulations, committing themselves of common accord to a certain course of action should one of them be elevated to the Pontificate. These promises too, should any in fact be made, even under oath, I also declare null and void.

83. With the same insistence shown by my Predecessors, I earnestly exhort the Cardinal electors not to allow themselves to be guided, in choosing the Pope, by friendship or aversion, or to be influenced by favour or personal

relationships towards anyone, or to be constrained by the interference of persons in authority or by pressure groups, by the suggestions of the mass media, or by force, fear or the pursuit of popularity. Rather, having before their eyes solely the glory of God and the good of the Church, and having prayed for divine assistance, they shall give their vote to the person, even outside the College of Cardinals, who in their judgment is most suited to govern the universal Church in a fruitful and beneficial way.

84. During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, and above all during the time of the election of the Successor of Peter, the Church is united in a very special way with her Pastors and particularly with the Cardinal electors of the Supreme Pontiff, and she asks God to grant her a new Pope as a gift of his goodness and providence. Indeed, following the example of the first Christian community spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 1:14), the universal Church, spiritually united with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, should persevere with one heart in prayer; thus the election of the new Pope will not be something unconnected with the People of God and concerning the College of electors alone, but will be in a certain sense an act of the whole Church. I therefore lay down that in all cities and other places, at least the more important ones, as soon as news is received of the vacancy of the Apostolic See and, in particular, of the death of the Pope, and following the celebration of his solemn funeral rites, humble and persevering prayers are to be offered to the Lord (cf. Mt 21:22; Mk 11:24), that he may enlighten the electors and make them so likeminded in their task that a speedy, harmonious and fruitful election may take place, as the salvation of souls and the good of the whole People of God demand.

85. In a most earnest and heartfelt way I recommend this prayer to the venerable Cardinals who, by reason of age, no longer enjoy the right to take part in the election of the Supreme Pontiff. By virtue of the singular bond with the Apostolic See which the Cardinalate represents, let them lead the prayer of the People of God, whether gathered in the Patriarchal Basilicas of the city of Rome or in places of worship in other particular Churches, fervently imploring the assistance of Almighty God and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit for the Cardinal electors, especially at the time of the election itself. They will thereby participate in an effective and real way in the difficult task of providing a Pastor for the universal Church.

86. I also ask the one who is elected not to refuse, for fear of its weight, the office to which he has been called, but to submit humbly to the design of the divine will. God who imposes the burden will sustain him with his hand, so that he will be able to bear it. In conferring the heavy task upon him, God will also help him to accomplish it and, in giving him the dignity, he will grant him the strength not to be overwhelmed by the weight of his office.

CHAPTER VII

THE ACCEPTANCE AND PROCLAMATION OF THE NEW POPE AND THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY

87. When the election has canonically taken place, the junior Cardinal Deacon summons into the hall of election the Secretary of the College of Cardinals and the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations. The Cardinal Dean, or the Cardinal who is first in order and seniority, in the name of the whole College of electors, then asks the consent of the one elected in the following words: Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff? And, as soon as he has received the consent, he asks him: By what name do you wish to be called? Then the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations, acting as notary and having as witnesses two Masters of Ceremonies, who are to be summoned at that moment, draws up a document certifying acceptance by the new Pope and the name taken by him.

88. After his acceptance, the person elected, if he has already received episcopal ordination, is immediately Bishop of the Church of Rome, true Pope and Head of the College of Bishops. He thus acquires and can exercise full and supreme power over the universal Church.

If the person elected is not already a Bishop, he shall immediately be ordained Bishop.

89. When the other formalities provided for in the *Ordo Rituum Conclavis* have been carried out, the Cardinal electors approach the newly-elected Pope in the prescribed manner, in order to make an act of homage and obedience. An act of thanksgiving to God is then made, after which the senior Cardinal Deacon announces to the waiting people that the election has taken place and proclaims the name of the new Pope, who immediately thereafter imparts the Apostolic Blessing *Urbi et Orbi* from the balcony of the Vatican Basilica.

If the person elected is not already a Bishop, homage is paid to him and the announcement of his election is made only after he has been solemnly ordained Bishop.

90. If the person elected resides outside Vatican City, the norms contained in the *Ordo Rituum Conclavis* are to be observed.

If the newly-elected Supreme Pontiff is not already a Bishop, his episcopal ordination, referred to in Nos. 88 and 89 of the present Constitution, shall be carried out according to the usage of the Church by the Dean of the College of Cardinals or, in his absence, by the Subdean or, should he too be prevented from doing so, by the senior Cardinal Bishop.

91. The Conclave ends immediately after the new Supreme Pontiff assents to his election, unless he should determine otherwise. From that moment the new Pope can be approached by the Substitute of the Secretariat of State, the

Secretary for Relations with States, the Prefect of the Papal Household and by anyone else needing to discuss with him matters of importance at the time.

92. After the solemn ceremony of the inauguration of the Pontificate and within an appropriate time, the Pope will take possession of the Patriarchal Archbasilica of the Lateran, according to the prescribed ritual.

PROMULGATION

Wherefore, after mature reflection and following the example of my Predecessors, I lay down and prescribe these norms and I order that no one shall presume to contest the present Constitution and anything contained herein for any reason whatsoever. This Constitution is to be completely observed by all, notwithstanding any disposition to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention. It is to be fully and integrally implemented and is to serve as a guide for all to whom it refers.

As determined above, I hereby declare abrogated all Constitutions and Orders issued in this regard by the Roman Pontiffs, and at the same time I declare completely null and void anything done by any person, whatever his authority, knowingly or unknowingly, in any way contrary to this Constitution.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 22 February, the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, Apostle, in the year 1996, the eighteenth of my Pontificate.

1 Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 3, 2: SCh 211, 33.

2 Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Vacante Sede Apostolica* (25 December 1904): Pii X Pontificis Maximi Acta, III (1908), 239-288.

3 Cf. *Motu Proprio Cum Proxime* (1 March 1922): AAS 14 (1922), 145-146; Apostolic Constitution *Quae Divinitus* (25 March 1935): AAS 27 (1935), 97-113.

4 Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Vacantis Apostolicae Sedis* (8 December 1945): AAS 38 (1946), 65-99.

5 Cf. *Motu proprio Summi Pontificis Electio* (5 September 1962): AAS 54 (1962), 632-640.

6 Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae* (15 August 1967): AAS 59 (1967), 885-928; *Motu Proprio Ingravescentem Aetatem* (21 November 1970): AAS 62 (1970), 810-813; Apostolic Constitution *Romano Pontifici Eligendo* (1 October 1975): AAS 67 (1975), 609-645.

7 Cf. AAS 80 (1988), 841-912.

8 Cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ *Pastor Aeternus*, III; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 18.

9 Canon 332 § 1 C.I.C.; Canon 44 § 1 C.C.E.O.

10 Cf. *Motu Proprio Ingravescentem Aetatem* (21 November 1970), II, 2: AAS 62 (1970), 811; Apostolic Constitution *Romano Pontifici Eligendo* (1 October 1975), 33: AAS 67 (1975), 622.

11 Code of Canon Law, Canon 1752.

12 Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 332 § 2, Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 47 § 2.

13 Cf. AAS 80 (1988), 860.

14 Cf. AAS 69 (1977), 9-10.

15 Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Vicariae Potestatis* (6 January 1977), 2 § 4: AAS 69 (1977), 10.

16 Cf. No. 12: AAS 27 (1935), 112-113.

17 Cf. Art. 117: AAS 80 (1988), 905.

18 Cf. AAS 80 (1988), 864.

19 *Missale Romanum*, No. 4, p. 795.

20 Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Vacante Sede Apostolica* (25 December 1904), 76: Pii X Pontificis Maximi Acta, III (1908), 280-281.

21 Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Vacantis Apostolicae Sedis* (8 December 1945), 88: AAS 38 (1946), 93.

22 Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Romano Pontifici Eligendo* (1 October 1975), 74: AAS 67 (1975), 639.

23 Cf. Saint Pius X, Apostolic Constitution *Vacante Sede Apostolica* (25 December 1904), 79: Pii X Pontificis Maximi Acta, III (1908), 282; Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Vacantis Apostolicae Sedis* (8 December 1945), 92: AAS 38 (1946), 94; Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Romano Pontifici Eligendo* (1 October 1975), 79: AAS 67 (1975), 641.

**Apostolic Constitution
Fidei Depositum
On The Publication Of The
Catechism Of The Catholic Church
Prepared Following The
Second Vatican Ecumenical Council**

To my Venerable Brothers the Cardinals,
to the Archbishops,
Bishops,
Priests,
Deacons and all the People of God

JOHN PAUL II, BISHOP
SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD
FOR EVERLASTING MEMORY

I - INTRODUCTION

Guarding the deposit of faith is the mission which the Lord has entrusted to his Church and which she fulfils in every age. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which was opened 30 years ago by my predecessor Pope John XXIII, of happy memory, had as its intention and purpose to highlight the Church's apostolic and pastoral mission, and by making the truth of the Gospel shine forth, to lead all people to seek and receive Christ's love which surpasses all knowledge (cf. Eph 3:19).

The principal task entrusted to the Council by Pope John XXIII was to guard and present better the precious deposit of Christian doctrine in order to make it more accessible to the Christian faithful and to all people of good will. For this reason the Council was not first of all to condemn the errors of the time, but above all to strive calmly to show the strength and beauty of the doctrine of the faith. "Illumined by the light of this Council", the Pope said, "the Church... will become greater in spiritual riches and, gaining the strength of new energies therefrom, she will look to the future without fear... Our duty is... to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us, thus pursuing the path which the Church has followed for 20 centuries."¹

With the help of God, the Council Fathers in four years of work were able to produce a considerable collection of doctrinal statements and pastoral norms which were presented to the whole Church. There the Pastors and Christian faithful find directives for that "renewal of thought, action, practices and moral virtue, of joy and hope, which was the very purpose of the Council".²

After its conclusion the Council did not cease to inspire the Church's life. In 1985 I was able to assert: "For me, then - who had the special grace of participating in it and actively collaborating in its development - Vatican II has always been, and especially during these years of my Pontificate, the constant reference point of my every pastoral action, in the conscious commitment to implement its directives concretely and faithfully at the level of each Church and the whole Church".³

In this spirit, on 25 January 1985 I convoked an Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the 25th anniversary of the close of the Council. The purpose of this assembly was to celebrate the graces and spiritual fruits of Vatican II, to study its teaching in greater depth in order the better to adhere to it and to promote knowledge and application of it.

On that occasion the Synod Fathers stated: "Very many have expressed the desire that a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals be composed, that it might be, as it were, a point of reference for the catechisms or compendiums that are prepared in various regions. The presentation of doctrine must be biblical and liturgical. It must be sound doctrine suited to the present life of Christians"⁴. After the Synod ended, I made this desire my own, considering it as "fully responding to a real need both of the universal Church and of the particular Churches".⁵ For this reason we thank the Lord wholeheartedly on this day when we can offer the entire Church this reference text entitled the Catechism of the Catholic Church, for a catechesis renewed at the living sources of the faith! Following the renewal of the Liturgy and the new codification of the canon law of the Latin Church and that of the Oriental Catholic Churches, this catechism will make a very important contribution to that work of renewing the whole life of the Church, as desired and begun by the Second Vatican Council.

II - THE PROCESS AND SPIRIT OF DRAFTING THE TEXT

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the result of very extensive collaboration: it was prepared over six years of intense work done in a spirit of complete openness and fervent zeal.

In 1986 I entrusted a commission of 12 Cardinals and Bishops, chaired by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, with the task of preparing a draft of the catechism requested by the Synod Fathers. An editorial committee of seven diocesan Bishops, experts in theology and catechesis, assisted the commission in its work.

The commission, charged with giving directives and with overseeing the course of the work attentively followed all the stages in editing the nine subsequent drafts. The editorial committee, for its part, assumed responsibility for writing the text, making the emendations requested by the commission and examining the observations of numerous theologians, exegetes and catechists, and above all, of the Bishops of the whole world, in order to improve the text. The committee was a place of fruitful and enriching exchanges of opinion to ensure the unity and homogeneity of the text.

The project was the object of extensive consultation among all Catholic Bishops, their Episcopal Conferences or Synods, and of theological and catechetical institutes. As a whole, it received a broadly favourable acceptance on the part of the Episcopate. It can be said that this catechism is the result of the collaboration of the whole Episcopate of the Catholic Church, who generously accepted my invitation to share responsibility for an enterprise which directly concerns the life of the Church. This response elicits in me a deep feeling of joy, because the harmony of so many voices truly expresses what could be called the symphony of the faith. The achievement of this catechism thus reflects the collegial nature of the Episcopate: it testifies to the Church's catholicity.

III -ARRANGEMENT OF THE MATERIAL

A catechism should faithfully and systematically present the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and the authentic Magisterium, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Fathers and the Church's saints, to allow for a better knowledge of the Christian mystery and for enlivening the faith of the People of God. It should take into account the doctrinal statements which down the centuries the Holy Spirit has intimated to his Church. It should also help illumine with the light of faith the new situations and problems which had not yet emerged in the past.

The catechism will thus contain the new and the old (cf. Mt 13:52), because the faith is always the same yet the source of ever new light.

To respond to this twofold demand, the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the one hand repeats the old, traditional order already followed by the Catechism of St Pius V, arranging the material in four parts: the Creed, the Sacred Liturgy, with pride of place given to the sacraments, the Christian way of life, explained beginning with the Ten Commandments, and finally, Christian prayer. At the same time, however, the contents are often expressed in a new way in order to respond to the questions of our age.

The four parts are related one to the other: the Christian mystery is the object of faith (first part); it is celebrated and communicated in liturgical actions (second part); it is present to enlighten and sustain the children of God in their actions (third part); it is the basis for our prayer, the privileged expression of which is the Our Father, and it represents the object of our supplication, our praise and our intercession (fourth part).

The Liturgy itself is prayer; the confession of faith finds its proper place in the celebration of worship. Grace, the fruit of the sacraments, is the irreplaceable condition for Christian living, just as participation in the Church's liturgy requires faith. If faith is not expressed in works, it is dead (cf. Jas 2:14-16) and cannot bear fruit unto eternal life.

In reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church we can perceive the wondrous unity of the mystery of God, his saving will, as well as the central place of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, sent by the Father, made man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be our Saviour. Having died and risen, Christ is always present in his Church, especially in the sacraments; he is the source of our faith, the model of Christian conduct and the Teacher of our prayer.

IV - THE DOCTRINAL VALUE OF THE TEXT

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which I approved 25 June last and the publication of which I today order by virtue of my Apostolic Authority, is a statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Church's Magisterium. I declare it to be a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith. May it serve the renewal to which the Holy Spirit ceaselessly calls the Church of God, the Body of Christ, on her pilgrimage to the undiminished light of the kingdom!

The approval and publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church represents a service which the Successor of Peter wishes to offer to the Holy Catholic Church, and to all the particular Churches in peace and communion with the Apostolic See: the service, that is, of supporting and confirming the faith of all the Lord Jesus' disciples (cf. Lk 22:32), as well as of strengthening the bonds of unity in the same apostolic faith.

Therefore, I ask the Church's Pastors and the Christian faithful to receive this catechism in a spirit of communion and to use it assiduously in fulfilling their mission of proclaiming the faith and calling people to the Gospel life. This catechism is given to them that it may be a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine and

particularly for preparing local catechisms. It is also offered to all the faithful who wish to deepen their knowledge of the unfathomable riches of salvation (cf. Jn 8:32). It is meant to support ecumenical efforts that are moved by the holy desire for the unity of all Christians, showing carefully the content and wondrous harmony of the Catholic faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, lastly, is offered to every individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15) and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes.

This catechism is not intended to replace the local catechisms duly approved by the ecclesiastical authorities, the diocesan Bishops and the Episcopal Conferences, especially if they have been approved by the Apostolic See. It is meant to encourage and assist in the writing of new local catechisms, which must take into account various situations and cultures, while carefully preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to Catholic doctrine.

V - CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this document presenting the Catechism of the Catholic Church, I beseech the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word and Mother of the Church, to support with her powerful intercession the catechetical work of the entire Church on every level, at this time when she is called to a new effort of evangelization. May the light of the true faith free humanity from ignorance and slavery to sin in order to lead it to the only freedom worthy of the name (cf. Jn 8:32): that of life in Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, here below and in the kingdom of heaven, in the fullness of the blessed vision of God face to face (cf. 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 5:6-8)!

Given on 11 October 1992, the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in the fourteenth year of my Pontificate.

NOTES

1 John XXIII, Opening Address to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 11 October 1962: AAS 54 (1962), pp. 788, 791.

2 Paul VI, Closing Address to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 8 December 1965: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 7-8.

3 John Paul II, Address of 25 January 1985: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27 January 1985.

4 Final Report of the Extraordinary Synod, 7 December 1985, II, B, a, n. 4: *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. 9, p. 1758, n. 1797.

5 John Paul II, Address at the closing of the Extraordinary Synod, 7 December 1985, n. 6: AAS 78 (1986), p. 435.

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**Post-Synodal
 Apostolic Exhortation
 Pastores Dabo Vobis
 To The Bishops,
 Clergy And Faithful
 On The Formation Of Priests
 In The Circumstances Of The Present Day**

INTRODUCTION

1. "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer. 3:15).

In these words from the prophet Jeremiah, God promises his people that he will never leave them without shepherds to gather them together and guide them: "I will set shepherds over them [my sheep] who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed (Jer. 23:4).

The Church, the People of God, constantly experiences the reality of this prophetic message and continues joyfully to thank God for it. She knows that Jesus Christ himself is the living, supreme and definitive fulfillment of God's promise: "I am the good shepherd" (Jn. 10:11). He, "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20), entrusted to the apostles and their successors the ministry of shepherding God's flock (cf. Jn. 21:15ff.; 1 Pt. 5:2).

Without priests the Church would not be able to live that fundamental obedience which is at the very heart of her existence and her mission in history, an obedience in response to the command of Christ: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19) and "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19; cf. 1 Cor. 11:24), i.e., an obedience to the command to announce the Gospel and to renew daily the sacrifice of the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood for the life of the world.

By faith we know that the Lord's promise cannot fail. This very promise is the reason and force underlying the Church's rejoicing at the growth and increase of priestly vocations now taking place in some parts of the world. It is also the foundation and impulse for a renewed act of faith and fervent hope in the face of the grave shortage of priests which is being felt in other parts of the world. Everyone is called upon to share complete trust in the unbroken fulfillment of God's promise, which the synod fathers expressed in clear and forceful terms: "The synod, with complete trust in the promise of Christ who has said: 'Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age' (Mt. 28:20), and aware of the constant activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church, firmly believes that there will never be a complete lack of sacred ministers in the Church... Even though in a number of regions there is a scarcity of clergy, the action of the Father, who raises up vocations, will nonetheless always be at work in the Church."(1)

At the conclusion of the synod, I said that in the face of a crisis of priestly vocations "the first answer which the Church gives lies in a total act of faith in the Holy Spirit. We are deeply convinced that this trusting abandonment will not disappoint if we remain faithful to the graces we have received."(2)

2. To remain faithful to the grace received! This gift of God does not cancel human freedom; instead it gives rise to freedom, develops freedom and demands freedom.

For this reason, the total trust in God's unconditional faithfulness to his promise is accompanied in the Church by the grave responsibility to cooperate in the action of God who calls, and to contribute toward creating and preserving the conditions in which the good seed, sown by God, can take root and bring forth abundant fruit. The Church must never cease to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into his harvest, (cf. Mt. 9:38). She must propose clearly and courageously to each new generation the vocational call, help people to discern the authenticity of their call from God and to respond to it generously, and give particular care to the formation of candidates for the priesthood.

The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and lifelong assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment is considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity.

The Church's work of formation is a continuation in time of Christ's own work, which the evangelist Mark illustrates in these words: "And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mk. 3:13-15). It can be said that through her work of forming candidates to the priesthood and priests themselves, the Church throughout her history has continued to live this passage of the Gospel in various ways and with varying intensity. Today, however, the Church feels called to relive with a renewed commitment all that the Master did with his apostles - urged on as she is by the deep and rapid transformations in the societies and culture of our age; by the multiplicity and diversity of contexts in which she announces the Gospel and witnesses to it; by the promising number of priestly vocations being seen in some dioceses around the world; by the urgency of a new look at the contents and methods of priestly formation; by the concern of bishops and their communities about a persisting scarcity of clergy; and by the absolute necessity that the "new evangelization" have priests as its initial "new evangelizers."

It is precisely in this cultural and historical context that the last ordinary general assembly of the Synod of Bishops took place. Dedicated to "the formation of priests in circumstances of the present day, " its purpose was to put into practice the Council's teaching on this matter, making it more up - to - date and incisive in present circumstances, twenty - five years after the Council itself.(3)

3. Following the texts of the Second Vatican Council regarding the ministry of priests and their formation, (4) and with the intention of applying to various situations their rich and authoritative teaching, the Church has on various occasions dealt with the subject of the life, ministry and formation of priests She has done this in a more solemn way during the Synods of Bishops. Already in October 1967, the first general ordinary assembly of the synod devoted five general congregations to the subject of the renewal of seminaries. This work gave a decisive impulse to the formulation of the document of the Congregation for Catholic Education titled Fundamental Norms for Priestly Formation.(5)

The second ordinary general assembly held in 1971 spent half its time on the ministerial priesthood. The fruit of the lengthy synodal discussion, incorporated and condensed in some "recommendations, " which were submitted to my predecessor Pope Paul VI and read at the opening of the 1974 synod, referred principally to the teaching on the ministerial priesthood and to some aspects of priestly spirituality and ministry.

On many other occasions the Church's magisterium has shown its concern for the life and ministry of priests. It may be said that in the years since the Council there has not been any subject treated by the magisterium which has not in some way, explicitly or implicitly, had to do with the presence of priests in the community as well as their role and the need for them in the life of the Church and the world.

In recent years some have voiced a need to return to the theme of the priesthood, treating it from a relatively new point of view, one that was more adapted to present ecclesial and cultural circumstances. Attention has shifted from the question of the priest's identity to that connected with the process of formation for the priesthood and the quality of priestly life. The new generation of those called to the ministerial priesthood display different characteristics in comparison to those of their immediate predecessors. In addition, they live in a world which in many respects is new and undergoing rapid and continual evolution. All of this cannot be ignored when it comes to programming and carrying out the various phases of formation for those approaching the ministerial priesthood.

Moreover, priests who have been actively involved in the ministry for a more or less lengthy period of time seem to be suffering today from an excessive loss of energy in their ever increasing pastoral activities. Likewise, faced with the difficulties of contemporary culture and society, they feel compelled to re -examine their way of life and their pastoral priorities, and they are more and more aware of their need for ongoing formation.

The concern of the 1990 Synod of Bishops and its discussion focused on the increase of vocations to the priesthood and the formation of candidates in an attempt to help them come to know and follow Jesus -- as they prepare to be ordained and to live the sacrament of holy orders, which configures them to Christ the head and shepherd, the servant and spouse of the Church. At the same time, the synod searched for forms of ongoing formation to provide realistic and effective means of support for priests in their spiritual life and ministry.

This same synod also sought to answer a request which was made at the previous synod on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world. Lay people themselves had asked that priests commit themselves to their formation so that they, the laity, could be suitably helped to fulfill their role in the ecclesial mission which is shared by all. Indeed, "the more the lay apostolate develops, the more strongly is perceived the need to have well - formed holy priests. Thus the very life of the People of God manifests the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning the relationship between the common priesthood and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood. For within the mystery of the Church the hierarchy has a ministerial character (cf. Lumen Gentium, 10). The more the laity's own sense of vocation is deepened, the more what is proper to the priest stands out."(6)

4. In the ecclesial experience that is typical of the synod (i.e., "a unique experience on a universal basis of episcopal communion, which strengthens the sense of the universal Church and the sense of responsibility of the bishops toward the universal Church and her mission, in affective and effective communion around Peter"), (7) the voice of the various particular churches -- and in this synod, for the first time, the voices of some churches from the East -- were clearly heard and taken to heart. The churches have proclaimed their faith in the fulfillment of God's promise: "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer. 3:15), and they have renewed their pastoral commitment to care for vocations and for the formation of priests -- aware that on this depends the future of the Church, her development and her universal mission of salvation.

In this post - synodal apostolic exhortation, I take up anew the rich legacy resulting from the reflections, endeavors and indications which were made during the synod's preparation, as well as those which accompanied the work of the synod fathers, and as the bishop of Rome and successor of Peter I add my voice to theirs -- addressing it to each and every one of the faithful, and in particular to each priest and to those involved in the important yet demanding ministry of their formation. Yes, in this exhortation I wish to meet with each and every priest, whether diocesan or religious.

Quoting from the "Final Message of the Synod to the People of God, " I make my own the words and the sentiments expressed by the synod fathers: "Brother priests, we want to express our appreciation to you, who are our most important collaborators in the apostolate. Your priesthood is absolutely vital. There is no substitute for it. You carry the main burden of priestly ministry through your day - to - day service of the faithful. You are ministers of the Eucharist

and ministers of God's mercy in the sacrament of penance. It is you who bring comfort to people and guide them in difficult moments in their lives.

"We acknowledge your work and thank you once again, urging you to continue on your chosen path willingly and joyfully. No one should be discouraged as we are doing God's work; the same God who calls us, sends us and remains with us every day of our lives. We are ambassadors of Christ."(8)

CHAPTER I

CHOSEN FROM AMONG ME

The Challenges Facing Priestly Formation at the Conclusion of the Second Millennium

The Priest in His Time

5. "Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God" (Heb. 5:1).

The Letter to the Hebrews clearly affirms the "human character" of God's minister he comes from the human community and is at its service, imitating Jesus Christ "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:1s)?.

God always calls his priests from specific human and ecclesial contexts, which inevitably influence them; and to these same contexts the priest is sent for the service of Christ's Gospel.

For this reason the synod desired to "contextualize" the subject of priests, viewing it in terms of today's society and today's Church in preparation for the third millennium. This is indicated in the second part of the topic's formulation: "The formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day."

Certainly "there is an essential aspect of the priest that does not change: the priest of tomorrow, no less than the priest of today, must resemble Christ. When Jesus lived on this earth, he manifested in himself the definitive role of the priestly establishing a ministerial priesthood with which the apostles were the first to be invested. This priesthood is destined to last in endless succession throughout history. In this sense the priest of the third millennium will continue the work of the priests who, in the preceding millennia, have animated the life of the Church. In the third millennium the priestly vocation will continue to be the call to live the unique and permanent priesthood of Christ."(9) It is equally certain that the life and ministry of the priest must also "adapt to every era and circumstance of life.... For our part we must therefore seek to be as open as possible to light from on high from the Holy Spirit, in order to discover the tendencies of contemporary society, recognize the deepest spiritual needs, determine the most important concrete tasks and the pastoral methods to adopt, and thus respond adequately to human expectations."(10)

With the duty of bringing together the permanent truth of the priestly ministry and the characteristic requirements of the present day, the synod fathers sought to respond to a few necessary questions: What are the positive and negative elements in socio - cultural and ecclesial contexts which affect boys, adolescents and young men who throughout their lives are called to bring to maturity a project of priestly life? What difficulties are posed by our times, and what new possibilities are offered for the exercise of a priestly ministry which corresponds to the gift received in the sacrament and the demands of the spiritual life which is consistent with it?

I now mention some comments taken from the synod fathers' analysis of the situation -- fully aware that the great variety of socio - cultural and ecclesial circumstances in different countries limits by necessity our treatment to only the most evident and widespread phenomena, particularly those relating to the question of education and priestly formation.

The Gospel Today: Hopes and Obstacles

6. A number of factors seem to be working toward making people today more deeply aware of the dignity of the human person and more open to religious values, to the Gospel and to the priestly ministry.

Despite many contradictions, society is increasingly witnessing a powerful thirst for justice and peace; a more lively sense that humanity must care for creation and respect nature; a more open search for truth; a greater effort to safeguard human dignity; a growing commitment in many sectors of the world population to a more specific international solidarity and a new ordering of the world in freedom and justice. Parallel to the continued development of the potential offered by science and technology and the exchange of information and interaction of cultures, there is a new call for ethics, that is, a quest for meaning -- and therefore for an objective standard of values which will delineate the possibilities and limits of progress.

In the more specifically religious and Christian sphere, ideological prejudice and the violent rejection of the message of spiritual and religious values are crumbling and there are arising new and unexpected possibilities of evangelization and the rebirth of ecclesial life in many parts of the world. These are evident in an increased love of the sacred Scriptures; in the vitality and growing vigor of many young churches and their ever - larger role in the defense and promotion of the values of human life and the person; and in the splendid witness of martyrdom provided by the

churches of Central and Eastern Europe as well as that of the faithfulness and courage of other churches which are still forced to undergo persecution and tribulation for the faith.(11)

The thirst for God and for an active meaningful relationship with him is so strong today that, where there is a lack of a genuine and full proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, there is a rising spread of forms of religiosity without God and the proliferation of many sects. For all children of the Church, and for priests especially, the increase of these phenomena, even in some traditionally Christian environments, is not only a constant motive to examine our consciences as to the credibility of our witness to the Gospel but at the same time is a sign of how deep and widespread is the search for God.

7. Mingled with these and other positive factors, there are also, however, many problematic or negative elements.

Rationalism is still very widespread and, in the name of a reductive concept of "science, " it renders human reason insensitive to an encounter with revelation and with divine transcendence.

We should take note also of a desperate defense of personal subjectivity which tends to close it off in individualism, rendering it incapable of true human relationships. As a result, many -- especially children and young people -- seek to compensate for this loneliness with substitutes of various kinds, in more or less acute forms of hedonism or flight from responsibility. Prisoners of the fleeting moment, they seek to "consume" the strongest and most gratifying individual experiences at the level of immediate emotions and sensations, inevitably finding themselves indifferent and "paralyzed" as it were when they come face to face with the summons to embark upon a life project which includes a spiritual and religious dimension and a commitment to solidarity.

Furthermore, despite the fall of ideologies which had made materialism a dogma and the refusal of religion a program, there is spreading in every part of the world a sort of practical and existential atheism which coincides with a secularist outlook on life and human destiny. The individual, "all bound up in himself, this man who makes himself not only the center of his every interest, but dares to propose himself as the principle and reason of all reality, "(12) finds himself ever more bereft of that "supplement of soul" which is all the more necessary to him in proportion -- as a wide availability of material goods and resources deceives him about his self - sufficiency. There is no longer a need to fight against God; the individual feels he is simply able to do without him.

In this context special mention should be made of the breakup of the family and an obscuring or distorting of the true meaning of human sexuality. That phenomena have a very negative effect on the education of young people and on their openness to any kind of religious vocation. Furthermore, one should mention the worsening of social injustices and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, the fruit of an inhuman capitalism(13) which increasingly widens the gap between affluent and indigent peoples. In this way tension and unrest are introduced into everyday life, deeply disturbing the lives of people and of whole communities.

There are also worrying and negative factors within the Church herself which have a direct influence on the lives and ministry of priests. For example: the lack of due knowledge of the faith among many believers; a catechesis which has little practical effect, stifled as it is by the mass media whose messages are more widespread and persuasive; an incorrectly understood pluralism in theology, culture and pastoral teaching which -- though starting out at times with good intentions -- ends up by hindering ecumenical dialogue and threatening the necessary unity of faith; a persistent diffidence toward and almost unacceptance of the magisterium of the hierarchy; the one - sided tendencies which reduce the richness of the Gospel message and transform the proclamation and witness to the faith into an element of exclusively human and social liberation or into an alienating flight into superstition and religiosity without God.

A particularly important phenomenon, even though it is relatively recent in many traditionally Christian countries, is the presence within the same territory of large concentrations of people of different races and religions, thereby resulting in multiracial and multi - religious societies. While on the one hand this can be an opportunity for a more frequent and fruitful exercise of dialogue, open - mindedness, good relations and a just tolerance -- on the other hand the situation can also result in confusion and relativism, above all among people and populations whose faith has not matured.

Added to these factors, and closely linked with the growth of individualism, is the phenomenon of subjectivism in matters of faith. An increasing number of Christians seem to have a reduced sensitivity to the universality and objectivity of the doctrine of the faith because they are subjectively attached to what pleases them; to what corresponds to their own experience; and to what does not impinge on their own habits. In such a context, even the appeal to the inviolability of the individual conscience -- in itself a legitimate appeal -- may be dangerously, marked by ambiguity.

This situation also gives rise to the phenomenon of belonging to the Church in ways which are ever more partial and conditional, with a resulting negative influence on the birth of new vocations to the priesthood, on the priest's own self - awareness and on his ministry within the community.

Finally, in many parts of the Church today it is still the scarcity of priests which creates the most serious problem. The faithful are often left to themselves for long periods, without sufficient pastoral support. As a result their growth as Christians suffers, not to mention their capacity to become better promoters of evangelization.

Young People: Vocation and Priestly Formation

8. The many contradictions and potentialities marking our societies and cultures -- as well as ecclesial communities -- are perceived, lived and experienced by our young people with a particular intensity and have immediate and very acute repercussions on their personal growth. Thus, the emergence and development of priestly vocations among boys, adolescents and young men are continually under pressure and facing obstacles.

The lure of the so - called "consumer society" is so strong among young people that they become totally dominated and imprisoned by an individualistic, materialistic and hedonistic interpretation of human existence. Material "well - being, " which is so intensely sought after, becomes the one ideal to be striven for in life, a well - being which is to be attained in any way and at any price. There is a refusal of anything that speaks of sacrifice and a rejection of any effort to look for and to practice spiritual and religious values. The all - determining "concern" for having supplants the primacy of being, and consequently personal and interpersonal values are interpreted and lived not according to the logic of giving and generosity but according to the logic of selfish possession and the exploitation of others.

This is particularly reflected in that outlook on human sexuality according to which sexuality's dignity in service to communion and to the reciprocal donation between persons becomes degraded and thereby reduced to nothing more than a consumer good. In this case, many young people undergo an affective experience which, instead of contributing to a harmonious and joyous growth in personality which opens them outward in an act of self - giving, becomes a serious psychological and ethical process of turning inward toward self, a situation which cannot fail to have grave consequences on them in the future.

In the case of some young people a distorted sense of freedom lies at the root of these tendencies. Instead of being understood as obedience to objective and universal truth, freedom is lived out as a blind acquiescence to instinctive forces and to an individual's will to power. Therefore, on the level of thought and behavior, it is almost natural to find an erosion of internal consent to ethical principles. On the religious level, such a situation, if it does not always lead to an explicit refusal of God, causes widespread indifference and results in a life which, even in its more significant moments and more decisive choices, is lived as if God did not exist. In this context it is difficult not only to respond fully to a vocation to the priesthood but even to understand its very meaning as a special witness to the primacy of "being" over "having, " and as a recognition that the significance of life consists in a free and responsible giving of oneself to others, a willingness to place oneself entirely at the Service of the Gospel and the kingdom of God as a priest.

Often the world of young people is a "problem" in the Church community itself. In fact, if in them -- more so than in adults -- there is present a strong tendency to subjectivize the Christian faith and to belong only partially and conditionally to the life and mission of the Church, and if the Church community is slow for a variety of reasons to initiate and sustain an up - to - date and courageous pastoral care for young people, they risk being left to themselves, at the mercy of their psychological frailty? dissatisfied and critical of a world of adults who, in failing to live the faith in a consistent and mature fashion, do not appear to them as credible models.

Thus we see how difficult it is to present young people with a full and penetrating experience of Christian and ecclesial life and to educate them in it. So, the prospect of having a vocation to the priesthood is far from the actual everyday interests which young men have in life.

9. Nevertheless, there are positive situations and tendencies which bring about and nurture in the heart of adolescents and young men a new readiness, and even a genuine search, for ethical and spiritual values. These naturally offer favorable conditions for embarking on the journey of a vocation which leads toward the total gift of self to Christ and to the Church in the priesthood.

First of all, mention should be made of the decrease of certain phenomena which had caused many problems in the recent past, such as radical rebellion, libertarian tendencies, utopian claims, indiscriminate forms of socialization and violence.

It must be recognized, moreover, that today's young people, with the vigor and vitality typical of their age, are also bearers of ideals which are coming to the fore in history: the thirst for freedom; the recognition of the inestimable value of the person; the need for authenticity and sincerity; a new conception and style of reciprocity in the rapport between men and women; a convinced and earnest seeking after a more just, sympathetic and united world; openness and dialogue with all; and the commitment to peace.

The fruitful and active development among so many young people today of numerous and varied forms of voluntary service, directed toward the most forgotten and forsaken of our society, represents in these times a particularly important resource for personal growth. It stimulates and sustains young people in a style of life which is less self - interested and more open and sympathetic toward the poor. This way of life can help young men perceive, desire and accept a vocation to stable and total service of others, following the path of complete consecration to God as a priest.

The recent collapse of ideologies, the heavily critical opposition to a world of adults who do not always offer a witness of a life based on moral and transcendent values, and the experience of companions who seek escape through drugs and violence -- contribute in no small fashion to making more keen and inescapable the fundamental question as to what values are truly capable of giving the fullest meaning to life, suffering and death. For many young people the question of religion and the need for spirituality are becoming more explicit. This is illustrated in the desire for "desert experiences" and for prayer, in the return to a more personal and regular reading of the word of God and in the study of theology.

As has happened in their involvement in the sphere of voluntary social service, young people are becoming more actively involved as leaders in the ecclesial community, above all through their membership in various groups -- whether traditional but renewed ones or of more recent origin. Their experience of a Church challenged to undertake a "new evangelization" by virtue of her faithfulness to the Spirit who animates her and in response to the demands of a world far from Christ but in need of him, as well as their experience of a Church ever more united with individuals and peoples in the defense and promotion of the dignity of the person and of the human rights of each and every one -- these experiences open the hearts and lives of the young to the exciting and demanding ideals which can find their concrete fulfillment in following Christ and in embracing the priesthood.

Naturally it is not possible to ignore this human and ecclesial situation -- characterized by strong ambivalence -- not only in the pastoral care of vocations and the formation of future priests, but also in the care of priests in their life and ministry and their ongoing formation. At the same time, while it is possible to detect various forms of "crisis" to which priests are subjected today in their ministry, in their spiritual life and indeed in the very interpretation of the nature and significance of the ministerial priesthood -- mention must likewise be made, in a spirit of joy and hope, of the new positive possibilities which the present historical moment is offering to priests for the fulfillment of their mission.

Gospel Discernment

10. The complex situation of the present day, briefly outlined above in general terms and examples, needs not only to be known but also and above all to be interpreted. Only in this way can an adequate answer be given to the fundamental question: How can we form priests who are truly able to respond to the demands of our times and capable of evangelizing the world of today?(15)

Knowledge of the situation is important. However, simply to provide data is not enough; what is needed is a "scientific" inquiry in order to sketch a precise and concrete picture of today's socio - cultural and ecclesial circumstances.

Even more important is an interpretation of the situation. Such an interpretation is required because of the ambivalence and at times contradictions which are characteristic of the present situation where there is a mixture of difficulties and potentialities, negative elements and reasons for hope, obstacles and alternatives, as in the field mentioned in the Gospel where good seed and weeds are both sown and "co - exist" (cf. Mt. 13:24ff.).

It is not always easy to give an interpretive reading capable of distinguishing good from evil or signs of hope from threats. In the formation of priests it is not sufficient simply to welcome the positive factors and to counteract the negative ones. The positive factors themselves need to be subjected to a careful work of discernment, so that they do not become isolated and contradict one another, becoming absolutes and at odds with one another. The same is true for the negative factors, which are not to be rejected en bloc and without distinction, because in each one there may lie hidden some value which awaits liberation and restoration to its full truth.

For a believer the interpretation of the historical situation finds its principle for understanding and its criterion for making practical choices in a new and unique reality, that is, in a Gospel discernment. This interpretation is a work which is done in the light and strength provided by the true and living Gospel, which is Jesus Christ, and in virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit. In such a way, Gospel discernment gathers from the historical situation -- from its events and circumstances -- not just a simple "fact" to be precisely recorded yet capable of leaving a person indifferent or passive, but a "task, " a challenge to responsible freedom -- both of the individual person and of the community. It is a "challenge" which is linked to a "call" which God causes to sound in the historical situation itself. In this situation, and also through it, God calls the believer -- and first of all the Church -- to ensure that "the Gospel of vocation and priesthood" expresses its perennial truth in the changing circumstances of life. In this case, the words of the Second Vatican Council are also applicable to the formation of priests: "The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel so that in a language intelligible to every generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which people ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings and its often dramatic characteristics."(16)

This Gospel discernment is based on trust in the love of Jesus Christ, who always and tirelessly cares for his Church (cf. Eph. 5:29), he the Lord and Master, the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of human history.(17) This discernment is nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit who evokes everywhere and in all circumstances, obedience to the faith, the joyous courage of following Jesus, and the gift of wisdom, which judges all things and is judged by no one (cf. 1 Cor. 2:15). It rests on the fidelity of the Father to his promises.

In this way the Church feels that she can face the difficulties and challenges of this new period of history and can also provide, in the present and in the future, priests who are well trained to be convinced and fervent ministers of the "new evangelization, " faithful and generous servants of Jesus Christ and of the human family. We are not unmindful of difficulties in this regard; they are neither few nor insignificant. However, to surmount these difficulties we have at our disposal our hope, our faith in the unfailing love of Christ, and our certainty that the priestly ministry in the life of the Church and in the world knows no substitute.

CHAPTER II

HE HAS ANOINTED ME AND HAS SENT ME FORTH The Nature and Mission of the Ministerial Priesthood

A Look at the Priest

11. "The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him" (Lk. 4:20). What the evangelist Luke says about the people in the synagogue at Nazareth that Sabbath, listening to Jesus' commentary on the words of the prophet Isaiah which he had just read, can be applied to all Christians. They are always called to recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the definitive fulfillment of the message of the prophets: "And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'" (Lk. 4:21). The "Scripture" he had read was this: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19; cf. Is. 61:1-2). Jesus thus presents himself as filled with the Spirit, "consecrated with an anointing, " "sent to preach good news to the poor." He is the Messiah, the Messiah who is priest, prophet and king.

These are the features of Christ upon which the eyes of faith and love of Christians should be fixed. Using this "contemplation" as a starting point and making continual reference to it, the synod fathers reflected on the problem of priestly formation in present - day circumstances. This problem cannot be solved without previous reflection upon the goal of formation, that is, the ministerial priesthood, or more precisely, the ministerial priesthood as a participation -- in the Church -- in the very priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Knowledge of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood is an essential presupposition, and at the same time the surest guide and incentive toward the development of pastoral activities in the Church for fostering and discerning vocations to the priesthood and training those called to the ordained ministry.

A correct and in - depth awareness of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood is the path which must be taken -- and in fact the synod did take it -- in order to emerge from the crisis of priestly identity. In the final address to the synod I stated: "This crisis arose in the years immediately following the Council. It was based on an erroneous understanding of -- and sometimes even a conscious bias against -- the doctrine of the conciliar magisterium. Undoubtedly, herein lies one of the reasons for the great number of defections experienced then by the Church, losses which did serious harm to pastoral ministry and priestly vocations, especially missionary vocations. It is as though the 1990 synod -- rediscovering, by means of the many statements which we heard in this hall, the full depth of priestly identity -- has striven to instill hope in the wake of these sad losses. These statements showed an awareness of the specific ontological bond which unites the priesthood to Christ the high priest and good shepherd. This identity is built upon the type of formation which must be provided for priesthood and then endure throughout the priest's whole life. This was the precise purpose of the synod."(18)

For this reason the synod considered it necessary to summarize the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood, as the Church's faith has acknowledged them down the centuries of its history and as the Second Vatican Council has presented them anew to the people of our day.(19)

In the Church as Mystery, Communion and Mission

12. "The priest's identity, " as the synod fathers wrote, "like every Christian identity, has its source in the Blessed Trinity, "(20) which is revealed and is communicated to people in Christ, establishing, in him and through the Spirit, the Church as "the seed and the beginning of the kingdom."(21) The apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, summarizing the Council's teaching, presents the Church as mystery, communion and mission: "She is mystery because the very life and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the gift gratuitously offered to all those who are born of water and the Spirit (cf. Jn. 3:5) and called to relive the very communion of God and to manifest it and communicate it in history [mission]." (22)

It is within the Church's mystery, as a mystery of Trinitarian communion in missionary tension, that every Christian identity is revealed, and likewise the specific identity of the priest and his ministry. Indeed, the priest, by virtue of the consecration which he receives in the sacrament of orders, is sent forth by the Father through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, to whom he is configured in a special way as head and shepherd of his people, in order to live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit in service of the Church and for the salvation of the world.(23)

In this way the fundamentally "relational" dimension of priestly identity can be understood. Through the priesthood which arises from the depths of the ineffable mystery of God, that is, from the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's gift of unity, the priest sacramentally enters into communion with the bishop and with other priests(24) in order to serve the People of God who are the Church and to draw all mankind to Christ in accordance with the Lord's prayer: "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one...even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:11, 21).

Consequently, the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood cannot be defined except through this multiple and rich interconnection of relationships which arise from the Blessed Trinity and are prolonged in the communion of the Church, as a sign and instrument of Christ, of communion with God and of the unity of all humanity.(25) In this context the ecclesiology of communion becomes decisive for understanding the identity of the priest, his essential dignity, and his vocation and mission among the People of God and in the world. Reference to the Church is therefore necessary, even if not primary, in defining the identity of the priest. As a mystery, the Church is essentially related to Jesus Christ. She is his fullness, his body, his spouse. She is the "sign" and living "memorial" of his permanent presence and activity in our midst and on our behalf. The priest finds the full truth of his identity in being a derivation, a specific participation in and continuation of Christ himself, the one high priest of the new and eternal covenant. The priest is a living and transparent image of Christ the priest. The priesthood of Christ, the expression of his absolute "newness" in salvation history, constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all Christians and the priest in particular. Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of priesthood.

The Fundamental Relationship With Christ the Head and Shepherd

13. Jesus Christ has revealed in himself the perfect and definitive features of the priesthood of the new Covenant.(26) He did this throughout his earthly life, but especially in the central event of his passion, death and resurrection.

As the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes, Jesus, being a man like us and at the same time the only begotten Son of God, is in his very being the perfect mediator between the Father and humanity (cf. Heb. 8-9). Thanks to the gift of his Holy Spirit he gives us immediate access to God: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:6; cf. Rom. 8:15)

Jesus brought his role as mediator to complete fulfillment when he offered himself on the cross, thereby opening to us, once and for all, access to the heavenly sanctuary, to the Father's house (cf. Heb. 9:24-28). Compared with Jesus, Moses and all other "mediators" between God and his people in the Old Testament --kings, priests and prophets -- are no more than "figures" and "shadows of the good things to come" instead of "the true form of these realities" (cf. Heb. 10:1).

Jesus is the promised good shepherd (cf. Ez. 34), who knows each one of his sheep, who offers his life for them and who wishes to gather them together as one flock with one shepherd (cf. Jn. 10:11-16). He is the shepherd who has come "not to be served but to serve" (Mt. 20:28), who in the paschal action of the washing of the feet (cf. Jn. 13:1-20) leaves to his disciples a model of service to one another and who freely offers himself as the "innocent lamb" sacrificed for our redemption (cf. Jn. 1:36; Rv. 5:6, 12).

With the one definitive sacrifice of the cross, Jesus communicated to all his disciples the dignity and mission of priests of the new and eternal covenant. And thus the promise which God had made to Israel was fulfilled: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). According to St. Peter, the whole people of the new covenant is established as "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt. 2:5). The baptized are "living stones" who build the spiritual edifice by keeping close to Christ, "that living stone...in God's sight chosen and precious" (1 Pt. 2:4). The new priestly people which is the Church not only has its authentic image in Christ, but also receives from him a real ontological share in his one eternal priesthood, to which she must conform every aspect of her life.

14. For the sake of this universal priesthood of the new covenant Jesus gathered disciples during his earthly mission (cf. Lk. 10:1-12), and with a specific and authoritative mandate he called and appointed the Twelve "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mk. 3:14-15).

For this reason, already during his public ministry (cf. Mt. 16:18), and then most fully after his death and resurrection (cf. Mt. 28; Jn. 20; 21), Jesus had conferred on Peter and the Twelve entirely special powers with regard to the future community and the evangelization of all peoples. After having called them to follow him, he kept them at his side and lived with them, imparting his teaching of salvation to them through word and example, and finally he sent them out to all mankind. To enable them to carry out this mission Jesus confers upon the apostles, by a specific paschal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the same messianic authority which he had received from the Father, conferred in its fullness in his resurrection: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28:18-20).

Jesus thus established a close relationship between the ministry entrusted to the apostles and his own mission: "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (Mt. 10:40); "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Lk. 10:16). Indeed, in the light of the paschal event of the death and resurrection, the fourth Gospel affirms this with great force and clarity: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn. 20:21; cf. 13:20; 17:18). Just as Jesus has a mission which comes to him directly from God and makes present the very authority of God (cf. Mt. 7:29; 21:23; Mk. 1:27; 11:28; Lk. 20:2; 24:19), so too the apostles have a mission which comes to them from Jesus. And just as "the Son can do nothing of his own accord" (Jn. 5:19) such that his teaching is not his own but the teaching of the One who sent him (cf. Jn. 7:16), so Jesus

says to the apostles: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Their mission is not theirs but is the same mission of Jesus. All this is possible not as a result of human abilities, but only with the "gift" of Christ and his Spirit, with the "sacrament": "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn. 20:22-23). And so the apostles, not by any special merit of their own, but only through a gratuitous participation in the grace of Christ, prolong throughout history to the end of time the same mission of Jesus on behalf of humanity.

The sign and presupposition of the authenticity and fruitfulness of this mission is the apostles' unity with Jesus and, in him, with one another and with the Father -- as the priestly prayer of our Lord, which sums up his mission, bears witness (cf. Jn. 17:20-23).

15. In their turn, the apostles, appointed by the Lord, progressively carried out their mission by calling -- in various but complementary ways -- other men as bishops, as priests and as deacons in order to fulfill the command of the risen Jesus who sent them forth to all people in every age.

The writings of the New Testament are unanimous in stressing that it is the same Spirit of Christ who introduces these men chosen from among their brethren into the ministry. Through the laying on of hands (cf. Acts 6:6; 1 Tm. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tm. 1:6) which transmits the gift of the Spirit, they are called and empowered to continue the same ministry of reconciliation, of shepherding the flock of God and of teaching (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Pt. 5:2).

Therefore, priests are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the one high priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care. We find this clearly and precisely stated in the first letter of Peter: "I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory" (1 Pt. 5:1-4).

In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ -- the head and shepherd -- authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation -- particularly in baptism, penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the head and shepherd.(27)

This is the ordinary and proper way in which ordained ministers share in the one priesthood of Christ. By the sacramental anointing of holy orders, the Holy Spirit configures them in a new and special way to Jesus Christ the head and shepherd; he forms and strengthens them with his pastoral charity; and he gives them an authoritative role in the Church as servants of the proclamation of the Gospel to every people and of the fullness of Christian life of all the baptized.

The truth of the priest as it emerges from the Word of God, that is, from Jesus Christ himself and from his constitutive plan for the Church, is thus proclaimed with joyful gratitude by the Preface of the liturgy of the Chrism Mass: "By your Holy Spirit you anointed your only Son high priest of the new and eternal covenant. With wisdom and love you have planned that this one priesthood should continue in the Church. Christ gives the dignity of a royal priesthood to the people he has made his own. From these, with a brother's love, he chooses men to share his sacred ministry by the laying on of hands. He appointed them to renew in his name the sacrifice of redemption as they set before your family his paschal meal. He calls them to lead your holy people in love, nourish them by your word and strengthen them through the sacraments. Father, they are to give their lives in your service and for the salvation of your people as they strive to grow in the likeness of Christ and honor you by their courageous witness of faith and love."

Serving the Church and the World

16. The priest's fundamental relationship is to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd. Indeed, the priest participates in a specific and authoritative way in the "consecration/anointing" and in the "mission" of Christ (cf. Lk. 4:18-19). But intimately linked to this relationship is the priest's relationship with the Church. It is not a question of "relations" which are merely juxtaposed, but rather of ones which are interiorly united in a kind of mutual immanence. The priest's relation to the Church is inscribed in the very relation which the priest has to Christ, such that the "sacramental representation" to Christ serves as the basis and inspiration for the relation of the priest to the Church.

In this sense the synod fathers wrote: "Inasmuch as he represents Christ the head, shepherd and spouse of the Church, the priest is placed not only in the Church but also in the forefront of the Church. The priesthood, along with the word of God and the sacramental signs which it serves, belongs to the constitutive elements of the Church. The ministry of the priest is entirely on behalf of the Church; it aims at promoting the exercise of the common priesthood of the entire People of God; it is ordered not only to the particular Church but also to the universal Church (Presbyterorum Ordinis, 10), in communion with the bishop, with Peter and under Peter. Through the priesthood of the bishop, the priesthood of the second order is incorporated in the apostolic structure of the Church. In this way priests, like the apostles, act as ambassadors of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20). This is the basis of the missionary character of every priest."(28)

Therefore, the ordained ministry arises with the Church and has in bishops, and in priests who are related to and are in communion with them, a particular relation to the original ministry of the apostles -- to which it truly "succeeds" -- even though with regard to the latter it assumes different forms.

Consequently, the ordained priesthood ought not to be thought of as existing prior to the Church, because it is totally at the service of the Church. Nor should it be considered as posterior to the ecclesial community, as if the Church could be imagined as already established without this priesthood.

The relation of the priest to Jesus Christ, and in him to his Church, is found in the very being of the priest by virtue of his sacramental consecration/ointing and in his activity, that is, in his mission or ministry. In particular, "the priest minister is the servant of Christ present in the Church as mystery, communion and mission. In virtue of his participation in the 'anointing' and 'mission' of Christ, the priest can continue Christ's prayer, word, sacrifice and salvific action in the Church. In this way, the priest is a servant of the Church as mystery because he actualizes the Church's sacramental signs of the presence of the risen Christ. He is a servant of the Church as communion because -- in union with the bishop and closely related to the presbyterate -- he builds up the unity of the Church community in the harmony of diverse vocations, charisms and services. Finally, the priest is a servant to the Church as mission because he makes the community a herald and witness of the Gospel."(29)

Thus, by his very nature and sacramental mission, the priest appears in the structure of the Church as a sign of the absolute priority and gratuitousness of the grace given to the Church by the risen Christ. Through the ministerial priesthood the Church becomes aware in faith that her being comes not from herself but from the grace of Christ in the Holy Spirit. The apostles and their successors, inasmuch as they exercise an authority which comes to them from Christ, the head and shepherd, are placed -- with their ministry -- in the fore front of the Church as a visible continuation and sacramental sign of Christ in his own position before the Church and the world, as the enduring and ever new source of salvation, he "who is head of the Church, his body, and is himself its savior" (Eph. 5:23).

17. By its very nature, the ordained ministry can be carried out only to the extent that the priest is united to Christ through sacramental participation in the priestly order, and thus to the extent that he is in hierarchical communion with his own bishop. The ordained ministry has a radical "communitarian form" and can only be carried out as "a collective work."(30) The Council dealt extensively with this communal aspect of the nature of the priesthood, (31) examining in succession the relationship of the priest with his own bishop, with other priests and with the lay faithful.

The ministry of priests is above all communion and a responsible and necessary cooperation with the bishop's ministry, in concern for the universal Church and for the individual particular churches, for whose service they form with the bishop a single presbyterate.

Each priest, whether diocesan or religious, is united to the other members of this presbyterate on the basis of the sacrament of holy orders and by particular bonds of apostolic charity, ministry and fraternity. All priests in fact, whether diocesan or religious, share in the one priesthood of Christ the head and shepherd; "they work for the same cause, namely, the building up of the body of Christ, which demands a variety of functions and new adaptations, especially at the present time,"(32) and is enriched down the centuries by ever new charisms.

Finally, because their role and task within the Church do not replace but promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire People of God, leading it to its full ecclesial realization, priests have a positive and helping relationship to the laity. Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. They recognize and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church's mission.(33) The ministerial priesthood conferred by the sacrament of holy orders and the common or "royal" priesthood of the faithful, which differ essentially and not only in degree, (34) are ordered one to the other -- for each in its own way derives from the one priesthood of Christ. Indeed, the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received.(35)

18. As the Council points out, "the spiritual gift which priests have received in ordination does not prepare them merely for a limited and circumscribed mission, but for the fullest, in fact the universal, mission of salvation to the end of the earth. The reason is that every priestly ministry shares in the fullness of the mission entrusted by Christ to the apostles."(36) By the very nature of their ministry they should therefore be penetrated and animated by a profound missionary spirit and "with that truly Catholic spirit which habitually looks beyond the boundaries of diocese, country or rite to meet the needs of the whole Church, being prepared in spirit to preach the Gospel everywhere."(37)

Furthermore, precisely because within the Church's life the priest is a man of communion, in his relations with all people he must be a man of mission and dialogue. Deeply rooted in the truth and charity of Christ, and impelled by the desire and imperative to proclaim Christ's salvation to all, the priest is called to witness in all his relationships to fraternity, service and a common quest for the truth, as well as a concern for the promotion of justice and peace. This is the case above all with the brethren of other churches and Christian denominations, but it also extends to the followers of other religions, to people of good will and in particular to the poor and the defenseless, and to all who yearn -- even if they do not know it or cannot express it -- for the truth and the salvation of Christ, in accordance with the words of Jesus who said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk. 2:17).

Today, in particular, the pressing pastoral task of the new evangelization calls for the involvement of the entire People of God, and requires a new fervor, new methods and a new expression for the announcing and witnessing of the Gospel. This task demands priests who are deeply and fully immersed in the mystery of Christ and capable of embodying a new style of pastoral life, marked by a profound communion with the pope, the bishops and other priests, and a fruitful cooperation with the lay faithful, always respecting and fostering the different roles, charisms and ministries present within the ecclesial community.(38)

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:2 1). Let us listen once again to these words of Jesus in the light of the ministerial priesthood which we have presented in its nature and mission. The "today" to which Jesus refers, precisely because it belongs to and defines the "fullness of time, " the time of full and definitive salvation, indicates the time of the Church. The consecration and mission of Christ --"The Spirit of the Lord...has anointed me and has sent me to preach good news to the poor" (cf. Lk. 4:18) --are the living branch from which bud the consecration and mission of the Church, the "fullness" of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:23). In the rebirth of baptism, the Spirit of the Lord is poured out on all believers, consecrating them as a spiritual temple and a holy priesthood and sending them forth to make known the marvels of him who out of darkness has called them into his marvelous light (cf. 1 Pt. 2:4-10). The priest shares in Christ's consecration and mission in a specific and authoritative way, through the sacrament of holy orders, by virtue of which he is configured in his being to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd, and shares in the mission of "preaching the good news to the poor" in the name and person of Christ himself.

In their final message the synod fathers summarized briefly but eloquently the "truth, " or better the "mystery" and "gift" of the ministerial priesthood, when they stated: "We derive our identity ultimately from the love of the Father, we turn our gaze to the Son, sent by the Father as high priest and good shepherd. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are united sacramentally to him in the ministerial priesthood. Our priestly life and activity continue the life and activity of Christ himself. Here lies our identity, our true dignity, the source of our joy, the very basis of our life."(39)

CHAPTER III

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME

The Spiritual Life of the Priest

A "Specific" Vocation to Holiness

19. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Lk. 4:18). The Spirit is not simply "upon" the Messiah, but he "fills" him, penetrating every part of him and reaching to the very depths of all that he is and does. Indeed, the Spirit is the principle of the "consecration" and "mission" of the Messiah: "Because he has anointed me and sent me to preach good news to the poor" (cf. Lk. 4:18). Through the Spirit, Jesus belongs totally and exclusively to God and shares in the infinite holiness of God, who calls him, chooses him and sends him forth. In this way the Spirit of the Lord is revealed as the source of holiness and of the call to holiness.

This name "Spirit of the Lord" is "upon" the entire People of God, which becomes established as a people "consecrated" to God and "sent" by God to announce the Gospel of salvation. The members of the People of God are "inebriated" and "sealed" with the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21ff.; Eph. 1:13; 4:30) and called to holiness.

In particular, the Spirit reveals to us and communicates the fundamental calling which the Father addresses to everyone from all eternity: the vocation to be "holy and blameless before him...in love, " by virtue of our predestination to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 1:4-5). This is not all. By revealing and communicating this vocation to us, the Spirit becomes within us the principle and wellspring of its fulfillment. He, the Spirit of the Son (cf. Gal. 4:6), configures us to Christ Jesus and makes us sharers in his life as Son, that is, sharers in his life of love for the Father and for our brothers and sisters. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). In these words the apostle Paul reminds us that a Christian life is a "spiritual life, " that is, a life enlivened and led by the Spirit toward holiness or the perfection of charity.

The Council's statement that "all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity"(40) applies in a special way to priests. They are called not only because they have been baptized, but also and specifically because they are priests, that is, under a new title and in new and different ways deriving from the sacrament of holy orders.

20. The Council's Decree on Priestly Life and Ministry gives us a particularly rich and thought - provoking synthesis of the priest's "spiritual life" and of the gift and duty to become "saints": "By the sacrament of orders priests are configured to Christ the priest so that as ministers of the head and co - workers with the episcopal order they may build up and establish his whole body which is the Church. Like all Christians they have already received in the consecration of baptism the sign and gift of their great calling and grace which enables and obliges them even in the midst of human weakness to seek perfection (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9), according to the Lord's word: 'You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt. 5:48). But priests are bound in a special way to strive for this perfection, since they are consecrated to God in a new way by their ordination. They have become living instruments of Christ the eternal priest, so that through the ages they, can accomplish his wonderful work of reuniting the whole human race with heavenly

power. Therefore, since every priest in his own way represents the person of Christ himself, he is endowed with a special grace. By this grace the priest, through his service of the people committed to his care and all the People of God, is able the better to pursue the perfection of Christ, whose place he takes. The human weakness of his flesh is remedied by the holiness of him who became for us a high priest "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners" (Heb. 7:26)."(41)

The Council first affirms the "common" vocation to holiness. This vocation is rooted in baptism, which characterizes the priest as one of the "faithful" (Christifidelis), as a "brother among brothers, " a member of the People of God, joyfully sharing in the gifts of salvation (cf. Eph. 4:4-6) and in the common duty of walking "according to the Spirit" in the footsteps of the one master and Lord. We recall the celebrated words of St. Augustine: "For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian. The former title speaks of a task undertaken, the latter of grace; the former betokens danger, the latter salvation."(42)

With the same clarity the conciliar text also speaks of a "specific" vocation to holiness, or more precisely of a vocation based on the sacrament of holy orders -- as a sacrament proper and specific to the priest -- and thus involving a new consecration to God through ordination. St. Augustine also alludes to this specific vocation when, after the words "For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian, he goes on to say: "If therefore it is to me a greater cause for joy to have been rescued with you than to have been placed as your leader, following the Lord's command, I will devote myself to the best of my abilities to serve you, so as not to show myself ungrateful to him who rescued me with that price which has made me your fellow servant."(43)

The conciliar text goes on to point out some elements necessary for defining what constitutes the "specific quality" of the priest's spiritual life. These are elements connected with the priest's "consecration, " which configures him to Christ the head and shepherd of the Church, with the "mission" or ministry peculiar to the priest; which equips and obliges him to be a "living instrument of Christ the eternal priest" and to act "in the name and in the person of Christ himself" and with his entire "life, " called to manifest and witness in a fundamental way the "radicalism of the Gospel."(44)

Configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, and Pastoral Charity

21. By sacramental consecration the priest is configured to Jesus Christ as head and shepherd of the Church, and he is endowed with a "spiritual power" which is a share in the authority with which Jesus Christ guides the Church through his Spirit.(45)

By virtue of this consecration brought about by the outpouring of the Spirit in the sacrament of holy orders, the spiritual life of the priest is marked, molded and characterized by the way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, and which are summed up in his pastoral charity.

Jesus Christ is head of the Church his body. He is the "head" in the new and unique sense of being a "servant, " according to his own words: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). Jesus' service attains its fullest expression in his death on the cross, that is, in his total gift of self in humility and love. "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). The authority of Jesus Christ as head coincides then with his service, with his gift, with his total, humble and loving dedication on behalf of the Church. All this he did in perfect obedience to the Father; he is the one true Suffering Servant of God, both priest and victim.

The spiritual existence of every priest receives its life and inspiration from exactly this type of authority, from service to the Church, precisely inasmuch as it is required by the priest's configuration to Jesus Christ Head and Servant of the Church.(46) As St. Augustine once reminded a bishop on the day of his ordination: "He who is head of the people must in the first place realize that he is to be the servant of many. And he should not disdain being such; I say it once again, he should not disdain being the servant of many, because the Lord of Lords did not disdain to make himself our servant."(47)

The spiritual life of the ministers of the New Testament should therefore be marked by this fundamental attitude of service to the People of God (cf. Mt. 20:24ff.; Mk. 10:43-44), freed from all presumption of desire of "lording over" those in their charge (cf. 1 Pt. 5:2-3). The priest is to perform this service freely and willingly as God desires. In this way the priests, as the ministers, the "elders" of the community, will be in their person the "model" of the flock, which for its part is called to display this same priestly attitude of service toward the world -- in order to bring to humanity the fullness of life and complete liberation.

22. The figure of Jesus Christ as shepherd of the Church, his flock, takes up and represents in new and more evocative terms the same content as that of Jesus Christ as head and servant. Fulfilling the prophetic proclamation of the Messiah and savior joyfully announced by the psalmist and the prophet Ezekiel (cf. Ps. 22-23; Ez. 34:11ff.), Jesus presents himself as "the good shepherd" (Jn. 10:11, 14), not only of Israel but of all humanity (cf. Jn. 10:16). His whole life is a continual manifestation of his "pastoral charity, " or rather, a daily enactment of it. He feels compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mt. 9:35-36). He goes in search of the straying and scattered sheep (cf. Mt. 18:12-14) and joyfully celebrates their return. He gathers and protects them. He knows them and calls each one by name (cf. Jn. 10:3). He leads them to green pastures and still waters (cf. Ps. 22-23)

and spreads a table for them, nourishing them with his own life. The good shepherd offers this life through his own death and resurrection, as the Church sings out in the Roman liturgy: "The good shepherd is risen! He who laid down his life for his sheep, who died for his flock, he is risen, alleluia."(48)

The author of the first letter of Peter calls Jesus the "chief Shepherd" (1 Pt. 5:4) because his work and mission continue in the Church through the apostles (cf. Jn. 21:15-17) and their successors (cf. 1 Pt. 5:1ff.), and through priests. By virtue of their consecration, priests are configured to Jesus the good shepherd and are called to imitate and to live out his own pastoral charity.

Christ's gift of himself to his Church, the fruit of his love, is described in terms of that unique gift of self made by the bridegroom to the bride, as the sacred texts often suggest. Jesus is the true bridegroom who offers to the Church the wine of salvation (cf. Jn. 2:11). He who is "the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its savior" (Eph. 5:23) "loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). The Church is indeed the body in which Christ the head is present and active, but she is also the bride who proceeds like a new Eve from the open side of the redeemer on the cross.

Hence Christ stands "before" the Church and "nourishes and cherishes her" (Eph. 5:29), giving his life for her. The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church.(49) Of course, he will always remain a member of the community as a believer alongside his other brothers and sisters who have been called by the Spirit, but in virtue of his configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community. "Inasmuch as he represents Christ, the head, shepherd and spouse of the Church, the priest is placed not only in the Church but also in the forefront of the Church."(50) In his spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ's spousal love toward the Church, his bride. Therefore, the priest's life ought to radiate this spousal character, which demands that he be a witness to Christ's spousal love and thus be capable of loving people with a heart which is new, generous and pure -- with genuine self - detachment, with full, constant and faithful dedication and at the same time with a kind of "divine jealousy" (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2) and even with a kind of maternal tenderness, capable of bearing "the pangs of birth" until "Christ be formed" in the faithful (cf. Gal. 4:19).

23. The internal principle, the force which animates and guides the spiritual life of the priest inasmuch as he is configured to Christ the head and shepherd, is pastoral charity, as a participation in Jesus Christ's own pastoral charity, a gift freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit and likewise a task and a call which demand a free and committed response on the part of the priest.

The essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of self to the Church, following the example of Christ. "Pastoral charity is the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self - giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ's love for his flock. Pastoral charity determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people. It makes special demands on us."(51)

The gift of self, which is the source and synthesis of pastoral charity, is directed toward the Church. This was true of Christ who "loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25), and the same must be true for the priest. With pastoral charity, which distinguishes the exercise of the priestly ministry as an *amoris officium*, (52) "the priest, who welcomes the call to ministry, is in a position to make this a loving choice, as a result of which the Church and souls become his first interest, and with this concrete spirituality he becomes capable of loving the universal Church and that part of it entrusted to him with the deep love of a husband for his wife."(53) The gift of self has no limits, marked as it is by the same apostolic and missionary zeal of Christ, the good shepherd, who said: "And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (Jn. 10:16).

Within the Church community the priest's pastoral charity impels and demands in a particular and specific way his personal relationship with the presbyterate, united in and with the bishop, as the Council explicitly states: "Pastoral charity requires that a priest always work in the bond of communion with the bishop and with his brother priests, lest his efforts be in vain."(54)

The gift of self to the Church concerns her insofar as she is the body and the bride of Jesus Christ. In this way the primary point of reference of the priest's charity is Jesus Christ himself. Only in loving and serving Christ the head and spouse will charity become a source, criterion, measure and impetus for the priest's love and service to the Church, the body and spouse of Christ. The apostle Paul had a clear and sure understanding of this point. Writing to the Christians of the church in Corinth, he refers to "ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5). Above all, this was the explicit and programmatic teaching of Jesus when he entrusted to Peter the ministry of shepherding the flock only after his threefold affirmation of love, indeed only after he had expressed a preferential love: "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter...said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'" (Jn. 21:17)

Pastoral charity, which has its specific source in the sacrament of holy orders, finds its full expression and its supreme nourishment in the Eucharist. As the Council states: "This pastoral charity flows mainly from the eucharistic sacrifice, which is thus the center and root of the whole priestly life. The priestly soul strives thereby to apply to itself the action which takes place on the altar of sacrifice."(55) Indeed, the Eucharist re-presents, makes once again priest, the sacrifice

of the cross, the full gift of Christ to the Church, the gift of his body given and his blood shed, as the supreme witness of the fact that he is head and shepherd, servant and spouse of the Church. Precisely because of this, the priest's pastoral charity not only flows from the Eucharist but finds in the celebration of the Eucharist its highest realization -- just as it is from the Eucharist that he receives the grace and obligation to give his whole life a "sacrificial" dimension. This same pastoral charity is the dynamic inner principle capable of unifying the many different activities of the priest. In virtue of this pastoral charity the essential and permanent demand for unity between the priest's interior life and all his external actions and the obligations of the ministry can be properly fulfilled, a demand particularly urgent in a socio-cultural and ecclesial context strongly marked by complexity, fragmentation and dispersion. Only by directing every moment and every one of his acts toward the fundamental choice to "give his life for the flock" can the priest guarantee this unity which is vital and indispensable for his harmony and spiritual balance. The Council reminds us that "priests attain to the unity of their lives by uniting themselves with Christ whose food was to fulfill the will of him who sent him to do his work.... In this way, by assuming the role of the good shepherd they will find in the very exercise of pastoral charity the bond of priestly perfection which will unify their lives and activities."(56)

The Spiritual Life in the Exercise of the Ministry

24. The Spirit of the Lord anointed Christ and sent him forth to announce the Gospel (cf. Lk. 4:18). The priest's mission is not extraneous to his consecration or juxtaposed to it, but represents its intrinsic and vital purpose: Consecration is for mission. In this sense, not only consecration but mission as well is under the seal of the Spirit and the influence of his sanctifying power.

This was the case in Jesus' life. This was the case in the lives of the apostles and their successors. This is the case for the entire Church and within her for priests: All have received the Spirit as a gift and call to holiness in and through the carrying out of the mission.(57)

Therefore, an intimate bond exists between the priest's spiritual life and the exercise of his ministry, (58) a bond which the Council expresses in this fashion: "And so it is that they are grounded in the life of the Spirit while they exercise the ministry of the Spirit and of justice (cf. 2 Cor. 3:8-9), as long as they are docile to Christ's Spirit, who gives them life and guidance. For by their everyday sacred actions, as by the entire ministry which they exercise in union with the bishop and their fellow priests, they are being directed toward perfection of life. Priestly holiness itself contributes very greatly to a fruitful fulfillment of the priestly ministry."(59)

"Live the mystery that has been placed in your hands!" This is the invitation and admonition which the Church addresses to the priest in the Rite of Ordination, when the offerings of the holy people for the eucharistic sacrifice are placed in his hands. The "mystery" of which the priest is a "steward" (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1) is definitively Jesus Christ himself, who in the Spirit is the source of holiness and the call to sanctification. This "mystery" seeks expression in the priestly life. For this to be so, there is need for great vigilance and lively awareness. Once again, the Rite of Ordination introduces these words with this recommendation: "Beware of what you will be doing." In the same way Paul had admonished Timothy, "Do not neglect the gift you have" (1 Tm. 4:14; cf. 2 Tm. 1:6).

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The relation between a priest's spiritual life and the exercise of his ministry can also be explained on the basis of the pastoral charity bestowed by the sacrament of holy orders. The ministry of the priest, precisely because of its participation in the saving ministry of Jesus Christ the head and shepherd, cannot fail to express and live out his pastoral charity which is both the source and spirit of his service and gift of self. In its objective reality the priestly ministry is an "amoris officium", according to the previously quoted expression of St. Augustine. This objective reality itself serves as both the basis and requirement for a corresponding ethos, which can be none other than a life of love, as St. Augustine himself points out: Sit amoris officium pascere dominicum gregem.(60) This ethos, and as a result the spiritual life, is none other than embracing consciously and freely -- that is to say in one's mind and heart, in one's decisions and actions -- the "truth" of the priestly ministry as an amoris officium.

25. For a spiritual life that grows through the exercise of the ministry, it is essential that the priest should continually renew and deepen his awareness of being a minister of Jesus Christ by virtue of sacramental consecration and configuration to Christ the head and shepherd of the Church.

This awareness is not only in accordance with the very nature of the mission which the priest carries out on behalf of the Church and humanity, but it also provides a focus for the spiritual life of the priest who carries out that mission. Indeed, the priest is chosen by Christ not as an "object" but as a "person." In other words, he is not inert and passive, but rather is a "living instrument," as the Council states, precisely in the passage where it refers to the duty to pursue this perfection (61) The Council also speaks of priests as "companions and helpers" of God who is "the holy one and sanctifier."(62)

In this way the exercise of his ministry deeply involves the priest himself as a conscious, free and responsible person. The bond with Jesus Christ assured by consecration and configuration to him in the sacrament of orders gives rise to and requires in the priest the further bond which comes from his "intention," that is, from a conscious and free choice to do in his ministerial activities what the Church intends to do. This bond tends by its very nature to become as

extensive and profound as possible, affecting one's way of thinking, feeling and life itself: in other words, creating a series of moral and spiritual "dispositions" which correspond to the ministerial actions performed by the priest.

There can be no doubt that the exercise of the priestly ministry, especially in the celebration of the sacraments, receives its saving effects from the action of Christ himself who becomes present in the sacraments. But so as to emphasize the gratuitous nature of salvation which makes a person both "saved" and a "savior" -- always and only in Christ -- God's plan has ordained that the efficacy of the exercise of the ministry is also conditioned by a greater or lesser human receptivity and participation.(63) In particular, the greater or lesser degree of the holiness of the minister has a real effect on the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and the leadership of the community in charity. This was clearly stated by the Council: "The very holiness of priests is of the greatest benefit for the fruitful fulfillment of their ministry. While it is possible for God's grace to carry out the work of salvation through unworthy ministers, yet God ordinarily prefers to show his wonders through those men who are more submissive to the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit and who, because of their intimate union with Christ and their holiness of life, are able to say with St. Paul: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20)."(64)

The consciousness that one is a minister of Jesus Christ the head and shepherd also brings with it a thankful and joyful awareness that one has received a singular grace and treasure from Jesus Christ: the grace of having been freely chosen by the Lord to be a "living instrument" in the work of salvation. This choice bears witness to Jesus Christ's love for the priest. This love, like other loves and yet even more so, demands a response. After his resurrection, Jesus asked Peter the basic question about love: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" And following his response Jesus entrusts Peter with the mission: "Feed my lambs" (Jn. 21:15). Jesus first asks Peter if he loves him so as to be able to entrust his flock to him. However, in reality it was Christ's own love, free and unsolicited, which gave rise to his question to Peter and to his act of entrusting "his" sheep to Peter. Therefore, every ministerial action -- while it leads to loving and serving the Church -- provides an incentive to grow in ever greater love and service of Jesus Christ the head, shepherd and spouse of the Church, a love which is always a response to the free and unsolicited love of God in Christ. Growth in the love of Jesus Christ determines in turn the growth of love for the Church: "We are your shepherds (pascimus vobis), with you we receive nourishment (pascimur vobiscum). May the Lord give us the strength to love you to the extent of dying for you, either in fact or in desire (aut effectu aut affectu)."(65)

26. Thanks to the insightful teaching of the Second Vatican Council, (66) we can grasp the conditions and demands, the manifestations and fruits of the intimate bond between the priest's spiritual life and the exercise of his threefold ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral charity.

The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God. He is consecrated and sent forth to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to all, calling every person to the obedience of faith and leading believers to an ever increasing knowledge of and communion in the mystery of God, as revealed and communicated to us in Christ. For this reason, the priest himself ought first of all to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. Knowledge of its linguistic or exegetical aspects, though certainly necessary, is not enough. He needs to approach the word with a docile and prayerful heart so that it may deeply penetrate his thoughts and feelings and bring about a new outlook in him "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) -- such that his words and his choices and attitudes may become ever more a reflection, a proclamation and a witness to the Gospel. Only if he "abides" in the word will the priest become a perfect disciple of the Lord. Only then will he know the truth and be set truly free, overcoming every conditioning which is contrary or foreign to the Gospel (cf. Jn. 8:31-32). The priest ought to be the first "believer" in the word, while being fully aware that the words of his ministry are not "his," but those of the One who sent him. He is not the master of the word, but its servant. He is not the sole possessor of the word; in its regard he is in debt to the People of God. Precisely because he can and does evangelize, the priest -- like every other member of the Church --ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized.(67) He proclaims the word in his capacity as "minister," as a sharer in the prophetic authority of Christ and the Church. As a result, in order that he himself may possess and give to the faithful the guarantee that he is transmitting the Gospel in its fullness, the priest is called to develop a special sensitivity, love and docility to the living tradition of the Church and to her magisterium. These are not foreign to the word, but serve its proper interpretation and preserve its authentic meaning.(68)

It is above all in the celebration of the sacraments and in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours that the priest is called to live and witness to the deep unity between the exercise of his ministry and his spiritual life. The gift of grace offered to the Church becomes the principle of holiness and a call to sanctification. For the priest as well, the truly central place, both in his ministry and spiritual life, belongs to the Eucharist, since in it is contained "the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself our pasch and the living bread which gives life to men through his flesh -- that flesh which is given life and gives life through the Holy Spirit. Thus people are invited and led to offer themselves, their works and all creation with Christ."(69)

From the various sacraments, and in particular from the specific grace proper to each of them, the priest's spiritual life receives certain features. It is built up and molded by the different characteristics and demands of each of the sacraments as he celebrates them and experiences them.

I would like to make special mention of the sacrament of penance, of which priests are the ministers, but ought also to be its beneficiaries, becoming themselves witnesses of God's mercy toward sinners. Once again, I would like to set forth what I wrote in the exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*: "The priest's spiritual and pastoral life, like that of his

brothers and sisters, lay and religious, depends, for its quality and fervor, on the frequent and conscientious personal practice of the sacrament of penance. The priest's celebration of the Eucharist and administration of the other sacraments, his pastoral zeal, his relationship with the faithful, his communion with his brother priests, his collaboration with his bishop, his life of prayer -- in a word, the whole of his priestly existence, suffers an inexorable decline if by negligence or for some other reason he fails to receive the sacrament of penance at regular intervals and in a spirit of genuine faith and devotion. If a priest were no longer to go to confession or properly confess his sins, his priestly being and his priestly action would feel its effects very soon, and this would also be noticed by the community of which he was the pastor."⁽⁷⁰⁾

Finally, the priest is called to express in his life the authority and service of Jesus Christ the head and priest of the Church by encouraging and leading the ecclesial community, that is, by gathering together "the family of God as a fellowship endowed with the spirit of unity" and by leading it "in Christ through the Spirit to God the Father."⁽⁷¹⁾ This *munus regendi* represents a very delicate and complex duty which, in addition to the attention which must be given to a variety of persons and their vocations, also involves the ability to coordinate all the gifts and charisms which the Spirit inspires in the community, to discern them and to put them to good use for the upbuilding of the Church in constant union with the bishops. This ministry demands of the priest an intense spiritual life, filled with those qualities and virtues which are typical of a person who "presides over" and "leads" a community, of an "elder" in the noblest and richest sense of the word: qualities and virtues such as faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, a welcoming spirit, friendliness, goodness of heart, decisive firmness in essentials, freedom from overly subjective viewpoints, personal disinterestedness, patience, an enthusiasm for daily tasks, confidence in the value of the hidden workings of grace as manifested in the simple and the poor (cf. Ti. 1:7-8).

Priestly Life and the Radicalism of the Gospel

27. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Lk. 4:18). The Holy Spirit poured out in the sacrament of holy orders is a source of holiness and a call to sanctification. This is the case not only because it configures the priest to Christ, the head and shepherd of the Church, entrusting him with a prophetic, priestly and royal mission to be carried out in the name and person of Christ, but also because it inspires and enlivens his daily existence, enriching it with gifts and demands, virtues and incentives which are summed up in pastoral charity. This charity is a synthesis which unifies the values and virtues contained in the Gospel and likewise a power which sustains their development toward Christian perfection.⁽⁷²⁾

For all Christians without exception, the radicalism of the Gospel represents a fundamental, undeniable demand flowing from the call of Christ to follow and imitate him by virtue of the intimate communion of life with him brought about by the Spirit (cf. Mt. 8:18ff.; 10:37ff.; Mk. 8:34-38; 10:17-21; Lk. 9:57ff.). This same demand is made anew to priests, not only because they are "in" the Church, but because they are "in the forefront" of the Church inasmuch as they are configured to Christ, the head and shepherd, equipped for and committed to the ordained ministry, and inspired by pastoral charity. Within and as a manifestation of the radicalism of the Gospel one can find a blossoming of many virtues and ethical demands which are decisive for the pastoral and spiritual life of the priest, such as faith, humility in relation to the mystery of God, mercy and prudence. A particularly significant expression of the radicalism of the Gospel is seen in the different "evangelical counsels" which Jesus proposes in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt. 5-7), and among them the intimately related counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty.⁽⁷³⁾ The priest is called to live these counsels in accordance with those ways and, more specifically, those goals and that basic meaning which derive from and express his own priestly identity

28. "Among the virtues most necessary for the priestly ministry must be named that disposition of soul by which priests are always ready to seek not their own will, but the will of him who sent them (cf. Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38)."⁽⁷⁴⁾ It is in the spiritual life of the priest that obedience takes on certain special characteristics.

First of all, obedience is "apostolic" in the sense that it recognizes, loves and serves the Church in her hierarchical structure. Indeed, there can be no genuine priestly ministry except in communion with the supreme pontiff and the episcopal college, especially with one's own diocesan bishop, who deserves that "filial respect and obedience" promised during the rite of ordination. This "submission" to those invested with ecclesial authority is in no way a kind of humiliation. It flows instead from the responsible freedom of the priest who accepts not only the demands of an organized and organic ecclesial life, but also that grace of discernment and responsibility in ecclesial decisions which was assured by Jesus to his apostles and their successors for the sake of faithfully safeguarding the mystery of the Church and serving the structure of the Christian community along its common path toward salvation.

Authentic Christian obedience, when it is properly motivated and lived without servility, helps the priest to exercise in accordance with the Gospel the authority entrusted to him for his work with the People of God: an authority free from authoritarianism or demagoguery. Only the person who knows how to obey in Christian reality is able to require obedience from others in accordance with the Gospel.

Priestly obedience has also a "community" dimension: It is not the obedience of an individual who alone relates to authority, but rather an obedience which is deeply a part of the unity of the presbyterate, which as such is called to cooperate harmoniously with the bishop and, through him, with Peter's successor.⁽⁷⁵⁾

This aspect of the priest's obedience demands a marked spirit of asceticism, both in the sense of a tendency not to become too bound up in one's own preferences or points of view and in the sense of giving brother priests the opportunity to make good use of their talents, and abilities, setting aside all forms of jealousy, envy and rivalry. Priestly obedience should be one of solidarity, based on belonging to a single presbyterate. Within the presbyterate, this obedience is expressed in co - responsibility regarding directions to be taken and choices to be made.

Finally, priestly obedience has a particular "pastoral" character. It is lived in an atmosphere of constant readiness to allow oneself to be taken up, as it were "consumed, " by the needs and demands of the flock. These last ought to be truly reasonable and at times they need to be evaluated and tested to see how genuine they are. But it is undeniable that the priest's life is fully "taken up" by the hunger for the Gospel and for faith, hope and love for God and his mystery, a hunger which is more or less consciously present in the People of God entrusted to him.

29. Referring to the evangelical counsels, the Council states that "preeminent among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. Mt. 19:11; 1 Cor. 7:7) in order more easily to devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. This perfect continence for love of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in high esteem by the Church as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world."(76) In virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and gift of self to others. This meaning is fully found in virginity which makes evident, even in the renunciation of marriage, the "nuptial meaning" of the body through a communion and a personal gift to Jesus Christ and his Church which prefigures and anticipates the perfect and final communion and self - giving of the world to come: "In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church, giving himself or herself completely to the Church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the Church in the full truth of eternal life."(77)

In this light one can more easily understand and appreciate the reasons behind the centuries - old choice which the Western Church has made and maintained -- despite all the difficulties and objections raised down the centuries -- of conferring the order of presbyter only on men who have given proof that they have been called by God to the gift of chastity in absolute and perpetual celibacy.

The synod fathers clearly and forcefully expressed their thought on this matter in an important proposal which deserves to be quoted here in full: "While in no way interfering with the discipline of the Oriental churches, the synod, in the conviction that perfect chastity in priestly celibacy is a charism, reminds priests that celibacy is a priceless gift of God for the Church and has a prophetic value for the world today. This synod strongly reaffirms what the Latin Church and some Oriental rites require that is, that the priesthood be conferred only on those men who have received from God the gift of the vocation to celibate chastity (without prejudice to the tradition of some Oriental churches and particular cases of married clergy who convert to Catholicism, which are admitted as exceptions in Pope Paul VI's encyclical on priestly celibacy, no. 42). The synod does not wish to leave any doubts in the mind of anyone regarding the Church's firm will to maintain the law that demands perpetual and freely chosen celibacy for present and future candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin rite. The synod would like to see celibacy presented and explained in the fullness of its biblical, theological and spiritual richness, as a precious gift given by God to his Church and as a sign of the kingdom which is not of this world -- a sign of God's love for this world and of the undivided love of the priest for God and for God's people, with the result that celibacy is seen as a positive enrichment of the priesthood."(78)

It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses the Church's will, even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the head and spouse of the Church. The Church, as the spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her head and spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with Christ to his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.

For an adequate priestly spiritual life, celibacy ought not to be considered and lived as an isolated or purely negative element, but as one aspect of the positive, specific and characteristic approach to being a priest. Leaving father and mother, the priest follows Jesus the good shepherd in an apostolic communion, in the service of the People of God. Celibacy, then, is to be welcomed and continually renewed with a free and loving decision as a priceless gift from God, as an "incentive to pastoral charity "(79) as a singular sharing in God's fatherhood and in the fruitfulness of the Church, and as a witness to the world of the eschatological kingdom. To put into practice all the moral, pastoral and spiritual demands of priestly celibacy it is absolutely necessary that the priest pray humbly and trustingly, as the Council points out: "In the world today, many people call perfect continence impossible. The more they do so, the more humbly and perseveringly priests should join with the Church in praying for the grace of fidelity. It is never denied to those who ask. At the same time let priests make use of all the supernatural and natural helps which are now available to all."(80) Once again it is prayer, together with the Church's sacraments and ascetical practice, which will provide hope in difficulties, forgiveness in failings, and confidence and courage in resuming the journey.

30. On the subject of evangelical poverty, the synod fathers gave a concise yet important description, presenting it as "the subjection of all goods to the supreme good of God and his kingdom.(81) In reality, only the person who contemplates and lives the mystery of God as the one and supreme good, as the true and definitive treasure, can

understand and practice poverty, which is certainly not a matter of despising or rejecting material goods but of a loving and responsible use of these goods and at the same time an ability to renounce them with great interior freedom -- that is, with reference to God and his plan.

Poverty for the priest, by virtue of his sacramental configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, takes on specific "pastoral" connotations which the synod fathers took up from the Council's teachings and further developed. Among other things, they wrote: "Priests, following the example of Christ, who, rich though he was, became poor for love of us (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9) -- should consider the poor and the weakest as people entrusted in a special way to them, and they should be capable of witnessing to poverty with a simple and austere lifestyle, having learned the generous renunciation of superfluous things (Optatam Totius, 9; Code of Canon Law, Canon 282)." (83)

It is true that "the workman deserves his wages" (Lk. 10:7) and that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14), but it is no less true that this right of the apostle can in no way be confused with attempts of any kind to condition service to the Gospel and the Church upon the advantages and interests which can derive from it. Poverty alone ensures that the priest remains available to be sent wherever his work will be most useful and needed even at the cost of personal sacrifice. It is a condition and essential premise of the apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to "go forth, " without traveling bag or personalities, following only the will of the Master (cf. Lk. 9:57-62; Mk. 10:17-22).

Being personally involved in the life of the community and being responsible for it, the priest should also offer the witness of a total "honesty" in the administration of the goods of the community, which he will never treat as if they were his own property, but rather something for which he will be held accountable by God and his brothers and sisters, especially the poor. Moreover, his awareness of belonging to the one presbyterate will be an incentive for the priest to commit himself to promoting both a more equitable distribution of goods among his fellow priests and a certain common use of goods (cf. Acts 2:42-47).

The interior freedom which is safeguarded and nourished by evangelical poverty will help the priest to stand beside the underprivileged; to practice solidarity with their efforts to create a more just society; to be more sensitive and capable of understanding and discerning realities involving the economic and social aspects of life; and to promote a preferential option for the poor. The latter, while excluding no one from the proclamation and gift of salvation, will assist him in gently approaching the poor, sinners and all those on the margins of society, following the model given by Jesus in carrying out his prophetic and priestly ministry (cf. Lk. 4:18).

Nor should the prophetic significance of priestly poverty be forgotten, so urgently needed in affluent and consumeristic societies: "A truly poor priest is indeed a specific sign of separation from, disavowal of and non - submission to the tyranny of a contemporary world which puts all its trust in money and in material security." (84)

Jesus Christ, who brought his pastoral charity to perfection on the cross with a complete exterior and interior emptying of self, is both the model and source of the virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty which the priest is called to live out as an expression of his pastoral charity for his brothers and sisters. In accordance with St. Paul's words to the Christians at Philippi, the priest should have "the mind which was in Christ Jesus, " emptying himself of his own "self, " so as to discover, in a charity which is obedient, chaste and poor, the royal road of union with God and unity with his brothers and sisters (cf. Phil. 2:5).

Membership in and Dedication to the Particular Church

31. Like every authentically Christian spiritual life, the spiritual life of the priest has an essential and undeniable ecclesial dimension which is a sharing in the holiness of the Church herself, which we profess in the Creed to be a "communion of saints." The holiness of the Christian has its source in the holiness of the Church; it expresses that holiness and at the same time enriches it. This ecclesial dimension takes on special forms, purposes and meanings in the spiritual life of the priest by virtue of his specific relation to the Church, always as a result of his configuration to Christ the head and shepherd, his ordained ministry and his pastoral charity.

In this perspective, it is necessary to consider the priest's membership in and dedication to a particular Church. These two factors are not the result of purely organizational and disciplinary needs. On the contrary, the priest's relationship with his bishop in the one presbyterate, his sharing in the bishop's ecclesial concern and his devotion to the evangelical care of the People of God in the specific historical and contextual conditions of a particular Church are elements which must be taken into account in sketching the proper configuration of the priest and his spiritual life. In this sense, "incardination" cannot be confined to a purely juridical bond, but also involves a set of attitudes as well as spiritual and pastoral decisions which help to fill out the specific features of the priestly vocation.

The priest needs to be aware that his "being in a particular Church" constitutes by its very nature a significant element in his living a Christian spirituality. In this sense, the priest finds precisely in his belonging to and dedication to the particular Church a wealth of meaning, criteria for discernment and action which shape both his pastoral mission and his spiritual life.

Other insights or reference to other traditions of spiritual life can contribute to the priest's journey toward perfection, for these are capable of enriching the life of individual priests as well as enlivening the presbyterate with precious spiritual gifts. Such is the case with many old and new Church associations which welcome priests into their spiritual

family: from societies of apostolic life to priestly secular institutes, and from various forms of spiritual communion and sharing to ecclesial movements. Priests who belong to religious orders and congregations represent a spiritual enrichment for the entire diocesan presbyterate, to which they contribute specific charisms and special ministries, stimulating the particular church by their presence to be more intensely open to the Church throughout the world.(85) The priest's membership in a particular church and his dedication -- even to the gift of his life -- to the upbuilding of the Church, "in the person" of Christ the head and shepherd, in service of the entire Christian community and in a generous and filial relationship with the bishop, must be strengthened by every charism which becomes part of his priestly life or surrounds it.(86)

For the abundance of The Spirit's gifts to be welcomed with joy and allowed to bear fruit for the glory of God and the good of the entire Church, each person is required first to have a knowledge and discernment of his or her own charisms and those of others, and always to use these charisms with Christian humility, with firm self - control and with the intention, above all else, to help build up the entire community which each particular charism is meant to serve. Moreover, all are required to make a sincere effort to live in mutual esteem, to respect others and to hold in esteem all the positive and legitimate diversities present in the presbyterate. This too constitutes part of the priest's spiritual life and continual practice of asceticism.

32. Membership in and dedication to a particular church does not limit the activity and life of the presbyterate to that church: A restriction of this sort is not possible, given the very nature both of the particular church(87) and of the priestly ministry. In this regard the Council teaches that "the spiritual gift which priests received at their ordination prepares them not for any limited or narrow mission but for the widest scope of the universal mission of salvation 'to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8). For every priestly ministry shares in the universality of the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles."(88)

It thus follows that the spiritual life of the priest should be profoundly marked by a missionary zeal and dynamism. In the exercise of their ministry and the witness of their lives, priests have the duty to form the community entrusted to them as a truly missionary community. As I wrote in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, "all priests must have the mind and heart of missionaries open to the needs of the Church and the world, with concern for those farthest away and especially for the non - Christian groups in their own area. They should have at heart, in their prayers and particularly at the eucharistic sacrifice, the concern of the whole Church for all of humanity."(89)

If the lives of priests are generously inspired by this missionary spirit, it will be easier to respond to that increasingly serious demand of the Church today which arises from the unequal distribution of the clergy. In this regard, the Council was both quite clear and forceful: "Let priests remember then that they must have at heart the care of all the churches. Hence priests belonging to dioceses which are rich in vocations should show themselves willing and ready, with the permission or at the urging of their own bishop, to exercise their ministry in other regions, missions or activities which suffer from a shortage of clergy."(90)

"Renew in Them the Outpouring of Your Spirit of Holiness"

33. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Lk. 4:18). Even today Christ makes these words which he proclaimed in the synagogue of Nazareth echo in our priestly hearts. Indeed, our faith reveals to us the presence of the spirit of Christ at work in our being, in our acting and in our living, just as the sacrament of orders has configured, equipped and molded it.

Yes, the Spirit of the Lord is the principal agent in our spiritual life. He creates our "new heart, " inspires it and guides it with the "new law" of love, of pastoral charity. For the development of the spiritual life it is essential to be aware that the priest will never lack the grace of the Holy Spirit as a totally gratuitous gift and as a task which he is called to undertake. Awareness of this gift is the foundation and support of the priest's unflagging trust amid the difficulties, temptations and weaknesses which he will meet along his spiritual path.

Here I would repeat to all priests what I said to so many of them on another occasion: "The priestly vocation is essentially a call to holiness in the form which derives from the sacrament of orders. Holiness is intimacy with God; it is the imitation of Christ, who was poor, chaste and humble; it is unreserved love for souls and a giving of oneself on their behalf and for their true good; it is love for the Church which is holy and wants us to be holy, because this is the mission that Christ entrusted to her. Each one of you should also be holy in order to help your brothers and sisters to pursue their vocation to holiness.

"How can we fail to reflect on...the essential role that the Holy Spirit carries out in this particular call to holiness which is proper to the priestly ministry? Let us remember the words of the rite of priestly ordination which are considered to be central in the sacramental formula: 'Almighty Father, give these your sons the dignity of the priesthood. Renew in them the outpouring of your Spirit of holiness. O Lord, may they fulfill the ministry of the second degree of priesthood received from you, and by their example may they lead all to upright conduct of life.'

"Beloved, through ordination, you have received the same Spirit of Christ, who makes you like him, so that you can act in his name and so that his very mind and heart might live in you. This intimate communion with the Spirit of Christ -- while guaranteeing the efficacy of the sacramental actions which you perform in persona Christi -- seeks to be

expressed in fervent prayer, in integrity of life, in the pastoral charity of a ministry tirelessly spending itself for the salvation of the brethren. In a word, it calls for your personal sanctification."(91)

CHAPTER IV

COME AND SEE

Priestly Vocation in the Church's Pastoral Work

Seek, Follow, Abide

34. "Come, and see" (Jn. 1:39). This was the reply Jesus gave to the two disciples of John the Baptist who asked him where he was staying. In these words we find the meaning of vocation.

This is how the evangelist relates the call of Andrew and Peter: "The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, 'What do you seek?' Arid they said to him, 'Rabbi' (which means Teacher), 'Where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

"One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother, Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)" (Jn. 1:35-42).

This Gospel passage is one of many in the Bible where the "mystery" of vocation is described, in our case the mystery of the vocation to be apostles of Jesus. This passage of John, which is also significant for the Christian vocation as such, has a particular value with regard to the priestly vocation. As the community of Jesus' disciples, the Church is called to contemplate this scene which in some way is renewed constantly down the ages. The Church is invited to delve more deeply into the original and personal meaning of the call to follow Christ in the priestly ministry and the unbreakable bond between divine grace and human responsibility which is contained and revealed in these two terms which we find more than once in the Gospel: Come follow me (cf. Mt. 19:21). She is asked to discern and to live out the proper dynamism of vocation, its gradual and concrete development in the phases of seeking Christ, finding him and staying with him.

The Church gathers from this "Gospel of vocation" the paradigm, strength and impulse behind her pastoral work of promoting vocations, of her mission to care for the birth, discernment and fostering of vocations, particularly those to the priesthood. By the very fact that "the lack of priests is certainly a sad thing for any Church,"(92) pastoral work for vocations needs especially today, to be taken up with a new vigor and more decisive commitment by all the members of the Church, in the awareness that it is not a secondary or marginal matter, or the business of one group only, as if it were but a "part," no matter how important, of the entire pastoral work of the Church. Rather as the synod fathers frequently repeated, it is an essential part of the overall pastoral work of each Church, (93) a concern which demands to be integrated into and fully identified with the ordinary "care of souls,"(94) a connatural and essential dimension of the Church's pastoral work, of her very life and mission.(95)

Indeed, concern for vocations is a connatural and essential dimension of the Church's pastoral work. The reason for this is that vocation, in a certain sense, defines the very being of the Church, even before her activity. In the Church's very name, ecclesia, we find its deep vocational aspect, for the Church is a "convocation," an assembly of those who have been called: "All those who in faith look toward Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church, that she may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity."(96)

A genuinely theological assessment of priestly vocation and pastoral work in its regard can only arise from an assessment of the mystery of the Church as a *Mysterium vocationis*.

The Church and the Gift of Vocation

35. Every Christian vocation finds its foundation in the gratuitous and prevenient choice made by the Father "who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:3-5).

Each Christian vocation comes from God and is God's gift. However, it is never bestowed outside of or independently of the Church. Instead it always comes about in the Church and through the Church because, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "God has willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness."(97)

The Church not only embraces in herself all the vocations which God gives her along the path to salvation, but she herself appears as a mystery of vocation, a luminous and living reflection of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. In

truth, the Church, a "people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," (98) carries within her the mystery of the Father, who, being neither called nor sent by anyone (cf. Rom. 11:33-35), calls all to hallow his name and do his will; she guards within herself the mystery of the Son, who is called by the Father and sent to proclaim the kingdom of God to all and who calls all to follow him; and she is the trustee of the mystery of the Holy Spirit, who consecrates for mission those whom the Father calls through his Son Jesus Christ.

The Church, being by her very nature a "vocation," is also a begetter and educator of vocations. This is so because she is a "sacrament," a "sign" and "instrument" in which the vocation of every Christian is reflected and lived out. And she is so in her activity, in the exercise of her ministry of proclaiming the word, in her celebration of the sacraments and in her service and witness to charity.

We can now see the essential dimension of the Christian vocation: Not only does it derive "from" the Church and her mediation, not only does it come to be known and find fulfillment "in" the Church, but it also necessarily appears -- in fundamental service to God -- as a service "to" the Church. Christian vocation, whatever shape it takes, is a gift whose purpose is to build up the Church and to increase the kingdom of God in the world. (99)

What is true of every vocation is true specifically of the priestly vocation: The latter is a call, by the sacrament of holy orders received in the Church, to place oneself at the service of the People of God with a particular belonging and configuration to Jesus Christ and with the authority of acting "in the name and in the person" of him who is head and shepherd of the Church.

From this point of view, we understand the statement of the synod fathers: "The vocation of each priest exists in the Church and for the Church: Through her this vocation is brought to fulfillment. Hence we can say that every priest receives his vocation from our Lord through the Church as a gracious gift, a grace gratis data (charisma). It is the task of the bishop or the competent superior not only to examine the suitability and the vocation of the candidate but also to recognize it. This ecclesiastical element is inherent in a vocation to the priestly ministry as such. The candidate to the priesthood should receive his vocation not by imposing his own personal conditions, but accepting also the norms and conditions which the Church herself lays down, in the fulfillment of her responsibility." (100)

The Vocational Dialogue - Divine Initiative and Human Response

36. The history of every priestly vocation, as indeed of every Christian vocation, is the history of an inexpressible dialogue between and human beings, between the love of God who calls and the freedom of individuals who respond lovingly to him. These two indivisible aspects of vocation, God's gratuitous gift and the responsible freedom of human beings, are reflected in a splendid and very effective way in the brief words with which the evangelist Mark presents the calling of the Twelve: Jesus "went up into the hills, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him" (Mk. 3:13). On the one hand, we have the completely free decision of Jesus; on the other, the "coming" of the Twelve, their "following" Jesus.

This is the constant paradigm, the fundamental datum of every vocation: whether of prophets, apostles, priests, religious, the lay faithful -- of everyone.

First of all, indeed in a prevenient and decisive way, comes the free and gracious intervention of God who calls. It is God who takes the initiative in the call. This was, for example, the experience of the prophet Jeremiah: "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you prophet to the nations'" (Jer. 1:4-5). The same truth is presented by the apostle Paul, who roots every vocation in the eternal election in Christ, made "before the foundation of the world" and "according to the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5). The absolute primacy of grace in vocation is most perfectly proclaimed in the words of Jesus: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn. 15:16).

If the priestly vocation bears unequivocal witness to the primacy of grace, God's free and sovereign decision to call man calls for total respect. It cannot be forced in the slightest by any human ambition, and it cannot be replaced by any human decision. Vocation is a gift of God's grace and never a human right, such that "one can never consider priestly life as a simply human affair, nor the mission of the minister as a simply personal project." (101) Every claim or presumption on the part of those called is thus radically excluded (cf. Heb 5:4ff). Their entire heart and spirit should be filled with an amazed and deeply felt gratitude, an unshakable trust and hope, because those who have been called know that they are rooted not in their own strength but in the unconditional faithfulness of God who calls.

"He called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him" (Mk. 3:13). This "coming," which is the same as "following" Jesus, expresses the free response of the Twelve to the Master's call. We see it in the case of Peter and Andrew: "And he said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Mt. 4:19-20). The experience of James and John was exactly the same (cf. Mt. 4:21-22). And so it is always: In vocation there shine out at the same time God's gracious love and the highest possible exaltation of human freedom -- the freedom of following God's call and entrusting oneself to him.

In effect, grace and freedom are not opposed. On the contrary, grace enlivens and sustains human freedom, setting it free from the slavery of sin (cf. Jn. 8:34-36), healing it and elevating it in its ability to be open to receiving God's gift. And if we cannot in any way minimize the absolutely gratuitous initiative of God who calls, neither can we in any way

minimize the serious responsibility which persons face in the challenge of their freedom. And so when he hears Jesus' invitation to "Come, follow me" the rich young man refuses, a sign -- albeit only a negative sign -- of his freedom: "At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions" (Mk. 10:22).

Freedom, therefore, is essential to vocation -- a freedom which, when it gives a positive response, appears as a deep personal adherence, as a loving gift -- or rather as a gift given back to the giver who is God who calls, an oblation: "The call" -- Paul VI once said -- "is as extensive as the response. There cannot be vocations unless they be free; that is, unless they be spontaneous offerings of oneself, conscious, generous, total.... Oblations, we call them: Here lies in practice the heart of the matter.... It is the humble and penetrating voice of Christ who says, today as yesterday, and even more than yesterday: Come. Freedom reaches its supreme foundation: precisely that of oblation, of generosity, of sacrifice." (102)

The free oblation, which constitutes the intimate and most precious core of a person's response to God who calls, finds its incomparable model, indeed its living root, in the most free oblation which Jesus Christ, the first of those called, made to the Father's will: "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ' Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me.... Then I said, lo, I have come to do your will, O God'" (Heb. 10:5, 7).

The creature who more than any other has lived the full truth of vocation is Mary the virgin mother, and she did so in intimate communion with Christ: No one has responded with a love greater than hers to the immense love of God. (103)

37. "At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions" (Mk. 10:22). The rich young man in the Gospel who did not follow Jesus' call reminds us of the obstacles preventing or eliminating one's free response: Material goods are not the only things that can shut the human heart to the values of the Spirit and the radical demands of the kingdom of God, certain social and cultural conditions of our day can also present many threats and can impose distorted and false visions about the true nature of vocation, making it difficult, if not impossible, to embrace or even to understand it. Many people have such a general and confused idea of God that their religiosity becomes a religiosity without God, where God's will is seen as an immutable and unavoidable fate to which one has to bend and resign oneself in a totally passive manner. But this is not the face of God which Jesus Christ came to reveal to us: God is truly a Father who with an eternal and prevenient love calls human beings and opens up with them a marvelous and permanent dialogue, inviting them, as his children, to share his own divine life. It is true that if human beings have an erroneous vision of God cannot even recognize the truth about themselves, and thus they will be unable to perceive or live their vocation in its genuine value: Vocation will be felt only as a crushing burden imposed upon them.

Certain distorted ideas regarding human nature, sometimes backed up by specious philosophical or "scientific" theories, also sometimes lead people to consider their own existence and freedom as totally determined and conditioned by external factors of an educational, psychological, cultural or environmental type. In other cases, freedom is understood in terms of total autonomy, the sole and indisputable basis for personal choices, and effectively as self - affirmation at any cost. But these ways of thinking make it impossible to understand and live one's vocation as a free dialogue of love, which arises from the communication of God to the human person and ends in the sincere self giving.

In the present context there is also a certain tendency to view the bond between human beings and God in an individualistic and self - centered way, as if God's call reached the individual by a direct route without in any way passing through the community. Its purpose is held to be the benefit, or the very salvation, of the individual called and not a total dedication to God in the service of the community. We thus find another very deep and at the same time subtle threat which makes it impossible to recognize and accept joyfully the ecclesial dimension which naturally marks every Christian vocation, and the priestly vocation in particular: As the Council reminds us, priestly ministry acquires its genuine meaning and attains to its fullest truth in serving and in fostering the growth of the Christian community and the common priesthood of the faithful. (104)

The cultural context which we have just recalled, and which affects Christians themselves and especially young people, helps us to understand the spread of the crisis of priestly vocations, a crisis that is rooted in and accompanied by even more radical crises of faith. The synod fathers made this very point when recognizing that the crisis of vocations to the priesthood has deep roots in the cultural environment and in the outlook and practical behavior of Christians." (105)

Hence the urgent need that the Church's pastoral work in promoting vocations be aimed decisively and primarily toward restoring a "Christian mentality, " one built on faith and sustained by it. More than ever, what is now needed is an evangelization which never tires of pointing to the true face of God, the Father who calls each one of us in Jesus Christ, and to the genuine meaning of human freedom as the principal driving force behind the responsible gift of oneself. Only thus will the indispensable foundations be laid, so that every vocation, including the priestly vocation, will be perceived for what it really is, loved in its beauty and lived out with total dedication and deep joy.

Content and Methods of Pastoral Work for Promoting Vocations

38. Certainly a vocation is a fathomless mystery involving the relationship established by God with human beings in their absolute uniqueness, a mystery perceived and heard as a call which awaits a response in the depths of one's conscience, which is "a person's most secret core and sanctuary. There one is alone with God whose voice echoes in his

depths."(106) But this does not eliminate the communitarian and in particular the ecclesial dimension of vocation. The Church is also truly present and at work in the vocation of every priest.

In her service to the priestly vocation and its development, that is, in the birth, discernment and care of each vocation, the Church can look for her model to Andrew, one of the first two disciples who set out to follow Jesus. Andrew himself told his brother what had happened to him: "'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)" (Jn. 1:41). His account of this "discovery" opened the way to a meeting: "He brought him to Jesus" (Jn. 1:42). There can be no doubt about the absolutely free initiative nor about the sovereign decision of Jesus. It is Jesus who calls Simon and gives him a new name: "Jesus looked at him, and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)" (Jn. 1:42). But Andrew also acted with initiative: He arranged his brother's meeting with Jesus.

"He brought him to Jesus." In a way, this is the heart of all the Church's pastoral work on behalf of vocations, in which she cares for the birth and growth of vocations, making use of the gifts and responsibilities, of the charisms and ministry she has received from Christ and his Spirit. The Church, as a priestly, prophetic and kingly people, is committed to foster and to serve the birth and maturing of priestly vocations through her prayer and sacramental life; by her proclamation of the word and by education in the faith; by her example and witness of charity.

The Church, in her dignity and responsibility as a priestly people, possesses in prayer and in the celebration of the liturgy the essential and primary stages of her pastoral work for vocations. Indeed, Christian prayer, nourished by the word of God, creates an ideal environment where each individual can discover the truth of his own being and the identity of the personal and unrepeatable life project which the Father entrusts to him. It is therefore necessary to educate boys and young men so that they will become faithful to prayer and meditation on God's word: in silence and listening, they will be able to perceive the Lord who is calling them to the priesthood, and be able to follow that call promptly and generously.

The Church should daily take up Jesus' persuasive and demanding invitation to "pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Mt. 9:38). Obedient to Christ's command, the Church first of all makes a humble profession of faith: In praying for vocations, conscious of her urgent need of them for her very life and mission, she acknowledges that they are a gift of God and, as such, must be asked for by a ceaseless and trusting prayer of petition. This prayer, the pivot of all pastoral work for vocations, is required' not only of individuals but of entire ecclesial communities. There can be no doubt about the importance of individual initiatives of prayer, of special times set apart for such prayer -- beginning with the World Day of Prayer for Vocations -- and of the explicit commitment of persons and groups particularly concerned with the problem of priestly vocations. Today the prayerful expectation of new vocations should become an ever more continual and widespread habit within the entire Christian community and in every one of its parts. Thus it will be possible to relive the experience of the apostles in the upper room who, in union with Mary, prayerfully awaited the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14), who will not fail to raise up once again in the People of God "worthy ministers for the altar, ardent but gentle proclaimers of the Gospel."(107)

In addition, the liturgy, as the summit and source of the Church's existence(108) and in particular of all Christian prayer, plays an influential and indispensable role in the pastoral work of promoting vocations. The liturgy is a living experience of God's gift and a great school for learning how to respond to his call. As such, every liturgical celebration, and especially the Eucharist, reveals to us the true face of God and grants us a share in the paschal mystery, in the "hour" for which Jesus came into the world and toward which he freely and willingly made his way in obedience to the Father's call (cf. Jn. 13:1). It shows us the Church as a priestly people and a community structured in the variety and complementarity of its charisms and vocations. The redemptive sacrifice of Christ, which the Church celebrates in mystery, accords a particular value to suffering endured in union with the Lord Jesus. The synod fathers invited us never to forget that "through the offering of sufferings, which are so frequent in human life, the Christian who is ill offers himself as a victim to God, in the image of Christ, who has consecrated himself for us all" (cf. Jn. 17:19) and that "the offering of sufferings for this intention is a great help in fostering vocations."(109)

39. In carrying out her prophetic role, the Church feels herself irrevocably committed to the task of proclaiming and witnessing to the Christian meaning of vocation, or as we might say, to "the Gospel of vocation." Here too, she feels the urgency of the apostle's exclamation: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16) This admonishment rings out especially for us who are pastors but, together with us, it touches all educators in the Church. Preaching and catechesis must always show their intrinsic vocational dimension: The word of God enlightens believers to appreciate life as a response to God's call and leads them to embrace in faith the gift of a personal vocation.

But all this, however important and even essential, is not enough: We need a "direct preaching on the mystery of vocation in the Church, on the value of the ministerial priesthood, on God's people's."(10) A properly structured catechesis, directed to all the members of the Church, in addition to dissipating doubts and countering one-sided or distorted ideas about priestly ministry, will open believers' hearts to expect the gift and create favorable conditions for the birth of new vocations. The time has come to speak courageously about priestly life as a priceless gift and a splendid and privileged form of Christian living. Educators, and priests in particular, should not be afraid to set forth explicitly and forcefully the priestly vocation as a real possibility for those young people who demonstrate the necessary gifts and talents. There should be no fear that one is thereby conditioning them or limiting their freedom; quite the contrary, a clear invitation, made at the right time, can be decisive in eliciting from young people a free and genuine response. Besides, the history of the Church and that of many individual priests whose vocations blossomed at

a young age bear ample witness to how providential the presence and conversation of a priest can be: not only his words, but his very presence, a concrete and joyful witness which can raise questions and lead to decisions, even definitive ones.

40. As a kingly people, the Church sees herself rooted in and enlivened by "the law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), which is essentially the royal law of charity (cf. Jas. 2:8) or the perfect law of freedom (cf. Jas. 1:25). Therefore, the Church fulfills her mission when she guides every member of the faithful to discover and live his or her own vocation in freedom and to bring it to fulfillment in charity.

In carrying out her educational role, the Church aims with special concern at developing in children, adolescents and young men a desire and a will to follow Jesus Christ in a total and attractive way. This educational work, while addressed to the Christian community as such, must also be aimed at the individual person: Indeed, God with his call reaches the call of each individual, and the Spirit, who abides deep within each disciple (cf. 1 Jn. 3:24), gives himself to each Christian with different charisms and special signs. Each one, therefore, must be helped to embrace the gift entrusted to him as a completely unique person, and to hear the words which the Spirit of God personally addresses to him.

From this point of view, the pastoral work of promoting vocations to the priesthood will also be able to find expression in a firm and encouraging invitation to spiritual direction. It is necessary to rediscover the great tradition of personal spiritual guidance which has always brought great and precious fruits to the Church's life. In certain cases and under precise conditions this work can be assisted, but not replaced, by forms of analysis or psychological help.(111) Children, adolescents and young men are invited to discover and appreciate the gift of spiritual direction, to look for it and experience it, and to ask for it with trusting insistence from those who are their educators in the faith. Priests, for their part, should be the first to devote time and energies to this work of education and personal spiritual guidance: They will never regret having neglected or put in second place so many other things which are themselves good and useful, if this proved necessary for them to be faithful to their ministry as cooperators of the Spirit in enlightening and guiding those who have been called.

The aim of education for a Christian is to attain the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13) under the influence of the Spirit. This happens when, imitating and sharing Christ's charity, a person turns his entire life into an act of loving service (cf. Jn. 13:14-15), offering to God a spiritual worship acceptable to him (cf. Rom. 12:1) and giving himself to his brothers and sisters. The service of love is the fundamental meaning of every vocation, and it finds a specific expression in the priestly vocation. Indeed, a priest is called to live out, as radically as possible, the pastoral charity of Jesus, the love of the good shepherd who "lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:11).

Consequently, an authentic pastoral work on behalf of vocations will never tire of training boys, adolescents and young men to appreciate commitment, the meaning of free service, the value of sacrifice and unconditional self - giving. In this context it is easy to see the great value of forms of volunteer work, which so many young people are growing to appreciate. If volunteer work is inspired by the Gospel values, capable of training people to discern true needs, lived with dedication and faithfulness each day, open to the possibility of a total commitment in consecrated life and nourished in prayer, then it will be more readily able to sustain a life of disinterested and free commitment and will make the one involved in it more sensitive to the voice of God who may be calling him to the priesthood. Unlike the rich young man, the person involved in volunteer work would be able to accept the invitation lovingly addressed to him by Jesus (cf. Mk. 10:21); and he would be able to accept it because his only wealth now consists in giving himself to others and in "losing" his life.

We Are All Responsible for Priestly Vocations

41. The priestly vocation is a gift from God. It is undoubtedly a great good for the person who is its first recipient. But it is also a gift to the Church as a whole, a benefit to her life and mission. The Church, therefore, is called to safeguard this gift, to esteem it and love it. She is responsible for the birth and development of priestly vocations. Consequently, the pastoral work of promoting vocations has as its active agents, as its protagonists, the ecclesial community as such, in its various expressions: from the universal Church to the particular church and, by analogy, from the particular church to each of its parishes and to every part of the People of God.

There is an urgent need, especially nowadays, for a more widespread and deeply felt conviction that all the members of the Church, without exception, have the grace and responsibility to look after vocations. The Second Vatican Council was quite explicit in this regard: "The duty of fostering vocations falls on the whole Christian community, and they should discharge it principally by living full Christian lives."(112) Only on the basis of this conviction will pastoral work on behalf of vocations be able to show its truly ecclesial aspect, develop a harmonious plan of action, and make use of specific agencies and appropriate instruments of communion and co - responsibility.

The first responsibility for the pastoral work of promoting priestly vocations lies with the bishop, (113) who is called to be the first to exercise this responsibility even though he can and must call upon many others to cooperate with him. As the father and friend of his presbyterate, it falls primarily to the bishop to be concerned about "giving continuity" to the priestly charism and ministry, bringing it new forces by the laying on of hands. He will be actively concerned to ensure that the vocational dimension is always present in the whole range of ordinary pastoral work, and that it is fully

integrated and practically identified with it. It is his duty to foster and coordinate various initiatives on behalf of vocations.(114)

The bishop can rely above all on the cooperation of his presbyterate. All its priests are united to him and share his responsibility in seeking and fostering priestly vocations. Indeed, as the Council states, "it is the priests' part as instructors of the people in the faith to see to it that each member of the faithful shall be led in the Holy Spirit to the full development of his own vocation."(115) "This duty belongs to the very nature of the priestly ministry which makes the priest share in the concern of the whole Church lest laborers should ever be wanting to the People of God here on earth."(116) The very life of priests, their unconditional dedication to God's flock, their witness of loving service to the Lord and to his Church -- a witness marked by free acceptance of the cross in the spirit of hope and Easter joy -- their fraternal unity and zeal for the evangelization of the world are the first and most convincing factor in the growth of vocations.(117)

A very special responsibility falls upon the Christian family, which by virtue of the sacrament of matrimony shares in its own unique way in the educational mission of the Church -- teacher and mother. As the synod fathers wrote: "The Christian family, which is truly a 'domestic Church' (Lumen Gentium, 11), has always offered and continues to offer favorable conditions for the birth of vocations. Since the reality of the Christian family is endangered nowadays, much importance should be given to pastoral work on behalf of the family, in order that the families themselves, generously accepting the gift of human life, may be 'as it were, a first seminary' (Optatam Totius, 2) in which children can acquire from the beginning an awareness of piety and prayer and love for the Church.(118) Following upon and in harmony with the work of parents and the family, the school is also called to live its identity as an "educating community" by providing a correct understanding of the dimension of vocation as an innate and fundamental value of the human person. In this sense, if it is endowed with a Christian spirit (either by a significant presence of members of the Church in state schools, following the laws of each country, or above all in the case of the Catholic school), it can infuse "in the hearts of boys and young men a desire to do God's will in that state in life which is most suitable to each person, and never excluding the vocation to the priestly ministry."(119)

The lay faithful also, and particularly catechists, teachers, educators and youth ministers, each with his or her own resources and style, have great importance in the pastoral work of promoting priestly vocations: The more they inculcate a deep appreciation of young people's vocation and mission in the Church, the more they will be able to recognize the unique value of the priestly vocation and mission.

With regard to diocesan and parish communities, special appreciation and encouragement should be given to groups which promote vocations, whose members make an important contribution by prayer and sufferings offered up for priestly and religious vocations, as well as by moral and material support.

We should also remember the numerous groups, movements and associations of lay faithful whom the Holy Spirit raises up and fosters in the Church with a view to a more missionary Christian presence in the world. These various groupings of lay people are proving a particularly fertile field for the manifestation of vocations to consecrated life, and are truly environments in which vocations can be encouraged and can grow. Many young people, in and through these groupings, have heard the Lord's call to follow him along the path of priestly ministry(120) and have responded with a generosity that is reassuring. These groupings, therefore, are to be utilized well, so that in communion with the whole Church and for the sake of her growth they may make their proper contribution to the development of the pastoral work of promoting vocations.

The various elements and members of the Church involved in the pastoral work of promoting vocations will make their work more effective insofar as they stimulate the ecclesial community as such, starting with the parish, to sense that the problem of priestly vocations cannot in any way be delegated to some "official" group (priests in general and the priests working in the seminary in particular), for inasmuch as it is "a vital problem which lies at the very heart of the Church, "(121) it should be at the heart of the love which each Christian feels for the Church.

CHAPTER V

HE APPOINTED TWELVE TO BE WITH HIM

The Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood

Following Christ as the Apostles Did

42. "And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mk. 3:13-15).

"To be with him": It is not difficult to find in these words a reference to Jesus' "accompanying" the apostles for the sake of their vocation. After calling them and before he sends them out, indeed in order to be able to send them out to preach, Jesus asks them to set aside a "period of time" for formation. The aim of this time is to develop a relationship of deep communion and friendship with himself. In this time they receive the benefit of a catechesis that is deeper than the teaching he gives to the people (cf. Mt. 13:11); also he wishes them to be witnesses of his silent prayer to the Father (cf. Jn. 17:1-26; Lk. 22:39-45).

In her care for priestly vocations the Church in every age draws her inspiration from Christ's example. There have been, and to some extent there still are, many different practical forms according to which the Church has been involved in the pastoral care of vocations. Her task is not only to discern but also to "accompany" priestly vocations. But the spirit which must inspire and sustain her remains the same: that of bringing to the priesthood only those who have been called, and to bring them adequately trained, namely, with a conscious and free response of adherence and involvement of their whole person with Jesus Christ, who calls them to intimacy of life with him and to share in his mission of salvation. In this sense, the "seminary" in its different forms -- and analogously the "house" of formation for religious priests -- more than a place, a material space, should be a spiritual place, a way of life, an atmosphere that fosters and ensures a process of formation, so that the person who is called to the priesthood by God may become, with the sacrament of orders, a living image of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church. In their final message the synod fathers have grasped in a direct and deep way the original and specific meaning of the formation of candidates for the priesthood, when they say that "To live in the seminary, which is a school of the Gospel, means to follow Christ as the apostles did. You are led by Christ into the service of God the Father and of all people, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus you become more like Christ the good shepherd in order better to serve the Church and the world as a priest. In preparing for the priesthood we learn how to respond from the heart to Christ's basic question: 'Do you love me?' (Jn. 21:15). For the future priest the answer can only mean total self giving."(122)

What needs to be done is to transfer this spirit -- which can never be lacking in the Church -- to the social, psychological, political and cultural conditions of the world today, conditions which are so varied and complex, as the synod fathers have confirmed, bearing in mind the different particular churches. The fathers, with words expressing thoughtful concern but at the same time great hope, have shown awareness of and reflected at length on the efforts going on in all their churches to identify and update methods of training candidates for the priesthood.

This present exhortation seeks to gather the results of the work of the synod, setting out some established points, indicating some essential goals, making available to all the wealth of experiences and training programs which have already been tried and found worthwhile. In this exhortation we consider "initial" formation and "ongoing" formation separately, but without forgetting that they are closely linked and that as a result they should become one sole organic journey of Christian and priestly living. The exhortation looks at the different areas of formation -- the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral areas -- as well as the settings and the persons responsible for the formation of candidates for the priesthood.

I. The Areas of Priestly Formation

Human Formation, the Basis of All Priestly Formation

43. "The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation."(123) This statement by the synod fathers expresses not only a fact which reason brings to our consideration every day and which experience confirms, but a requirement which has a deeper and specific motivation in the very nature of the priest and his ministry. The priest, who is called to be a "living image" of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the incarnate Son of God and which is reflected with particular liveliness in his attitudes toward others as we see narrated in the Gospels. The ministry of the priest is, certainly, to proclaim the word, to celebrate the sacraments, to guide the Christian community in charity "in the name and in the person of Christ, " but all this he does dealing always and only with individual human beings: "Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God" (Heb. 5:1). So we see that the human formation of the priest shows its special importance when related to the receivers of the mission: In order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mold his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity. It is necessary that, following the example of Jesus who "knew what was in humanity" (Jn. 2:25; cf. 8:3-11), the priest should be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to make meeting and dialogue easy, to create trust and cooperation, to express serene and objective judgments.

Future priests should therefore cultivate a series of human qualities, not only out of proper and due growth and realization of self, but also with a view to the ministry. These qualities are needed for them to be balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities. They need to be educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behavior.(124) A simple and demanding program for this human formation can be found in the words of the apostle Paul to the Philippians: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8). It is interesting to note that Paul, precisely in these profoundly human qualities, presents himself as a model to his faithful, for he goes on to say: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do" (Phil. 4:9).

Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a "man of communion." This demands that the priest not be arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console (125) (cf. 1 Tm. 3:1-5; Ti. 1:7-9). People today are often trapped in situations of standardization and loneliness, especially in large urban centers, and they become ever more appreciative of the value of communion. Today this is one of the most eloquent signs and one of the most effective ways of transmitting the Gospel message.

In this context affective maturity, which is the result of an education in true and responsible love, is a significant and decisive factor in the formation of candidates for the priesthood.

44. Affective maturity presupposes an awareness that love has a central role in human life. In fact, as I have written in the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself; his life is meaningless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. (126)

We are speaking of a love that involves the entire person, in all his or her aspects -- physical, psychic and spiritual -- and which is expressed in the "nuptial meaning" of the human body, thanks to which a person gives oneself to another and takes the other to oneself. A properly understood sexual education leads to understanding and realizing this "truth" about human love. We need to be aware that there is a widespread social and cultural atmosphere which "largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure." (127) Sometimes the very family situations in which priestly vocations arise will display not a few weaknesses and at times even serious failings.

In such a context, an education for sexuality becomes more difficult but also more urgent. It should be truly and fully personal and therefore should present chastity in a manner that shows appreciation and love for it as a "virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the 'nuptial meaning' of the body." (128)

Education for responsible love and the affective maturity of the person are totally necessary for those who, like the priest, are called to celibacy, that is, to offer with the grace of the Spirit and the free response of one's own will the whole of one's love and care to Jesus Christ and to his Church. In view of the commitment to celibacy, affective maturity should bring to human relationships of serene friendship and deep brotherliness a strong, lively and personal love for Jesus Christ. As the synod fathers have written, "A love for Christ, which overflows into a dedication to everyone, is of the greatest importance in developing affective maturity. Thus the candidate, who is called to celibacy, will find in affective maturity a firm support to live chastity in faithfulness and joy." (129)

Since the charism of celibacy, even when it is genuine and has proved itself, leaves one's affections and instinctive impulses intact, candidates to the priesthood need an affective maturity which is prudent, able to renounce anything that is a threat to it, vigilant over both body and spirit, and capable of esteem and respect in interpersonal relationships between men and women. A precious help can be given by a suitable education to true friendship, following the image of the bonds of fraternal affection which Christ himself lived on earth (cf. Jn. 11:5).

Human maturity, and in particular affective maturity, requires a clear and strong training in freedom, which expresses itself in convinced and heartfelt obedience to the "truth of one's own being, to the "meaning" of one's own existence, that is to the "sincere gift of self" as the way and fundamental content of the authentic realization of self. (130) Thus understood, freedom requires the person to be truly master of oneself, determined to fight and overcome the different forms of selfishness and individualism which threaten the life of each one, ready to open out to others, generous in dedication and service to one's neighbor. This is important for the response that will have to be given to the vocation, and in particular to the priestly vocation, and for faithfulness to it and to the commitments connected with it, even in times of difficulty. On this educational journey toward a mature, responsible freedom, the community life of the seminary can provide help. (131)

Intimately connected with formation to responsible freedom is education of the moral conscience. Such education calls from the depths of one's own "self" obedience to moral obligations and at the same time reveals the deep meaning of such obedience. It is a conscious and free response, and therefore a loving response, to God's demands, to God's love. "The human maturity of the priest -- the synod fathers write -- should include especially the formation of his conscience. In order that the candidate may faithfully meet his obligations with regard to God and the Church and wisely guide the consciences of the faithful he should become accustomed to listening to the voice of God, who speaks to him in his heart, and to adhere with love and constancy to his will." (132)

Spiritual Formation: In Communion with God and in Search of Christ

45. Human formation, when it is carried out in the context of an anthropology which is open to the full truth regarding the human person, leads to and finds its completion in spiritual formation. Every human being, as God's creature who has been redeemed by Christ's blood, is called to be reborn "of water and the Spirit" (Jn. 3:5) and to become a "son in the Son." In this wonderful plan of God is to be found the basis of the essentially religious dimension of the human

person, which moreover can be grasped and recognized by reason itself: The human individual is open to transcendence, to the absolute; he has a heart which is restless until it rests in the Lord.(133)

The educational process of a spiritual life, seen as a relationship and communion with God, derives and develops from this fundamental and irrepressible religious need. In the light of revelation and Christian experience, spiritual formation possesses the unmistakable originality which derives from evangelical "newness." Indeed, it "is the work of the Holy Spirit and engages a person in his totality. It introduces him to a deep communion with Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, and leads to the total submission of one's life to the Spirit, in a filial attitude toward the Father and a trustful attachment to the Church. Spiritual formation has its roots in the experience of the cross, which in deep communion leads to the totality of the paschal mystery."(134)

Spiritual formation, as we have just seen, is applicable to all the faithful. Nevertheless, it should be structured according to the meanings and connotations which derive from the identity of the priest and his ministry. And just as for all the faithful spiritual formation is central and unifies their being and living as Christians, that is, as new creatures in Christ who walk in the Spirit, so too for every priest his spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to his being a priest and his acting as a priest. In this context, the synod fathers state that "without spiritual formation pastoral formation would be left without foundation"(135) and that spiritual formation is "an extremely important element of a priest's education."(136)

The essential content of spiritual formation specifically leading toward the priesthood is well expressed in the Council's decree *Optatum Totius*: "Spiritual formation...should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Those who are to take on the likeness of Christ the priest by sacred ordination should form the habit of drawing close to him as friends in every detail of their lives. They should live his paschal mystery in such a way that they will know how to initiate into it the people committed to their charge. They should be taught to seek Christ in faithful meditation on the word of God and in active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church, especially the Eucharist and the Divine Office, to seek him in the bishop by whom they are sent and in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, little children, the weak, sinners and unbelievers. With the confidence of sons they should love and reverence the most blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as a mother to the disciple by Jesus Christ as he was dying on the cross."(137)

46. This text from the Council deserves our careful and loving meditation, out of which we will easily be able to outline some fundamental values and demands of the spiritual path trodden by the candidate for the priesthood.

First there is the value and demand of "living intimately united" to Jesus Christ. Our union with the Lord Jesus, which has its roots in baptism and is nourished with the Eucharist, has to express itself and be radically renewed each day. Intimate communion with the Blessed Trinity, that is, the new life of grace which makes us children of God, constitutes the "novelty" of the believer, a novelty which involves both his being and his acting. It constitutes the "mystery" of Christian existence which is under the influence of the Spirit: it should, as a result, constitute the ethos of Christian living. Jesus has taught us this marvelous reality of Christian living, which is also the heart of spiritual life, with his allegory of the vine and the branches: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:1, 4-5).

There are spiritual and religious values present in today's culture, and man, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, cannot help but hunger and thirst for God. However, the Christian religion is often regarded as just one religion among many or reduced to nothing more than a social ethic at the service of man. As a result, its amazing novelty in human history is quite often not apparent. It is a "mystery," the event of the coming of the Son of God who becomes man and gives to those who welcome him the "power to become children of God" (Jn. 1:12). It is the proclamation, nay the gift, of a personal covenant of love and life between God and human beings. Only if future priests, through a suitable spiritual formation, have become deeply aware and have increasingly experienced this "mystery" will they be able to communicate this amazing and blessed message to others (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-4).

The Council text, while taking account of the absolute transcendence of the Christian mystery, describes the communion of future priests with Jesus in terms of friendship. And indeed it is not an absurdity for a person to aim at this, for it is the priceless gift of Christ, who said to his apostles, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15).

The Council text then points out a second great spiritual value: the search for Jesus. "They should be taught to seek Christ." This, along with the *quaerere Deum* (the search for God), is a classical theme of Christian spirituality. It has a specific application in the context of the calling of the apostles. When John tells the story of the way the first two disciples followed Christ, he highlights this "search." It is Jesus himself who asks the question: "What do you seek?" And the two reply: "Rabbi, where are you staying?" The evangelist continues: "He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day" (Jn. 1:37-39). In a certain sense, the spiritual life of the person who is preparing for the priesthood is dominated by this search: by it and by the "finding" of the Master, to follow him, to be in communion with him. So inexhaustible is the mystery of the imitation of Christ and the sharing in his life that this "seeking" will also have to continue throughout the priest's life and ministry. Likewise this

"finding" the Master will have to continue in order to bring him to others, or rather in order to excite in others the desire to seek out the Master. But all this becomes possible if it is proposed to others as a living "experience, ' an experience that is worthwhile sharing. This was the path followed by Andrew to lead his brother Simon to Jesus. The evangelist John writes that Andrew "first found his brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)" and brought him to Jesus (Jn. 1:41-42). And so Simon too will be called, as an apostle, to follow the Messiah: "Jesus looked at him and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)" (Jn. 1:42).

But what does to seek Christ signify in the spiritual life? And where is he to be found? "Rabbi, where are you staying?" The decree *Optatum Totius* would seem to indicate a triple path to be covered: a faithful meditation on the word of God, active participation in the Church's holy mysteries and the service of charity to the "little ones." These are three great values and demands which further define the content of the spiritual formation of the candidate to the priesthood.

47. An essential element of spiritual formation is the prayerful and meditated reading of the word of God (*lectio divina*), a humble and loving listening of him who speaks. It is in fact by the light and with the strength of the word of God that one's own vocation can be discovered and understood, loved and followed, and one's own mission carried out. So true is this that the person's entire existence finds its unifying and radical meaning in being the terminus of God's word which calls man and the beginning of man's word which answers God. Familiarity with the word of God will make conversion easy, not only in the sense of detaching us from evil so as to adhere to the good, but also in the sense of nourishing our heart with the thoughts of God, so that the faith (as a response to the word) becomes our new basis for judging and evaluating persons and things, events and problems.

Provided that we approach the word of God and listen to it as it really is, it brings us into contact with God himself, God speaking to us. It brings us into contact with Christ, the Word of God, the truth, who is at the same time both the way and the life (cf. Jn. 14:6). It is a matter of reading the "scriptures" by listening to the "words, " "the word" of God, as the Council reminds us: "The sacred Scriptures contain the word of God, and because they are inspired, are truly the word of God."(138) The Council also states: "By this revelation, then, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15; 1 Tm. 1:7), from the fullness of his love, addresses people as his friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; Jn. 15:14-15), and moves among them (cf. Bar. 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company.(139)

A loving knowledge of the word of God and a prayerful familiarity with it are specifically important for the prophetic ministry of the priest. They are a fundamental condition for such a ministry to be carried out suitably, especially if we bear in mind the "new evangelization" which the Church today is called to undertake. The Council tells us: "All clerics, particularly priests of Christ and others who, as deacons or catechists, are officially engaged in the ministry of the word, should immerse themselves in the Scriptures by constant sacred reading and diligent study. For it must not happen that anyone becomes 'an empty preacher of the word of God to others, not being a hearer of the word of God in his own heart' (St. Augustine, Sermon 179, 1: PL 8:966)."(140)

The first and fundamental manner of responding to the word is prayer, which is without any doubt a primary value and demand of spiritual formation. Prayer should lead candidates for the priesthood to get to know and have experience of the genuine meaning of Christian prayer, as a living and personal meeting with the Father through the only - begotten Son under the action of the Spirit, a dialogue that becomes a sharing in the filial conversation between Jesus and the Father. One aspect of the priest's mission, and certainly by no means a secondary aspect, is that he is to be a "teacher of prayer." However, the priest will only be able to train others in this school of Jesus at prayer if he himself has been trained in it and continues to receive its formation. This is what people ask of the priest: "The priest is The man of God, the one who belongs to God and makes people think about God. When the letter to the Hebrews speaks of Christ it presents him as 'merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God' (Heb. 2:17)... Christians expect to find in the priest not only a man who welcomes them, who listens to them gladly and shows a real interest in them, but also and above all a man who will help them to turn to God, to rise up to him. And so the priest needs to be trained to have a deep intimacy with God. Those who are preparing for the priesthood should realize that their whole priestly life will have value inasmuch as they are able to give themselves to Christ and through Christ to the Father."(141)

A necessary training in prayer in a context of noise and agitation like that of our society is an education in the deep human meaning and religious value of silence as the spiritual atmosphere vital for perceiving God's presence and for allowing oneself to be won over by it (cf. 1 Kgs. 19:11ff.).

48. The high point of Christian prayer is the Eucharist, which in its turn is to be seen as the "summit and source" of the sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours. A totally necessary aspect of the formation of every Christian, and in particular of every priest, is liturgical formation, in the full sense of becoming inserted in a living way in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and is present and active in the Church's sacraments. Communion with God, which is the hinge on which the whole of the spiritual life turns, is the gift and fruit of the sacraments. At the same time it is a task and responsibility which the sacraments entrust to the freedom of the believer, so that one may live this same communion in the decisions, choices, attitudes and actions of daily existence. In this sense, the "grace" which "renews" Christian living is the grace of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and continues to pour out his holy and sanctifying Spirit in the sacraments. In the same way, the "new law" which should guide and govern the life of the Christian is written by the sacraments in the "new heart." And it is a law of charity toward God and humanity, as a response and prolonging of the charity of God toward humanity signified and communicated by the sacraments. It is

thus possible to understand at once the value of a "full, conscious and active participation"(142) in sacramental celebrations for the gift and task of that "pastoral charity" which is the soul of the priestly ministry.

This applies above all to sharing in the Eucharist, the memorial of the sacrificial death of Christ and of his glorious resurrection, the "sacrament of piety, sign of unity, bond of charity, (143)the paschal banquet "in which Christ is received, the soul is filled with grace and we are given a pledge of the glory that is to be ours."(144) For priests, as ministers of sacred things, are first and foremost ministers of the sacrifice of the Mass:(145) The role is utterly irreplaceable, because without the priest there can be no eucharistic offering.

This explains the essential importance of the Eucharist for the priest's life and ministry and, as a result, in the spiritual formation of candidates for the priesthood. To be utterly frank and clear, I would like to say once again: "It is fitting that seminarians take part every day in the eucharistic celebration, in such a way that afterward they will take up as a rule of their priestly life this daily celebration. They should, moreover, be trained to consider the eucharistic celebration as the essential moment of their day, in which they will take an active part and at which they will never be satisfied with a merely habitual attendance. Finally, candidates to the priesthood will be trained to share in the intimate dispositions which the Eucharist fosters: gratitude for heavenly benefits received, because the Eucharist is thanksgiving; an attitude of self - offering, which will impel them to unite the offering of themselves to the eucharistic offering of Christ; charity nourished by a sacrament which is a sign of unity and sharing; the yearning to contemplate and bow in adoration before Christ, who is really present under the eucharistic species."(146)

It is necessary and very urgent to rediscover within spiritual formation the beauty and joy of the sacrament of penance. In a culture which -- through renewed and more subtle forms of self justification -- runs the fatal risk of losing the "sense of sin" and, as a result, the consoling joy of the plea for forgiveness (cf. Ps. 51:14) and of meeting God who is "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4), it is vital to educate future priests to have the virtue of penance, which the Church wisely nourishes in her celebrations and in the seasons of the liturgical year, and which finds its fullness in the sacrament of reconciliation. From it flow the sense of asceticism and interior discipline, a spirit of sacrifice and self - denial, the acceptance of hard work and of the cross. These are elements of the spiritual life which often prove to be particularly arduous for many candidates for the priesthood who have grown up in relatively comfortable and affluent circumstances and have been made less inclined and open to these very elements by the models of behavior and ideals transmitted by the mass media; but this also happens in countries where the conditions of life are poorer and young people live in more austere situations. For this reason, but above all in order to put into practice the "radical self - giving" proper to the priest following the example of Christ the good shepherd, the synod fathers wrote: "It is necessary to inculcate the meaning of the cross, which is at the heart of the paschal mystery. Through this identification with Christ crucified, as a slave, the world can rediscover the value of austerity, of suffering and also of martyrdom within the present culture, which is imbued with secularism, greed and hedonism."(147)

49. Spiritual formation also involves seeking Christ in people.

The spiritual life is, indeed, an interior life, a life of intimacy with God, a life of prayer and contemplation. But this very meeting with God and with his fatherly love for everyone brings us face to face with the need to meet our neighbor, to give ourselves to others, to serve in a humble and disinterested fashion, following the example which Jesus has proposed to everyone as a program of life when he washed the feet of the apostles: "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:15).

Formation which aims at giving oneself generously and freely, which is something helped also by the communal structure which preparation to the priesthood normally takes, is a necessary condition for one who is called to be a manifestation and image of the good shepherd, who gives life (cf. Jn. 10:11, 15). From this point of view, spiritual formation has and should develop its own inherent pastoral and charitable dimension, and can profitably make use of a proper devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, one that is both strong and tender. This is a point made by the synod fathers: "When we speak of forming future priests in the spirituality of the heart of the Lord, we mean they should lead lives that are a response to the love and affection of Christ the priest and good shepherd: to his love for the Father in the Holy Spirit, and to his love toward men that was so great as to lead him to give his life in sacrifice for them."(148)

The priest is, therefore, a man of charity and is called to educate others according to Christ's example and the new commandment of brotherly love (cf. Jn. 15:12). But this demands that he allow himself to be constantly trained by the Spirit in the charity of Christ. In this sense preparation for the priesthood must necessarily involve a proper training in charity and particularly in the preferential love for the "poor" in whom our faith discovers Jesus (cf. Mt. 25:40) and a merciful love for sinners.

In the general context of charity -- which consists in the loving gift of oneself -- is to be found, in the program of spiritual formation of the future priest, education in obedience, celibacy and poverty.(149) The Council offers this invitation: "Students must clearly understand that it is not their lot in life to lord it over others and enjoy honors, but to devote themselves completely to the service of God and the pastoral ministry. With special care they should be trained in priestly obedience, poverty and a spirit of self - denial, that they may accustom themselves to living in conformity with the crucified Christ and to, give up willingly even those things which are lawful, but not expedient."(150)

50. The spiritual formation of one who is called to live celibacy should pay particular attention to preparing the future priest so that he may know, appreciate, love and live celibacy according to its true nature and according to its real purposes, that is, for evangelical, spiritual and pastoral motives. The virtue of chastity is a premise for this preparation

and is its content. It colors all human relations and leads "to experiencing and showing...a sincere, human, fraternal and personal love, one that is capable of sacrifice, following Christ's example, a love for all and for each person."(151)

The celibacy of priests brings with it certain characteristics thanks to which they "renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt. 19:12) and hold fast to their Lord with that undivided love which is profoundly in harmony with the new covenant; they bear witness to the resurrection in a future life (cf. Lk. 20:36) and obtain the most useful assistance toward the constant exercise of that perfect charity by which they can become all things to all men in their priestly ministry."(152) And so priestly celibacy should not be considered just as a legal norm or as a totally external condition for admission to ordination, but rather as a value that is profoundly connected with ordination, whereby a man takes on the likeness of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd and spouse of the Church, and therefore as a choice of a greater and undivided love for Christ and his Church, as a full and joyful availability in his heart for the pastoral ministry. Celibacy is to be considered as a special grace, as a gift, for "not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given" (Mt. 19:11). Certainly it is a grace which does not dispense with, but counts most definitely on, a conscious and free response on the part of the receiver. This charism of the Spirit also brings with it the grace for the receiver to remain faithful to it for all his life and be able to carry out generously and joyfully its concomitant commitments. Formation in priestly celibacy should also include helping people to be aware of the "precious gift of God, "(153) which will lead to prayer and to vigilance in guarding the gift from anything which could put it under threat.

Through his celibate life, the priest will be able to fulfill better his ministry on behalf of the People of God. In particular, as he witnesses to the evangelical value of virginity, he will be able to aid Christian spouses to live fully the "great sacrament" of the love of Christ the bridegroom for his spouse the Church, just as his own faithfulness to celibacy will help them to be faithful to each other as husband and wife.(154)

The importance of a careful preparation for priestly celibacy, especially in the social and cultural situations that we see today, led the synod fathers to make a series of requests which have a permanent value, as the wisdom of our mother the Church confirms. I authoritatively set them down again as criteria to be followed in formation for chastity in celibacy: "Let the bishops together with the rectors and spiritual directors of the seminaries establish principles, offer criteria and give assistance for discernment in this matter. Of the greatest importance for formation for chastity in celibacy are the bishop's concern and fraternal life among priests. In the seminary, that is, in the program of formation, celibacy should be presented clearly, without any ambiguities and in a positive fashion. The seminarian should have a sufficient degree of psychological and sexual maturity as well as an assiduous and authentic life of prayer, and he should put himself under the direction of a spiritual father. The spiritual director should help the seminarian so that he himself reaches a mature and free decision, which is built on esteem for priestly friendship and self - discipline, as well as on the acceptance of solitude and on a physically and psychologically sound personal state. Therefore, seminarians should have a good knowledge of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, of the encyclical *Sacerdotalis Coelibatus* and the Instruction for Formation in Priestly Celibacy published by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1974. In order that the seminarian may be able to embrace priestly celibacy for the kingdom of heaven with a free decision, he needs to know the Christian and truly human nature and purpose of sexuality in marriage and in celibacy. It is necessary also to instruct and educate the lay faithful regarding the evangelical, spiritual and pastoral reasons proper to priestly celibacy so that they will help priests with their friendship, understanding and cooperation."(155)

Intellectual Formation: Understanding the Faith

51. Intellectual formation has its own characteristics, but it is also deeply connected with, and indeed can be seen as a necessary expression of, both human and spiritual formation: It is a fundamental demand of the human intelligence by which one "participates in the light of God's mind" and seeks to acquire a wisdom which in turn opens to and is directed toward knowing and adhering to God.(156)

The intellectual formation of candidates for the priesthood finds its specific justification in the very nature of the ordained ministry, and the challenge of the "new evangelization" to which our Lord is calling the Church on the threshold of the third millennium shows just how important this formation is. "If we expect every Christian, " the synod fathers write, "to be prepared to make a defense of the faith and to account for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15), then all the more should candidates for the priesthood and priests have diligent care of the quality of their intellectual formation in their education and pastoral activity. For the salvation of their brothers and sisters they should seek an ever deeper knowledge of the divine mysteries."(157) The present situation is heavily marked by religious indifference, by a widespread mistrust regarding the real capacity of reason to reach objective and universal truth, and by fresh problems and questions brought up by scientific and technological discoveries. It strongly demands a high level of intellectual formation, such as will enable priests to proclaim, in a context like this, the changeless Gospel of Christ and to make it credible to the legitimate demands of human reason. Moreover, there is the present phenomenon of pluralism, which is very marked in the field not only of human society but also of the community of the Church herself. It demands special attention to critical discernment: It is a further reason showing the need for an extremely rigorous intellectual formation.

These "pastoral" reasons for intellectual formation reconfirm what has been said above concerning the unity of the educational process in its diverse aspects. The commitment to study, which takes up no small part of the time of those preparing for the priesthood, is not in fact an external and secondary dimension of their human, Christian, spiritual and vocational growth. In reality, through study, especially the study of theology, the future priest assents to the word of God, grows in his spiritual life and prepares himself to fulfill his pastoral ministry. This is the many sided and unifying scope of the theological study indicated by the Council (158) and repropounded by the synod's *Instrumentum Laboris*: "To be pastorally effective, intellectual formation is to be integrated with a spirituality marked by a personal experience of God. In this way a purely abstract approach to knowledge is overcome in favor of that intelligence of heart which knows how 'to look beyond,' and then is in a position to communicate the mystery of God to the people."(159)

52. A crucial stage of intellectual formation is the study of philosophy, which leads to a deeper understanding and interpretation of the person, and of the person's freedom and relationships with the world and with God. A proper philosophical training is vital, not only because of the links between the great philosophical questions and the mysteries of salvation which are studied in theology under the guidance of the higher light of faith, (160) but also *vis - a - vis* an extremely widespread cultural situation which emphasizes subjectivism as a criterion and measure of truth: Only a sound philosophy can help candidates for the priesthood to develop a reflective awareness of the fundamental relationship that exists between the human spirit and truth, that truth which is revealed to us fully in Jesus Christ. Nor must one underestimate the importance of philosophy as a guarantee of that "certainty of truth" which is the only firm basis for a total giving of oneself to Jesus and to the Church. It is not difficult to see that some very specific questions, such as that concerning the priest's identity and his apostolic and missionary commitment, are closely linked to the question about the nature of truth, which is anything but an abstract question: If we are not certain about the truth, how can we put our whole life on the line, how can we have the strength to challenge others' way of living?

Philosophy greatly helps the candidate to enrich his intellectual formation in the "cult of truth," namely, in a kind of loving veneration of the truth, which leads one to recognize that the truth is not created or measured by man but is given to man as a gift by the supreme truth, God; that, albeit in a limited way and often with difficulty, human reason can reach objective and universal truth, even that relating to God and the radical meaning of existence; and that faith itself cannot do without reason and the effort of "thinking through" its contents, as that great mind Augustine bore witness: "I wished to see with my mind what I have believed, and I have argued and labored greatly."(161)

For a deeper understanding of man and the phenomena and lines of development of society, in relation to a pastoral ministry which is as "incarnate" as possible, the so - called "human sciences" can be of considerable use, sciences such as sociology, psychology, education, economics and politics, and the science of social communication. Also in the precise field of the positive or descriptive sciences, these can help the future priest prolong the living "contemporaneity" of Christ. As Paul VI once said, "Christ became the contemporary of some men and spoke their language. Our faithfulness to him demands that this contemporaneity should be maintained."(162)

53. The intellectual formation of the future priest is based and built above all on the study of sacred doctrine, of theology. The value and genuineness of this theological formation depend on maintaining a scrupulous respect for the nature of theology. The synod fathers summarized this as follows: "True theology proceeds from the faith and aims at leading to the faith.(163) This is the conception of theology which has always been put forward by the Church and, specifically, by her magisterium. This is the line followed by the great theologians who have enriched the Church's thinking down the ages. St. Thomas is extremely clear when he affirms that the faith is as it were the habitus of theology, that is, its permanent principle of operation, (164) and that the whole of theology is ordered to nourishing the faith.(165)

The theologian is therefore, first and foremost, a believer, a person of faith. But the theologian is a believer who asks himself questions about his own faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*), with the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of the faith itself. The two aspects (of faith and mature reflection) are intimately connected, intertwined: Their intimate coordination and interpenetration are what make for true theology and as a result decide the contents, modalities and spirit according to which the sacred doctrine (*sacra doctrina*) is elaborated and studied.

Moreover, since the faith, which is the point of departure and the point of arrival of theology, brings about a personal relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ in the Church, theology also has intrinsic Christological and ecclesial connotations, which the candidate to the priesthood should take up consciously, not only because of what they imply for his personal life but also inasmuch as they affect his pastoral ministry. If our faith truly welcomes the word of God, it will lead to a radical "yes" on the part of the believer to Jesus Christ, who is the full and definitive Word of God to the world (cf. Heb. 1:1ff.). As a result, theological reflection is centered on adherence to Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God: Mature reflection has to be described as a sharing in the "thinking" of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16) in the human form of a science (*scientia fidei*): At the same time, faith inserts believers in the Church and makes them partake in the life of the Church as a community of faith. Hence theology has an ecclesial dimension, because it is a mature reflection on the faith of the Church by the theologian who is a member of the Church.(166)

These Christological and ecclesial dimensions which are connatural to theology, while they help candidates for the priesthood grow in scientific precision, will also help them develop a great and living love for Jesus Christ and for his Church. This love will both nourish their spiritual life and guide them to carry out their ministry with a generous spirit. This was what the Second Vatican Council had in mind when it called for a revision of ecclesiastical studies, with a

view to "a more effective coordination of philosophy and theology so that they supplement one another in revealing to the minds of the students with ever - increasing clarity the mystery of Christ, which affects the whole course of human history, exercises an unceasing influence on the Church and operates mainly through the ministry of the priest."(167)

Intellectual formation in theology and formation in the spiritual life, in particular the life of prayer, meet and strengthen each other, without detracting in any way from the soundness of research or from the spiritual tenor of prayer. St. Bonaventure reminds us: "Let no one think that it is enough for him to read if he lacks devotion, or to engage in speculation without spiritual Joy, or to be active if he has no piety, or to have knowledge without charity, or intelligence without humility, or study without God's grace, or to expect to know himself if he is lacking the infused wisdom of God."(168)

54. Theological formation is both complex and demanding. It should lead the candidate for the priesthood to a complete and unified vision of the truths which God has revealed in Jesus Christ and of the Church's experience of faith. Hence the need both to know "all" the Christian truths, without arbitrarily selecting among them, and to know them in an orderly fashion. This means the candidate needs to be helped to build a synthesis which will be the result of the contributions of the different theological disciplines, the specific nature of which acquires genuine value only in their profound coordination.

In reflecting maturely upon the faith, theology moves in two directions. The first is that of the study of the word of God: the word set down in holy writ, celebrated and lived in the living tradition of the Church, and authoritatively interpreted by the Church's magisterium. Hence the importance of studying sacred Scripture "which should be the soul, as it were, of all theological (169) the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, the history of the Church and the teachings of the magisterium. The second direction is that of the human person, who converses with God: the person who is called "to believe, " "to live, " "to communicate" to others the Christian faith and outlook. Hence the study of dogmatic and moral theology, of spiritual theology, of canon law and of pastoral theology.

Because of its relationship to the believer, theology is led to pay particular attention both to the fundamental and permanent question of the relationship between faith and reason and to a number of requirements more closely related to the social and cultural situation of today. In regard to the first we have the study of fundamental theology, whose object is the fact of Christian revelation and its transmission in the Church. In regard to the second we have disciplines which have been and are being developed as responses to problems strongly felt nowadays. This is true of the study of the Church's social doctrine which "belongs to the field...of theology and, in particular, of moral theology"(170) and is to be counted among the "essential components" of the "new evangelization, " of which it is an instrument.(171) This is likewise true of the study of missiology, ecumenism, Judaism, Islam and other religions.

55. Theological formation nowadays should pay attention to certain problems which not infrequently raise difficulties, tensions and confusion within the life of the Church. One can think of the relationship between statements issued by the magisterium and theological discussion, a relationship which does not always take the shape it ought to have, that is, within a framework of cooperation. It is indeed true that the living magisterium of the Church and theology, while having different gifts and functions, ultimately have the same goal: preserving the People of God in the truth which sets free and thereby making them 'a light to the nations.' This service to the ecclesial community brings the theologian and the magisterium into a mutual relationship. The latter authentically teaches the doctrine of the apostles. And, befitting from the work of theologians, it refutes objections to and distortions of the faith, and promotes, with the authority received from Jesus Christ, new and deeper comprehension, clarification and application of revealed doctrine.

Theology -- for its part -- gains, by way of reflection, an ever deeper understanding of the word of God found in the Scripture and handed on faithfully by the Church's living tradition under the guidance of the magisterium. Theology strives to clarify the teaching of revelation with regard to reason and gives it finally an organic and systematic form."(172) When, for a number of reasons, this cooperation is lacking, one needs to avoid misunderstandings and confusion, and to know how to distinguish carefully "the common teaching of the Church from the opinions of theologians and from tendencies which quickly pass (the so -called trends) There is no "parallel" magisterium, for the one magisterium is that of Peter and the apostles, the pope and the bishops.(171)

Another problem, which is experienced especially when seminary studies are entrusted to academic institutions, is that of the relationship between high scientific standards in theology and its pastoral aim. This raises the issue of the pastoral nature of theology. It is a question, really, of two characteristics of theology and how it is to be taught, which are not only not opposed to each other, but which work together, from different angles, in favor of a more complete "understanding of the faith." In fact the pastoral nature of theology does not mean that it should be less doctrinal or that it should be completely stripped of its scientific nature. It means, rather, that it enables future priests to proclaim the Gospel message through the cultural modes of their age and to direct pastoral action according to an authentic theological vision. Hence, on the one hand, a respectful study of the genuine scientific quality of the individual disciplines of theology will help provide a more complete and deeper training of the pastor of souls as a teacher of faith; and, on the other hand, an appropriate awareness that there is a pastoral goal in view will help The serious and scientific study of theology be more formative for future priests.

A further problem that is strongly felt these days is the demand for the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the message of faith. An eminently pastoral problem, this should enter more broadly and carefully into the formation of the candidates to the priesthood: In the present circumstances in which, in a number of regions of the world, the

Christian religion is considered as something foreign to cultures (be they ancient or modern), it is very important that in the whole intellectual and human formation the dimension of inculturation be seen as necessary and essential."(175) But this means we need a genuine theology, inspired by the Catholic principles on inculturation. These principles are linked with the mystery of the incarnation of the word of God and with Christian anthropology, and thus illumine the authentic meaning of inculturation. In the face of all the different and at times contrasting cultures present in the various parts of the world, inculturation seeks to obey Christ's command to preach the Gospel to all nations even unto the ends of the earth. Such obedience does not signify either syncretism or a simple adaptation of the announcement of the Gospel, but rather the fact that the Gospel penetrates the very life of cultures, becomes incarnate in them, overcoming those cultural elements that are incompatible with the faith and Christian living, and raising their values to the mystery of salvation which comes from Christ.(176) The problem of inculturation can have a particularly great interest when the candidates to the priesthood are themselves coming from indigenous cultures. In that case, they will need to find suitable ways of formation, both to overcome the danger of being less demanding and to strengthen their weaker education in human, Christian and priestly virtues, and also to make proper use of the good and genuine elements of their own cultures and traditions.(177)

56. Following the teaching and the indications of the Second Vatican Council and their application in the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, the Church decided upon a vast updating of the teaching of the philosophical and especially theological disciplines in seminaries. This updating, which in some cases still needs amendments and developments, has on the whole helped to make the education available a more effective medium for intellectual formation. In this respect "the synod fathers have confirmed once again, frequently and clearly, the need -- indeed the urgency -- to put the basic study plan both the general one which applies to the Church worldwide, and those of the individual nations or episcopal conferences) into effect in seminaries and in houses of formation."(178)

It is necessary to oppose firmly the tendency to play down the seriousness of studies and the commitment to them. This tendency is showing itself in certain spheres of the Church, also as a consequence of the insufficient and defective basic education of students beginning the philosophical and theological curriculum. The very situation of the Church today demands increasingly that teachers be truly able to face the complexity of the times and that they be in a position to face competently, with clarity and deep reasoning, the questions about meaning which are put by the people of today, questions which can only receive full and definitive reply in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastoral Formation: Communion With the Charity of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd

57. The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd. Hence their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character. The Council's decree *Optatum Totius* states so clearly when speaking of major seminaries; "The whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. Hence, they should be trained for the ministry of the word so that they may gain an ever - increasing understanding of the revealed word of God, making it their own by meditation and giving it expression in their speech and in their lives. They should be trained for the ministry of worship and sanctification so that by prayer and the celebration of the sacred liturgical functions they may carry on the work of salvation through the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments. They should be trained to undertake the ministry of the shepherd, that they may know how to represent Christ to humanity, Christ who 'did not come to have service done to him but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for the lives of many ' (Mk. 10:45; Jn. 1 3:12-17), and that they may win over many by becoming the servants of all (1 Cor. 9:19)."(179) The Council text insists upon the coordination of the different aspects of human, spiritual and intellectual formation. At the same time it stresses that they are all directed to a specific pastoral end. This pastoral aim ensures that the human, spiritual and intellectual formation has certain precise content and characteristics; it also unifies and gives specificity to the whole formation of future priests.

Like all other branches of formation, pastoral formation develops by means of mature reflection and practical application, and it is rooted in a spirit, which is the hinge of all and the force which stimulates it and makes it develop.

It needs to be studied therefore as the true and genuine theological discipline that it is; pastoral or practical theology. It is a scientific reflection on the Church as she is built up daily, by the power of the Spirit, in history; on the Church as the "universal sacrament of salvation, "(180) as a living sign and instrument of the salvation wrought by Christ through the word, the sacraments and the service of charity. Pastoral theology is not just an art. Nor is it a set of exhortations, experiences and methods. It is theological in its own right, because it receives from the faith the principles and criteria for the pastoral action of the Church in history, a Church that each day "begets" the Church herself, to quote the felicitous expression of the Venerable Bede: "Nam et Ecclesia quotidie gignit Ecclesiam."(181) Among these principles and criteria, one that is specially important is that of the evangelical discernment of the socio - cultural and ecclesial situation in which the particular pastoral action has to be carried out.

The study of pastoral theology should throw light upon its practical application through involvement in certain pastoral services which the candidates to the priesthood should carry out, with a necessary progression and always in harmony with their other educational commitments. It is a question of pastoral "experiences, " which can come together in a real

program of "pastoral training, " which can last a considerable amount of time and the usefulness of which will itself need to be checked in an orderly manner.

Pastoral study and action direct one to an inner source, which the work of formation will take care to guard and make good use of: This is the ever - deeper communion with the pastoral charity of Jesus, which -- just as it was the principle and driving force of his salvific action -- likewise, thanks to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of orders, should constitute the principle and driving force of the priestly ministry. It is a question of a type of formation meant not only to ensure scientific, pastoral competence and practical skill, but also and especially a way of being in communion with the very sentiments and behavior of Christ the good shepherd: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

58. And so pastoral formation certainly cannot be reduced to a mere apprenticeship, aiming to make the candidate familiar with some pastoral techniques. The seminary which educates must seek really and truly to initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, in the conscious and mature assumption of his responsibilities, in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in pastoral work.

Thanks to an initial and gradual experience of ministry, future priests will be able to be inserted into the living pastoral tradition of their particular church. They will learn to open the horizon of their mind and heart to the missionary dimension of the Church's life. They will get practice in some initial forms of cooperation with one another and with the priests alongside whom they will be sent to work. These priests have a considerably important role, in union with the seminary program, in showing the candidates how they should go about pastoral work.

When it comes to choosing places and services in which candidates can obtain their pastoral experience, the parish should be given particular importance⁽¹⁸²⁾ for it is a living cell of local and specialized pastoral work in which they will find themselves faced with the kind of problems they will meet in their future ministry. The synod fathers have proposed a number of concrete examples such as visits to the sick; caring for immigrants, refugees and nomads; and various social works which can be expressions of charitable zeal. Specifically, they write: "The priest must be a witness of the charity of Christ himself who 'went about doing good' (Acts 10:38). He must also be a visible sign of the solicitude of the Church who is mother and teacher. And given that man today is affected by so many hardships, especially those who are sunk in inhuman poverty, blind violence and unjust power, it is necessary that the man of God who is to be equipped for every good work (cf. 2 Tm. 3:17) should defend the rights and dignity of man. Nevertheless, he should be careful not to adopt false ideologies, nor should he forget, as he strives to promote its perfecting, that the only redemption of the world is that effected by the cross of Christ."⁽¹⁸³⁾

These and other pastoral activities will teach the future priest to live out as a "service" his own mission of "authority" in the community, setting aside all attitudes of superiority or of exercising a power if it is not simply that which is justified by pastoral charity.

If the training is to be suitable, the different experiences which candidates for the priesthood have should assume a clear "ministerial" character and should be intimately linked with all the demands that befit preparation to the priesthood and (certainly not neglecting their studies) in relation to the services of the proclamation of the word, of worship and of leadership. These services can become a specific way of experiencing the ministries of lector, acolyte and deacon.

59. Since pastoral action is destined by its very nature to enliven the Church, which is essentially "mystery, " "communion" and "mission, " pastoral formation should be aware of and should live these ecclesial aspects in the exercise of the ministry.

Of fundamental importance is awareness that the Church is a "mystery, " that is, a divine work, fruit of the Spirit of Christ, an effective sign of grace, the prescience of the Trinity in the Christian community. This awareness, while never lessening the pastor's genuine sense of responsibility, will convince him that the Church grows thanks to the gratuitous work of the Spirit and that his service -- thanks to the very grace of God that is entrusted to the free responsibility of man -- is the Gospel service of the "unworthy servant" (cf. Lk. 17:10).

Awareness of the Church as "communion" will prepare the candidate for the priesthood to carry out his pastoral work with a community spirit, in heartfelt cooperation with the different members of the Church: priests and bishop, diocesan and religious priests, priests and lay people. Such a cooperation presupposes a knowledge and appreciation of the different gifts and charisms, of the diverse vocations and responsibilities which the Spirit offers and entrusts to the members of Christ's body. It demands a living and precise consciousness of one's own identity in the Church and of the identity of others. It demands mutual trust, patience, gentleness and the capacity for understanding and expectation. It finds its roots above all in a love for the Church that is deeper than love for self and the group or groups one may belong to. It is particularly important to prepare future priests for cooperation with the laity. The Council says: "They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes and recognize their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able to recognize with them the signs of the times."⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ The recent synod too has insisted upon pastoral solicitude for the laity: "The student should become capable of proposing and introducing the lay faithful, the young especially, to the different vocations (marriage, social services, apostolate, ministries and other responsibilities in pastoral activity, the consecrated life, involvement in political and social leadership, scientific research, teaching). Above all it is necessary that he be able to teach and

support the laity in their vocation to be present in and to transform the world with the light of the Gospel, by recognizing this task of theirs and showing respect for it."(185)

Lastly, awareness of the Church as a "missionary" communion will help the candidate; for the priesthood to love and live the essential missionary dimension of the Church and her different pastoral activities. He should be open and available to all the possibilities offered today for the proclamation of the Gospel, not forgetting the valuable service which can and should be given by the media.(186) He should prepare himself for a ministry which may mean in practice that his readiness to follow the indications of the Holy Spirit and of his bishop will lead him to be sent to preach the Gospel even beyond the frontiers of his own country.(187)

II. The Setting of Priestly Formation

The Major Seminary - A Formation Community

60. The need for the major seminary -- and by analogy for the religious house -- for the formation of candidates for priesthood, was affirmed with authority by the Second Vatican Council (188) and has been reaffirmed by the synod as follows: "The institution of the major seminary, as the best place for formation, is to be certainly reaffirmed as the normal place, in the material sense as well, for a community and hierarchical life, indeed as the proper home for the formation of candidates for the priesthood, with superiors who are truly dedicated to this service. This institution has produced many good results down the ages and continues to do so all over the world."(189) The seminary can be seen as a place and a period in life. But it is above all an educational community in progress: It is a community established by the bishop to offer to those called by the Lord to serve as apostles the possibility of re - living the experience of formation which our Lord provided for the Twelve. In fact, the Gospels present a prolonged and intimate sharing of life with Jesus as a necessary premise for the apostolic ministry. Such an experience demands of the Twelve the practice of detachment in a particularly clear and specific fashion, a detachment that in some way is demanded of all the disciples, a detachment from their roots, from their usual work, from their nearest and dearest (cf. Mk. 1:16-20; 10:28; Lk. 9:23, 57-62; 14:25-27). On several occasions we have referred to the Marcan tradition which stresses the deep link that unites the apostles to Christ and to one another: Before being sent out to preach and to heal, they are called "to be with him" (Mk. 3:14).

In its deepest identity the seminary is called to be, in its own way, a continuation in the Church of the apostolic community gathered about Jesus, listening to his word, proceeding toward the Easter experience, awaiting the gift of the Spirit for the mission. Such an identity constitutes the normative ideal which stimulates the seminary in the many diverse forms and varied aspects which it assumes historically as a human institution, to find a concrete realization, faithful to the Gospel values from which it takes its inspiration and able to respond to the situations and needs of the times.

The seminary is, in itself, an original experience of the Church's life. In it the bishop is present through the ministry of the rector and the service of co - responsibility and communion fostered by him with the other teachers, for the sake of the pastoral and apostolic growth of the students. The various members of the seminary community, gathered by the Spirit into a single brotherhood, cooperate, each according to his own gift in the growth of all in faith and charity so that they may prepare suitably for the priesthood and so prolong in the Church and in history the saving presence of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd.

The human point of view, the major seminary should strive to become "a community built on deep friendship and charity so that it can be considered a true family living in joy."(190) As a Christian institution, the seminary should become -- as the synod fathers continue -- an "ecclesial community, " a "community of the disciples of the Lord in which the one same liturgy (which imbues life with a spirit of prayer) is celebrated; a community molded daily in the reading and meditation of the word of God and with the sacrament of the Eucharist, and in the practice of fraternal charity and justice; a community in which, as its life and the life each of its members progresses, there shine forth the Spirit of Christ and love for the Church."(191) This ecclesial aspect of the seminary is confirmed and concretized by the fathers when they add: "As an ecclesial community, be it diocesan or interdiocesan, or even religious, the seminary should nourish the meaning of communion between the candidates and their bishop and presbyterate, in such a way that they share in their hopes and anxieties and learn to extend this openness to the needs of the universal Church."(192)

It is essential for the formation of candidates for the priesthood and the pastoral ministry, which by its very nature is ecclesial, that the seminary should be experienced not as something external and superficial, or simply a place in which to live and study, but in an interior and profound way. It should be experienced as a community, a specifically ecclesial community, a community that relives the experience of the group of Twelve who were united to Jesus.(193)

61. The seminary is, therefore, an educational ecclesial community, indeed a particular educating community. And it is the specific goal which determines its physiognomy: the vocational accompanying of future priests, and therefore discernment of a vocation; the help to respond to it and the preparation to receive the sacrament of orders with its own graces and responsibilities, by which the priest is configured to Jesus Christ head and shepherd and is enabled and committed to share the mission of salvation in the church and in the world.

Inasmuch as it is an educating community, the seminary and its entire life -- in all its different expressions -- is committed to formation, the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of future priests. Although this formation has many aspects in common with the human and Christian formation of all the members of the Church, it has, nevertheless, contents, modalities and characteristics which relate specifically to the aim of preparation for the priesthood.

The content and form of the educational work require that the seminary should have a precise program, a program of life characterized by its being organized and unified, by its being in harmony or correspondence with one aim which justifies the existence of the seminary: preparation of future priests.

In this regard, the synod fathers write: "As an educational community, (the seminary) should follow a clearly defined program which will have, as a characteristic, a unity of leadership expressed in the figure of the rector and his cooperators, a consistency in the ordering of life, formational activity and the fundamental demands of community life, which also involves the essential aspects of the task of formation. This program should be at the service of the specific finality which alone justify the existence of the seminary, and it should do so without hesitation or ambiguity. That aim is the formation of future priests, pastors of the Church."(194) And in order to ensure that the programming is truly apt and effective, the fundamental outlines of the program will have to be translated into more concrete details, with the help of particular norms that are aimed at regulating community life, establishing certain precise instruments and timetables.

A further aspect is to be stressed here: The educational work is by its nature an accompanying of specific individual persons who are proceeding to a choice of and commitment to precise ideals of life. For this very reason, the work of education should be able to bring together into a harmonious whole a clear statement of the goal to be achieved, the requirement that candidates proceed seriously toward the goal, and third, attention to the "journeyer, " that is, the individual person who is embarked on this adventure, and therefore attention to a series of situations, problems, difficulties and different rates of progress and growth. This requires a wise flexibility. And this does not mean compromising, either as regards values or as regards the conscious and free commitment of the candidates. What it does mean is a true love and a sincere respect for the person who, in conditions which are very personal, is proceeding toward the priesthood. This applies not only to individual candidates, but also to the diverse social and cultural contexts in which seminaries exist and to the different life histories which they have. In this sense the educational work requires continual renewal. The synod fathers have brought this out forcefully also when speaking about the structure of seminaries: "Without questioning the validity of the classical forms of seminaries, the synod desires that the work of consultation of the episcopal conferences on the present - day needs of formation should proceed as is established in the decree *Optatum Totius* (no. 1), and in the 1967 synod. The rationes of the different nations or rites should be revised where opportune whether on the occasion of requests made by the episcopal conferences or in relation to apostolic visitations of the seminaries of different countries, in order to bring into them diverse forms of formation that have proved successful, as well as to respond to the needs of people with so - called indigenous cultures, the needs of the vocations of adult men and the needs of vocations for the missions, etc."(195)

62. The purpose and specific educational form of the major seminary demand that candidates for the priesthood have a certain prior preparation before entering it. Such preparation, at least until a few decades ago, did not create particular problems. In those days most candidates to the priesthood came from minor seminaries, and the Christian life of the community offered all, in general, a suitable Christian instruction and education.

The situation in many places has changed. There is a considerable discrepancy between -- on the one hand -- the style of life and basic preparation of boys, adolescents and young men, even when they are Christians and at times have been involved in Church life, and -- on the other hand -- the style of life of the seminary with its formational demands.

In this context, together with the synod fathers I ask that there be a sufficient period of preparation prior to seminary formation: "It is a good thing that there be a period of human, Christian, intellectual and spiritual preparation for the candidates to the major seminary. These candidates should, however, have certain qualities: a right intention, a sufficient degree of human maturity, a sufficiently broad knowledge of the doctrine of the faith, some introduction into the methods of prayer and behavior in conformity with Christian tradition. They should also have attitudes proper to their regions, through which they can express their effort to find God and the faith (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 48)."(196)

The "sufficiently broad knowledge of the doctrine of the faith" which the synod fathers mention is a primary condition for theology. It simply is not possible to develop an "*intelligentia fidei*" (an understanding of the faith), if the content of the "*fides*" is not known. Such a gap can be filled more easily when the forthcoming Universal Catechism appears.

While there is increasing consensus regarding the need for preparation prior to the major seminary, there are different ideas as to what such preparation should contain and what its characteristics should be: Should it be directed mainly to spiritual formation to discern the vocation or to intellectual and cultural formation? On the other hand, we cannot overlook the many and deep diversities that exist, not only among the individual candidates but also in the different regions and countries. This implies the need for a period of study and experimentation in order to define as clearly and suitably as possible the different elements of this prior preparation or "*propaedeutic period*": the duration, place, form, subject matter of this period, all of which will have to be coordinated with the subsequent years of formation offered by the seminary.

In this sense I take up and propose to the Congregation for Catholic Education a request expressed by the synod fathers: "The synod asks that the Congregation for Catholic Education gather all the information on experiments of such initial formation that have been done or are being done. At a suitable time, the congregation is requested to communicate its findings on this matter to the episcopal conferences."(197)

The Minor Seminary and Other Forms of Fostering Vocations

63. As long experience shows, a priestly vocation tends to show itself in the preadolescent years or in the earliest years of youth. Even in people who decide to enter the seminary later on it is not infrequent to find that God's call had been perceived much earlier. The Church's history gives constant witness of calls which the Lord directs to people of tender age. St. Thomas, for example, explains Jesus' special love for St. John the Apostle "because of his tender age" and draws the following conclusion: "This explains that God loves in a special way those who give themselves to his service from their earliest youth."(198)

The Church looks after these seeds of vocations sown in the hearts of children by means of the institution of minor seminaries, providing a careful though preliminary discernment and accompaniment. In a number of parts of the world, these seminaries continue to carry out a valuable educational work, the aim of which is to protect and develop the seeds of a priestly vocation so that the students may more easily recognize it and be in a better position to respond to it. The educational goal of such seminaries tends to favor in a timely and gradual way the human, cultural and spiritual formation which will lead the young person to embark on the path of the major seminary with an adequate and solid foundation. "To be prepared to follow Christ the Redeemer with generous souls and pure hearts": This is the purpose of the minor seminary as indicated by the Council in the decree *Optatam Totius*, which thus outlines its educational aspect: The students "under the fatherly supervision of the superiors -- the parents too playing their appropriate part -- should lead lives suited to the age, mentality and development of young people. Their way of life should be fully in keeping with the standards of sound psychology and should include suitable experience of the ordinary affairs of daily life and contact with their own families."(199)

The minor seminary can also be in the diocese a reference point for vocation work, with suitable forms of welcome and the offering of opportunities for information to adolescents who are looking into the possibility of a vocation or who, having already made up their mind to follow their vocation, have to delay entry into the seminary for various family or educational reasons.

64. In those cases where it is not possible to run minor seminaries (which "in many regions seem necessary and very useful"), other "institutions" need to be provided, as for example vocational groups for adolescents and young people.(200) While they lack the quality of permanence, such groups can offer a systematic guide, in a community context, with which to check the existence and development of vocations. While such young people live at home and take part in the activities of the Christian community which helps them along the path of formation, they should not be left alone. They need a particular group or community to refer to and where they can find support to follow through the specific vocational journey which the gift of the Holy Spirit has initiated in them.

We should also mention the phenomenon of priestly vocations arising among people of adult age after some years of experience of lay life and professional involvement. This phenomenon, while not new in the Church's history, at present appears with some novel features and with a certain frequency. It is not always possible and often it is not even convenient to invite adults to follow the educative itinerary of the major seminary. Rather, after a careful discernment of the genuineness of such vocations, what needs to be provided is some kind of specific program to accompany them with formation in order to ensure, bearing in mind all the suitable adaptations, that such persons receive the spiritual and intellectual formation they require. A suitable relationship with other candidates to the priesthood and periods spent in the community of the major seminary can be a way of guaranteeing that these vocations are fully inserted in the one presbyterate and are in intimate and heartfelt communion with it.(201)

III. The Agents of Priestly Formation

The Church and the Bishop

65. Given that the formation of candidates for the priesthood belongs to the Church's pastoral care of vocations, it must be said that the Church as such is the communal subject which has the grace and responsibility to accompany those whom the Lord calls to become his ministers in the priesthood.

In this sense the appreciation of the mystery of the Church helps us to establish more precisely the place and role which her different members have -- be it individually or as members of a body -- in the formation of candidates for the priesthood.

The Church is by her very nature the "memorial" or "sacrament" of the presence and action of Jesus Christ in our midst and on our behalf. The call to the priesthood depends on his saving presence: not only the call, but also the accompanying so that the person called can recognize the Lord's grace and respond to it freely and lovingly. It is the Spirit of Jesus that throws light on and gives strength to vocational discernment and the journey to the priesthood. So

we can say that there cannot exist any genuine formational work for the priesthood without the influence of the Spirit of Christ. Everyone involved in the work of formation should be fully aware of this. How can we fail to appreciate this utterly gratuitous and completely effective "resource," which has its own decisive "weight" in the effort to train people for the priesthood? How can we not rejoice when we consider the dignity of every human being involved in formation, who for the candidate to the priesthood becomes, as it were, the visible representative of Christ? If training for the priesthood is, as it should be, essentially the preparation of future "shepherds" in the likeness of Jesus Christ the good shepherd, who better than Jesus himself, through the outpouring of his Spirit, can give them and fully develop in them that pastoral charity which he himself lived to the point of total self-giving (cf. Jn. 15:13; 10:11) and which he wishes all priests to live in their turn?

The first representative of Christ in priestly formation is the bishop. What Mark the evangelist tells us, in the text we have already quoted more than once, can be applied to the bishop, to every bishop: "He called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve to be with him, and to be sent out" (Mk. 3:13-14). The truth is that the interior call of the Spirit needs to be recognized as the authentic call of the bishop. Just as all can "go" to the bishop, because he is shepherd and father to all, his priests who share with him the one priesthood and ministry can do so in a special way: The bishop, the Council tell us should consider them and treat them as "brothers" and friends."(202) By analogy the same can be said of those who are preparing for the priesthood. As for "being with him," with the bishop, the bishop should make a point of visiting them often and in some way "being" with them as a way of giving significant expression to his responsibility for the formation of candidates for the priesthood.

The presence of the bishop is especially valuable, not only because it helps the seminary community live its insertion in the particular church and its communion with the pastor who guides it, but also because verifies and encourages the pastoral purpose which is what specifies the entire formation of candidates for the priesthood. In particular, with his presence and by his sharing with candidates for the priesthood all that has to do with the pastoral progress of the particular church, the bishop offers a fundamental contribution to formation in the "sensus ecclesiae," as a central spiritual and pastoral value in the exercise of the priestly ministry.

The Seminary as an Educational Community

66. The educational community of the seminary is built round the various people involved in formation: the rector, the spiritual father or spiritual director, the superiors and professors. These people should feel profoundly united to the bishop, whom they represent in their different roles and in various ways. They should also maintain among themselves a frank and genuine communion. The unity of the educators not only helps the educational program to be put into practice properly, but also and above all it offers candidates for the priesthood a significant example and a practical introduction to that ecclesial communion which is a fundamental value of Christian living and of the pastoral ministry.

It is evident that much of the effectiveness of the training offered depends on the maturity and strength of personality of those entrusted with formation, both from the human and from the Gospel points of view. And so it is especially important both to select them carefully and to encourage them to become ever more suitable for carrying out the task entrusted to them. The synod fathers were very aware that the future of the preparation of candidates for the priesthood depends on the choice and formation of those entrusted with the work of formation, and so they describe at length the qualities sought for in them. Specifically they wrote: "The task of formation of candidates for the priesthood requires not only a certain special preparation of those to whom this work is entrusted, one that is professional, pedagogical, spiritual, human and theological, but also a spirit of communion and of cooperating together to carry out the program, so that the unity of the pastoral action of the seminary is always maintained under the leadership of the rector. The body of formation personnel should witness to a truly evangelical lifestyle and total dedication to the Lord. It should enjoy a certain stability, and its members as a rule should live in the seminary community. They should be intimately joined to the bishop, who is the first one responsible for the formation of the priests."(203)

The bishops first of all should feel their grave responsibility for the formation of those who have been given the task of educating future priests. For this ministry, priests of exemplary life should be chosen, men with a number of qualities: "human and spiritual maturity, pastoral experience, professional competence, stability in their own vocation, a capacity to work with others, serious preparation in those human sciences (psychology especially) which relate to their office, a knowledge of how to work in groups."(204)

While safeguarding the distinctions between internal and external forum, and maintaining a suitable freedom in the choice of confessors and the prudence and discretion which should be a feature of the ministry of the spiritual director, the priestly community of teachers should feel united in the responsibility of educating candidates for the priesthood. It is their duty, always with regard to the authoritative evaluation made by the bishop and the rector together, to foster and verify in the first place the suitability of the candidates in regard to their spiritual, human and intellectual endowments, above all in regard to their spirit of prayer, their deep assimilation of the doctrine of the faith, their capacity for true fraternity and the charism of celibacy.(205)

Bearing in mind (as the synod fathers have indeed done) the indications of the exhortation *Christifideles Laici*(206) and of the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, which stress the suitability of a healthy influence of lay spirituality and of the charism of femininity in every educational itinerary, it is worthwhile to involve, in ways that are prudent and

adapted to the different cultural contexts, the cooperation also of lay faithful, both men and women, in the work of training future priests. They are to be selected with care, within the framework of Church laws and according to their particular charisms and proven competence. We can expect beneficial fruits from their cooperation, provided it is suitably coordinated and integrated in the primary educational responsibilities of those entrusted with the formation of future priests, fruits for a balanced growth of the sense of the Church and a more precise perception of what it is to be a priest on the part of the candidates to the priesthood.(207)

The Professors of Theology

67. Those who by their teaching of theology introduce future priests to sacred doctrine and accompany them in it have a particular educational responsibility. Experience teaches that they often have a greater influence on the development of the priest's personality than other educators.

The responsibility of the teachers of theology will lead them, even before they consider the teaching relationship they are to establish with candidates for the priesthood, to look into the concept they themselves should have of the nature of theology and the priestly, ministry, and also of the spirit and style in which they should carry out their teaching of theology. In this sense the synod fathers have rightly affirmed that "the theologian must never forget that as a teacher he is not presenting his personal doctrines but opening to and communicating to others the understanding of the faith, in the last analysis in the name of the Lord and his Church. In such a way, the theologian, using all the methods and techniques provided by his science, carries out his task at the mandate of the Church and cooperates with the bishop in his task of teaching. Since theologians and bishops are at the service of the Church herself in promoting the faith, they should develop and foster trust in each other and, in this spirit, overcome tensions and conflicts (for fuller treatment, cf. Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian)."(208)

The teacher of theology, like any other teacher, should remain in communion and sincerely cooperate with all the other people who are involved in the formation of future priests and offer with scientific precision, generosity, humility and enthusiasm his own original and expert contribution, which is not simply the communication of doctrine -- even though it be sacred doctrine -- but is above all the presentation of the point of view which unifies, in the plan of God, all the different branches of human knowledge and the various expressions of life.

In particular, the formative effect of the teachers of theology will depend, above all, on whether they are "men of faith who are full of love for the Church, convinced that the one who really knows the Christian mystery is the Church as such and, therefore, that their task of teaching is really and truly an ecclesial ministry, men who have a richly developed pastoral sense which enables them to discern not only content but forms that are suitable for the exercise of their ministry. In particular, what is expected of the teachers is total fidelity to the magisterium; for they teach in the name of the Church, and because of this they are witnesses to the faith.(209)

Communities of Origin and Associations and Youth Movements

68. The communities from which the candidate for the priesthood comes continue, albeit with the necessary detachment which is involved by the choice of a vocation, to bear considerable influence on the formation of the future priest. They should therefore be aware of their specific share of responsibility.

Let us mention first of all the family: Christian parents, as also brothers and sisters and the other members of the family, should never seek to call back the future priest within the narrow confines of a too human (if not worldly) logic, no matter how supported by sincere affection that logic may be (cf. Mk. 3:20-21, 31-35). Instead, driven by the same desire "to fulfill the will of God, " they should accompany the formative journey with prayer, respect, the good example of the domestic virtues and spiritual and material help, especially in difficult moments. Experience teaches that, in so many cases, this multiple help has proved decisive for candidates for the priesthood. Even in the case of parents or relatives who are indifferent or opposed to the choice of a vocation, a clear and calm facing of the situation and the encouragement which derives from it can be a great help to the deeper and more determined maturing of a priestly vocation.

Closely linked with the families is the parish community. Both it and the family are connected in education in the faith. Often, afterward, the parish, with its specific pastoral care for young people and vocations, supplements the family's role. Above all, inasmuch as it is the most immediate local expression of the mystery of the Church, the parish offers an original and especially valuable contribution to the formation of a future priest. The parish community should continue to feel that the young man on his way to the priesthood is a living part of itself; it should accompany him with its prayer, give him a cordial welcome during the holiday periods, respect and encourage him to form himself in his identity as a priest, and offer him suitable opportunities and strong encouragement to try out his vocation for the priestly mission.

Associations and youth movements, which are a sign and confirmation of the vitality which the Spirit guarantees to the Church, can and should contribute also to the formation of candidates for the priesthood, in particular of those who are the product of the Christian, spiritual and apostolic experience of these groups. Young people who have received their basic formation in such groups and look to them for their experience of the Church should not feel they are being asked

to uproot themselves from their past or to break their links with the environment which has contributed to their decision to respond to their vocation, nor should they erase the characteristic traits of the spirituality which they have learned and lived there in all that they contain that is good, edifying and rich.(210) For them too, this environment from which they come continues to be a source of help and support on the path of formation toward the priesthood.

The Spirit offers to many young people opportunities to be educated in the faith and to grow as Christians and as members of the Church through many kinds of groups, movements and associations inspired in different ways by the Gospel message. These should be felt and lived as a nourishing gift of a soul within the institution and at its service. A movement or a particular spirituality "is not an alternative structure to the institution. It is rather a source of a presence which constantly regenerates the existential and historical authenticity of the institution. The priest should therefore find within a movement the light and warmth which make him capable of fidelity to his bishop and which make him ready for the duties of the institution and mindful of ecclesiastical discipline, thus making the reality of his faith more fertile and his faithfulness more joyful."(211)

It is therefore necessary, in the new community of the seminary in which they are gathered by the bishop, that young people coming from associations and ecclesial movements should learn "respect for other spiritual paths and a spirit of dialogue and cooperation, " should take in genuinely and sincerely the indications for their training imparted by the bishop and the teachers in the seminary, abandoning themselves with real confidence to their guidance and assessments." Such an attitude will prepare and in some way anticipate a genuine priestly choice to serve the entire People of God in the fraternal communion of the presbyterate and in obedience to the bishop.

The fact that seminarians and diocesan priests take part in particular spiritualities or ecclesial groupings is indeed, in itself, a factor which helps growth and priestly fraternity. Such participation, however, should not be an obstacle, but rather a help to the ministry and spiritual life which are proper to the diocesan priest, who "will always remain the shepherd of all. Not only is he a 'permanent' shepherd, available to all, but he presides over the gathering of all so that all may find the welcome which they have a right to expect in the community and in the Eucharist that unites them, whatever be their religious sensibility or pastoral commitment."(213)

The Candidate Himself

69. Lastly, we must not forget that the candidate himself is a necessary and irreplaceable agent in his own formation: All formation, priestly formation included, is ultimately a self formation. No one can replace us in the responsible freedom that we have as individual persons.

And so the future priest also, and in the first place, must grow in his awareness that the agent par excellence of his formation is the Holy Spirit, who by the gift of a new heart configures and conforms him to Jesus Christ the good shepherd. In this way the candidate to the priesthood will affirm in the most radical way possible his freedom to welcome the molding action of the Spirit. But to welcome this action implies also, on the part of the candidate, a welcome for the human "mediating" forces which the Spirit employs. As a result, the actions of the different teachers become truly and fully effective only if the future priest offers his own convinced and heartfelt cooperation to this work of formation.

CHAPTER VI

I REMIND YOU TO REKINDLE THE GIFT OF GOD THAT IS WITHIN YOU

The Ongoing Formation of Priests

Theological Reasons Behind Ongoing Formation

70. "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Tm. 1:6).

The words of St. Paul to Timothy can appropriately be applied to the ongoing formation to which all priests are called by virtue of the "gift of God" which they have received at their ordination. The passage helps us to grasp the full truth, the absolute uniqueness of the permanent formation of priests. Here we are also helped by another text of St. Paul, who once more writes to Timothy: "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you. Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tm. 4:14-16).

Paul asks Timothy to "rekindle, " or stir into flame, the divine gift he has received, much as one might do with the embers of a fire, in the sense of welcoming it and living it out without ever losing or forgetting that "permanent novelty" which is characteristic of every gift from God, who makes all things new (cf. Rv. 21:5), and thus living it out in its unfading freshness and original beauty.

But this "rekindling" is not only the outcome of a task entrusted to the personal responsibility of Timothy, nor only the result of his efforts to use his mind and will. It is also the effect of a dynamism of grace intrinsic to God's gift. God himself, in other words, rekindles his own gift, so as better to release all the extraordinary riches of grace and

responsibility contained in it. With the sacramental outpouring of the Holy Spirit who consecrates and sends forth, the priest is configured to the likeness of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, and is sent forth to carry out a pastoral ministry. In this way the priest is marked permanently and indelibly in his inner being as a minister of Jesus and of the Church. He comes to share in a permanent and irreversible way of life and is entrusted with a pastoral ministry which, because it is rooted in his being and involves his entire life, is itself permanent. The sacrament of holy orders confers upon the priest sacramental grace which gives him a share not only in Jesus' saving "power" and "ministry" but also in his pastoral "love." At the same time it ensures that the priest can count on all the actual graces he needs, whenever they are necessary and useful for the worthy and perfect exercise of the ministry he has received. We thus see that the proper foundation and original motivation for ongoing formation is contained in the dynamism of the sacrament of holy orders.

Certainly there are also purely human reasons which call for the priest to engage in ongoing formation. This formation is demanded by his own continuing personal growth. Every life is a constant path toward maturity, a maturity which cannot be attained except by constant formation. It is also demanded by the priestly ministry seen in a general way and taken in common with other professions, that is, as a service directed to others. There is no profession, job or work which does not require constant updating if it is to remain current and effective. The need to "keep pace" with the path of history is another human reason justifying ongoing formation.

But these and other motivations are taken up and become even clearer by the theological motivations mentioned previously and which demand further reflection.

The sacrament of holy orders, by its nature (common to all the sacraments) as a "sign" may be considered, and truly is, a word of God. It is a word of God which calls and sends forth. It is the strongest expression of the priest's vocation and mission. By the sacrament of holy orders, God calls the candidate "to" the priesthood "coram ecclesia." The "come, follow me" of Jesus is proclaimed fully and definitively in the sacramental celebration of his Church. It is made manifest and communicated by the Church's voice, which is heard in the words of the bishop who prays and imposes his hands. The priest then gives his response, in faith, to Jesus' call. "I am coming, to follow you." From this moment there begins that response which, as a fundamental choice, must be expressed anew and reaffirmed through the years of his priesthood in countless other responses, all of them rooted in and enlivened by that "yes" of holy orders.

In this sense one can speak of a vocation "within" the priesthood. The fact is that God continues to call and send forth, revealing his saving plan in the historical development of the priest's life and the life of the Church and of society. It is in this perspective that the meaning of ongoing formation emerges. Permanent formation is necessary in order to discern and follow this constant call or will of God. Thus the apostle Peter is called to follow Jesus even after the risen Lord has entrusted his flock to him: "Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.' (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, 'Follow me...'" (Jn. 21:17-19). Consequently there is a "follow me" which accompanies the apostle's whole life and mission. It is a "follow me" in line with the call and demand of faithfulness unto death (cf. Jn. 21:22), a "follow me" which can signify a sequela Christi to the point of total self-giving in martyrdom.(214)

The synod fathers explained the reason justifying the need for ongoing formation, while at the same time revealing its deep nature as "faithfulness" to the priestly ministry and as a "process of continual conversion."(215) It is the Holy Spirit, poured out in the sacrament, who sustains the priest in this faithfulness and accompanies him and encourages him along this path of unending conversion. The gift of the Spirit does not take away the freedom of the priest. It calls on the priest to make use of his freedom in order to cooperate responsibly and accept permanent formation as a task entrusted to him. Thus permanent formation is a requirement of the priest's own faithfulness to his ministry, to his very being. It is love for Jesus Christ and fidelity to oneself. But it is also an act of love for the People of God, at whose service the priest is placed. Indeed, an act of true and proper justice: The priest owes it to God's people, whose fundamental "right" to receive the word of God, the sacraments and the service of charity, the original and irreplaceable content of the priest's own pastoral ministry, he is called to acknowledge and foster. Ongoing formation is necessary to ensure that the priest can properly respond to this right of the People of God. The heart and form of the priest's ongoing formation is pastoral charity: The Holy Spirit, who infuses pastoral charity, introduces and accompanies the priest to an ever deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ, which is unfathomable in its richness (cf. Eph. 3;14ff.) and, in turn, to a knowledge of the mystery of Christian priesthood. Pastoral charity itself impels the priest to an ever deeper knowledge of the hopes, the needs, the problems, the sensibilities of the people to whom he ministers, taken in their specific situations, as individuals, in their families, in society and in history.

All this constitutes the object of ongoing formation, understood as a conscious and free decision to live out the dynamism of pastoral charity and of the Holy Spirit who is its first source and constant nourishment. In this sense ongoing formation is an intrinsic requirement of the gift and sacramental ministry received; and it proves necessary in every age. It is particularly urgent today, not only because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions of individuals and peoples among whom priestly ministry is exercised, but also because of that "new evangelization" which constitutes the essential and pressing task of the Church at the end of the second millennium.

Different Dimensions of Ongoing Formation

71. The ongoing formation of priests, whether diocesan or religious, is the natural and absolutely necessary continuation of the process of building priestly personality which began and developed in the seminary or the religious house with the training program which aimed at ordination.

It is particularly important to be aware of and to respect the intrinsic link between formation before ordination to the priesthood and formation after ordination. Should there be a break in continuity, or worse a complete difference between these two phases of formation, there would be serious and immediate repercussions on pastoral work and fraternal communion among priests, especially those in different age groups. Ongoing formation is not a repetition of the formation acquired in the seminary, simply reviewed or expanded with new and practical suggestions. Ongoing formation involves relatively new content and especially methods; it develops as a harmonious and vital process which -- rooted in the formation received in the seminary -- calls for adaptations, updating and modifications, but without sharp breaks in continuity.

On the other hand, long - term preparation for ongoing formation should take place in the major seminary, where encouragement needs to be given to future priests to look forward to it, seeing its necessity, its advantages and the spirit in which it should be undertaken, and appropriate conditions for its realization need to be ensured.

By the very fact that ongoing formation is a continuation of the formation received in the seminary, its aim cannot be the inculcation of a purely "professional" approach, which could be acquired by learning a few new pastoral techniques. Instead its aim must be that of promoting a general and integral process of constant growth, deepening each of the aspects of formation human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral -- as well as ensuring their active and harmonious integration, based on pastoral charity and in reference to it.

72. Fuller development is first required in the human aspect of priestly formation. Through his daily contact with people, his sharing in their daily lives, the priest needs to develop and sharpen his human sensitivity so as to understand more clearly their needs, respond to their demands, perceive their unvoiced questions and share the hopes and expectations, the joys and burdens which are part of life: Thus he will be able to meet and enter into dialogue with all people. In particular, through coming to know and share, through making his own the human experience of suffering in its many different manifestations, from poverty to illness, from rejection to ignorance, loneliness and material or moral poverty, the priest can cultivate his own humanity and make it all the more genuine and clearly apparent by his increasingly ardent love for his fellow men and women.

In this task of bringing his human formation to maturity, the priest receives special assistance from the grace of Jesus Christ. The charity of the good shepherd was revealed not only by his gift of salvation to mankind, but also by his desire to share our life: Thus, the Word who became "flesh" (cf. Jn. 1:14) desired to know joy and suffering, to experience weariness, to share feelings, to console sadness. Living as a man among and with men, Jesus Christ offers the most complete, genuine and perfect expression of what it means to be human. We see him celebrating at the wedding feast of Cana, a friend's family, moved by the hungry crowd who follow him, giving sick or even dead children back to their parents, weeping for the death of Lazarus, and so on.

The People of God should be able to say about the priest, who has increasingly matured in human sensitivity, something similar to what we read about Jesus in the letter to the Hebrews: "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. 4:15).

The formation of the priest in its spiritual dimension is required by the new Gospel life to which he has been called in a specific way by the Holy Spirit, poured out in the sacrament of holy orders. The Spirit, by consecrating the priest and configuring him to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd, creates a bond which, located in the priest's very being, demands to be assimilated and lived out in a personal, free and conscious way through an ever richer communion of life and love and an ever broader and more radical sharing in the feelings and attitudes of Jesus Christ. In this bond between the Lord Jesus and the priest, an ontological and psychological bond, a sacramental and moral bond, is the foundation and likewise the power for that "life according to the Spirit" and that "radicalism of the Gospel" to which every priest is called today and which is fostered by ongoing formation in its spiritual aspect. This formation proves necessary also for the priestly ministry to be genuine and spiritually fruitful. "Are you exercising the care of souls?" St. Charles Borromeo once asked in a talk to priests. And he went on to say: "Do not thereby neglect yourself. Do not give yourself to others to such an extent that nothing is left of yourself for yourself. You should certainly keep in mind the souls whose pastor you are, but without forgetting yourself. My brothers, do not forget that there is nothing so necessary to all churchmen that the meditation which precedes, accompanies and follows all our actions: I will sing, says the prophet, and I will meditate (cf. Ps. 100:1). If you administer the sacraments, my brother, meditate upon what you are doing. If you celebrate Mass, meditate on what you are offering. If you recite the psalms in choir, meditate to whom and of what you are speaking. If you are guiding souls, meditate in whose blood they have been cleansed. And let all be done among you in charity (1 Cor. 16:14). Thus we will be able to overcome the difficulties we meet, countless as they are, each day. In any event, this is what is demanded of us by the task entrusted to us. If we act thus, we will find the strength to give birth to Christ in ourselves and in others."(216)

The priest's prayer life in particular needs to be continually "reformed." Experience teaches that in prayer one cannot live off past gains. Every day we need not only to renew our external fidelity to times of prayer, especially those devoted to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours and those left to personal choice and not reinforced by fixed times of liturgical service, but also to strive constantly for the experience of a genuine personal encounter with Jesus, a trusting dialogue with the Father and a deep experience of the Spirit.

What the apostle Paul says of all Christians, that they must attain "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), can be applied specifically to priests, who are called to the perfection of charity and therefore to holiness, even more so because their pastoral ministry itself demands that they be living models for all the faithful.

The intellectual dimension of formation likewise needs to be continually fostered through the priest's entire life, especially by a commitment to study and a serious and disciplined familiarity with modern culture. As one who shares in the prophetic mission of Jesus and is part of the mystery of the Church, the teacher of truth, the priest is called to reveal to others, in Jesus Christ, the true face of God, and as a result the true face of humanity."(217) This demands that the priest himself seek God's face and contemplate it with loving veneration (cf. Ps. 26:7; 41:2). Only thus will he be able to make others know him. In particular, continuing theological study is necessary if the priest is to faithfully carry out the ministry of the word, proclaiming it clearly and without ambiguity, distinguishing it from mere human opinions, no matter how renowned and widespread these might be. Thus he will be able to stand at the service of the People of God, helping them to give an account, to all who ask, of their Christian hope (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15). Furthermore, the priest "in applying himself conscientiously and diligently to theological study is in a position to assimilate the genuine richness of the Church in a sure and personal way. Therefore, he can faithfully discharge the mission which is incumbent on him when responding to difficulties about authentic Catholic doctrine and overcome the inclination, both in himself and others, which leads to dissent and negative attitudes toward the magisterium and sacred tradition."(218)

The pastoral aspect of ongoing formation is well expressed by the words of the apostle Peter: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt. 4:10). If he is to live daily according to the graces he has received, the priest must be ever more open to accepting the pastoral charity of Jesus Christ granted him by Christ's Spirit in the sacrament he has received. Just as all the Lord's activity was the fruit and sign of pastoral charity, so should the priest's ministerial activity be. Pastoral charity is a gift, but it is likewise a task, a grace and a responsibility to which we must be faithful. We have, therefore, to welcome it and live out its dynamism even to its most radical demands. This pastoral charity, as has been said, impels the priest and stimulates him to become ever better acquainted with the real situation of the men and women to whom he is sent, to discern the call of the Spirit in the historical circumstances in which he finds himself and to seek the most suitable methods and the most useful forms for carrying out his ministry today. Thus pastoral charity encourages and sustains the priest's human efforts for pastoral activity that is relevant, credible and effective. But this demands some kind of permanent pastoral formation.

The path toward maturity does not simply demand that the priest deepen the different aspects of his formation. It also demands above all that he be able to combine ever more harmoniously all these aspects, gradually achieving their inner unity. This will be made possible by pastoral charity. Indeed, pastoral charity not only coordinates and unifies the diverse aspects, but it makes them more specific, marking them out as aspects of the formation of the priest as such, that is, of the priest as a clear and living image, a minister of Jesus the good shepherd.

Ongoing formation helps the priest to overcome the temptation to reduce his ministry to an activism which becomes an end in itself, to the provision of impersonal services, even if these are spiritual or sacred, or to a businesslike function which he carries out for the Church. Only ongoing formation enables the priest to safeguard with vigilant love the "mystery" which he bears within his heart for the good of the Church and of mankind.

The Profound Meaning of Ongoing Formation

73 The different and complementary dimensions of ongoing formation help us to grasp its profound meaning. Ongoing formation helps the priest to be and act as a priest in the spirit and style of Jesus the good shepherd.

Truth needs to be put into practice! St. James tells us as much: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22). Priests are called to "live the truth" of their being, that is to live "in love" (cf. Eph. 4:15) their identity and ministry in the Church and for the Church. They are called to become ever more aware of the gift of God and to live it out constantly. This is the invitation Paul makes to Timothy: "Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit which dwells within us" (2 Tm. 1:14).

In the ecclesiological context which we have recalled more than once, we can consider the profound meaning of ongoing priestly formation in relation to the priest's presence and activity in the Church as *mysterium*, *communio* et *missio*.

Within the Church as "mystery" the priest is called, by his ongoing formation, to safeguard and develop in faith his awareness of the total and marvelous truth of his being: He is a minister of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1). Paul expressly asks Christians to consider him in this way. But even before that, he himself lives in the awareness of the sublime gift he has received from the Lord. This should be the case with every priest, if he wishes to remain true to his being. But this is possible only in faith, only by looking at things through the eyes of Christ.

In this sense it can be said that ongoing formation has as its aim that the priest become a believer and ever more of one: that he grow in understanding of who he truly is, seeing things with the eyes of Christ. The priest must safeguard this truth with grateful and joyful love. He must renew his faith when he exercises his priestly ministry; he must feel himself a minister of Christ, a sacrament of the love of God for mankind, every time that he is the means and the living instrument for conferring God's grace upon men and women. He must recognize this same truth in his fellow priests, for this is the basis of his respect and love for other priests.

74. Ongoing formation helps priests, within the Church as "communion," to deepen their awareness that their ministry is ultimately aimed at gathering together the family of God as a brotherhood inspired by charity and to lead it to the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit.(219)

The priest should grow in awareness of the deep communion uniting him to the People of God: He is not only "in the forefront of" the Church, but above all "in" the Church. He is a brother among brothers. By baptism, which marks him with the dignity and freedom of the children of God in the only begotten Son, the priest is a member of the one body of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:16). His consciousness of this communion leads to a need to awaken and deepen co-responsibility in the one common mission of salvation, with a prompt and heartfelt esteem for all the charisms and tasks which the Spirit gives believers for the building up of the Church. It is above all in the exercise of the pastoral ministry, directed by its very nature to the good of the People of God, that the priest must live and give witness to his profound communion with all. As Pope Paul VI wrote: "We must become brothers to all at the very same time as we wish to be their shepherds, fathers and teachers. The climate of dialogue is friendship. Indeed it is service."(220)

More specifically, the priest is called to deepen his awareness of being a member of the particular church in which he is incardinated, joined by a bond that is juridical, spiritual and pastoral. This awareness presupposes a particular love for his own church and it makes that love grow. This is truly the living and permanent goal of the pastoral charity which should accompany the life of the priest and lead him to share in the history or life experience of this same particular church, in its riches and in its weaknesses, in its difficulties and in its hopes, working in it for its growth. And thus to feel himself both enriched by the particular church and actively involved in building it up, carrying on -- as an individual and together with other priests -- that pastoral involvement typical of his brother priests who have gone before him. A necessary requirement of this pastoral charity toward one's own particular church and its future ministry is the concern which the priest should have to find, so to speak, someone to replace him in the priesthood.

The priest must grow in his awareness of the communion existing between the various particular churches, a communion rooted in their very being as churches which make present in various places Christ's one universal Church. This awareness of the communion of the particular churches will foster an "exchange of gifts," beginning with living and personal gifts, such as priests themselves. There should be a readiness, indeed a generous commitment, to provide for a fair distribution of clergy. (221) Among these particular churches, those should be kept in mind which, because they are "deprived of freedom, cannot have their own vocations," as well as those "churches which have emerged recently from persecution and poor churches which have been given help already for many years and from many sources with great-hearted brotherliness and still receive help.(222) Within the ecclesial communion, the priest is called in particular to grow, thanks to his ongoing formation, in and with his own presbyterate in union with his bishop. The presbyterate, in the fullness of its truth, is a mystery: It is in fact a supernatural reality because it is rooted in the sacrament of holy orders. This is its source and origin. This is its "place" of birth and of its growth. Indeed, "priests by means of the sacrament of orders are tied with a personal and indissoluble bond to Christ the one priest. The sacrament of holy orders is conferred upon each of them as individuals, but they are inserted into the communion of the presbyterate united with the bishop (Lumen Gentium, 28; Presbyterorum Ordinis, 7 and 8)."(223)

This sacramental origin is reflected and continued in the sphere of priestly ministry: from *mysterium* to *ministerium*. "Unity among the priests with the bishop and among themselves is not something added from the outside to the nature of their service, but expresses its essence inasmuch as it is the care of Christ the priest for the people gathered in the unity of the Blessed Trinity."(224) This unity among priests, lived in a spirit of pastoral charity, makes priests witnesses of Jesus Christ, who prayed to the Father "that they may all be one" (Jn. 17:21).

The presbyterate thus appears as a true family, as a fraternity whose ties do not arise from flesh and blood but from the grace of holy orders. This grace takes up and elevates the human and psychological bonds of affection and friendship, as well as the spiritual bonds which exist between priests. It is a grace that grows ever greater and finds expression in the most varied forms of mutual assistance, spiritual and material as well. Priestly fraternity excludes no one. However it can and should have its preferences, those of the Gospel, reserved for those who have greatest need of help and encouragement. This fraternity "takes special care of the young priests, maintains a kind and fraternal dialogue with those of the middle and older age groups, and with those who for whatever reasons are facing difficulties, as for those priests who have given up this way of life or are not following it at this time, this brotherhood does not forget them but follows them all the more with fraternal solicitude."(225)

Religious clergy who live and work in a particular church also belong to the one presbyterate, albeit under a different title. Their presence is a source of enrichment for all priests. The different particular charisms which they live, while challenging all priests to grow in the understanding of the priesthood itself, help to encourage and promote ongoing priestly formation. The gift of religious life, in the framework of the diocese, when accompanied by genuine esteem and rightful respect for the particular features of each institute and each spiritual tradition, broadens the horizon of

Christian witness and contributes in various ways to an enrichment of priestly spirituality, above all with regard to the proper relationship and interplay between the values of the particular church and those of the whole People of God. For their part, religious will be concerned to ensure a spirit of true ecclesial communion, a genuine participation in the progress of the diocese and the pastoral decisions of the bishop, generously putting their own charism at the service of building up everyone; in charity.(226)

Finally, it is in the context of the Church as communion and in the context of the presbyterate that we can best discuss the problem of priestly loneliness treated by the synod fathers. There is a loneliness which all priests experience and which is completely normal. But there is another loneliness which is the product of various difficulties and which in turn creates further difficulties. With regard to the latter, "active participation in the diocesan presbyterate, regular contact with the bishop and with the other priests, mutual cooperation, common life or fraternal dealings between priests, as also friendship and good relations with the lay faithful who are active in parish life are very useful means to overcome the negative effects of loneliness which the priest can sometimes experience."(227)

Loneliness does not however create only difficulties; it can also offer positive opportunities for the priestly life: "When it is accepted in a spirit of oblation and is seen as an opportunity for greater intimacy with Jesus Christ the Lord, solitude can be an opportunity for prayer and study, as also a help for sanctification and also for human growth."(228)

It should be added that a certain type of solitude is a necessary element in ongoing formation. Jesus often went off alone to pray (cf. Mt. 14:23). The ability to handle a healthy solitude is indispensable for caring for one's interior life. Here we are speaking of a solitude filled with the presence of the Lord who puts us in contact with the Father, in the light of the Spirit. In this regard, concern for silence and looking for places and times of "desert" are necessary for the priest's permanent formation, whether in the intellectual, spiritual or pastoral areas. In this regard too, it can be said that those unable to have a positive experience of their own solitude are incapable of genuine and fraternal fellowship.

75. Ongoing formation aims at increasing the priest's awareness of his share in the Church's saving mission. In the Church's "mission, " the priest's permanent formation appears not only as a necessary condition but also as an indispensable means for constantly refocusing on the meaning of his mission and for ensuring that he is carrying it out with fidelity and generosity. By this formation, the priest is helped to become aware of the seriousness and yet the splendid grace of an obligation which cannot let him rest, so that, like Paul, he must be able to say: "If I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16) At the same time, he also becomes aware of a demand, whether explicit or implicit, which insistently comes from all those whom God is unceasingly calling to salvation.

Only a suitable ongoing formation will succeed in confirming the priest in the essential and decisive element in his ministry, namely his faithfulness. The apostle Paul writes: "It is required of stewards [of the mysteries of God] that they be found trustworthy" (1 Cor. 4:2). The priest must be faithful no matter how many and varied the difficulties he meets, even in the most uncomfortable situations or when he is understandably tired, expending all his available energy until the end of his life. Paul's witness should be both an example and an incentive for every priest: "We put no obstacle, " he writes to the Christians at Corinth, "in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:3-10).

At Every Age and in All Conditions of Life

76. Permanent or ongoing formation, precisely because it is "permanent, " should always be a part of the priest's life. In every phase and condition of his life, at every level of responsibility he has in the Church, he is undergoing formation. Clearly then, the possibilities for formation and the different kinds of formation are connected with the variety of ages, conditions of life and duties one finds among priests.

Ongoing formation is a duty, in the first instance, for young priests. They should have frequent and systematic meetings which, while they continue the sound and serious formation they have received in the seminary, will gradually lead young priests to grasp and incarnate the unique wealth of God's gift which is the priesthood and to express their capabilities and ministerial attitude, also through an ever more convinced and responsible insertion in the presbyterate, and therefore in communion and co - responsibility with all their brethren.

With priests who have just come out of the seminary, a certain sense of "having had enough is quite understandable when faced with new times of study and meeting. But the idea that priestly formation ends on the day one leaves the seminary is false and dangerous, and needs to be totally rejected.

Young priests who take part in meetings for ongoing formation will be able to help one another by exchanging experiences and reflecting on how to put into practice the ideals of the priesthood and of ministry which they have imbibed during their seminary years. At the same time, their active participation in the formational meetings of the presbyterate can be an example and stimulus to other priests who are ahead of them in years. They can thus show their

love for all those making up the presbyterate and how much they care for their particular church, which needs well - formed priests.

In order to accompany the young priests in this first delicate phase of their life and ministry, it is very opportune, and perhaps even absolutely necessary nowadays, to create a suitable support structure, with appropriate guides and teachers. Here priests can find, in an organized way that continues through their first years of ministry, the help they need to make a good start in their priestly service. Through frequent and regular meetings -- of sufficient duration and held within a community setting, if possible -- they will be assured of having times for rest, prayer, reflection and fraternal exchange. It will then be easier for them, right from the beginning, to give a balanced approach, based on the Gospel, to their priestly life. And in those cases where individual local churches are not in a position to offer this service to their own young priests, it will be a good idea for neighboring churches to pool resources and draw up suitable programs.

77. Ongoing formation is a duty also for priests of middle age. They can face a number of risks precisely because of their age, as for example an exaggerated activism or a certain routine approach to the exercise of their ministry. As a result, the priest can be tempted to presume he can manage on his own, as if his own personal experience, which has seemed trustworthy to that point, needs no contact with anything or anyone else. Often enough, the older priest has a sort of interior fatigue which is dangerous. It can be a sign of a resigned disillusionment in the face of difficulties and failures. Such situations find an answer in ongoing formation, in a continued and balanced checking of oneself and one's activity, constantly looking for motivation and aids which will enable one to carry on one's mission. As a result the priest will maintain a vigilant spirit, ready to face the perennial yet ever new demands of salvation which people keep bringing to him as the "man of God."

Ongoing formation should also involve those priests who by their advanced years can be called elderly and who in some churches make up the greater part of the presbyterate. The presbyterate should show them gratitude for the faithful service they have performed on behalf of Christ and his Church, and also practical solidarity to help them in their condition. Ongoing formation for these priests will not be a matter so much of study, updating and educational renewal, but rather a calm and reassuring confirmation of the part which they are still called upon to play in the presbyterate, not only inasmuch as they continue -- perhaps in different ways -- their pastoral ministry, but also because of the possibilities they themselves have, thanks to their experience of life and apostolate, of becoming effective teachers and trainers of other priests.

Also those priests who because of the burden of work or illness find themselves in a condition of physical weakness or moral fatigue can be helped by an on, going formation which will encourage them to keep up their service to the Church in a calm and sustained fashion, and not to isolate themselves either from the community or from the presbyterate. However, they should reduce their external activities and dedicate themselves to those pastoral contacts and that personal spirituality which can help them keep up their motivation and priestly joy. Ongoing formation will help such priests to keep alive the conviction -- which they themselves have inculcated in the faithful -- that they continue to be active members for the building up of the Church, especially by virtue of their union with the suffering Christ and with so many other brothers and sisters in the Church who are sharing in the Lord's passion, reliving Paul's spiritual experience when he said, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col. 1:24).²²⁹

The Agents of Ongoing Formation

78. The conditions in which the ministry of priests -- often and in many places -- has to be carried out nowadays do not make it easy to undertake a serious commitment to formation. The multiplication of responsibilities and services, the complexity of human life in general and the life of the Christian communities in particular, the activism and anxiety that are features of vast areas of society today often deprive priests of the time and energies they need to "take heed of themselves" (cf. 1 Tm. 4:16).

This should increase the responsibility of priests to overcome these difficulties and see them as a challenge to plan and carry out a permanent formation which will respond appropriately to the greatness of God's gift and to the urgency of the demands and requirements of our time.

Those responsible for the ongoing formation of priests are to be found in the Church as "communion." In this sense, the entire particular church has the responsibility, under the guidance of the bishop, to develop and look after the different aspects of her priests' permanent formation. Priests are not there to serve themselves but the People of God. So, ongoing formation, in ensuring the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral maturity of priests, is doing good to the People of God itself. Besides, the very exercise of the pastoral ministry leads to a constant and fruitful mutual exchange between the priest's life of faith and that of the laity. Indeed the very relationship and sharing of life between the priest and the community, if it is wisely conducted and made use of, will be a fundamental contribution to permanent formation, which cannot be reduced to isolated episodes or initiatives, but covers the whole ministry and life of the priest.

The truth is that the Christian experience of persons who are simple and humble, the spiritual enthusiasm of people who truly love God, the courageous application of the faith to practical life by Christians involved in all kinds of social and

civil tasks -- all these things are embraced by the priest who, while illuminating them with his priestly service, at the same time draws from them a precious spiritual nourishment. Even the doubts, crises and hesitations in the face of all kinds of personal or social situations, the temptation to rejection or despair at times of pain, illness, death: All the difficult circumstances which people find in their path as Christians are fraternally lived and sincerely suffered in the priest's heart. And he, in seeking answers for others, is constantly spurred on to find them first of all for himself.

And so the entire People of God, in each and every one of its members, can and should offer precious assistance to the ongoing formation of its priests. In this sense the people should see that priests are allowed time for study and prayer. They should ask of them that for which Christ has sent them and not require anything else. They should offer to help in the various aspects of the pastoral mission, especially in those related to human development and works of charity. They should establish cordial and brotherly relations with them, helping priests to remember that they are not "to lord it over" the faithful, but rather "work with them for their joy" (cf. 2 Cor. 1:24).

The particular church's responsibility for the formation of its priests is specific and depends on its different members, starting with the priest himself.

79. In a certain sense, it is the priest himself, the individual priest, who is the person primarily responsible in the Church for ongoing formation. Truly each priest has the duty, rooted in the sacrament of holy orders, to be faithful to the gift God has given him and to respond to the call for daily conversion which comes with the gift itself. The regulations and norms established by Church authority, as also the example given by other priests, are not enough to make permanent formation attractive unless the individual priest is personally convinced of its need and is determined to make use of the opportunities, times and forms in which it comes. Ongoing formation keeps up one's "youthfulness of spirit, which is something that cannot be imposed from without. Each priest must continually find it within himself. Only those who keep ever alive their desire to learn and grow can be said to enjoy this "youthfulness."

The responsibility of the bishop and, with him, of the presbyterate, is fundamental. The bishop's responsibility is based on the fact that priests receive their priesthood from him and share his pastoral solicitude for the People of God. He is responsible for ongoing formation, the purpose of which is to ensure that all his priests are generously faithful to the gift and ministry received, that they are priests such as the People of God wishes to have and has a "right" to. This responsibility leads the bishop, in communion with the presbyterate, to outline a project and establish a program which can ensure that ongoing formation is not something haphazard but a systematic offering of subjects, which unfold by stages and take on precise forms. The bishop will live up to his responsibility not only by seeing to it that his presbyterate has places and times for its ongoing formation, but also by being present in person and taking part in an interested and friendly way. Often it will be suitable, or indeed necessary, for bishops of neighboring dioceses or of an ecclesiastical region to come together and join forces to be able to offer initiatives for permanent formation that are better organized and more interesting, such as in - service training courses in biblical, theological and pastoral studies, residential weeks, conference series and times to reflect on and examine how, from the pastoral point of view, the affairs of the presbyterate and the ecclesial community are progressing.

To fulfill his responsibility in this field, the bishop will also ask for help from theological and pastoral faculties or institutes; seminaries, offices and federations that bring together people -- priests, religious and lay faithful -- who are involved in priestly formation.

In the context of the particular churches, families have a significant role to play. The life of ecclesial communities, led and guided by priests, looks to families inasmuch as they are "domestic churches." In particular the role of the family into which the priest is born needs to be stressed. By being one with their son in his aims, the family can offer him its own important contribution to his mission. The plan of providence chose the priest's family to be the place in which his vocation was planted and nourished, an indispensable help for the growth and development of his vocation. Now the family, with the greatest respect for their son who has chosen to give himself to God and neighbor, should always remain as a faithful and encouraging witness of his mission, supporting that mission and sharing in it with devotion and respect. In this way the family will help bring God's providential plan to completion.

Times, Forms and Means for Ongoing Formation

80. While every moment can be an "acceptable time" (2 Cor. 6:2) for the Holy Spirit to lead the priest to a direct growth in prayer, study and an awareness of his own pastoral responsibilities, nevertheless there are certain "privileged" moments for this, even though they may be common and prearranged.

Let us recall, in the first place, the meetings of the bishop with his presbyterate, whether they be liturgical (in particular the concelebration of the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday), or pastoral and educational, related to pastoral activity or to the study of specific theological problems.

There are also spiritual gatherings for priests, such as spiritual exercises, days of recollection and spirituality, etc. These are opportunities for spiritual and pastoral growth, in which one can devote more time to pray in peace; opportunities to get back to what it means deep down to be a priest, to find fresh motives for faithfulness and pastoral endeavor.

Study workshops and sessions for reflection in common are also important. They help to prevent cultural impoverishment or getting entrenched in one's ways, even in the pastoral field, as a result of mental laziness. They help

to foster a greater synthesis between the various elements of the spiritual, intellectual and apostolic life. They open minds and hearts to the new challenges of history and to the new appeals which the Spirit addresses to the Church.

81. Many ways and means are at hand to make ongoing formation an ever more precious living experience for priests. Among them, let us recall the different forms of common life among priests, which have always existed, though they have appeared in different ways and with different degrees of intensity, in the life of the Church: "Today, it is impossible not to recommend them, especially among those who live together or are pastorally involved in the same place. Besides the advantage which comes to the apostolate and its activities, this common life of priests offers to all, to fellow priests and lay faithful alike, a shining example of charity and unity."(230)

Another help can be given by priestly associations, in particular by priestly secular institutes -- which have as their characteristic feature their being diocesan -- through which priests are more closely united to their bishop, and which constitute "a state of consecration in which priests by means of vows or other sacred bonds consecrate themselves to incarnate in their life the evangelical counsels."(231) All the forms of "priestly fraternity" approved by the Church are useful not only for the spiritual life but also for the apostolic and pastoral life.

Spiritual direction too contributes in no small way to the ongoing formation of the priests. It is a well - tried means and has lost none of its value. It ensures spiritual formation. It fosters and maintains faithfulness and generosity in the carrying out of the priestly ministry. As Pope Paul VI wrote before his election to the pontificate: "Spiritual direction has a wonderful purpose. We could say it is indispensable for the moral and spiritual education of young people who want to find what their vocation in life is and follow it wherever it may lead, with utter loyalty. It retains its beneficial effect at all stages of life, when in the light and affection of a devout and prudent counsel one asks for a check on one's own right intention and for support in the generous fulfillment of one's own duties. It is a very delicate but immensely valuable psychological means. It is an educational and psychological art calling for deep responsibility in the one who practices it. Whereas for the one who receives it, it is a spiritual act of humility and trust."(232)

CONCLUSION

82. "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer. 3:15).

Today, this promise of God is still living and at work in the Church. At all times, she knows she is the fortunate receiver of these prophetic words. She sees them put into practice daily in so many parts of the world, or rather, in so many human hearts, young hearts in particular. On the threshold of the third millennium, and in the face of the serious and urgent needs which confront the Church and the world, she yearns to see this promise fulfilled in a new and richer way, more intensely and effectively: She hopes for an extraordinary outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost.

The Lord's promise calls forth from the heart of the Church a prayer, that is a confident and burning petition in the love of the Father, who, just as he has sent Jesus the good shepherd, the apostles, their successors and a countless host of priests, will continue to show to the people of today his faithfulness, his goodness.

And the Church is ready to respond to this grace. She feels in her heart that God's gift begs for a united and generous reply: The entire People of God should pray and work tirelessly for priestly vocations. Candidates for the priesthood should prepare themselves very conscientiously to welcome God's gift and put it into practice, knowing that the Church and the world have an absolute need of them. They should deepen their love for Christ the good shepherd, pattern their hearts on his, be ready to go out as his image into the highways of the world to proclaim to all mankind Christ the way, the truth and the life.

I appeal especially to families. May parents, mothers in particular, be generous in giving their sons to the Lord when he calls them to the priesthood. May they cooperate joyfully in their vocational journey, realizing that in this way they will be increasing and deepening their Christian fruitfulness in the Church and that, in a sense, they will experience the blessedness of Mary, the virgin mother: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Lk. 1:42)

To today's young people I say: Be more docile to the voice of the Spirit, let the great expectations of the Church, of mankind, resound in the depths of your hearts. Do not be afraid to open your minds to Christ the Lord who is calling. Feel his loving look upon you and respond enthusiastically to Jesus when he asks you to follow him without reserve.

The Church responds to grace through the commitment which priests make to receive that ongoing formation which is required by the dignity and responsibility conferred on them by the sacrament of holy orders. All priests are called to become aware how especially urgent it is for them to receive formation at the present time: The new evangelization needs new evangelizers, and these are the priests who are serious about living their priesthood as a specific path toward holiness.

God promises the Church not just any sort of shepherds, but shepherds "after his own heart." And God's "heart" has revealed itself to us fully in the heart of Christ the good shepherd. Christ's heart continues today to have compassion for the multitudes and to give them the bread of truth, the bread of love, the bread of life (cf. Mk. 6:30ff.), and it pleads to be allowed to beat in other hearts -- priests' hearts: "You give them something to eat" (Mk. 6:37). People need to come out of their anonymity and fear. They need to be known and called by name, to walk in safety, along the paths of life, to be found again if they have become lost, to be loved, to receive salvation as the supreme gift of God's love. All this is done by Jesus, the good shepherd -- by himself and by his priests with him.

Now, as I bring this exhortation to a close, I turn my thoughts to all aspirants to the priesthood, to seminarians and to priests who in all parts of the world -- even in the most difficult and dramatic conditions, but always with the joyous struggle to be faithful to the Lord and to serve his flock unswervingly -- are offering their lives daily in order that faith, hope and charity may grow in human hearts and in the history of the men and women of our day.

Dear brother priests, you do this because our Lord himself, with the strength of his Spirit, has called you to incarnate in the earthen vessels of your simple lives the priceless treasure of his good shepherd's love.

In communion with the synod fathers and in the name of all the bishops of the world and of the entire community of the Church I wish to express all the gratitude which your faithfulness and service deserve.

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And while I wish for all of you the grace to rekindle daily the gift of God you have received with the laying on of hands (cf. 2 Tm. 1:6), to feel the comfort of the deep friendship which binds you to Jesus and unites you with one another, the comfort of experiencing the joy of seeing the flock of God grow in an ever greater love for him and for all people, of cultivating the tranquil conviction that the one who began in you the good work will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil. 1:6), I turn with each and every one of you in prayer to Mary, Mother and Teacher of our priesthood.

Every aspect of priestly formation can be referred to Mary, the human being who has responded better than any other to God's call. Mary became both the servant and the disciple of the Word to the point of conceiving, in her heart and in her flesh, the Word made man, so as to give him to mankind. Mary was called to educate the one eternal priest, who became docile and subject to her motherly authority. With her example and intercession the Blessed Virgin keeps vigilant watch over the growth of vocations and priestly life in the Church.

And so we priests are called to have an ever firmer and more tender devotion to the Virgin Mary and to show it by imitating her virtues and praying to her often.

O Mary,
Mother of Jesus Christ and Mother of priests,
accept this title which we bestow on you
to celebrate your motherhood
and to contemplate with you the priesthood
of, your Son and of your sons,
O holy Mother of God.

O Mother of Christ,
to the Messiah - priest you gave a body of flesh
through the anointing of the Holy Spirit
for the salvation of the poor and the contrite of heart;
guard priests in your heart and in the Church,
O Mother of the Savior.

O Mother of Faith,
you accompanied to the Temple the Son of Man,
the fulfillment of the promises given to the fathers;
give to the Father for his glory
the priests of your Son,
O Ark of the Covenant.

O Mother of the Church,
in the midst of the disciples in the upper room
you prayed to the Spirit
for the new people and their shepherds;
obtain for the Order of Presbyters
a full measure of gifts,
O Queen of the Apostles.

O Mother of Jesus Christ,
you were with him at the beginning
of his life and mission,
you sought the Master among the crowd,

you stood beside him when he was lifted
up from the earth
consumed as the one eternal sacrifice,
and you had John, your son, near at hand;
accept from the beginning those
who have been called,
protect their growth,
in their life ministry accompany
your sons,
O Mother of Priests.
Amen.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's on March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, in the year 1992, the fourteenth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

1. Cf. Proposition 2.
2. Discourse at the end of the Synod (Oct. 27, 1990), 5: L'Osservatore Romano, Oct. 28, 1990.
3. Cf. Proposition 1.
4. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 28; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*; Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius*.
5. *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Jan. 6, 1970): AAS 62 (1970), 321-384.
6. Discourse at the end of the Synod, 3.
7. *Ibid.*, 1.
8. Message of the Synod Fathers to the People of God, III: L'Osservatore Romano, Oct. 29-30, 1990.
9. *Angelus* (Jan. 14, 1990), 2: L'Osservatore Romano, Jan. 15-16, 1990.
10. *Ibid.*, 3.
11. Cf. Proposition 3.
12. Paul VI, homily at the ninth session of the Second Vatican Council (Dec. 7, 1965): AAS 58 (1966), 55.
13. Cf. Proposition 3.
14. Cf. *ibid.*
15. Cf. Synod of Bishops, "The Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day," *Lineamenta*, 5-6.
16. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.
17. Cf. Message of the Synod Fathers to the People of God, 1;
18. Discourse at the end of the Synod, 4; cf letter to priests for Holy Thursday 1991 (March 10, 1991): L'Osservatore Romano, March 15, 1991.
19. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*; *Optatam Totius*; *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*; Synod of Bishops, second ordinary general assembly, 1971.
20. Proposition 7.
21. *Lumen Gentium*, 5.
22. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (Dec. 30, 1988), 8: AAS 81 (1989), 405; cf. Synod of Bishops, second extraordinary general assembly, 1985.
23. Cf. Proposition 7.
24. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
25. Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7-8.
26. Cf. Proposition 7.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Proposition 7.
29. Synod of Bishops, eighth ordinary general assembly, "The Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day," *Instrumentum Laboris*, 16; cf. Proposition 7.
30. *Angeles* (Feb. 25, 1990): L'Osservatore Romano, Feb. 26-27, 1990.
31. Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7-9.
32. *Ibid.*, 8; cf. Proposition 7.
33. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9.
34. *Lumen Gentium*, 10.
35. Cf. Proposition 7.
36. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 10.
37. *Optatam Totius*, 20.

38. Cf. Proposition 12.
39. Final message, III.
40. Lumen Gentium, 40.
41. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 12.
42. Sermo 340, 1: PL 38:1483.
43. Ibid.
44. Cf. Proposition 8.
45. Cf. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 2; 12.
46. Cf. Proposition 8.
47. Sermo Morin Guelferbytanus, 32, 1: PLS 2, 637.
48. Roman Missal, Communion Antiphon from the Mass of the Fourth Sunday of Easter.
49. Apostolic letter Mulieris Dignitatem (Aug. 15, 1988), 26: AAS 80 (1988), 1715-1716.
50. Proposition 7.
51. Homily at eucharistic adoration, Seoul (Oct. 7, 1989), 2: Insegnamenti XII/2 (1989), 785.
52. St. Augustine, In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus 123, 5: CCL 36, 678.
53. To priests taking part in an assembly organized by the Italian episcopal conference (Nov. 4, 1980): Insegnamenti III/2 (1980), 1055.
54. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 14.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Paul VI, apostolic exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi (Dec. 8, 1975), 75: AAS 68 (1976), 64-67.
58. Cf. Proposition 8.
59. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 12.
60. In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus 123, 5.
61. Cf. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 12.
62. Ibid., 5.
63. Cf. Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, Cap. 7; Decree on Sacraments, Can. 6.
64. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 12.
65. St. Augustine, Sermo de Nat. Sanct. Apost. Petri et Pauli ex Evangelio in quo ait: Simon Iohannis diligis me?: Bibliotheca Casinensis, in "Miscellanea Augustiniana," Vol. 1, ed. G. Morin, O.S.B., Rome, Typ. Poligl. Vat., 1930, p. 404.
66. Cf. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 4-6;13.
67. Cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi, 15.
68. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, 8, 10.
69. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 5.
70. Post - synodal apostolic exhortation Reconciliatio Paenitentia (Dec. 2, 1984), 31, VI: AAS 77 (1985), 265-266.
71. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 6.
72. Cf. Lumen Gentium, 42.
73. Cf. Proposition 9.
74. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 15.
75. Cf. ibid.
76. Lumen Gentium, 42.
77. Apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio (Nov. 22, 1981) 16: AAS 74 (1982), 98.
78. Proposition 11.
79. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 16.
80. Ibid.
81. Proposition 8.
82. Cf. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 17.
83. Proposition 10.
84. Ibid.
85. Cf. Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and Congregation for Bishops, Directives for Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in the Church Mutuae Relationes, (May 14, 1978), 18: AAS 70 (1978), 484-485.
86. Cf. Proposition 25; 38.
87. Cf. Lumen Gentium, 23.
88. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 10; cf. Proposition 12.
89. Encyclical letter Redemptoris Missio (Dec. 7, 1990), 67: AAS 83 (1991), 315-316.
90. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 10.
91. Homily to 5, 000 priests from throughout the world (Oct. 9, 1984), 2: Insegnamenti VII/2 (1984), 839.
92. Discourse at the end of the Synod, 5.

93. Cf. Proposition 6.
94. Cf. Proposition 13.
95. Cf. Proposition 4.
96. *Lumen Gentium*, 9.
97. *Ibid.*
98. St. Cyprian, *De Dominica Oratione*, 23: CCL 3/A, 105.
99. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 3.
100. Proposition 5.
101. Angeles (Dec. 3, 1989), 2: *Insegnamenti XII/2* (1989), 1417.
102. Message for the fifth World Day of Prayer for Priestly Vocations (April 19, 1968): *Insegnamenti VI* (1968), 134-135.
103. Cf. Proposition 5.
104. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 10; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12.
105. Cf. Proposition 13.
106. *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.
107. Roman Missal, Collect of the Mass for Vocations to Holy Orders.
108. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.
109. Proposition 15.
110. *Ibid.*
111. Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 220: "It is not lawful for anyone...to violate the right which each person has of defending his own privacy"; cf. Canon 642.
112. *Optatam Totius*, 2.
113. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 15.
114. Cf. *Optatam Totius*, 2.
115. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6.
116. *Ibid.*, 11.
117. Cf. *Optatam Totius*, 2.
118. Proposition 14.
119. Proposition 15.
120. Cf. Proposition 16.
121. Message for the 22nd World Day of Prayer for Priestly Vocations (April 13, 1985), 1: AAS 77 (1985), 982.
122. Message of the Synod Fathers to the People of God, IV.
123. Proposition 21.
124. Cf. *Optatam Totius*, 11; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 3; *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 51.
125. Cf. Proposition 21.
126. *Redemptoris Hominis*, 10.
127. *Familiaris Consortio*, 37.
128. *Ibid.*
129. Proposition 21.
130. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
131. Cf. Proposition 21.
132. Proposition 22.
133. Cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1, 1: CSEL 33, 1.
134. Synod of Bishops, eighth ordinary general assembly, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 30.
135. Proposition 22.
136. Proposition 23.
137. *Optatam Totius*, 8.
138. *Dei Verbum*, 24.
139. *Ibid.*, 2.
140. *Ibid.*, 25.
141. Angeles (March 4, 1990), 2-3: *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 5-6, 1990.
142. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14.
143. St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 26, 13.
144. Liturgy of the Hours, Magnificat Antiphon of Second Vespers of the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.
145. Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 13.
146. Angeles (July 1, 1990), 3: *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 2-3, 1990.
147. Proposition 23.
148. *Ibid.*
149. Cf. *ibid.*
150. *Optatam Totius*, 9.

151. Ratio Fundamental^{is} Institutionis Sacerdotalis, (Jan. 6, 1970) AAS 62 (1970), 354.
152. Optatam Totius, 10.
153. Ibid.
154. Letter to all the priests of the Church on Holy Thursday 1979 (April 8, 1979): Insegnamenti 11/1 (1979), 841 -862.
155. Proposition 24.
156. Gaudium et Spes, 15.
157. Proposition 26.
158. Optatam Totius, 16.
159. Instrumentum Laboris, 39.
160. Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, Letter to Bishops De necessitate Philosophiae studia in Seminariis impensius promovendi (Jan. 20, 1972).
161. "Desideravi intellectu videre quod credidi, et multum disputavi et laboravi, " De Trinitate XV, 28: CCL 50/A, 534.
162. Paul VI, Address to the participants in the 21st Italian Biblical Week (Sept. 25, 1970): AAS 62, (1970), 618.
163. Proposition 26.
164. "Fides, quae est quasi habitus theologiae": In Lib. Boethii de Trinitate, V, 4 ad 8.
165. Cf. St. Thomas, In I Sentent. Prolog., q. 1, a. 1-5.
166. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian Donum Veritatis (May 24, 1990), 11; 40: AAS 82 (1990), 1554-1555; 1568-1569.
167. Optatam Totius, 14.
168. Itinerarium mentis in Deum, Prol., 4: Opera Omnia, Tomus V, Ad Aquas Claras 1891, 296.
169. Optatam Totius, 16.
170. Encyclical letter Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (Dec. 30, 1987) 41: AAS 80 (1988), 571.
171. Cf. Encyclical letter Centesimus Annus (May 1, 1991), 54: AAS 83 (1991), 859-860.
172. Donum Veritatis, 21.
173. Proposition 26.
174. For example, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: "We have to be more on the side of the authority of the Church than on that of Augustine or Jerome, or any other doctor" (Summa Theol. 11-11, q. 10, a. 12). And again: "No one can shield himself with the authority of Jerome or Augustine or any other doctor against the authority of Peter" (ibid. I-II, q.11, a. 2 ad 3).
175. Proposition 32.
176. Cf. Redemptoris Missio, 67.
177. Cf. Proposition 32.
178. Proposition 27.
179. Optatam Totius, 4.
180. Lumen Gentium, 48.
181. Explanatio Apocalypsis, lib. II, 12: PL 93, 166.
182. Cf. Proposition 28.
183. Ibid.
184. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 9; cf. Christifideles Laici, 61.
185. Proposition 28.
186. Cf. ibid.
187. Cf. Redemptoris Missio, 67-68.
188. Optatam Totius, 4.
189. Proposition 20.
190. Ibid.
191. Ibid.
192. Ibid.
193. Cf. Address to the students and former students of the Almo Collegio Capranica (Jan. 21, 1983): Insegnamenti VI/1(1983), 173-178.
194. Proposition 20.
195. Ibid.
196. Proposition 19.
197. Ibid.
198. In Iohannem Evangelistam Expositio, c. 21, lect. V, 2.
199. Optatam Totius, 3.
200. Cf. Proposition 17.
201. Ratio Fundamental^{is} Institutionis Sacerdotalis, 19.
202. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 7.
203. Proposition 29.
204. Ibid.

205. Cf. Proposition 23.
206. Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 61; 63; *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29-31.
207. Cf. Proposition 29.
208. Proposition 30.
209. *Ibid.*
210. Cf. Proposition 25.
211. Address to priests connected with the Communion and Liberation movement (Sept. 12, 1985); AAS 78 (1986), 256.
212. Cf. Proposition 25.
213. Meeting with members of the Swiss clergy, Einsiedeln (June 15, 1984), 10; *Insegnamenti VII/I* (1984), 1798.
214. Cf. *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 123, S.
215. Cf. Proposition 31.
216. St. Charles Borromeo, *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, Milan 1599, 1178.
217. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
218. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 55.
219. Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6.
220. Paul VI, encyclical letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (Aug. 6, 1964), III: AAS 56 (1964), 647.
221. Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, Directives for the promotion of mutual cooperation between particular churches and especially for a more suitable distribution of the clergy *Postquam Apostoli* (March 25, 1980): AAS 72 (1980), 343-364.
222. Proposition 39.
223. Proposition 34.
224. *Ibid.*
225. *Ibid.*
226. Cf. Proposition 38; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 1; *Optatam Totius*, 1; *Mutuae Relationes*, 2; 10.
227. Proposition 35.
228. *Ibid.*
229. Proposition 36.
230. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 60: cf. *Christus Dominus*, 30; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8; Code of Canon Law, Canon 550.2.
231. Proposition 37.
232. G.B. Moneini, *Pastoral Letter on the Moral Sense*. 1961.
233. Cf. Proposition 40.

**Ex Corde Ecclesiae
Apostolic Constitution
Of The Supreme Pontiff
John Paul II
On Catholic Universities**

INTRODUCTION

BORN FROM THE HEART of the Church, a Catholic University is located in that course of tradition which may be traced back to the very origin of the University as an institution. It has always been recognized as an incomparable centre of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity. By vocation, the Universitas magistrorum et scholarium is dedicated to research, to teaching and to the education of students who freely associate with their teachers in a common love of knowledge(1). With every other University it shares that *gaudium de veritate*, so precious to Saint Augustine, which is that joy of searching for, discovering and communicating truth(2) in every field of knowledge. A Catholic University's privileged task is "to unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth"(3).

2. For many years I myself was deeply enriched by the beneficial experience of university life: the ardent search for truth and its unselfish transmission to youth and to all those learning to think rigorously, so as to act rightly and to serve humanity better.

Therefore, I desire to share with everyone my profound respect for Catholic Universities, and to express my great appreciation for the work that is being done in them in the various spheres of knowledge. In a particular way, I wish to manifest my joy at the numerous meetings which the Lord has permitted me to have in the course of my apostolic journeys with the Catholic University communities of various continents. They are for me a lively and promising sign of the fecundity of the Christian mind in the heart of every culture. They give me a well-founded hope for a new flowering of Christian culture in the rich and varied context of our changing times, which certainly face serious challenges but which also bear so much promise under the action of the Spirit of truth and of love.

It is also my desire to express my pleasure and gratitude to the very many Catholic scholars engaged in teaching and research in non-Catholic Universities. Their task as academics and scientists, lived out in the light of the Christian faith, is to be considered precious for the good of the Universities in which they teach. Their presence, in fact, is a continuous stimulus to the selfless search for truth and for the wisdom that comes from above.

3. Since the beginning of this Pontificate, I have shared these ideas and sentiments with my closest collaborators, the Cardinals, with the Congregation for Catholic Education, and with men and women of culture throughout the world. In fact, the dialogue of the Church with the cultures of our times is that vital area where "the future of the Church and of the world is being played out as we conclude the twentieth century"(4). There is only one culture: that of man, by man and for man(5). And thanks to her Catholic Universities and their humanistic and scientific inheritance, the Church, expert in humanity, as my predecessor, Paul VI, expressed it at the United Nations(6), explores the mysteries of humanity and of the world, clarifying them in the light of Revelation.

4. It is the honour and responsibility of a Catholic University to consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of truth. This is its way of serving at one and the same time both the dignity of man and the good of the Church, which has "an intimate conviction that truth is (its) real ally... and that knowledge and reason are sure ministers to faith"(7). Without in any way neglecting the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic University is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God. The present age is in urgent need of this kind of disinterested service, namely of proclaiming the meaning of truth, that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished. By means of a kind of universal humanism a Catholic University is completely dedicated to the research of all aspects of truth in their essential connection with the supreme Truth, who is God. It does this without fear but rather with enthusiasm, dedicating itself to every path of knowledge, aware of being preceded by him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"(8), the Logos, whose Spirit of intelligence and love enables the human person with his or her own intelligence to find the ultimate reality of which he is the source and end and who alone is capable of giving fully that Wisdom without which the future of the world would be in danger.

5. It is in the context of the impartial search for truth that the relationship between faith and reason is brought to light and meaning. The invitation of Saint Augustine, "*Intellege ut credas; crede ut intellegas*"(9), is relevant to Catholic Universities that are called to explore courageously the riches of Revelation and of nature so that the united endeavour of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, renewed even more marvellously, after sin, in Christ, and called to shine forth in the light of the Spirit.

6. Through the encounter which it establishes between the unfathomable richness of the salvific message of the Gospel and the variety and immensity of the fields of knowledge in which that richness is incarnated by it, a Catholic

University enables the Church to institute an incomparably fertile dialogue with people of every culture. Man's life is given dignity by culture, and, while he finds his fullness in Christ, there can be no doubt that the Gospel which reaches and renews him in every dimension is also fruitful for the culture in which he lives.

7. In the world today, characterized by such rapid developments in science and technology, the tasks of a Catholic University assume an ever greater importance and urgency. Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the correspondingly necessary search for meaning in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole. If it is the responsibility of every University to search for such meaning, a Catholic University is called in a particular way to respond to this need: its Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research, and to evaluate the attainments of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person.

In this context, Catholic Universities are called to a continuous renewal, both as "Universities" and as "Catholic". For, "What is at stake is the very meaning of scientific and technological research, of social life and of culture, but, on an even more profound level, what is at stake is the very meaning of the human person"(10). Such renewal requires a clear awareness that, by its Catholic character, a University is made more capable of conducting an impartial search for truth, a search that is neither subordinated to nor conditioned by particular interests of any kind.

8. Having already dedicated the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* to Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities(11), I then felt obliged to propose an analogous Document for Catholic Universities as a sort of "magna carta", enriched by the long and fruitful experience of the Church in the realm of Universities and open to the promise of future achievements that will require courageous creativity and rigorous fidelity.

9. The present Document is addressed especially to those who conduct Catholic Universities, to the respective academic communities, to all those who have an interest in them, particularly the Bishops, Religious Congregations and ecclesial Institutions, and to the numerous laity who are committed to the great mission of higher education. Its purpose is that "the Christian mind may achieve, as it were, a public, persistent and universal presence in the whole enterprise of advancing higher culture and that the students of these institutions become people outstanding in learning, ready to shoulder society's heavier burdens and to witness the faith to the world"(12).

10. In addition to Catholic Universities, I also turn to the many Catholic Institutions of higher education. According to their nature and proper objectives, they share some or all of the characteristics of a University and they offer their own contribution to the Church and to society, whether through research, education or professional training. While this Document specifically concerns Catholic Universities, it is also meant to include all Catholic Institutions of higher education engaged in instilling the Gospel message of Christ in souls and cultures.

Therefore, it is with great trust and hope that I invite all Catholic Universities to pursue their irreplaceable task. Their mission appears increasingly necessary for the encounter of the Church with the development of the sciences and with the cultures of our age.

Together with all my brother Bishops who share pastoral responsibility with me, I would like to manifest my deep conviction that a Catholic University is without any doubt one of the best instruments that the Church offers to our age which is searching for certainty and wisdom. Having the mission of bringing the Good News to everyone, the Church should never fail to interest herself in this Institution. By research and teaching, Catholic Universities assist the Church in the manner most appropriate to modern times to find cultural treasures both old and new, "nova et vetera", according to the words of Jesus(13).

11. Finally, I turn to the whole Church, convinced that Catholic Universities are essential to her growth and to the development of Christian culture and human progress. For this reason, the entire ecclesial Community is invited to give its support to Catholic Institutions of higher education and to assist them in their process of development and renewal. It is invited in a special way to guard the rights and freedom of these Institutions in civil society, and to offer them economic aid, especially in those countries where they have more urgent need of it, and to furnish assistance in founding new Catholic Universities wherever this might be necessary.

My hope is that these prescriptions, based on the teaching of Vatican Council II and the directives of the Code of Canon Law, will enable Catholic Universities and other Institutes of higher studies to fulfil their indispensable mission in the new advent of grace that is opening up to the new Millennium.

PART I - IDENTITY AND MISSION

A. THE IDENTITY OF A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

1. Nature and Objectives

12. Every Catholic University, as a university, is an academic community which, in a rigorous and critical fashion, assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through research, teaching and various services offered to the local, national and international communities(14). It possesses that institutional autonomy necessary to perform its functions effectively and guarantees its members academic freedom, so long as the

rights of the individual person and of the community are preserved within the confines of the truth and the common good(15).

13. Since the objective of a Catholic University is to assure in an institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world confronting the great problems of society and culture(16), every Catholic University, as Catholic, must have the following essential characteristics:

"1. a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such;

2. a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;

3. fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church;

4. an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life"(17).

14. "In the light of these four characteristics, it is evident that besides the teaching, research and services common to all Universities, a Catholic University, by institutional commitment, brings to its task the inspiration and light of the Christian message. In a Catholic University, therefore, Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles penetrate and inform university activities in accordance with the proper nature and autonomy of these activities. In a word, being both a University and Catholic, it must be both a community of scholars representing various branches of human knowledge, and an academic institution in which Catholicism is vitally present and operative"(18).

15. A Catholic University, therefore, is a place of research, where scholars scrutinize reality with the methods proper to each academic discipline, and so contribute to the treasury of human knowledge. Each individual discipline is studied in a systematic manner; moreover, the various disciplines are brought into dialogue for their mutual enhancement.

In addition to assisting men and women in their continuing quest for the truth, this research provides an effective witness, especially necessary today, to the Church's belief in the intrinsic value of knowledge and research.

In a Catholic University, research necessarily includes (a) the search for an integration of knowledge, (b) a dialogue between faith and reason, (c) an ethical concern, and (d) a theological perspective.

16. Integration of knowledge is a process, one which will always remain incomplete; moreover, the explosion of knowledge in recent decades, together with the rigid compartmentalization of knowledge within individual academic disciplines, makes the task increasingly difficult. But a University, and especially a Catholic University, "has to be a 'living union' of individual organisms dedicated to the search for truth... It is necessary to work towards a higher synthesis of knowledge, in which alone lies the possibility of satisfying that thirst for truth which is profoundly inscribed on the heart of the human person"(19). Aided by the specific contributions of philosophy and theology, university scholars will be engaged in a constant effort to determine the relative place and meaning of each of the various disciplines within the context of a vision of the human person and the world that is enlightened by the Gospel, and therefore by a faith in Christ, the Logos, as the centre of creation and of human history.

17. In promoting this integration of knowledge, a specific part of a Catholic University's task is to promote dialogue between faith and reason, so that it can be seen more profoundly how faith and reason bear harmonious witness to the unity of all truth. While each academic discipline retains its own integrity and has its own methods, this dialogue demonstrates that "methodical research within every branch of learning, when carried out in a truly scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, can never truly conflict with faith. For the things of the earth and the concerns of faith derive from the same God"(20). A vital interaction of two distinct levels of coming to know the one truth leads to a greater love for truth itself, and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of human life and of the purpose of God's creation.

18. Because knowledge is meant to serve the human person, research in a Catholic University is always carried out with a concern for the ethical and moral implications both of its methods and of its discoveries. This concern, while it must be present in all research, is particularly important in the areas of science and technology. "It is essential that we be convinced of the priority of the ethical over the technical, of the primacy of the person over things, of the superiority of the spirit over matter. The cause of the human person will only be served if knowledge is joined to conscience. Men and women of science will truly aid humanity only if they preserve 'the sense of the transcendence of the human person over the world and of God over the human person"(21).

19. Theology plays a particularly important role in the search for a synthesis of knowledge as well as in the dialogue between faith and reason. It serves all other disciplines in their search for meaning, not only by helping them to investigate how their discoveries will affect individuals and society but also by bringing a perspective and an orientation not contained within their own methodologies. In turn, interaction with these other disciplines and their discoveries enriches theology, offering it a better understanding of the world today, and making theological research more relevant to current needs. Because of its specific importance among the academic disciplines, every Catholic University should have a faculty, or at least a chair, of theology(22).

20.

Given the close connection between research and teaching, the research qualities indicated above will have their influence on all teaching. While each discipline is taught systematically and according to its own methods, interdisciplinary studies, assisted by a careful and thorough study of philosophy and theology, enable students to acquire an organic vision of reality and to develop a continuing desire for intellectual progress. In the communication

of knowledge, emphasis is then placed on how human reason in its reflection opens to increasingly broader questions, and how the complete answer to them can only come from above through faith. Furthermore, the moral implications that are present in each discipline are examined as an integral part of the teaching of that discipline so that the entire educative process be directed towards the whole development of the person. Finally, Catholic theology, taught in a manner faithful to Scripture, Tradition, and the Church's Magisterium, provides an awareness of the Gospel principles which will enrich the meaning of human life and give it a new dignity.

Through research and teaching the students are educated in the various disciplines so as to become truly competent in the specific sectors in which they will devote themselves to the service of society and of the Church, but at the same time prepared to give the witness of their faith to the world.

2. The University Community

21. A Catholic University pursues its objectives through its formation of an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ. The source of its unity springs from a common dedication to the truth, a common vision of the dignity of the human person and, ultimately, the person and message of Christ which gives the Institution its distinctive character. As a result of this inspiration, the community is animated by a spirit of freedom and charity; it is characterized by mutual respect, sincere dialogue, and protection of the rights of individuals. It assists each of its members to achieve wholeness as human persons; in turn, everyone in the community helps in promoting unity, and each one, according to his or her role and capacity, contributes towards decisions which affect the community, and also towards maintaining and strengthening the distinctive Catholic character of the Institution.

22. University teachers should seek to improve their competence and endeavour to set the content, objectives, methods, and results of research in an individual discipline within the framework of a coherent world vision. Christians among the teachers are called to be witnesses and educators of authentic Christian life, which evidences attained integration between faith and life, and between professional competence and Christian wisdom. All teachers are to be inspired by academic ideals and by the principles of an authentically human life.

23. Students are challenged to pursue an education that combines excellence in humanistic and cultural development with specialized professional training. Most especially, they are challenged to continue the search for truth and for meaning throughout their lives, since "the human spirit must be cultivated in such a way that there results a growth in its ability to wonder, to understand, to contemplate, to make personal judgments, and to develop a religious, moral, and social sense"(23). This enables them to acquire or, if they have already done so, to deepen a Christian way of life that is authentic. They should realize the responsibility of their professional life, the enthusiasm of being the trained 'leaders' of tomorrow, of being witnesses to Christ in whatever place they may exercise their profession.

24. Directors and administrators in a Catholic University promote the constant growth of the University and its community through a leadership of service; the dedication and witness of the non-academic staff are vital for the identity and life of the University.

25. Many Catholic Universities were founded by Religious Congregations, and continue to depend on their support; those Religious Congregations dedicated to the apostolate of higher education are urged to assist these Institutions in the renewal of their commitment, and to continue to prepare religious men and women who can positively contribute to the mission of a Catholic University.

Lay people have found in university activities a means by which they too could exercise an important apostolic role in the Church and, in most Catholic Universities today, the academic community is largely composed of laity; in increasing numbers, lay men and women are assuming important functions and responsibilities for the direction of these Institutions. These lay Catholics are responding to the Church's call "to be present, as signs of courage and intellectual creativity, in the privileged places of culture, that is, the world of education-school and university"(24). The future of Catholic Universities depends to a great extent on the competent and dedicated service of lay Catholics. The Church sees their developing presence in these institutions both as a sign of hope and as a confirmation of the irreplaceable lay vocation in the Church and in the world, confident that lay people will, in the exercise of their own distinctive role, "illumine and organize these (temporal) affairs in such a way that they always start out, develop, and continue according to Christ's mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer"(25).

26. The university community of many Catholic institutions includes members of other Churches, ecclesial communities and religions, and also those who profess no religious belief. These men and women offer their training and experience in furthering the various academic disciplines or other university tasks.

3. The Catholic University in the Church

27. Every Catholic University, without ceasing to be a University, has a relationship to the Church that is essential to its institutional identity. As such, it participates most directly in the life of the local Church in which it is situated; at the same time, because it is an academic institution and therefore a part of the international community of scholarship and inquiry, each institution participates in and contributes to the life and the mission of the universal Church, assuming consequently a special bond with the Holy See by reason of the service to unity which it is called to render to the whole

Church. One consequence of its essential relationship to the Church is that the institutional fidelity of the University to the Christian message includes a recognition of and adherence to the teaching authority of the Church in matters of faith and morals. Catholic members of the university community are also called to a personal fidelity to the Church with all that this implies. Non-Catholic members are required to respect the Catholic character of the University, while the University in turn respects their religious liberty(26).

28. Bishops have a particular responsibility to promote Catholic Universities, and especially to promote and assist in the preservation and strengthening of their Catholic identity, including the protection of their Catholic identity in relation to civil authorities. This will be achieved more effectively if close personal and pastoral relationships exist between University and Church authorities, characterized by mutual trust, close and consistent cooperation and continuing dialogue. Even when they do not enter directly into the internal governance of the University, Bishops "should be seen not as external agents but as participants in the life of the Catholic University"(27).

29. The Church, accepting "the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences", recognizes the academic freedom of scholars in each discipline in accordance with its own principles and proper methods(28), and within the confines of the truth and the common good.

Theology has its legitimate place in the University alongside other disciplines. It has proper principles and methods which define it as a branch of knowledge. Theologians enjoy this same freedom so long as they are faithful to these principles and methods.

Bishops should encourage the creative work of theologians. They serve the Church through research done in a way that respects theological method. They seek to understand better, further develop and more effectively communicate the meaning of Christian Revelation as transmitted in Scripture and Tradition and in the Church's Magisterium. They also investigate the ways in which theology can shed light on specific questions raised by contemporary culture. At the same time, since theology seeks an understanding of revealed truth whose authentic interpretation is entrusted to the Bishops of the Church(29), it is intrinsic to the principles and methods of their research and teaching in their academic discipline that theologians respect the authority of the Bishops, and assent to Catholic doctrine according to the degree of authority with which it is taught(30). Because of their interrelated roles, dialogue between Bishops and theologians is essential; this is especially true today, when the results of research are so quickly and so widely communicated through the media(31).

B. THE MISSION OF SERVICE OF A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

30. The basic mission of a University is a continuous quest for truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society. A Catholic University participates in this mission with its own specific characteristics and purposes.

1. Service to Church and Society

31. Through teaching and research, a Catholic University offers an indispensable contribution to the Church. In fact, it prepares men and women who, inspired by Christian principles and helped to live their Christian vocation in a mature and responsible manner, will be able to assume positions of responsibility in the Church. Moreover, by offering the results of its scientific research, a Catholic University will be able to help the Church respond to the problems and needs of this age.

32. A Catholic University, as any University, is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church, and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society. Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.

If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.

33. A specific priority is the need to examine and evaluate the predominant values and norms of modern society and culture in a Christian perspective, and the responsibility to try to communicate to society those ethical and religious principles which give full meaning to human life. In this way a University can contribute further to the development of a true Christian anthropology, founded on the person of Christ, which will bring the dynamism of the creation and redemption to bear on reality and on the correct solution to the problems of life.

34. The Christian spirit of service to others for the promotion of social justice is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. The Church is firmly committed to the integral growth of all men and women(32). The Gospel, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, is an urgent call to promote "the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming

purposefully at their complete fulfilment"(33). Every Catholic University feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works: for example it will be capable of searching for ways to make university education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it. A Catholic University also has the responsibility, to the degree that it is able, to help to promote the development of the emerging nations.

35. In its attempts to resolve these complex issues that touch on so many different dimensions of human life and of society, a Catholic University will insist on cooperation among the different academic disciplines, each offering its distinct contribution in the search for solutions; moreover, since the economic and personal resources of a single Institution are limited, cooperation in common research projects among Catholic Universities, as well as with other private and governmental institutions, is imperative. In this regard, and also in what pertains to the other fields of the specific activity of a Catholic University, the role played by various national and international associations of Catholic Universities is to be emphasized. Among these associations the mission of The International Federation of Catholic Universities, founded by the Holy See(34), is particularly to be remembered. The Holy See anticipates further fruitful collaboration with this Federation.

36. Through programmes of continuing education offered to the wider community, by making its scholars available for consulting services, by taking advantage of modern means of communication, and in a variety of other ways, a Catholic University can assist in making the growing body of human knowledge and a developing understanding of the faith available to a wider public, thus expanding university services beyond its own academic community.

37. In its service to society, a Catholic University will relate especially to the academic, cultural and scientific world of the region in which it is located. Original forms of dialogue and collaboration are to be encouraged between the Catholic Universities and the other Universities of a nation on behalf of development, of understanding between cultures, and of the defence of nature in accordance with an awareness of the international ecological situation.

Catholic Universities join other private and public Institutions in serving the public interest through higher education and research; they are one among the variety of different types of institution that are necessary for the free expression of cultural diversity, and they are committed to the promotion of solidarity and its meaning in society and in the world. Therefore they have the full right to expect that civil society and public authorities will recognize and defend their institutional autonomy and academic freedom; moreover, they have the right to the financial support that is necessary for their continued existence and development.

2. Pastoral Ministry

38. Pastoral ministry is that activity of the University which offers the members of the university community an opportunity to integrate religious and moral principles with their academic study and non-academic activities, thus integrating faith with life. It is part of the mission of the Church within the University, and is also a constitutive element of a Catholic University itself, both in its structure and in its life. A university community concerned with promoting the Institution's Catholic character will be conscious of this pastoral dimension and sensitive to the ways in which it can have an influence on all university activities.

39. As a natural expression of the Catholic identity of the University, the university community should give a practical demonstration of its faith in its daily activity, with important moments of reflection and of prayer. Catholic members of this community will be offered opportunities to assimilate Catholic teaching and practice into their lives and will be encouraged to participate in the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist as the most perfect act of community worship. When the academic community includes members of other Churches, ecclesial communities or religions, their initiatives for reflection and prayer in accordance with their own beliefs are to be respected.

40. Those involved in pastoral ministry will encourage teachers and students to become more aware of their responsibility towards those who are suffering physically or spiritually. Following the example of Christ, they will be particularly attentive to the poorest and to those who suffer economic, social, cultural or religious injustice. This responsibility begins within the academic community, but it also finds application beyond it.

41. Pastoral ministry is an indispensable means by which Catholic students can, in fulfilment of their baptism, be prepared for active participation in the life of the Church; it can assist in developing and nurturing the value of marriage and family life, fostering vocations to the priesthood and religious life, stimulating the Christian commitment of the laity and imbuing every activity with the spirit of the Gospel. Close cooperation between pastoral ministry in a Catholic University and the other activities within the local Church, under the guidance or with the approval of the diocesan Bishop, will contribute to their mutual growth(35).

42. Various associations or movements of spiritual and apostolic life, especially those developed specifically for students, can be of great assistance in developing the pastoral aspects of university life.

3. Cultural Dialogue

43. By its very nature, a University develops culture through its research, helps to transmit the local culture to each succeeding generation through its teaching, and assists cultural activities through its educational services. It is open to

all human experience and is ready to dialogue with and learn from any culture. A Catholic University shares in this, offering the rich experience of the Church's own culture. In addition, a Catholic University, aware that human culture is open to Revelation and transcendence, is also a primary and privileged place for a fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and culture.

44. Through this dialogue a Catholic University assists the Church, enabling it to come to a better knowledge of diverse cultures, discern their positive and negative aspects, to receive their authentically human contributions, and to develop means by which it can make the faith better understood by the men and women of a particular culture(36). While it is true that the Gospel cannot be identified with any particular culture and transcends all cultures, it is also true that "the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men and women who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures(37). "A faith that places itself on the margin of what is human, of what is therefore culture, would be a faith unfaithful to the fullness of what the Word of God manifests and reveals, a decapitated faith, worse still, a faith in the process of self-annihilation"(38).

45. A Catholic University must become more attentive to the cultures of the world of today, and to the various cultural traditions existing within the Church in a way that will promote a continuous and profitable dialogue between the Gospel and modern society. Among the criteria that characterize the values of a culture are above all, the meaning of the human person, his or her liberty, dignity, sense of responsibility, and openness to the transcendent. To a respect for persons is joined the preeminent value of the family, the primary unit of every human culture.

Catholic Universities will seek to discern and evaluate both the aspirations and the contradictions of modern culture, in order to make it more suited to the total development of individuals and peoples. In particular, it is recommended that by means of appropriate studies, the impact of modern technology and especially of the mass media on persons, the family, and the institutions and whole of modern culture be studied deeply. Traditional cultures are to be defended in their identity, helping them to receive modern values without sacrificing their own heritage, which is a wealth for the whole of the human family. Universities, situated within the ambience of these cultures, will seek to harmonize local cultures with the positive contributions of modern cultures.

46. An area that particularly interests a Catholic University is the dialogue between Christian thought and the modern sciences. This task requires persons particularly well versed in the individual disciplines and who are at the same time adequately prepared theologically, and who are capable of confronting epistemological questions at the level of the relationship between faith and reason. Such dialogue concerns the natural sciences as much as the human sciences which posit new and complex philosophical and ethical problems. The Christian researcher should demonstrate the way in which human intelligence is enriched by the higher truth that comes from the Gospel: "The intelligence is never diminished, rather, it is stimulated and reinforced by that interior fount of deep understanding that is the Word of God, and by the hierarchy of values that results from it... In its unique manner, the Catholic University helps to manifest the superiority of the spirit, that can never, without the risk of losing its very self, be placed at the service of something other than the search for truth"(39).

47. Besides cultural dialogue, a Catholic University, in accordance with its specific ends, and keeping in mind the various religious-cultural contexts, following the directives promulgated by competent ecclesiastical authority, can offer a contribution to ecumenical dialogue. It does so to further the search for unity among all Christians. In inter-religious dialogue it will assist in discerning the spiritual values that are present in the different religions.

4. Evangelization

48. The primary mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel in such a way that a relationship between faith and life is established in each individual and in the socio-cultural context in which individuals live and act and communicate with one another. Evangelization means "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new... It is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and, as it were, upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humanity's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation"(40).

49. By its very nature, each Catholic University makes an important contribution to the Church's work of evangelization. It is a living institutional witness to Christ and his message, so vitally important in cultures marked by secularism, or where Christ and his message are still virtually unknown. Moreover, all the basic academic activities of a Catholic University are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing mission of the Church: research carried out in the light of the Christian message which puts new human discoveries at the service of individuals and society; education offered in a faith-context that forms men and women capable of rational and critical judgment and conscious of the transcendent dignity of the human person; professional training that incorporates ethical values and a sense of service to individuals and to society; the dialogue with culture that makes the faith better understood, and the theological research that translates the faith into contemporary language. "Precisely because it is more and more conscious of its salvific mission in this world, the Church wants to have these centres closely connected with it; it wants to have them present and operative in spreading the authentic message of Christ"(41).

PART II

GENERAL NORMS

Article 1. The Nature of these General Norms

§ 1. These General Norms are based on, and are a further development of, the Code of Canon Law(42) and the complementary Church legislation, without prejudice to the right of the Holy See to intervene should this become necessary. They are valid for all Catholic Universities and other Catholic Institutes of Higher Studies throughout the world.

§ 2. The General Norms are to be applied concretely at the local and regional levels by Episcopal Conferences and other Assemblies of Catholic Hierarchy(43) in conformity with the Code of Canon Law and complementary Church legislation, taking into account the Statutes of each University or Institute and, as far as possible and appropriate, civil law. After review by the Holy See(44), these local or regional "Ordinances" will be valid for all Catholic Universities and other Catholic Institutes of Higher Studies in the region, except for Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties. These latter Institutions, including Ecclesiastical Faculties which are part of a Catholic University, are governed by the norms of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*(45).

§ 3. A University established or approved by the Holy See, by an Episcopal Conference or another Assembly of Catholic Hierarchy, or by a diocesan Bishop is to incorporate these General Norms and their local and regional applications into its governing documents, and conform its existing Statutes both to the General Norms and to their applications, and submit them for approval to the competent ecclesiastical Authority. It is contemplated that other Catholic Universities, that is, those not established or approved in any of the above ways, with the agreement of the local ecclesiastical Authority, will make their own the General Norms and their local and regional applications, internalizing them into their governing documents, and, as far as possible, will conform their existing Statutes both to these General Norms and to their applications.

Article 2. The Nature of a Catholic University

§ 1. A Catholic University, like every university, is a community of scholars representing various branches of human knowledge. It is dedicated to research, to teaching, and to various kinds of service in accordance with its cultural mission.

§ 2. A Catholic University, as Catholic, informs and carries out its research, teaching, and all other activities with Catholic ideals, principles and attitudes. It is linked with the Church either by a formal, constitutive and statutory bond or by reason of an institutional commitment made by those responsible for it.

§ 3. Every Catholic University is to make known its Catholic identity, either in a mission statement or in some other appropriate public document, unless authorized otherwise by the competent ecclesiastical Authority. The University, particularly through its structure and its regulations, is to provide means which will guarantee the expression and the preservation of this identity in a manner consistent with §2.

§ 4. Catholic teaching and discipline are to influence all university activities, while the freedom of conscience of each person is to be fully respected(46). Any official action or commitment of the University is to be in accord with its Catholic identity.

§ 5. A Catholic University possesses the autonomy necessary to develop its distinctive identity and pursue its proper mission. Freedom in research and teaching is recognized and respected according to the principles and methods of each individual discipline, so long as the rights of the individual and of the community are preserved within the confines of the truth and the common good(47).

Article 3. The Establishment of a Catholic University

§ 1. A Catholic University may be established or approved by the Holy See, by an Episcopal Conference or another Assembly of Catholic Hierarchy, or by a diocesan Bishop.

§ 2. With the consent of the diocesan Bishop, a Catholic University may also be established by a Religious Institute or other public juridical person.

§ 3. A Catholic University may also be established by other ecclesiastical or lay persons; such a University may refer to itself as a Catholic University only with the consent of the competent ecclesiastical Authority, in accordance with the conditions upon which both parties shall agree(48).

§ 4. In the cases of §§ 1 and 2, the Statutes must be approved by the competent ecclesiastical Authority.

Article 4. The University Community

§ 1. The responsibility for maintaining and strengthening the Catholic identity of the University rests primarily with the University itself. While this responsibility is entrusted principally to university authorities (including, when the positions exist, the Chancellor and/or a Board of Trustees or equivalent body), it is shared in varying degrees by all members of the university community, and therefore calls for the recruitment of adequate university personnel, especially teachers and administrators, who are both willing and able to promote that identity. The identity of a Catholic University is essentially linked to the quality of its teachers and to respect for Catholic doctrine. It is the responsibility of the competent Authority to watch over these two fundamental needs in accordance with what is indicated in Canon Law (49).

§ 2. All teachers and all administrators, at the time of their appointment, are to be informed about the Catholic identity of the Institution and its implications, and about their responsibility to promote, or at least to respect, that identity.

§ 3. In ways appropriate to the different academic disciplines, all Catholic teachers are to be faithful to, and all other teachers are to respect, Catholic doctrine and morals in their research and teaching. In particular, Catholic theologians, aware that they fulfil a mandate received from the Church, are to be faithful to the Magisterium of the Church as the authentic interpreter of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition(50).

§ 4. Those university teachers and administrators who belong to other Churches, ecclesial communities, or religions, as well as those who profess no religious belief, and also all students, are to recognize and respect the distinctive Catholic identity of the University. In order not to endanger the Catholic identity of the University or Institute of Higher Studies, the number of non-Catholic teachers should not be allowed to constitute a majority within the Institution, which is and must remain Catholic.

§ 5. The education of students is to combine academic and professional development with formation in moral and religious principles and the social teachings of the Church; the programme of studies for each of the various professions is to include an appropriate ethical formation in that profession. Courses in Catholic doctrine are to be made available to all students(51).

Article 5. The Catholic University within the Church

§ 1. Every Catholic University is to maintain communion with the universal Church and the Holy See; it is to be in close communion with the local Church and in particular with the diocesan Bishops of the region or nation in which it is located. In ways consistent with its nature as a University, a Catholic University will contribute to the Church's work of evangelization.

§ 2. Each Bishop has a responsibility to promote the welfare of the Catholic Universities in his diocese and has the right and duty to watch over the preservation and strengthening of their Catholic character. If problems should arise concerning this Catholic character, the local Bishop is to take the initiatives necessary to resolve the matter, working with the competent university authorities in accordance with established procedures(52) and, if necessary, with the help of the Holy See.

§ 3. Periodically, each Catholic University, to which Article 3, 1 and 2 refers, is to communicate relevant information about the University and its activities to the competent ecclesiastical Authority. Other Catholic Universities are to communicate this information to the Bishop of the diocese in which the principal seat of the Institution is located.

Article 6. Pastoral Ministry

§ 1. A Catholic University is to promote the pastoral care of all members of the university community, and to be especially attentive to the spiritual development of those who are Catholics. Priority is to be given to those means which will facilitate the integration of human and professional education with religious values in the light of Catholic doctrine, in order to unite intellectual learning with the religious dimension of life.

§ 2. A sufficient number of qualified people-priests, religious, and lay persons-are to be appointed to provide pastoral ministry for the university community, carried on in harmony and cooperation with the pastoral activities of the local Church under the guidance or with the approval of the diocesan Bishop. All members of the university community are to be invited to assist the work of pastoral ministry, and to collaborate in its activities.

Article 7. Cooperation

§ 1. In order better to confront the complex problems facing modern society, and in order to strengthen the Catholic identity of the Institutions, regional, national and international cooperation is to be promoted in research, teaching, and other university activities among all Catholic Universities, including Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties(53). Such cooperation is also to be promoted between Catholic Universities and other Universities, and with other research and educational Institutions, both private and governmental.

§ 2. Catholic Universities will, when possible and in accord with Catholic principles and doctrine, cooperate with government programmes and the programmes of other national and international Organizations on behalf of justice, development and progress.

TRANSITIONAL NORMS

Art. 8. The present Constitution will come into effect on the first day to the academic year 1991.

Art. 9. The application of the Constitution is committed to the Congregation for Catholic Education, which has the duty to promulgate the necessary directives that will serve towards that end.

Art. 10. It will be the competence of the Congregation for Catholic Education, when with the passage of time circumstances require it, to propose changes to be made in the present Constitution in order that it may be adapted continuously to the needs of Catholic Universities.

Art. 11. Any particular laws or customs presently in effect that are contrary to this Constitution are abolished. Also, any privileges granted up to this day by the Holy See whether to physical or moral persons that are contrary to this present Constitution are abolished.

CONCLUSION

The mission that the Church, with great hope, entrusts to Catholic Universities holds a cultural and religious meaning of vital importance because it concerns the very future of humanity. The renewal requested of Catholic Universities will make them better able to respond to the task of bringing the message of Christ to man, to society, to the various cultures: "Every human reality, both individual and social has been liberated by Christ: persons, as well as the activities of men and women, of which culture is the highest and incarnate expression. The salvific action of the Church on cultures is achieved, first of all, by means of persons, families and educators... Jesus Christ, our Saviour, offers his light and his hope to all those who promote the sciences, the arts, letters and the numerous fields developed by modern culture. Therefore, all the sons and daughters of the Church should become aware of their mission and discover how the strength of the Gospel can penetrate and regenerate the mentalities and dominant values that inspire individual cultures, as well as the opinions and mental attitudes that are derived from it"(54).

It is with fervent hope that I address this Document to all the men and women engaged in various ways in the significant mission of Catholic higher education.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, my encouragement and my trust go with you in your weighty daily task that becomes ever more important, more urgent and necessary on behalf of Evangelization for the future of culture and of all cultures. The Church and the world have great need of your witness and of your capable, free, and responsible contribution.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 15 August, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, in the year 1990, the twelfth of the Pontificate.

ENDNOTES

1 Cf. The letter of Pope Alexander IV to the University of Paris, 14 April 1255, Introduction: Bullarium Diplomatum..., vol. III, Turin 1858, p. 602.

2 SAINT AUGUSTINE, Confes. X, xxiii, 33: "In fact, the blessed life consists in the joy that comes from the truth, since this joy comes from You who are Truth, God my light, salvation of my face, my God". PL 32, 793-794. Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, De Malo, IX, 1: "It is actually natural to man to strive for knowledge of the truth".

3 JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the "Institut Catholique de Paris", 1 June 1980: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, Vol. III/1 (1980), p. 1581.

4 JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the Cardinals, 10 November 1979: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, Vol. II/2 (1979), p. 1096; cf. Discourse to UNESCO, Paris, 2 June 1980: AAS 72 (1980), pp. 735-752.

5 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the University of Coimbra, 15 May 1982: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, Vol. V/2 (1982), p. 1692.

6 PAUL VI, Allocution to Representatives of States, 4 October 1965: Insegnamenti di Paolo VI, Vol. III (1965), p. 508.

7 JOHN HENRY CARDINAL NEWMAN, The Idea of a University, London, Longmans, Green and Company, 1931, p. XI.

8 Jn 14:6.

9 Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, Serm. 43, 9: PL 38, 258. Cf. also SAINT ANSELM, Proslogion, chap. I: PL 158, 227.

10 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Allocution to the International Congress on Catholic Universities, 25 April 1989, n.

3: AAS 18 (1989), p. 1218.

11 JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution Sapientia Christiana concerning the Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, 15 April 1979: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 469-521.

12 VATICAN COUNCIL II, Declaration on Catholic Education Gravissimum Educationis, n. 10: AAS 58 (1966), p. 737.

13 Mt 13:52.

14 Cf. The Magna Carta of the European Universities, Bologna, Italy, 18 September 1988, "Fundamental Principles".

15 Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 59: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1080; Declaration on Catholic Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 10: AAS 58 (1966), p. 737. "Institutional autonomy" means that the governance of an academic institution is and remains internal to the institution; "academic freedom" is the guarantee given to those involved in teaching and research that, within their specific specialized branch of knowledge, and according to the methods proper to that specific area, they may search for the truth wherever analysis and evidence leads them, and may teach and publish the results of this search, keeping in mind the cited criteria, that is, safeguarding the rights of the individual and of society within the confines of the truth and the common good.

16 There is a two-fold notion of culture used in this document: the humanistic and the socio-historical. "The word 'culture' in its general sense indicates all those factors by which man refines and unfolds his manifold spiritual and bodily qualities. It means his effort to bring the world itself under his control by his knowledge and his labor. It includes the fact that by improving customs and institutions he renders social life more human both within the family and in the civic community. Finally, it is a feature of culture that throughout the course of time man expresses, communicates, and conserves in his works great spiritual experiences and desires, so that these may be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family. Hence it follows that human culture necessarily has a historical and social aspect and that the word 'culture' often takes on a sociological and ethnological sense". VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 53: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1075.

17 L'Université Catholique dans le monde moderne. Document final du 2ème Congrès des Délégués des Universités Catholiques, Rome, 20-29 November 1972, § 1.

18 Ibid.

19 JOHN PAUL II, Allocution to the International Congress on Catholic Universities, 25 April 1989, n. 4: AAS 81 (1989), p. 1219. Cf. also VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 61: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1081-1082. Cardinal Newman observes that a University "professes to assign to each study which it receives, its proper place and its just boundaries; to define the rights, to establish the mutual relations and to effect the intercommunion of one and all". (Op. cit., p. 457).

20 VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n.

36: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1054. To a group of scientists I pointed out that "while reason and faith surely represent two distinct orders of knowledge, each autonomous with regard to its own methods, the two must finally converge in the discovery of a single whole reality which has its origin in God". (JOHN PAUL II, Address at the Meeting on Galileo, 9 May 1983, n. 3: AAS 75 [1983], p. 690).

21 JOHN PAUL II, Address at UNESCO, 2 June 1980, n. 22: AAS 72 (1980), p. 750. The last part of the quotation uses words directed to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 10 November 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, Vol. II/2 (1979), p. 1109.

22 Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Declaration on Catholic Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 10: AAS 58 (1966), p. 737.

23 VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n.

59: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1080. Cardinal Newman describes the ideal to be sought in this way: "A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom". (Op. cit., pp. 101-102).

24 JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 30 December 1988, n. 44: AAS 81 (1989), p. 479.

25 VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 31: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 37-38. Cf. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, passim: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 837ff. Cf. also *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 43: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1061-1064.

26 Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 2: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 930-931.

27 JOHN PAUL II, Address to Leaders of Catholic Higher Education, Xavier University of Louisiana, U.S. A., 12 September 1987, n. 4: AAS 80 (1988), p. 764.

28 VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n.

59: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1080.

29 Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, nn. 8-10: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 820-822.

30 Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 25: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 29-31.

31 Cf. "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian" of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of 24 May 1990.

32 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, nn. 27-34: AAS 80 (1988), pp. 547-560.

33 PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 1: AAS 59 (1967), p. 257.

34 "Therefore, in that there has been a pleasing multiplication of centres of higher learning, it has become apparent that it would be opportune for the faculty and the alumni to unite in common association which, working in reciprocal understanding and close collaboration, and based upon the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, as father and universal doctor, they might more efficaciously spread and extend the light of Christ". (Plus XII, Apostolic Letter *Catholicas Studiorum Universitates*, with which The International Federation of Catholic Universities was established: AAS 42 [1950], p. 386).

35 The Code of Canon Law indicates the general responsibility of the Bishop toward university students: "The diocesan bishop is to have serious pastoral concern for students by erecting a parish for them or by assigning priests for this purpose on a stable basis; he is also to provide for Catholic university centers at universities, even non-Catholic ones, to give assistance, especially spiritual to young people". (CIC, can. 813).

36 "Living in various circumstances during the course of time, the Church, too, has used in her preaching the discoveries of different cultures to spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, to probe it and more deeply understand it, and to give it better expression in liturgical celebrations and in the life of the diversified community of the faithful". (VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 58: AAS 58 [1966], p. 1079).

37 PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 20: AAS 68 (1976), p. 18. Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 58: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1079.

38 JOHN PAUL II, Address to Intellectuals, to Students and to University Personnel at Medellín, Colombia, 5 July 1986, n. 3: AAS 79 (1987), p. 99. Cf. also VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 58: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1079.

39 PAUL VI, to the Delegates of The International Federation of Catholic Universities, 27 November 1972: AAS 64 (1972), p. 770.

40 PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nn. 18ff.: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 17-18.

41 PAUL VI, Address to Presidents and Rectors of the Universities of the Society of Jesus, 6 August 1975, n. 2: AAS 67 (1975), p. 533. Speaking to the participants of the International Congress on Catholic Universities, 25 April 1989, I added (n. 5): "Within a Catholic University the evangelical mission of the Church and the mission of research and teaching become interrelated and coordinated": Cf. AAS 81 (1989), p. 1220.

42 Cf. in particular the Chapter of the Code: "Catholic Universities and other Institutes of Higher Studies" (CIC, cann. 807-814).

43 Episcopal Conferences were established in the Latin Rite. Other Rites have other Assemblies of Catholic Hierarchy.

44 Cf. CIC, Can. 455, § 2.

45 Cf. *Sapientia Christiana*: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 469-521. Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties are those that have the right to confer academic degrees by the authority of the Holy See.

46 Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 2: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 930-931.

47 Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 57 and 59: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1077-1080; *Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 10: AAS 58 (1966), p. 737.

48 Both the establishment of such a university and the conditions by which it may refer to itself as a Catholic University are to be in accordance with the prescriptions issued by the Holy See, Episcopal Conference or other Assembly of Catholic Hierarchy.

49 Canon 810 of CIC, specifies the responsibility of the competent Authorities in this area: § 1 "It is the responsibility of the authority who is competent in accord with the statutes to provide for the appointment of teachers to Catholic universities who, besides their scientific and pedagogical suitability, are also outstanding in their integrity of doctrine and probity of life; when those requisite qualities are lacking they are to be removed from their positions in accord with the procedure set forth in the statutes. § 2 The conference of bishops and the diocesan bishops concerned have the duty and right of being vigilant that in these universities the principles of Catholic doctrine are faithfully observed". Cf. also Article 5, 2 ahead in these "Norms".

50 VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 25: AAS 57 (1965), p. 29; *Dei Verbum*, nn. 8-10: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 820-822; Cf. CIC, can. 812: "It is necessary that those who teach theological disciplines in any institute of higher studies have a mandate from the competent ecclesiastical authority".

51 Cf. CIC, can 811 § 2.

52 For Universities to which Article 3 §§ 1 and 2 refer, these procedures are to be established in the university statutes approved by the competent ecclesiastical Authority; for other Catholic Universities, they are to be determined by Episcopal Conferences or other Assemblies of Catholic Hierarchy.

53 Cf. CIC, can. 820. Cf. also *Sapientia Christiana*, Norms of Application, Article 49: AAS 71 (1979), p. 512.

54 JOHN PAUL II, to the Pontifical Council for Culture, 13 January 1989, n. 2: AAS 81 (1989), pp. 857-858.

**Apostolic Exhortation
Redemptoris Custos
Of The Supreme Pontiff
John Paul II
On The Person And Mission Of
Saint Joseph
In The Life Of Christ And Of The Church**

To Bishops To Priests and Deacons To Men and Women Religious And to all the Lay Faithful

INTRODUCTION

1. "Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took his wife" (cf. Mt 1:24).

Inspired by the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church from the earliest centuries stressed that just as St. Joseph took loving care of Mary and gladly dedicated himself to Jesus Christ's upbringing, (1) he likewise watches over and protects Christ's Mystical Body, that is, the Church, of which the Virgin Mary is the exemplar and model.

On the occasion of the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam Pluries*, (2) and in line with the veneration given to St. Joseph over the centuries, I wish to offer for your consideration, dear brothers, and sisters, some reflections concerning him "into whose custody God entrusted his most precious treasures." (3) I gladly fulfill this pastoral duty so that all may grow in devotion to the Patron of the Universal Church and in love for the Savior whom he served in such an exemplary manner.

In this way the whole Christian people not only will turn to St. Joseph with greater fervor and invoke his patronage with trust, but also will always keep before their eyes his humble, mature way of serving and of "taking part" in the plan of salvation. (4)

I am convinced that by reflection upon the way that Mary's spouse shared in the divine mystery, the Church - on the road towards the future with all of humanity - will be enabled to discover ever anew her own identity within this redemptive plan, which is founded on the mystery of the Incarnation.

This is precisely the mystery in which Joseph of Nazareth "shared" like no other human being except Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word. He shared in it with her; he was involved in the same salvific event; he was the guardian of the same love, through the power of which the eternal Father "destined us to be his sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:5).

I - THE GOSPEL PORTRAIT

Marriage to Mary

2. "Joseph, Son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:20-21).

In these words we find the core of biblical truth about St. Joseph; they refer to that moment in his life to which the Fathers of the Church make special reference.

The Evangelist Matthew explains the significance of this moment while also describing how Joseph lived it. However, in order to understand fully both its content and context, it is important to keep in mind the parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke. In Matthew we read: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:18). However, the origin of Mary's pregnancy "of the Holy Spirit" is described more fully and explicitly in what Luke tells us about the annunciation of Jesus' birth: "The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary" (Lk 1:26-27). The angel's greeting: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28) created an inner turmoil in Mary and also moved her to reflect. Then the messenger reassured the Virgin and at the same time revealed God's special plan for her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David" (Lk 1:30-32).

A little earlier the Gospel writer had stated that at the moment of the Annunciation, Mary was "betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David." The nature of this "marriage" is explained indirectly when Mary, after hearing what the messenger says about the birth of the child, asks, "How can this be, since I do not know man?" (Lk 1:34) The angel responds: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). Although Mary is already "wedded" to

Joseph, she will remain a virgin, because the child conceived in her at the Annunciation was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

At this point Luke's text coincides with Matthew 1:18 and serves to explain what we read there. If, after her marriage to Joseph, Mary is found to be with child of the Holy Spirit, "this fact corresponds to all that the Annunciation means, in particular to Mary's final words: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). In response to what is clearly the plan of God, with the passing of days and weeks Mary's "pregnancy" is visible to the people and to Joseph; she appears before them as one who must give birth and carry within herself the mystery of motherhood.

3. In these circumstances, "her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to send her away quietly" (Mt 1:19). He did not know how to deal with Mary's "astonishing" motherhood. He certainly sought an answer to this unsettling question, but above all he sought a way out of what was for him a difficult situation. "But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'" (Mt 1:20-21).

There is a strict parallel between the "annunciation" in Matthew's text and the one in Luke. The divine messenger introduces Joseph to the mystery of Mary's motherhood. While remaining a virgin, she who by law is his "spouse" has become a mother through the power of the Holy Spirit. And when the Son in Mary's womb comes into the world, he must receive the name Jesus. This was a name known among the Israelites and sometimes given to their sons. In this case, however, it is the Son who, in accordance with the divine promise, will bring to perfect fulfillment the meaning of the name Jesus-Yehosua' - which means "God saves."

Joseph is visited by the messenger as "Mary's spouse," as the one who in due time must give this name to the Son to be born of the Virgin of Nazareth who is married to him. It is to Joseph, then, that the messenger turns, entrusting to him the responsibilities of an earthly father with regard to Mary's Son.

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife" (cf. Mt 1:24). He took her in all the mystery of her motherhood. He took her together with the Son who had come into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way he showed a readiness of will like Mary's with regard to what God asked of him through the angel.

II - THE GUARDIAN OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD

4. When, soon after the Annunciation, Mary went to the house of Zechariah to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth, even as she offered her greeting she heard the words of Elizabeth, who was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk 1:41). Besides offering a salutation which recalled that of the angel at the Annunciation, Elizabeth also said: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). These words were the guiding thought of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, in which I sought to deepen the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which stated the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully preserved her union with her Son even to the cross, "(5) "preceding"(6) all those who follow Christ by faith.

Now at the beginning of this pilgrimage, the faith of Mary meets the faith of Joseph. If Elizabeth said of the Redeemer's Mother, "blessed is she who believed," in a certain sense this blessedness can be referred to Joseph as well, since he responded positively to the word of God when it was communicated to him at the decisive moment. While it is true that Joseph did not respond to the angel's "announcement" in the same way as Mary, he "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took his wife." What he did is the clearest "obedience of faith" (cf. Rom 1:5; 16:26; 2 Cor 10:5-6). One can say that what Joseph did united him in an altogether special way to the faith of Mary. He accepted as truth coming from God the very thing that she had already accepted at the Annunciation. The Council teaches: "'The obedience of faith' must be given to God as he reveals himself. By this obedience of faith man freely commits himself entirely to God, making 'the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals,' and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him."(7) This statement, which touches the very essence of faith, is perfectly applicable to Joseph of Nazareth.

5. Therefore he became a unique guardian of the mystery "hidden for ages in God" (Eph 3:9), as did Mary, in that decisive moment which St. Paul calls "the fullness of time," when "God sent forth his Son, born of woman...to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5). In the words of the Council: "It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1:9). His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pt 1:4)."(8)

Together with Mary, Joseph is the first guardian of this divine mystery. Together with Mary, and in relation to Mary, he shares in this final phase of God's self-revelation in Christ and he does so from the very beginning. Looking at the gospel texts of both Matthew and Luke, one can also say that Joseph is the first to share in the faith of the Mother of God and that in doing so he supports his spouse in the faith of the divine annunciation. He is also the first to be placed by God on the path of Mary's "pilgrimage of faith." It is a path along which - especially at the time of Calvary and Pentecost - Mary will precede in a perfect way. (9)

6. The path that was Joseph's-his pilgrimage of faith - ended first, that is to say, before Mary stood at the foot of the cross on Golgotha, and before the time after Christ returned to the Father, when she was present in the upper room on Pentecost, the day the Church was manifested to the world, having been born in the power of the Spirit of truth. Nevertheless, Joseph's way of faith moved in the same direction: it was totally determined by the same mystery, of which he, together with Mary, had been the first guardian. The Incarnation and Redemption constitute an organic and indissoluble unity, in which "the plan of revelation is realized by words and deeds which are intrinsically bound up with each other."(10) Precisely because of this unity, Pope John XXIII, who had a great devotion to St. Joseph, directed that Joseph's name be inserted in the Roman Canon of the Mass-which is the perpetual memorial of redemption - after the name of Mary and before the apostles, popes and martyrs.(11)

The Service of Fatherhood

7. As can be deduced from the gospel texts, Joseph's marriage to Mary is the juridical basis of his fatherhood. It was to assure fatherly protection for Jesus that God chose Joseph to be Mary's spouse. It follows that Joseph's fatherhood - a relationship that places him as close as possible to Christ, to whom every election and predestination is ordered (cf. Rom 8:28-29) - comes to pass through marriage to Mary, that is, through the family.

While clearly affirming that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that virginity remained intact in the marriage (cf. Mt 1:18-25; Lk 1:26-38), the evangelists refer to Joseph as Mary's husband and to Mary as his wife (cf. Mt 1:16, 18-20, 24; Lk 1:27; 2:5).

And while it is important for the Church to profess the virginal conception of Jesus, it is no less important to uphold Mary's marriage to Joseph, because juridically Joseph's fatherhood depends on it. Thus one understands why the generations are listed according to the genealogy of Joseph: "Why, " St. Augustine asks, "should they not be according to Joseph? Was he not Mary's husband?... Scripture states, through the authority of an angel, that he was her husband. Do not fear, says the angel, to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Joseph was told to name the child, although not born from his seed. She will bear a son, the angel says, and you will call him Jesus. Scripture recognizes that Jesus is not born of Joseph's seed, since in his concern about the origin of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph is told that it is of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, he is not deprived of his fatherly authority from the moment that he is told to name the child. Finally, even the Virgin Mary, well aware that she has not conceived Christ as a result of conjugal relations with Joseph, still calls him Christ's father."(12)

The Son of Mary is also Joseph's Son by virtue of the marriage bond that unites them: "By reason of their faithful marriage both of them deserve to be called Christ's parents, not only his mother, but also his father, who was a parent in the same way that he was the mother's spouse: in mind, not in the flesh."(13) In this marriage none of the requisites of marriage were lacking: "In Christ's parents all the goods of marriage were realized-offspring, fidelity, the sacrament: the offspring being the Lord Jesus himself; fidelity, since there was no adultery: the sacrament, since there was no divorce."(14)

Analyzing the nature of marriage, both St. Augustine and St. Thomas always identify it with an "indivisible union of souls, " a "union of hearts, " with "consent."(15) These elements are found in an exemplary manner in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. At the culmination of the history of salvation, when God reveals his love for humanity through the gift of the Word, it is precisely the marriage of Mary and Joseph that brings to realization in full "freedom" the "spousal gift of self" in receiving and expressing such a love.(16) "In this great undertaking which is the renewal of all things in Christ, marriage-it too purified and renewed-becomes a new reality, a sacrament of the New Covenant. We see that at the beginning of the New Testament, as at the beginning of the Old, there is a married couple. But whereas Adam and Eve were the source of evil which was unleashed on the world, Joseph and Mary are the summit from which holiness spreads all over the earth. The Savior began the work of salvation by this virginal and holy union, wherein is manifested his all-powerful will to purify and sanctify the family - that sanctuary of love and cradle of life."(17)

How much the family of today can learn from this! "The essence and role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love. Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church his bride."(18) This being the case, it is in the Holy Family, the original "Church in miniature (Ecclesia domestica), "(19) that every Christian family must be reflected. "Through God's mysterious design, it was in that family that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It is therefore the prototype and example for all Christian families."(20)

8. St. Joseph was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood. It is precisely in this way that, as the Church's Liturgy teaches, he "cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation" and is truly a "minister of salvation."(21) His fatherhood is expressed concretely "in his having made his life a service, a sacrifice to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the redemptive mission connected with it; in having used the legal authority which was his over the Holy Family in order to make a total gift of self, of his life and work; in having turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house."(22)

In recalling that "the beginnings of our redemption" were entrusted "to the faithful care of Joseph, "(23) the Liturgy specifies that "God placed him at the head of his family, as a faithful and prudent servant, so that with fatherly care he

might watch over his only begotten Son."(24) Leo XIII emphasized the sublime nature of this mission: "He among all stands out in his august dignity, since by divine disposition he was guardian, and according to human opinion, father of God's Son. Whence it followed that the Word of God was subjected to Joseph, he obeyed him and rendered to him that honor and reverence that children owe to their father."(25)

Since it is inconceivable that such a sublime task would not be matched by the necessary qualities to adequately fulfill it, we must recognize that Joseph showed Jesus "by a special gift from heaven, all the natural love, all the affectionate solicitude that a father's heart can know."(26)

Besides fatherly authority over Jesus, God also gave Joseph a share in the corresponding love, the love that has its origin in the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:15).

The Gospels clearly describe the fatherly responsibility of Joseph toward Jesus. For salvation-which comes through the humanity of Jesus-is realized in actions which are an everyday part of family life, in keeping with that "condescension" which is inherent in the economy of the Incarnation. The gospel writers carefully show how in the life of Jesus nothing was left to chance, but how everything took place according to God's predetermined plan. The oft-repeated formula, "This happened, so that there might be fulfilled....," in reference to a particular event in the Old Testament serves to emphasize the unity and continuity of the plan which is fulfilled in Christ.

With the Incarnation, the "promises" and "figures" of the Old Testament become "reality": places, persons, events and rites interrelate according to precise divine commands communicated by angels and received by creatures who are particularly sensitive to the voice of God. Mary is the Lord's humble servant, prepared from eternity for the task of being the Mother of God. Joseph is the one whom God chose to be the "overseer of the Lord's birth,"(27) the one who has the responsibility to look after the Son of God's "ordained" entry into the world, in accordance with divine dispositions and human laws. All of the so-called "private" or "hidden" life of Jesus is entrusted to Joseph's guardianship.

The Census

9. Journeying to Bethlehem for the census in obedience to the orders of legitimate authority, Joseph fulfilled for the child the significant task of officially inserting the name "Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth" (cf. Jn 1:45) in the registry of the Roman Empire. This registration clearly shows that Jesus belongs to the human race as a man among men, a citizen of this world, subject to laws and civil institutions, but also "savior of the world." Origen gives a good description of the theological significance, by no means marginal, of this historical fact: "Since the first census of the whole world took place under Caesar Augustus, and among all the others Joseph too went to register together with Mary his wife, who was with child, and since Jesus was born before the census was completed: to the person who makes a careful examination it will appear that a kind of mystery is expressed in the fact that at the time when all people in the world presented themselves to be counted, Christ too should be counted. By being registered with everyone, he could sanctify everyone; inscribed with the whole world in the census, he offered to the world communion with himself, and after presenting himself he wrote all the people of the world in the book of the living, so that as many as believed in him could then be written in heaven with the saints of God, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever, Amen."(28)

The Birth at Bethlehem

10. As guardian of the mystery "hidden for ages in the mind of God," which begins to unfold before his eyes "in the fullness of time," Joseph, together with Mary, is a privileged witness to the birth of the Son of God into the world on Christmas night in Bethlehem. Luke writes: "And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk 2:6-7).

Joseph was an eyewitness to this birth, which took place in conditions that, humanly speaking, were embarrassing-a first announcement of that "self-emptying" (cf. Phil 2:5-8) which Christ freely accepted for the forgiveness of sins. Joseph also witnessed the adoration of the shepherds who arrived at Jesus' birthplace after the angel had brought them the great and happy news (cf. Lk 2:15-16). Later he also witnessed the homage of the magi who came from the East (cf. Mt 2:11).

The Circumcision

11. A son's circumcision was the first religious obligation of a father, and with this ceremony (cf. Lk 2:21) Joseph exercised his right and duty with regard to Jesus.

The principle which holds that all the rites of the Old Testament are a shadow of the reality (cf. Heb 9:9f; 10:1) serves to explain why Jesus would accept them. As with all the other rites, circumcision too is "fulfilled" in Jesus. God's covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was the sign (cf. Gn 17:13), reaches its full effect and perfect realization in Jesus, who is the "yes" of all the ancient promises (cf. 2 Cor 1:20).

Conferral of the Name

12. At the circumcision Joseph names the child "Jesus." This is the only name in which there is salvation (cf. Acts 4:12). Its significance had been revealed to Joseph at the moment of his "annunciation": "You shall call the child Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (cf. Mt 1:21). In conferring the name, Joseph declares his own legal fatherhood over Jesus, and in speaking the name he proclaims the child's mission as Savior.

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

13. This rite, to which Luke refers (2:22ff.), includes the ransom of the first-born and sheds light on the subsequent stay of Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve.

The ransoming of the first-born is another obligation of the father, and it is fulfilled by Joseph. Represented in the first-born is the people of the covenant, ransomed from slavery in order to belong to God. Here too, Jesus - who is the true "price" of ransom (cf. 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pt 1:19) - not only "fulfills" the Old Testament rite, but at the same time transcends it, since he is not a subject to be redeemed, but the very author of redemption.

The gospel writer notes that "his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him" (Lk 2:23), in particular at what Simeon said in his canticle to God, when he referred to Jesus as the "salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" and as a "sign that is spoken against" (cf. Lk 2:30-34).

The Flight into Egypt

14. After the presentation in the Temple the Evangelist Luke notes: "And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (Lk 2:39-40).

But according to Matthew's text, a very important event took place before the return to Galilee, an event in which divine providence once again had recourse to Joseph. We read: "Now when [the magi] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him'" (Mt 2:13). Herod learned from the magi who came from the East about the birth of the "king of the Jews" (Mt 2:2). And when the magi departed, he "sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under" (Mt 2:16). By killing them all, he wished to kill the new-born "king of the Jews" whom he had heard about. And so, Joseph, having been warned in a dream, "took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son'" (Mt 2:14-15; cf. Hos 11:1).

And so Jesus' way back to Nazareth from Bethlehem passed through Egypt. Just as Israel had followed the path of the exodus "from the condition of slavery" in order to begin the Old Covenant, so Joseph, guardian and cooperator in the providential mystery of God, even in exile watched over the one who brings about the New Covenant.

Jesus' Stay in the Temple

15. From the time of the Annunciation, both Joseph and Mary found themselves, in a certain sense, at the heart of the mystery hidden for ages in the mind of God, a mystery which had taken on flesh: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). He dwelt among men, within the surroundings of the Holy Family of Nazareth - one of many families in this small town in Galilee, one of the many families of the land of Israel. There Jesus "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (Lk 2:40). The Gospels summarize in a few words the long period of the "hidden" life, during which Jesus prepared himself for his messianic mission. Only one episode from this "hidden time" is described in the Gospel of Luke: the Passover in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old. Together with Mary and Joseph, Jesus took part in the feast as a young pilgrim. "And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it" (Lk 2:43). After a day's journey, they noticed his absence and began to search "among their kinsfolk and acquaintances." "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Lk 2:47). Mary asked: "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously" (Lk 2:48). The answer Jesus gave was such that "they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them." He had said, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49-50)

Joseph, of whom Mary had just used the words "your father," heard this answer. That, after all, is what all the people said and thought: Jesus was the son (as was supposed) or Joseph" (Lk 3:23). Nonetheless, the reply of Jesus in the Temple brought once again to the mind of his "presumed father" what he had heard on that night twelve years earlier:

"Joseph...do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." From that time onwards he knew that he was a guardian of the mystery of God, and it was precisely this mystery that the twelve-year-old Jesus brought to mind: "I must be in my Father's house."

The Support and Education of Jesus of Nazareth

16. The growth of Jesus "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Lk 2:52) took place within the Holy Family under the eyes of Joseph, who had the important task of "raising" Jesus, that is, feeding, clothing and educating him in the Law and in a trade, in keeping with the duties of a father.

In the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Church venerates the memory of Mary the ever Virgin Mother of God and the memory of St. Joseph, (29) because "he fed him whom the faithful must eat as the bread of eternal life." (30)

For his part, Jesus "was obedient to them" (Lk 2:51), respectfully returning the affection of his "parents." In this way he wished to sanctify the obligations of the family and of work, which he performed at the side of Joseph.

III - A JUST MAN A HUSBAND

17. In the course of that pilgrimage of faith which was his life, Joseph, like Mary, remained faithful to God's call until the end. While Mary's life was the bringing to fullness of that fiat first spoken at the Annunciation, at the moment of Joseph's own "annunciation" he said nothing; instead he simply "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (Mt 1:24). And this first "doing" became the beginning of "Joseph's way." The Gospels do not record any word ever spoken by Joseph along that way. But the silence of Joseph has its own special eloquence, for thanks to that silence we can understand the truth of the Gospel's judgment that he was "a just man" (Mt 1:19).

One must come to understand this truth, for it contains one of the most important testimonies concerning man and his vocation. Through many generations the Church has read this testimony with ever greater attention and with deeper understanding, drawing, as it were, "what is new and what is old" (Mt 13:52) from the storehouse of the noble figure of Joseph.

18. Above all, the "just" man of Nazareth possesses the clear characteristics of a husband. Luke refers to Mary as "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph" (Lk 1:27). Even before the "mystery hidden for ages" (Eph 3:9) began to be fulfilled, the Gospels set before us the image of husband and wife. According to Jewish custom, marriage took place in two stages: first, the legal, or true marriage was celebrated, and then, only after a certain period of time, the husband brought the wife into his own house. Thus, before he lived with Mary, Joseph was already her "husband." Mary, however, preserved her deep desire to give herself exclusively to God. One may well ask how this desire of Mary's could be reconciled with a "wedding." The answer can only come from the saving events as they unfold, from the special action of God himself. From the moment of the Annunciation, Mary knew that she was to fulfill her virginal desire to give herself exclusively and fully to God precisely by becoming the Mother of God's Son. Becoming a Mother by the power of the Holy Spirit was the form taken by her gift of self: a form which God himself expected of the Virgin Mary, who was "betrothed" to Joseph. Mary uttered her fiat. The fact that Mary was "betrothed" to Joseph was part of the very plan of God. This is pointed out by Luke and especially by Matthew. The words spoken to Joseph are very significant: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:20). These words explain the mystery of Joseph's wife: In her motherhood Mary is a virgin. In her, "the Son of the Most High" assumed a human body and became "the Son of Man."

Addressing Joseph through the words of the angel, God speaks to him as the husband of the Virgin of Nazareth. What took place in her through the power of the Holy Spirit also confirmed in a special way the marriage bond which already existed between Joseph and Mary. God's messenger was clear in what he said to Joseph: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife into your home." Hence, what had taken place earlier, namely, Joseph's marriage to Mary, happened in accord with God's will and was meant to endure. In her divine motherhood Mary had to continue to live as "a virgin, the wife of her husband" (cf. Lk 1:27).

19. In the words of the "annunciation" by night, Joseph not only heard the divine truth concerning his wife's indescribable vocation; he also heard once again the truth about his own vocation. This "just" man, who, in the spirit of the noblest traditions of the Chosen People, loved the Virgin of Nazareth and was bound to her by a husband's love, was once again called by God to this love.

"Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife" into his home (Mt 1:24); what was conceived in Mary was "of the Holy Spirit." From expressions such as these are we not to suppose that his love as a man was also given new birth by the Holy Spirit? Are we not to think that the love of God which has been poured forth into the human heart through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rm 5:5) molds every human love to perfection? This love of God also molds in a completely unique way—the love of husband and wife, deepening within it everything of human worth and beauty, everything that bespeaks an exclusive gift of self, a covenant between persons, and an authentic communion according to the model of the Blessed Trinity.

"Joseph...took his wife; but he knew her not, until she had borne a son" (Mt 1:24-25). These words indicate another kind of closeness in marriage. The deep spiritual closeness arising from marital union and the interpersonal contact

between man and woman have their definitive origin in the Spirit, the Giver of Life (cf. Jn 6:63). Joseph, in obedience to the Spirit, found in the Spirit the source of love, the conjugal love which he experienced as a man. And this love proved to be greater than this "just man" could ever have expected within the limits of his human heart.

20. In the Liturgy, Mary is celebrated as "united to Joseph, the just man, by a bond of marital and virginal love."(31) There are really two kinds of love here, both of which together represent the mystery of the Church - virgin and spouse - as symbolized in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. "Virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but presupposes and confirms it. Marriage and virginity are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the Covenant of God with his people."(32) the Covenant which is a communion of love between God and human beings.

Through his complete self-sacrifice, Joseph expressed his generous love for the Mother of God, and gave her a husband's "gift of self." Even though he decided to draw back so as not to interfere in the plan of God which was coming to pass in Mary, Joseph obeyed the explicit command of the angel and look Mary into his home, while respecting the fact that she belonged exclusively to God.

On the other hand, it was from his marriage to Mary that Joseph derived his singular dignity and his rights in regard to Jesus. "It is certain that the dignity of the Mother of God is so exalted that nothing could be more sublime; yet because Mary was united to Joseph by the bond of marriage, there can be no doubt but that Joseph approached as no other person ever could that eminent dignity whereby the Mother of God towers above all creatures. Since marriage is the highest degree of association and friendship involving by its very nature a communion of goods, it follows that God, by giving Joseph to the Virgin, did not give him to her only as a companion for life, a witness of her virginity and protector of her honor: he also gave Joseph to Mary in order that he might share, through the marriage pact, in her own sublime greatness."(33)

21. This bond of charity was the core of the Holy Family's life, first in the poverty of Bethlehem, then in their exile in Egypt, and later in the house of Nazareth. The Church deeply venerates this Family, and proposes it as the model of all families. Inserted directly in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Family of Nazareth has its own special mystery. And in this mystery, as in the Incarnation, one finds a true fatherhood: the human form of the family of the Son of God, a true human family, formed by the divine mystery. In this family, Joseph is the father: his fatherhood is not one that derives from begetting offspring; but neither is it an "apparent" or merely "substitute" fatherhood. Rather, it is one that fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family. This is a consequence of the hypostatic union: humanity taken up into the unity of the Divine Person of the Word-Son, Jesus Christ. Together with human nature, all that is human, and especially the family - as the first dimension of man's existence in the world - is also taken up in Christ. Within this context, Joseph's human fatherhood was also "taken up" in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation.

On the basis of this principle, the words which Mary spoke to the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple take on their full significance: "Your father and I...have been looking for you." This is no conventional phrase: Mary's words to Jesus show the complete reality of the Incarnation present in the mystery of the Family of Nazareth. From the beginning, Joseph accepted with the "obedience of faith" his human fatherhood over Jesus. And thus, following the light of the Holy Spirit who gives himself to human beings through faith, he certainly came to discover ever more fully the indescribable gift that was his human fatherhood.

IV - WORK AS AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE

22. Work was the daily expression of love in the life of the Family of Nazareth. The Gospel specifies the kind of work Joseph did in order to support his family: he was a carpenter. This simple word sums up Joseph's entire life. For Jesus, these were hidden years, the years to which Luke refers after recounting the episode that occurred in the Temple: "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (Lk 2:51). This "submission" or obedience of Jesus in the house of Nazareth should be understood as a sharing in the work of Joseph. Having learned the work of his presumed father, he was known as "the carpenter's son." If the Family of Nazareth is an example and model for human families, in the order of salvation and holiness, so too, by analogy, is Jesus' work at the side of Joseph the carpenter. In our own day, the Church has emphasized this by instituting the liturgical memorial of St. Joseph the Worker on May 1. Human work, and especially manual labor, receive special prominence in the Gospel. Along with the humanity of the Son of God, work too has been taken up in the mystery of the Incarnation, and has also been redeemed in a special way. At the workbench where he plied his trade together with Jesus, Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the Redemption.

23. In the human growth of Jesus "in wisdom, age and grace," the virtue of industriousness played a notable role, since "work is a human good" which "transforms nature" and makes man "in a sense, more human."(34)

The importance of work in human life demands that its meaning be known and assimilated in order to "help all people to come closer to God, the Creator and Redeemer, to participate in his salvific plan for man and the world, and to deepen...friendship with Christ in their lives, by accepting, through faith, a living participation in his threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King."(35)

24. What is crucially important here is the sanctification of daily life, a sanctification which each person must acquire according to his or her own state, and one which can be promoted according to a model accessible to all people: "St. Joseph is the model of those humble ones that Christianity raises up to great destinies;...he is the proof that in order to be a good and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need of great things-it is enough to have the common, simple and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic."(36)

V - THE PRIMACY OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

25. The same aura of silence that envelops everything else about Joseph also shrouds his work as a carpenter in the house of Nazareth. It is, however, a silence that reveals in a special way the inner portrait of the man. The Gospels speak exclusively of what Joseph "did." Still, they allow us to discover in his "actions" - shrouded in silence as they are - an aura of deep contemplation. Joseph was in daily contact with the mystery "hidden from ages past, " and which "dwelt" under his roof. This explains, for example, why St. Teresa of Jesus, the great reformer of the Carmelites, promoted the renewal of veneration to St. Joseph in Western Christianity.

26. The total sacrifice, whereby Joseph surrendered his whole existence to the demands of the Messiah's coming into his home, becomes understandable only in the light of his profound interior life. It was from this interior life that "very singular commands and consolations came, bringing him also the logic and strength that belong to simple and clear souls, and giving him the power of making great decisions-such as the decision to put his liberty immediately at the disposition of the divine designs, to make over to them also his legitimate human calling, his conjugal happiness, to accept the conditions, the responsibility and the burden of a family, but, through an incomparable virginal love, to renounce that natural conjugal love that is the foundation and nourishment of the family.(37)

This submission to God, this readiness of will to dedicate oneself to all that serves him, is really nothing less than that exercise of devotion which constitutes one expression of the virtue of religion.(38)

27. The communion of life between Joseph and Jesus leads us to consider once again the mystery of the Incarnation, precisely in reference to the humanity of Jesus as the efficacious instrument of his divinity for the purpose of sanctifying man: "By virtue of his divinity, Christ's human actions were salvific for us, causing grace within us, either by merit or by a certain efficacy."(39)

Among those actions, the gospel writers highlight those which have to do with the Paschal Mystery, but they also underscore the importance of physical contact with Jesus for healing (cf. for example, Mk 1:41), and the influence Jesus exercised upon John the Baptist when they were both in their mothers' wombs (cf. Lk 1:41-44).

As we have seen, the apostolic witness did not neglect the story of Jesus' birth, his circumcision, his presentation in the Temple, his flight into Egypt and his hidden life in Nazareth. It recognized the "mystery" of grace present in each of these saving "acts, " inasmuch as they all share the same source of love: the divinity of Christ. If through Christ's humanity this love shone on all mankind, the first beneficiaries were undoubtedly those whom the divine will had most intimately associated with itself: Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and Joseph, his presumed father.(40)

Why should the "fatherly" love of Joseph not have had an influence upon the "filial" love of Jesus? And vice versa why should the "filial" love of Jesus not have had an influence upon the "fatherly" love of Joseph, thus leading to a further deepening of their unique relationship? Those souls most sensitive to the impulses of divine love have rightly seen in Joseph a brilliant example of the interior life.

Furthermore, in Joseph, the apparent tension between the active and the contemplative life finds an ideal harmony that is only possible for those who possess the perfection of charity. Following St. Augustine's well-known distinction between the love of the truth (*caritas veritatis*) and the practical demands of love (*necessitas caritatis*), (41) we can say that Joseph experienced both love of the truth-that pure contemplative love of the divine Truth which radiated from the humanity of Christ-and the demands of love-that equally pure and selfless love required for his vocation to safeguard and develop the humanity of Jesus, which was inseparably linked to his divinity.

VI - PATRON OF THE CHURCH IN OUR DAY

28. At a difficult time in the Church's history, Pope Pius IX, wishing to place her under the powerful patronage of the holy patriarch Joseph, declared him "Patron of the Catholic Church."(42) For Pius IX this was no idle gesture, since by virtue of the sublime dignity which God has granted to his most faithful servant Joseph, "the Church, after the Blessed Virgin, his spouse, has always held him in great honor and showered him with praise, having recourse to him amid tribulations."(43)

What are the reasons for such great confidence? Leo XIII explained it in this way: "The reasons why St. Joseph must be considered the special patron of the Church, and the Church in turn draws exceeding hope from his care and patronage, chiefly arise from his having been the husband of Mary and the presumed father of Jesus...., Joseph was in his day the lawful and natural guardian, head and defender of the Holy Family.... It is thus fitting and most worthy of Joseph's dignity that, in the same way that he once kept unceasing holy watch over the family of Nazareth, so now does he protect and defend with his heavenly patronage the Church of Christ."(44)

29. This patronage must be invoked as ever necessary for the Church, not only as a defense against all dangers, but also, and indeed primarily, as an impetus for her renewed commitment to evangelization in the world and to re-evangelization in those lands and nations where-as I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* - "religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and...are now put to a hard test."(45) In order to bring the first proclamation of Christ, or to bring it anew wherever it has been neglected or forgotten, the Church has need of special "power from on high" (cf. Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8): a gift of the Spirit of the Lord, a gift which is not unrelated to the intercession and example of his saints.

30. Besides trusting in Joseph's sure protection, the Church also trusts in his noble example, which transcends all individual states of life and serves as a model for the entire Christian community, whatever the condition and duties of each of its members may be.

As the Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council has said, the basic attitude of the entire Church must be that of "hearing the word of God with reverence, "(46) an absolute readiness to serve faithfully God's salvific will revealed in Jesus. Already at the beginning of human redemption, after Mary, we find the model of obedience made incarnate in St. Joseph, the man known for having faithfully carried out God's commands.

Pope Paul VI invited us to invoke Joseph's patronage "as the Church has been wont to do in these recent times, for herself in the first place, with a spontaneous theological reflection on the marriage of divine and human action in the great economy of the Redemption, in which economy the first-the divine one-is wholly sufficient unto itself, while the second-the human action which is ours-though capable of nothing (cf. Jn 15:5), is never dispensed from a humble but conditional and ennobling collaboration. The Church also calls upon Joseph as her protector because of a profound and ever present desire to reinvigorate her ancient life with true evangelical virtues, such as shine forth in St. Joseph."(47)

31. The Church transforms these needs into prayer. Recalling that God wished to entrust the beginnings of our redemption to the faithful care of St. Joseph, she asks God to grant that she may faithfully cooperate in the work of salvation; that she may receive the same faithfulness and purity of heart that inspired Joseph in serving the Incarnate Word; and that she may walk before God in the ways of holiness and justice, following Joseph's example and through his intercession.(48)

One hundred years ago, Pope Leo XIII had already exhorted the Catholic world to pray for the protection of St. Joseph, Patron of the whole Church. The Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam Pluries* appealed to Joseph's "fatherly love...for the child Jesus" and commended to him, as "the provident guardian of the divine Family, " "the beloved inheritance which Jesus Christ purchased by his blood." Since that time-as I recalled at the beginning of this Exhortation-the Church has implored the protection of St. Joseph on the basis of "that sacred bond of charity which united him to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, " and the Church has commended to Joseph all of her cares, including those dangers which threaten the human family.

Even today we have many reasons to pray in a similar way: "Most beloved father, dispel the evil of falsehood and sin...graciously assist us from heaven in our struggle with the powers of darkness...and just as once you saved the Child Jesus from mortal danger, so now defend God's holy Church from the snares of her enemies and from all adversity."(49) Today we still have good reason to commend everyone to St. Joseph.

32. It is my heartfelt wish that these reflections on the person of St. Joseph will renew in us the prayerful devotion which my Predecessor called for a century ago. Our prayers and the very person of Joseph have renewed significance for the Church in our day in light of the Third Christian Millennium.

The Second Vatican Council made all of us sensitive once again to the "great things which God has done, " and to that "economy of salvation" of which St. Joseph was a special minister. Commending ourselves, then, to the protection of him to whose custody God "entrusted his greatest and most precious treasures, "(50) let us at the same time learn from him how to be servants of the "economy of salvation." May St. Joseph become for all of us an exceptional teacher in the service of Christ's saving mission, a mission which is the responsibility of each and every member of the Church: husbands and wives, parents, those who live by the work of their hands or by any other kind of work, those called to the contemplative life and those called to the apostolate.

This just man, who bore within himself the entire heritage of the Old Covenant, was also brought into the "beginning" of the New and Eternal Covenant in Jesus Christ. May he show us the paths of this saving Covenant as we stand at the threshold of the next millennium, in which there must be a continuation and further development of the "fullness of time" that belongs the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Word.

May St. Joseph obtain for the Church and for the world, as well as for each of us, the blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Given at Rome, in St. Peter's, on August 15 - the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary -in the year 1989, the eleventh of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

1. Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, IV, 23, 1: S. Ch. 100/2, pp. 692-694.
2. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, IX (1890), pp. 175-182.
3. Sacror. Rituum Congreg., Decr. *Quemadmodum Deus* (December 8, 1870): Pii IX P.M. Acta, pars I, vol. V, p. 282; Pius IX, Apostolic Letter *Inclitum Patriarcham* (July 7, 1871): loc. cit., pp. 331-335.
4. Cf. St. John Chrysostom, In Matth. Hom. V, 3: PG 57, 57f. The Fathers of the Church and the Popes, on the basis of their common name, also saw in Joseph of Egypt a prototype of Joseph of Nazareth, inasmuch as the former foreshadowed in some way the ministry and greatness of the latter, who was guardian of God the Father's most precious treasures—the Incarnate Word and his most holy Mother: cf., for example, St. Bernard, *Super "Missus est,"* Hom. II, 16: S. Bernardi Opera, Ed. Cist., IV, 33f.; Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., p. 179.
5. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 58.
6. Cf. *ibid.*, 63.
7. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 5.
8. *Ibid.*, 2.
9. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 63.
10. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 2.
11. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Decree *Novis hisce temporibus* (November 13, 1962): AAS 54 (1962), p. 873.
12. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 51, 10, 16: PL 38, 342.
13. St. Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, I, 11, 12: PL 44, 421; cf. *De consensu evangelistarum*, II, 1, 2: PL 34, 1071; *Contra Faustum*, III, 2: PL 42, 214.
14. St. Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, I, 11, 13: PL 44, 421; cf. *Contra Iulianum*, V, 12, 46: PL 44, 810.
15. Cf. St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, XXIII, 8: PL 42, 470f.; *De consensu evangelistarum*, II, 1, 3: PL 34, 1072; *Sermo*, 51, 13, 21: PL 38, 344f.; St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 29, a. 2 in conclus.
16. Cf. Discourses of January 9, 16, February 20, 1980: *Insegnamenti*, III/I (1980), pp. 88-92; 148-152; 428-431.
17. Paul VI, Discourse to the "Equipes Notre-Dame" Movement (May 4, 1970), n. 7: AAS 62 (1970), p. 431. Similar praise of the Family of Nazareth as a perfect example of domestic life can be found, for example, in Leo XIII, Apostolic Letter *Neminem fugit* (June 14, 1892); Leonis XIII P.M. Acta, XII (1892), p. 149f.; Benedict XV, *Motu Proprio Bonum sane* (July 25, 1920): AAS 12 (1920), pp. 313-317.
18. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 17: AAS 74 (1982), p. 100.
19. *Ibid.*, 49: loc. cit., p. 140; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Genhum*, 11; Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.
20. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 85: loc. cit., pp. 189f.
21. Cf. St. John Chrysostom, In Matth. Hom. V, 3: PG 57, 57f.
22. Paul VI, Discourse (March 19, 1966): *Insegnamenti*, IV (1966), p. 110.
23. Cf. Roman Missal, Collect for the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
24. Cf. *ibid.*, Preface for the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
25. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., p. 178.
26. Pius XII, Radio Message to Catholic School Students in the United States of America (February 19, 1958): AAS 50 (1958), p.174.
27. Origen, Hom. XIII in Lucam, 7: S. Ch. 87, pp 214f.
28. Origen, Hom. XI in Lucam, 6: S. Ch. 87, pp. 196f.
29. Cf. Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer I.
30. Sacror. Rituum Congreg., Decr. *Quemadmodum Deus* (December 8 1870): loc. cit., p. 282.
31. *Collectio Missarum de Beata Maria Virgine*, 1, "Sancta Maria de Nazareth," Praefatio. 32 Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 16:106. cit., p. 98.
33. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., pp. 177f.
34. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981), 9: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 599f.
35. *Ibid.*, 24: loc. cit., p. 638. The Popes in recent times have constantly presented St. Joseph as the "model" of workers and laborers; Cf., for example, Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., p. 180; Benedict XV, *Motu proprio Bonum sane* (July 25, 1920): loc. cit., pp. 314-316; Pius XII, Discourse (March 11, 1945), 4: AAS 37 (1945), p. 72; Discourse (May 1, 1955): AAS 47 (1955), p. 406; John XXIII, Radio Address (May 1, 1960): AAS 52 (1960), p. 398.
36. Paul VI, Discourse (March 19, 1969): *Insegnamenti*, VII (1969), p. 1268.
37. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., p. 1267.
38. Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.* II-IIae, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.
39. *Ibid.*, III, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1.
40. Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Haurietis aquas* (May 15, 1956), III: AAS 48 (1956), pp. 329f.
41. Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.* II-IIae, q. 182, a. 1, ad 3.
42. Cf. Sacror. Rituum Congreg., Decr. *Quemadmodum Deus* (December 8, 1870): loc. cit., p.283.
43. *Ibid.*: loc. cit., pp. 282f.

44. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889): loc. cit., pp. 177-179.
45. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidele Laici* (December 30, 1988), 34: AAS 81 (1989), p. 456.
46. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 1.
47. Paul VI, Discourse (March 19, 1969): *Insegnamenti*, VII (1969) p. 1269.
48. Cf. Roman Missal, Collect, Prayer over the Gifts for the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Prayer after Communion from the Votive Mass of St. Joseph.
49. Cf. Leo XIII, "Oratio ad Sanctum Iosephum, " contained immediately after the text of the Encyclical Epistle *Quamquam pluries* (August 15, 1889)-*Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, IX (1890), p. 183.
50. *Sacror Rituum Congreg.*, Decr. *Quemadmodum Deus* (December 8 1870): loc. cit., p. 282.

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**Post-Synodal
 Apostolic Exhortation
 Christifideles Laici
 Of
 His Holiness
 John Paul II
 On The Vocation And The Mission
 Of The Lay Faithful
 In The Church And In The World**

To Bishops To Priests and Deacons To Women and Men Religious and to All the Lay Faithful

INTRODUCTION

1. THE LAY MEMBERS of Christ's Faithful People (Christifideles Laici), whose "Vocation and Mission in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council" was the topic of the 1987 Synod of Bishops, are those who form that part of the People of God which might be likened to the labourers in the vineyard mentioned in Matthew's Gospel: "For the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard" (Mt 20:1-2).

The gospel parable sets before our eyes the Lord's vast vineyard and the multitude of persons, both women and men, who are called and sent forth by him to labour in it. The vineyard is the whole world (cf. Mt 13:38), which is to be transformed according to the plan of God in view of the final coming of the Kingdom of God.

You Go Into My Vineyard Too

2. "And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too'" (Mt 20:3-4).

From that distant day the call of the Lord Jesus "You go into my vineyard too" never fails to resound in the course of history: it is addressed to every person who comes into this world.

In our times, the Church after Vatican II in a renewed outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost has come to a more lively awareness of her missionary nature and has listened again to the voice of her Lord who sends her forth into the world as "the universal sacrament of salvation"(1).

You go too. The call is a concern not only of Pastors, clergy, and men and women religious. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world. In preaching to the people Saint Gregory the Great recalls this fact and comments on the parable of the labourers in the vineyard: "Keep watch over your manner of life, dear people, and make sure that you are indeed the Lord's labourers. Each person should take into account what he does and consider if he is labouring in the vineyard of the Lord"(2).

The Council, in particular, with its rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral patrimony, has written as never before on the nature, dignity, spirituality, mission and responsibility of the lay faithful. And the Council Fathers, re-echoing the call of Christ, have summoned all the lay faithful, both women and men, to labour in the vineyard: "The Council, then, makes an earnest plea in the Lord's name that all lay people give a glad, generous, and prompt response to the impulse of the Holy Spirit and to the voice of Christ, who is giving them an especially urgent invitation at this moment. Young people should feel that this call is directed to them in particular, and they should respond to it eagerly and magnanimously. The Lord himself renews his invitation to all the lay faithful to come closer to him every day, and with the recognition that what is his is also their own (Phil 2:5) they ought to associate themselves with him in his saving mission. Once again he sends them into every town and place where he himself is to come (cf. Lk 10:1)"(3).

You go into my vineyard too. During the Synod of Bishops, held in Rome, 1-30 October 1987, these words were re-echoed in spirit once again. Following the path marked out by the Council and remaining open to the light of the experience of persons and communities from the whole Church, the Fathers, enriched by preceding Synods, treated in a specific and extensive manner the topic of the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world.

In this assembly of bishops there was not lacking a qualified representation of the lay faithful, both women and men, which rendered a valuable contribution to the Synod proceedings. This was publicly acknowledged in the concluding homily: "We give thanks that during the course of the Synod we have not only rejoiced in the participation of the lay faithful (both men and women auditors), but even more so in that the progress of the Synodal discussions has enabled us to listen to those whom we invited, representatives of the lay faithful from all parts of the world, from different

countries, and to profit from their experience, their advice and the suggestions they have offered out of love for the common cause"(4).

In looking over the years following the Council the Synod Fathers have been able to verify how the Holy Spirit continues to renew the youth of the Church and how he has inspired new aspirations towards holiness and the participation of so many lay faithful. This is witnessed, among other ways, in the new manner of active collaboration among priests, religious and the lay faithful; the active participation in the Liturgy, in the proclamation of the Word of God and catechesis; the multiplicity of services and tasks entrusted to the lay faithful and fulfilled by them; the flourishing of groups, associations and spiritual movements as well as a lay commitment in the life of the Church; and in the fuller and meaningful participation of women in the development of society.

At the same time, the Synod has pointed out that the post-conciliar path of the lay faithful has not been without its difficulties and dangers. In particular, two temptations can be cited which they have not always known how to avoid: the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel's acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world.

In the course of its work, the Synod made constant reference to the Second Vatican Council, whose teaching on the lay faithful, after twenty years, has taken on a surprisingly contemporary character and at times has carried prophetic significance: such teaching has the capacity of enlightening and guiding the responses that today must be given to new situations. In reality, the challenge embraced by the Synod Fathers has been that of indicating the concrete ways through which this rich "theory" on the lay state expressed by the Council can be translated into authentic Church "practice". Some situations have made themselves felt because of a certain "novelty" that they have, and in this sense they can be called post-conciliar, at least chronologically: to these the Synod Fathers have rightly given a particular attention in the course of their discussion and reflection. Among those situations to be recalled are those regarding the ministries and Church services entrusted at present and in the future to the lay faithful, the growth and spread of new "movements" alongside other group forms of lay involvement, and the place and role of women both in the Church and in society.

At the conclusion of their work, which proceeded with great commitment, competence and generosity, the Synod Fathers made known to me their desires and requested that at an opportune time, a conclusive papal document on the topic of the lay faithful be offered to the Universal Church(5).

This Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation intends to take into account all the richness of the Synod work, from the Lineamenta to the Instrumentum Laboris, from the introductory report, the presentations of individual bishops and lay persons to the summary reports after discussion in the Synod hall, from the discussions and reports of the "small groups" to the final "Propositions" and the concluding "Message". For this reason the present document is not something in contradistinction to the Synod, but is meant to be a faithful and coherent expression of it, a fruit of collegiality. As such, the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and the Secretariat itself have contributed to its final form.

This Exhortation intends to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share, both as a group and as individuals, in the communion and mission of the Church.

The Pressing Needs of the World Today: "Why do you stand here idle all day?"

3. The basic meaning of this Synod and the most precious fruit desired as a result of it, is the lay faithful's hearkening to the call of Christ the Lord to work in his vineyard, to take an active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church in this great moment in history, made especially dramatic by occurring on the threshold of the Third Millennium.

A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle.

We continue in our reading of the gospel parable: "And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?'. They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us'. He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too'" (Mt 20:6-7).

Since the work that awaits everyone in the vineyard of the Lord is so great there is no place for idleness. With even greater urgency the "householder" repeats his invitation: "You go into my vineyard too".

The voice of the Lord clearly resounds in the depths of each of Christ's followers, who through faith and the sacraments of Christian initiation is made like to Jesus Christ, is incorporated as a living member in the Church and has an active part in her mission of salvation. The voice of the Lord also comes to be heard through the historic events of the Church and humanity, as the Council reminds us: "The People of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the whole world. Moved by this faith it tries to discern authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the events, the needs, and the longings which it shares with other people of our time. For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal to which God has called each individual, and thus guides the mind towards solutions which are fully human"(6).

It is necessary, then, to keep a watchful eye on this our world, with its problems and values, its unrest and hopes, its defeats and triumphs: a world whose economic, social, political and cultural affairs pose problems and grave difficulties in light of the description provided by the Council in the Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*.⁽⁷⁾ This, then, is the vineyard; this is the field in which the faithful are called to fulfill their mission. Jesus wants them, as he wants all his disciples, to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (cf. Mt 5:13-14). But what is the actual state of affairs of the "earth" and the "world", for which Christians ought to be "salt" and "light"?

The variety of situations and problems that exist in our world is indeed great and rapidly changing. For this reason it is all the more necessary to guard against generalizations and unwarranted simplifications. It is possible, however, to highlight some trends that are emerging in present-day society. The gospel records that the weeds and the good grain grew together in the farmer's field. The same is true in history, where in everyday life there often exist contradictions in the exercise of human freedom, where there is found, side by side and at times closely intertwined, evil and good, injustice and justice, anguish and hope.

Secularism and the Need for Religion

4. How can one not notice the ever-growing existence of religious indifference and atheism in its more varied forms, particularly in its perhaps most widespread form of secularism? Adversely affected by the impressive triumphs of continuing scientific and technological development and above all, fascinated by a very old and yet new temptation, namely, that of wishing to become like God (cf. Gen 3:5) through the use of a liberty without bounds, individuals cut the religious roots that are in their hearts; they forget God, or simply retain him without meaning in their lives, or outrightly reject him, and begin to adore various "idols" of the contemporary world.

The present-day phenomenon of secularism is truly serious, not simply as regards the individual, but in some ways, as regards whole communities, as the Council has already indicated: "Growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice"⁽⁸⁾. At other times I myself have recalled the phenomenon of de-Christianization that strikes long-standing Christian people and which continually calls for a re-evangelization.

Human longing and the need for religion, however, are not able to be totally extinguished. When persons in conscience have the courage to face the more serious questions of human existence—particularly questions related to the purpose of life, to suffering and to dying—they are unable to avoid making their own the words of truth uttered by Saint Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you"⁽⁹⁾. In the same manner the present-day world bears witness to this as well, in ever-increasing and impressive ways, through an openness to a spiritual and transcendent outlook towards life, the renewed interest in religious research, the return to a sense of the sacred and to prayer, and the demand for freedom to call upon the name of the Lord.

The Human Person: A Dignity Violated and Exalted

5. We furthermore call to mind the violations to which the human person is subjected. When the individual is not recognized and loved in the person's dignity as the living image of God (cf. Gen 1:26), the human being is exposed to more humiliating and degrading forms of "manipulation", that most assuredly reduce the individual to a slavery to those who are stronger. "Those who are stronger" can take a variety of names: an ideology; economic power, political and inhumane systems, scientific technocracy or the intrusiveness of the mass-media. Once again we find ourselves before many persons, our sisters and brothers, whose fundamental rights are being violated, owing to their exceedingly great capacity for endurance and to the clear injustice of certain civil laws: the right to life and to integrity, the right to a house and to work, the right to a family and responsible parenthood, the right to participation in public and political life, the right to freedom of conscience and the practice of religion.

Who is able to count the number of babies unborn because they have been killed in their mothers' wombs, children abandoned and abused by their own parents, children who grow without affection and education? In some countries entire populations are deprived of housing and work, lacking the means absolutely essential for leading a life worthy of a human being, and are deprived even of those things necessary for their sustenance. There are great areas of poverty and of misery, both physical and moral, existing at this moment on the periphery of great cities. Entire groups of human beings have been seriously afflicted.

But the sacredness of the human person cannot be obliterated, no matter how often it is devalued and violated because it has its unshakable foundation in God as Creator and Father. The sacredness of the person always keeps returning, again and again.

The sense of the dignity of the human person must be pondered and reaffirmed in stronger terms. A beneficial trend is advancing and permeating all peoples of the earth, making them ever more aware of the dignity of the individual: the person is not at all a "thing" or an "object" to be used, but primarily a responsible "subject", one endowed with conscience and freedom, called to live responsibly in society and history, and oriented towards spiritual and religious values.

It has been said that ours is the time of "humanism": paradoxically, some of its atheistic and secularistic forms arrive at a point where the human person is diminished and annihilated; other forms of humanism, instead, exalt the individual

in such a manner that these forms become a veritable and real idolatry. There are still other forms, however, in line with the truth, which rightly acknowledge the greatness and misery of individuals and manifest, sustain and foster the total dignity of the human person.

The sign and fruit of this trend towards humanism is the growing need for participation, which is undoubtedly one of the distinctive features of present-day humanity, a true "sign of the times" that is developing in various fields and in different ways: above all the growing need for participation regarding women and young people, not only in areas of family and academic life, but also in cultural, economic, social and political areas. To be leading characters in this development, in some ways to be creators of a new, more humane culture, is a requirement both for the individual and for peoples as a whole(10).

Conflict and Peace

6. Finally, we are unable to overlook another phenomenon that is quite evident in present-day humanity: perhaps as never before in history, humanity is daily buffeted by conflict. This is a phenomenon which has many forms, displayed in a legitimate plurality of mentalities and initiatives, but manifested in the fatal opposition of persons, groups, categories, nations and blocks of nations. This opposition takes the form of violence, of terrorism, and of war. Once again, but with proportions enormously widespread, diverse sectors of humanity today, wishing to show their "omnipotence", renew the futile experience of constructing the "Tower of Babel" (cf. Gen 11:1-9), which spreads confusion, struggle, disintegration and oppression. The human family is thus in itself dramatically convulsed and wounded.

On the other hand, totally unexpressible is that human longing experienced by individuals and whole peoples for the inestimable good of peace in justice. The gospel beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9) finds in the people of our time a new and significant resonance: entire populations today live, suffer and labour to bring about peace and justice. The participation by so many persons and groups in the life of society is increasingly pursued today as the way to make a desired peace become a reality.

On this road we meet many lay faithful generously committed to the social and political field, working in a variety of institutional forms and those of a voluntary nature in service to the least.

Jesus Christ, the Hope of Humanity

7. This, then, is the vast field of labour that stands before the labourers sent forth by the "householder" to work in his vineyard.

In this field the Church is present and working, every one of us, Pastors, priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful. The adverse situations here mentioned deeply affect the Church: they in part condition the Church, but they do not crush her, nor even less overcome her, because the Holy Spirit, who gives her life, sustains her in her mission.

Despite every difficulty, delay and contradiction caused by the limits of human nature, by sin and by the Evil One, the Church knows that all the forces that humanity employs for communion and participation find a full response in the intervention of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man and of the world.

The Church knows that she is sent forth by him as "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all the human race"(11).

Despite all this, then, humanity is able to hope. Indeed it must hope: the living and personal Gospel, Jesus Christ himself, is the "good news" and the bearer of joy that the Church announces each day, and to whom the Church bears testimony before all people.

The lay faithful have an essential and irreplaceable role in this announcement and in this testimony: through them the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the world, as a sign and source of hope and of love.

CHAPTER I

I AM THE VINE AND YOU ARE THE BRANCHES

The Dignity of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mystery

The Mystery of the Vine

8. The Sacred Scriptures use the image of the vine in various ways. In a particular case, the vine serves to express the Mystery of the People of God. From this perspective which emphasizes the Church's internal nature, the lay faithful are seen not simply as labourers who work in the vineyard, but as themselves being a part of the vineyard. Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15:5).

The prophets in the Old Testament used the image of the vine to describe the chosen people. Israel is God's vine, the Lord's own work, the joy of his heart: "I have planted you a choice vine" (Jer 2:21); "Your mother was like a vine in a

vineyard transplanted by the water, fruitful and full of branches by reason of abundant water" (Ez 19:10); "My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines..."(Is 5:1-2).

Jesus himself once again takes up the symbol of the vine and uses it to illustrate various aspects of the Kingdom of God: "A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a pit for the winepress, and built a tower and let it out to tenants and went into another country" (Mk 12:1; cf. Mt 21:28 ff.).

John the Evangelist invites us to go further and leads us to discover the mystery of the vine: it is the figure and symbol not only of the People of God, but of Jesus himself. He is the vine and we, his disciples, are the branches. He is the "true vine", to which the branches are grafted to have life (cf. Jn 15:1 ff.).

The Second Vatican Council, making reference to the various biblical images that help to reveal the mystery of the Church, proposes again the image of the vine and the branches: "Christ is the true vine who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us. Through the Church we abide in Christ, without whom we can do nothing (Jn 15:1-5)"(12). The Church herself, then, is the vine in the gospel. She is mystery because the very life and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the gift gratuitously offered to all those who are born of water and the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5), and called to relive the very communion of God and to manifest it and communicate it in history (mission): "In that day", Jesus says, "you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:20).

Only from inside the Church's mystery of communion is the "identity" of the lay faithful made known, and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world be defined.

Who are the Lay Faithful

9. The Synod Fathers have rightly pointed to the need for a definition of the lay faithful's vocation and mission in positive terms, through an in-depth study of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council in light of both recent documentation from the Magisterium and the lived experience of the Church, guided as she is by the Holy Spirit(13).

In giving a response to the question "Who are the lay faithful", the Council went beyond previous interpretations which were predominantly negative. Instead it opened itself to a decidedly positive vision and displayed a basic intention of asserting the full belonging of the lay faithful to the Church and to its mystery.

At the same time it insisted on the unique character of their vocation, which is in a special way to "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God"(14). "The term 'lay faithful' -we read in the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*- is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state sanctioned by the Church. Through Baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world"(15).

Pius XII once stated: "The Faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the front lines of the Church's life; for them the Church is the animating principle for human society. Therefore, they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the head of all, and of the Bishops in communion with him. These are the Church..."(16).

According to the Biblical image of the vineyard, the lay faithful, together with all the other members of the Church, are branches grafted to Christ the true vine, and from him derive their life and fruitfulness.

Incorporation into Christ through faith and Baptism is the source of being a Christian in the mystery of the Church. This mystery constitutes the Christian's most basic "features" and serves as the basis for all the vocations and dynamism of the Christian life of the lay faithful (cf. Jn 3:5). In Christ who died and rose from the dead, the baptized become a "new creation" (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17), washed clean from sin and brought to life through grace.

Therefore, only through accepting the richness in mystery that God gives to the Christian in Baptism is it possible to come to a basic description of the lay faithful.

Baptism and the "Newness" of Christian Life

10. It is no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God. In arriving at a basic description of the lay faithful we now more explicitly and directly consider among others the following three fundamental aspects: Baptism regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; and anoints us in the Holy Spirit, making us spiritual temples.

Children in the Son

11. We here recall Jesus' words to Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). Baptism, then, is a rebirth, a regeneration.

In considering this aspect of the gift which comes from Baptism, the apostle Peter breaks out into song: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading" (1 Pt 1:3-4). And he calls Christians those who have been "born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pt 1:23).

With Baptism we become children of God in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Rising from the waters of the Baptismal font, every Christian hears again the voice that was once heard on the banks of the Jordan River: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Lk 3:22). From this comes the understanding that one has been brought into association with the beloved Son, becoming a child of adoption (cf. Gal 4:4-7) and a brother or sister of Christ. In this way the eternal plan of the Father for each person is realized in history: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren" (Rom 8:29).

It is the Holy Spirit who constitutes the baptized as Children of God and members of Christ's Body. St. Paul reminds the Christians of Corinth of this fact: "For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13), so that the apostle can say to the lay faithful: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27); "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal 4:6; cf. Rom 8:15-16).

We Are One Body in Christ

12. Regenerated as "Children in the Son", the baptized are inseparably joined together as "members of Christ and members of the body of the Church", as the Council of Florence teaches(17).

Baptism symbolizes and brings about a mystical but real incorporation into the crucified and glorious body of Christ. Through the sacrament Jesus unites the baptized to his death so as to unite the recipient to his resurrection (cf. Rom 6:3-5). The "old man" is stripped away for a reclothing with "the new man", that is, with Jesus himself: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27; cf. Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). The result is that "we, though many, are one body in Christ" (Rom 12:5).

In the words of Saint Paul we find again the faithful echo of the teaching of Jesus himself, which reveals the mystical unity of Christ with his disciples and the disciples with each other, presenting it as an image and extension of that mystical communion that binds the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father in the bond of love, the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 17:21). Jesus refers to this same unity in the image of the vine and the branches: "I am the vine, you the branches" (Jn 15:5), an image that sheds light not only on the deep intimacy of the disciples with Jesus but on the necessity of a vital communion of the disciples with each other: all are branches of a single vine.

Holy and Living Temples of the Spirit

13. In another comparison, using the image of a building, the apostle Peter defines the baptized as "living stones" founded on Christ, the "corner stone", and destined to "be raised up into a spiritual building" (1 Pt 2:5 ff.). The image introduces us to another aspect of the newness of Christian life coming from Baptism and described by the Second Vatican Council: "By regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the baptized are consecrated into a spiritual house"(18).

The Holy Spirit "anoints" the baptized, sealing each with an indelible character (cf. 2 Cor 1:21-22), and constituting each as a spiritual temple, that is, he fills this temple with the holy presence of God as a result of each person's being united and likened to Jesus Christ.

With this spiritual "unction", Christians can repeat in an individual way the words of Jesus: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19; cf. Is 61:1-2). Thus with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation, the baptized share in the same mission of Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour-Messiah.

Sharers in the Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly Mission of Jesus Christ

14. Referring to the baptized as "new born babes", the apostle Peter writes: "Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pt 2:4-5, 9).

A new aspect to the grace and dignity coming from Baptism is here introduced: the lay faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. This aspect has never been forgotten in the living tradition of the Church, as exemplified in the explanation which St. Augustine offers for Psalm 26: "David was anointed king. In those days only a king and a priest were anointed. These two persons prefigured the one and only priest and

king who was to come, Christ (the name "Christ" means "anointed"). Not only has our head been anointed but we, his body, have also been anointed... therefore anointing comes to all Christians, even though in Old Testament times it belonged only to two persons. Clearly we are the Body of Christ because we are all "anointed" and in him are "Christs", that is, "anointed ones", as well as Christ himself, "The Anointed One". In a certain way, then, it thus happens that with head and body the whole Christ is formed"(19).

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council(20), at the beginning of my pastoral ministry, my aim was to emphasize forcefully the priestly, prophetic and kingly dignity of the entire People of God in the following words: "He who was born of the Virgin Mary, the carpenter's Son -as he was thought to be-Son of the living God (confessed by Peter), has come to make us 'a kingdom of priests' The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of the mystery of this power and of the fact that the mission of Christ -Priest, Prophet-Teacher, King-continues in the Church. Everyone, the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission"(21).

With this Exhortation the lay faithful are invited to take up again and reread, meditate on and assimilate with renewed understanding and love, the rich and fruitful teaching of the Council which speaks of their participation in the threefold mission of Christ(22). Here in summary form are the essential elements of this teaching.

The lay faithful are sharers in the priestly mission, for which Jesus offered himself on the cross and continues to be offered in the celebration of the Eucharist for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. Incorporated in Jesus Christ, the baptized are united to him and to his sacrifice in the offering they make of themselves and their daily activities (cf. Rom 12:1, 2). Speaking of the lay faithful the Council says: "For their work, prayers and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labour, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life if patiently borne-all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Pt 2:5). During the celebration of the Eucharist these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. Thus as worshipers whose every deed is holy, the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God"(23).

Through their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, "who proclaimed the kingdom of his Father by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word"(24), the lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deed, without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil. United to Christ, the "great prophet" (Lk 7:16), and in the Spirit made "witnesses" of the Risen Christ, the lay faithful are made sharers in the appreciation of the Church's supernatural faith, that "cannot err in matters of belief"(25) and sharers as well in the grace of the word (cf. Acts 2:17-18; Rev 19:10). They are also called to allow the newness and the power of the gospel to shine out everyday in their family and social life, as well as to express patiently and courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory even "through the framework of their secular life"(26).

Because the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the Universe, they share in his kingly mission and are called by him to spread that Kingdom in history. They exercise their kingship as Christians, above all in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin (cf. Rom 6:12), and then to make a gift of themselves so as to serve, in justice and in charity, Jesus who is himself present in all his brothers and sisters, above all in the very least (cf. Mt 25:40).

But in particular the lay faithful are called to restore to creation all its original value. In ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace, they share in the exercise of the power with which the Risen Christ draws all things to himself and subjects them along with himself to the Father, so that God might be everything to everyone (cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Jn 12:32).

The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist. It is a participation given to each member of the lay faithful individually, in as much as each is one of the many who form the one Body of the Lord: in fact, Jesus showers his gifts upon the Church which is his Body and his Spouse. In such a way individuals are sharers in the threefold mission of Christ in virtue of their being members of the Church, as St. Peter clearly teaches, when he defines the baptized as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pt 2:9). Precisely because it derives from Church communion, the sharing of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ requires that it be lived and realized in communion and for the increase of communion itself. Saint Augustine writes: "As we call everyone 'Christians' in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone 'priests' because all are members of only one priesthood"(27).

The Lay Faithful and Their Secular Character

15. The newness of the Christian life is the foundation and title for equality among all the baptized in Christ, for all the members of the People of God: "As members, they share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ, they have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity"(28). Because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers and men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the Church's mission.

But among the lay faithful this one baptismal dignity takes on a manner of life which sets a person apart, without, however, bringing about a separation from the ministerial priesthood or from men and women religious. The Second Vatican Council has described this manner of life as the "secular character": "The secular character is properly and particularly that of the lay faithful"(29).

To understand properly the lay faithful's position in the Church in a complete, adequate and specific manner it is necessary to come to a deeper theological understanding of their secular character in light of God's plan of salvation and in the context of the mystery of the Church.

Pope Paul VI said the Church "has an authentic secular dimension, inherent to her inner nature and mission, which is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Word Incarnate, and which is realized in different forms through her members"(30). The Church, in fact, lives in the world, even if she is not of the world (cf. Jn 17:16). She is sent to continue the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, which "by its very nature concerns the salvation of humanity, and also involves the renewal of the whole temporal order"(31).

Certainly all the members of the Church are sharers in this secular dimension but in different ways. In particular the sharing of the lay faithful has its own manner of realization and function, which, according to the Council, is "properly and particularly" theirs. Such a manner is designated with the expression "secular character"(32).

In fact the Council, in describing the lay faithful's situation in the secular world, points to it above all, as the place in which they receive their call from God: "There they are called by God"(33). This "place" is treated and presented in dynamic terms: the lay faithful "live in the world, that is, in every one of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very fabric of their existence is woven"(34). They are persons who live an ordinary life in the world: they study, they work, they form relationships as friends, professionals, members of society, cultures, etc. However, the Council considers their condition not simply an external and environmental framework, but as a reality destined to find in Jesus Christ the fullness of its meaning(35). Indeed it leads to the affirmation that "the Word made flesh willed to share in human fellowship... He sanctified those human ties, especially family ones, from which social relationships arise, willingly submitting himself to the laws of his country. He chose to lead the life of an ordinary craftsman of his own time and place"(36).

The "world" thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ. The Council is able then to indicate the proper and special sense of the divine vocation which is directed to the lay faithful. They are not called to abandon the position that they have in the world. Baptism does not take them from the world at all, as the apostle Paul points out: "So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God" (1 Cor 7:24). On the contrary, he entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world. The lay faithful, in fact, "are called by God so that they, led by the spirit of the Gospel, might contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially in this way of life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they manifest Christ to others"(37). Thus for the lay faithful, to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well. In fact, in their situation in the world God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of "seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God"(38).

Precisely with this in mind the Synod Fathers said: "The secular character of the lay faithful is not therefore to be defined only in a sociological sense, but most especially in a theological sense. The term secular must be understood in light of the act of God the creator and redeemer, who has handed over the world to women and men, so that they may participate in the work of creation, free creation from the influence of sin and sanctify themselves in marriage or the celibate life, in a family, in a profession and in the various activities of society"(39).

The lay faithful's position in the Church, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character(40).

The images taken from the gospel of salt, light and leaven, although indiscriminately applicable to all Jesus' disciples, are specifically applied to the lay faithful. They are particularly meaningful images because they speak not only of the deep involvement and the full participation of the lay faithful in the affairs of the earth, the world and the human community, but also and above all, they tell of the radical newness and unique character of an involvement and participation which has as its purpose the spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation.

Called to Holiness

16. We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council has significantly spoken on the universal call to holiness. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church by a Council which intended to bring a renewal of Christian life based on the gospel(41). This charge is not a simple moral exhortation, but an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church: she is the choice vine, whose branches live and grow with the same holy and life-giving energies that come from Christ; she is the Mystical Body, whose members

share in the same life of holiness of the Head who is Christ; she is the Beloved Spouse of the Lord Jesus, who delivered himself up for her sanctification (cf. Eph 5:25 ff.). The Spirit that sanctified the human nature of Jesus in Mary's virginal womb (cf. Lk 1:35) is the same Spirit that is abiding and working in the Church to communicate to her the holiness of the Son of God made man.

It is ever more urgent that today all Christians take up again the way of gospel renewal, welcoming in a spirit of generosity the invitation expressed by the apostle Peter "to be holy in all conduct" (1 Pt 1:15). The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, twenty years after the Council, opportunely insisted on this urgency: "Since the Church in Christ is a mystery, she ought to be considered the sign and instrument of holiness... Men and women saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult circumstances in the Church's history. Today we have the greatest need of saints whom we must assiduously beg God to raise up"(42).

Everyone in the Church, precisely because they are members, receive and thereby share in the common vocation to holiness. In the fullness of this title and on equal par with all other members of the Church, the lay faithful are called to holiness: "All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity"(43). "All of Christ's followers are invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their own state of life"(44).

The call to holiness is rooted in Baptism and proposed anew in the other Sacraments, principally in the Eucharist. Since Christians are reclothed in Christ Jesus and refreshed by his Spirit, they are "holy". They therefore have the ability to manifest this holiness and the responsibility to bear witness to it in all that they do. The apostle Paul never tires of admonishing all Christians to live "as is fitting among saints" (Eph 5:3).

Life according to the Spirit, whose fruit is holiness (cf. Rom 6:22;Gal 5:22), stirs up every baptized person and requires each to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, in embracing the Beatitudes, in listening and meditating on the Word of God, in conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, in personal prayer, in family or in community, in the hunger and thirst for justice, in the practice of the commandment of love in all circumstances of life and service to the brethren, especially the least, the poor and the suffering.

The Life of Holiness in the World

17. The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities. Once again the apostle admonishes us: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17). Applying the apostle's words to the lay faithful, the Council categorically affirms: "Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be excluded from their religious programme of life"(45). Likewise the Synod Fathers have said: "The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ"(46).

The vocation to holiness must be recognized and lived by the lay faithful, first of all as an undeniable and demanding obligation and as a shining example of the infinite love of the Father that has regenerated them in his own life of holiness. Such a vocation, then, ought to be called an essential and inseparable element of the new life of Baptism, and therefore an element which determines their dignity. At the same time the vocation to holiness is intimately connected to mission and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the Church and in the world. In fact, that same holiness which is derived simply from their participation in the Church's holiness, represents their first and fundamental contribution to the building of the Church herself, who is the "Communion of Saints". The eyes of faith behold a wonderful scene: that of a countless number of lay people, both women and men, busy at work in their daily life and activity, oftentimes far from view and quite unacclaimed by the world, unknown to the world's great personages but nonetheless looked upon in love by the Father, untiring labourers who work in the Lord's vineyard. Confident and steadfast through the power of God's grace, these are the humble yet great builders of the Kingdom of God in history.

Holiness, then, must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation within the Church. The Church's holiness is the hidden source and the infallible measure of the works of the apostolate and of the missionary effort. Only in the measure that the Church, Christ's Spouse, is loved by him and she, in turn, loves him, does she become a mother fruitful in the Spirit.

Again we take up the image from the gospel: the fruitfulness and the growth of the branches depends on their remaining united to the vine. "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:4-5).

It is appropriate to recall here the solemn proclamation of beatification and canonization of lay men and women which took place during the month of the Synod. The entire People of God, and the lay faithful in particular, can find at this moment new models of holiness and new witnesses of heroic virtue lived in the ordinary everyday circumstances of human existence. The Synod Fathers have said: "Particular Churches especially should be attentive to recognizing among their members the younger men and women of those Churches who have given witness to holiness in such

conditions (everyday secular conditions and the conjugal state) and who can be an example for others, so that, if the case calls for it, they (the Churches) might propose them to be beatified and canonized"(47).

At the end of these reflections intended to define the lay faithful's position in the Church, the celebrated admonition of Saint Leo the Great comes to mind: "Acknowledge, O Christian, your dignity!"(48). Saint Maximus, Bishop of Turin, in addressing those who had received the holy anointing of Baptism, repeats the same sentiments: "Ponder the honor that has made you sharers in this mystery!"(49). All the baptized are invited to hear once again the words of Saint Augustine: "Let us rejoice and give thanks: we have not only become Christians, but Christ himself... Stand in awe and rejoice: We have become Christ"(50).

The dignity as a Christian, the source of equality for all members of the Church, guarantees and fosters the spirit of communion and fellowship, and, at the same time, becomes the hidden dynamic force in the lay faithful's apostolate and mission. It is a dignity, however, which brings demands, the dignity of labourers called by the Lord to work in his vineyard: "Upon all the lay faithful, then, rests the exalted duty of working to assure that each day the divine plan of salvation is further extended to every person, of every era, in every part of the earth"(51).

CHAPTER II

ALL BRANCHES OF A SINGLE VINE

The Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Life of Church as Communion

The Mystery of Church Communion

18. Again we turn to the words of Jesus: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser... Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15: 1, 4).

These simple words reveal the mystery of communion that serves as the unifying bond between the Lord and his disciples, between Christ and the baptized: a living and life-giving communion through which Christians no longer belong to themselves but are the Lord's very own, as the branches are one with the vine.

The communion of Christians with Jesus has the communion of God as Trinity, namely, the unity of the Son to the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit, as its model and source, and is itself the means to achieve this communion: united to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father.

Jesus continues: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15: 5). From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another: all are branches of a single vine, namely, Christ. In this communion is the wonderful reflection and participation in the mystery of the intimate life of love in God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed by the Lord Jesus. For this communion Jesus prays: "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17: 21).

Such communion is the very mystery of the Church, as the Second Vatican Council recalls in the celebrated words of Saint Cyprian: "The Church shines forth as 'a people made one with the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'"(52). We are accustomed to recall this mystery of Church communion at the beginning of the celebration of the Eucharist, when the priest welcomes all with the greeting of the Apostle Paul: "The grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:13).

After having described the distinguishing features of the lay faithful on which their dignity rests, we must at this moment reflect on their mission and responsibility in the Church and in the world. A proper understanding of these aspects, however, can be found only in the living context of the Church as communion.

Vatican II and the Ecclesiology of Communion

19. At the Second Vatican Council the Church again proposed this central idea about herself, as the 1985 Extraordinary Synod recalls: "The ecclesiology of communion is a central and fundamental concept in the conciliar documents. *Koinonia*-communion, finding its source in Sacred Scripture, was a concept held in great honour in the early Church and in the Oriental Churches, and this teaching endures to the present day. Much was done by the Second Vatican Council to bring about a clearer understanding of the Church as communion and its concrete application to life. What, then, does this complex word 'communion' mean? Its fundamental meaning speaks of the union with God brought about by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. The opportunity for such communion is present in the Word of God and in the Sacraments. Baptism is the door and the foundation of communion in the Church. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11). The Body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist sacramentalizes this communion, that is, it is a sign and actually brings about the intimate bonds of communion among all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Cor 10:16)"(53).

On the day after the conclusion of the Council Pope Paul VI addressed the faithful in the following words: "The Church is a communion. In this context what does communion mean? We refer you to the paragraph in the Catechism that speaks of the *sanctorum communionem*, 'the Communion of Saints'. The meaning of the Church is a communion of

saints. 'Communion' speaks of a double, lifegiving participation: the incorporation of Christians into the life of Christ, and the communication of that life of charity to the entire body of the Faithful, in this world and in the next, union with Christ and in Christ, and union among Christians, in the Church"(54).

Vatican Council II has invited us to contemplate the mystery of the Church through biblical images which bring to light the reality of the Church as a communion with its inseparable dimensions: the communion of each Christian with Christ and the communion of all Christians with one another. There is the sheepfold, the flock, the vine, the spiritual building, the Holy City(55). Above all, there is the image of the Body as set forth by the Apostle Paul. Its doctrine finds a pleasing expression once again in various passages of the Council's documents(56). In its turn, the Council has looked again at the entire history of salvation and has repropounded the image of the Church as the People of God: "It has pleased God to make people holy and to save them, not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness(57)." From its opening lines, the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* summarizes this doctrine in a wonderful way: "The Church in Christ is a kind of sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all the human race"(58).

The reality of the Church as Communion is, then, the integrating aspect, indeed the central content of the "mystery", or rather, the divine plan for the salvation of humanity. For this purpose ecclesial communion cannot be interpreted in a sufficient way if it is understood as simply a sociological or a psychological reality. The Church as Communion is the "new" People, the "messianic" People, the People that "has, for its head, Christ... as its heritage, the dignity and freedom of God's Children... for its law, the new commandment to love as Christ loved us... for its goal, the kingdom of God... established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth"(59). The bonds that unite the members of the New People among themselves -and first of all with Christ-are not those of "flesh and blood", but those of the spirit, more precisely those of the Holy Spirit, whom all the baptized have received (cf. Joel 3:1).

In fact, that Spirit is the One who from eternity unites the one and undivided Trinity, that Spirit who "in the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4) forever unites human nature to the Son of God, that same identical Spirit who in the course of Christian generations is the constant and never-ending source of communion in the Church.

An Organic Communion: Diversity and Complementarity

20. Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an "organic" communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities. Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body.

Saint Paul insists in a particular way on the organic communion of the Mystical Body of Christ. We can hear his rich teaching echoed in the following synthesis from the Council: "Jesus Christ"-we read in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*-"by communicating his Spirit to his brothers and sisters, called together from all peoples, made them mystically into his own body. In that body, the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe... As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the Faithful in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12). Also, in the building up of Christ's body there is a diversity of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the necessities of service, distributes his different gifts for the welfare of the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11). Among these gifts comes in the first place the grace given to the apostles to whose authority the Spirit himself subjects even those who are endowed with charisms (cf. 1 Cor 14). Furthermore it is this same Spirit, who through his power and through the intimate bond between the members, produces and urges love among the faithful. Consequently, if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer it too, and if one member is honoured, all members together rejoice (cf. 1 Cor 12:26)"(60).

One and the same Spirit is always the dynamic principle of diversity and unity in the Church. Once again we read in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, "In order that we might be unceasingly renewed in him (cf. Eph 4:23), he has shared with us his Spirit who, existing as one and the same being in the head and in the members, gives life to, unifies and moves the whole body. This he does in such a way that his work could be compared by the Fathers to the function which the soul as the principle of life fulfills in the human body"(60). And in another particularly significant text which is helpful in understanding not only the organic nature proper to ecclesial communion but also its aspect of growth toward perfect communion, the Council writes: "The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the Faithful, as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). In them he prays and bears witness that they are adopted sons (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15-16, 26). Guiding the Church in the way of all truth (cf. Jn 16:13) and unifying her in communion and in the works of service, he bestows upon her varied hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns her with the fruits of his grace (cf. Eph 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22). By the power of the Gospel he makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to the Lord Jesus, 'Come!' (cf. Rev 22:17)"(62).

Church communion then is a gift, a great gift of the Holy Spirit, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility. This is concretely realized through their participation in the

life and mission of the Church, to whose service the lay faithful put their varied and complementary ministries and charisms.

A member of the lay faithful "can never remain in isolation from the community, but must live in a continual interaction with others, with a lively sense of fellowship, rejoicing in an equal dignity and common commitment to bring to fruition the immense treasure that each has inherited. The Spirit of the Lord gives a vast variety of charisms, inviting people to assume different ministries and forms of service and reminding them, as he reminds all people in their relationship in the Church, that what distinguishes persons is not an increase in dignity, but a special and complementary capacity for service... Thus, the charisms, the ministries, the different forms of service exercised by the lay faithful exist in communion and on behalf of communion. They are treasures that complement one another for the good of all and are under the wise guidance of their Pastors"(63).

Ministries and Charisms, the Spirit's Gifts to the Church

21. The Second Vatican Council speaks of the ministries and charisms as the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are given for the building up of the Body of Christ and for its mission of salvation in the world(64). Indeed, the Church is directed and guided by the Holy Spirit, who lavishes diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts on all the baptized, calling them to be, each in an individual way, active and coresponsible.

We now turn our thoughts to ministries and charisms as they directly relate to the lay faithful and to their participation in the life of Church-Communion.

Ministries, Offices and Roles

The ministries which exist and are at work at this time in the Church are all, even in their variety of forms, a participation in Jesus Christ's own ministry as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. Jn 10:11), the humble servant who gives himself without reserve for the salvation of all (cf. Mk 10:45). The Apostle Paul is quite clear in speaking about the ministerial constitution of the Church in apostolic times. In his First Letter to the Corinthians he writes: "And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers..." (1 Cor 12:28). In his Letter to the Ephesians we read: "But the grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift... And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:7, 11-13; cf. Rom 12:4-8). These and other New Testament texts indicate the diversity of ministries as well as of gifts and ecclesial tasks.

The Ministries Derived from Holy Orders

22. In a primary position in the Church are the ordained ministries, that is, the ministries that come from the Sacrament of Orders. In fact, with the mandate to make disciples of all nations (cf. Mt 28:19), the Lord Jesus chose and constituted the apostles-seed of the People of the New Covenant and origin of the Hierarchy (65)-to form and to rule the priestly people. The mission of the Apostles, which the Lord Jesus continues to entrust to the Pastors of his people, is a true service, significantly referred to in Sacred Scripture as "diakonia", namely, service or ministry. The ministries receive the charism of the Holy Spirit from the Risen Christ, in uninterrupted succession from the apostles, through the Sacrament of Orders: from him they receive the authority and sacred power to serve the Church, acting in persona Christi Capitis (in the person of Christ, the Head)(66) and to gather her in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Sacraments.

The ordained ministries, apart from the persons who receive them, are a grace for the entire Church. These ministries express and realize a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ that is different, not simply in degree but in essence, from the participation given to all the lay faithful through Baptism and Confirmation. On the other hand, the ministerial priesthood, as the Second Vatican Council recalls, essentially has the royal priesthood of all the faithful as its aim and is ordered to it(67).

For this reason, so as to assure and to increase communion in the Church, particularly in those places where there is a diversity and complementarity of ministries, Pastors must always acknowledge that their ministry is fundamentally ordered to the service of the entire People of God (cf. Heb 5:1). The lay faithful, in turn, must acknowledge that the ministerial priesthood is totally necessary for their participation in the mission in the Church(68).

The Ministries, Offices and Roles of the Lay Faithful

23. The Church's mission of salvation in the world is realized not only by the ministers in virtue of the Sacrament of Orders but also by all the lay faithful; indeed, because of their Baptismal state and their specific vocation, in the measure proper to each person, the lay faithful participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ.

The Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, for a good many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

When necessity and expediency in the Church require it, the Pastors, according to established norms from universal law, can entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles that are connected to their pastoral ministry but do not require the character of Orders. The Code of Canon Law states: "When the necessity of the Church warrants it and when ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply for certain of their offices, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer Baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion in accord with the prescriptions of the law"(69). However, the exercise of such tasks does not make Pastors of the lay faithful: in fact, a person is not a minister simply in performing a task, but through sacramental ordination. Only the Sacrament of Orders gives the ordained minister a particular participation in the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head, and in his Eternal Priesthood(70). The task exercised in virtue of supply takes its legitimacy formally and immediately from the official deputation given by the Pastors, as well as from its concrete exercise under the guidance of ecclesiastical authority(71).

The recent Synodal Assembly has provided an extensive and meaningful overview of the situation in the Church on the ministries, offices and roles of the baptized. The Fathers have manifested a deep appreciation for the contribution of the lay faithful, both women and men, in the work of the apostolate, in evangelization, sanctification and the Christian animation of temporal affairs, as well as their generous willingness to supply in situations of emergency and chronic necessity(72).

Following the liturgical renewal promoted by the Council, the lay faithful themselves have acquired a more lively awareness of the tasks that they fulfill in the liturgical assembly and its preparation, and have become more widely disposed to fulfill them: the liturgical celebration, in fact, is a sacred action not simply of the clergy, but of the entire assembly. It is, therefore, natural that the tasks not proper to the ordained ministers be fulfilled by the lay faithful(73). In this way there is a natural transition from an effective involvement of the lay faithful in the liturgical action to that of announcing the word of God and pastoral care(74).

In the same Synod Assembly, however, a critical judgment was voiced along with these positive elements, about a too-indiscriminate use of the word "ministry", the confusion and the equating of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, the lack of observance of ecclesiastical laws and norms, the arbitrary interpretation of the concept of "supply", the tendency towards a "clericalization" of the lay faithful and the risk of creating, in reality, an ecclesial structure of parallel service to that founded on the Sacrament of Orders.

Precisely to overcome these dangers the Synod Fathers have insisted on the necessity to express with greater clarity, and with a more precise terminology(75), both the unity of the Church's mission in which all the baptized participate, and the substantial diversity of the ministry of Pastors which is rooted in the Sacrament of Orders, all the while respecting the other ministries, offices and roles in the Church, which are rooted in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

In the first place, then, it is necessary that in acknowledging and in conferring various ministries, offices and roles on the lay faithful, the Pastors exercise the maximum care to institute them on the basis of Baptism in which these tasks are rooted. It is also necessary that Pastors guard against a facile yet abusive recourse to a presumed "situation of emergency" or to "supply by necessity", where objectively this does not exist or where alternative possibilities could exist through better pastoral planning.

The various ministries, offices and roles that the lay faithful can legitimately fulfill in the liturgy, in the transmission of the faith, and in the pastoral structure of the Church, ought to be exercised in conformity to their specific lay vocation, which is different from that of the sacred ministry. In this regard the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, that had such a great part in stimulating the varied collaboration of the lay faithful in the Church's life and mission of spreading the gospel, recalls that "their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, as well as the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, and suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often repressed and buried, the more these realities will be at the service of the Kingdom of God and therefore at the service of salvation in Jesus Christ, without in any way losing or sacrificing their human content but rather pointing to a transcendent dimension which is often disregarded"(76).

In the course of Synod work the Fathers devoted much attention to the Lectorate and the Acolytate. While in the past these ministries existed in the Latin Church only as spiritual steps on route to the ordained ministry, with the *motu proprio* of Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam* (15 August 1972), they assumed an autonomy and stability, as well as a possibility of their being given to the lay faithful, albeit, only to men. This same fact is expressed in the new Code of Canon Law(77). At this time the Synod Fathers expressed the desire that "the *motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam* be reconsidered, bearing in mind the present practice of local churches and above all indicating criteria which ought to be used in choosing those destined for each ministry"(78).

In this regard a Commission was established to respond to this desire voiced by the Synod Fathers, specifically to provide an in-depth study of the various theological, liturgical, juridical and pastoral considerations which are associated with the great increase today of the ministries entrusted to the lay faithful.

While the conclusions of the Commission's study are awaited, a more ordered and fruitful ecclesial practice of the ministries entrusted to the lay faithful can be achieved if all the particular Churches faithfully respect the above mentioned theological principles, especially the essential difference between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood, and the difference between the ministries derived from the Sacrament of Orders and those derived from the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

Charisms

24. The Holy Spirit, while bestowing diverse ministries in Church communion, enriches it still further with particular gifts or promptings of grace, called charisms. These can take a great variety of forms, both as a manifestation of the absolute freedom of the Spirit who abundantly supplies them, and as a response to the varied needs of the Church in history. The description and the classification given to these gifts in the New Testament are an indication of their rich variety. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues" (1 Cor 12:7-10; cf. 1 Cor 12:4-6, 28-31; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Pt 4:10-11).

Whether they be exceptional and great or simple and ordinary, the charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit that have, directly or indirectly, a usefulness for the ecclesial community, ordered as they are to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world.

Even in our own times there is no lack of a fruitful manifestation of various charisms among the faithful, women and men. These charisms are given to individual persons, and can even be shared by others in such ways as to continue in time a precious and effective heritage, serving as a source of a particular spiritual affinity among persons. In referring to the apostolate of the lay faithful the Second Vatican Council writes: "For the exercise of the apostolate the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the People of God through the ministry and the sacraments gives the faithful special gifts as well (cf. 1 Cor 12:7), 'allotting them to each one as he wills' (cf. 1 Cor 12:11), so that each might place 'at the service of others the grace received' and become 'good stewards of God's varied grace' (1 Pt 4:10), and build up thereby the whole body in charity (cf. Eph 4:16)"(79).

By a logic which looks to the divine source of this giving, as the Council recalls(80), the gifts of the Spirit demand that those who have received them exercise them for the growth of the whole Church.

The charisms are received in gratitude both on the part of the one who receives them, and also on the part of the entire Church. They are in fact a singularly rich source of grace for the vitality of the apostolate and for the holiness of the whole Body of Christ, provided that they be gifts that come truly from the Spirit and are exercised in full conformity with the authentic promptings of the Spirit. In this sense the discernment of charisms is always necessary. Indeed, the Synod Fathers have stated: "The action of the Holy Spirit, who breathes where he will, is not always easily recognized and received. We know that God acts in all Christians, and we are aware of the benefits which flow from charisms both for individuals and for the whole Christian community. Nevertheless, at the same time we are also aware of the power of sin and how it can disturb and confuse the life of the faithful and of the community"(81).

For this reason no charism dispenses a person from reverence and submission to the Pastors of the Church. The Council clearly states: "Judgment as to their (charisms) genuineness and proper use belongs to those who preside over the Church, and to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good (cf. 1 Thess 5:12 and 19-21)"(82), so that all the charisms might work together, in their diversity and complementarity, for the common good(83).

The Lay Faithful's Participation in the Life of the Church

25. The lay faithful participate in the life of the Church not only in exercising their tasks and charisms, but also in many other ways.

Such participation finds its first and necessary expression in the life and mission of the particular Church, in the diocese in which "the Church of Christ, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is truly present and at work"(84).

The Particular Churches and the Universal Church

For an adequate participation in ecclesial life the lay faithful absolutely need to have a clear and precise vision of the particular Church with its primordial bond to the universal Church. The particular Church does not come about from a kind of fragmentation of the universal Church, nor does the universal Church come about by a simple amalgamation of particular Churches. But there is a real, essential and constant bond uniting each of them and this is why the universal

Church exists and is manifested in the particular Churches. For this reason the Council says that the particular Churches "are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in and from these particular Churches that there come into being the one and unique Catholic Church"(85).

The same Council strongly encourages the lay faithful actively to live out their belonging to the particular Church, while at the same time assuming an ever-increasing "catholic" spirit: "Let the lay faithful constantly foster"-we read in the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People- "a feeling for their own diocese, of which the parish is a kind of cell, and be always ready at their bishops' invitation to participate in diocesan projects. Indeed, if the needs of cities and rural areas are to be met, lay people should not limit their cooperation to the parochial or diocesan boundaries but strive to extend it to interparochial, interdiocesan, national and international fields, the more so because the daily increase in population mobility, the growth of mutual bonds, and the ease of communication no longer allow any sector of society to remain closed in upon itself. Thus they should be concerned about the needs of the People of God scattered throughout the world"(86).

In this sense, the recent Synod has favored the creation of Diocesan Pastoral Councils, as a recourse at opportune times. In fact, on a diocesan level this structure could be the principle form of collaboration, dialogue, and discernment as well. The participation of the lay faithful in these Councils can broaden resources in consultation and the principle of collaboration-and in certain instances also in decision-making -if applied in a broad and determined manner(87).

The participation of the lay faithful in Diocesan Synods and in local Councils, whether provincial or plenary, is envisioned by the Code of Canon Law(88). These structures could contribute to Church communion and the mission of the particular Church, both in its own surroundings and in relation to the other particular Churches of the ecclesiastical province or Episcopal Conference.

Episcopal Conferences are called to evaluate the most opportune way of developing the consultation and the collaboration of the lay faithful, women and men, at a national or regional level, so that they may consider well the problems they share and manifest better the communion of the whole Church(89).

The Parish

26. The ecclesial community, while always having a universal dimension, finds its most immediate and visible expression in the parish. It is there that the Church is seen locally. In a certain sense it is the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters(90).

It is necessary that in light of the faith all rediscover the true meaning of the parish, that is, the place where the very "mystery" of the Church is present and at work, even if at times it is lacking persons and means, even if at other times it might be scattered over vast territories or almost not to be found in crowded and chaotic modern sections of cities. The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather, "the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit"(91), "a familial and welcoming home"(92), the "community of the faithful"(93). Plainly and simply, the parish is founded on a theological reality, because it is a Eucharistic community(94). This means that the parish is a community properly suited for celebrating the Eucharist, the living source for its upbuilding and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church. Such suitability is rooted in the fact that the parish is a community of faith and an organic community, that is, constituted by the ordained ministers and other Christians, in which the pastor-who represents the diocesan bishop(95)-is the hierarchical bond with the entire particular Church.

Since the Church's task in our day is so great its accomplishment cannot be left to the parish alone. For this reason the Code of Canon Law provides for forms of collaboration among parishes in a given territory(96) and recommends to the bishop's care the various groups of the Christian Faithful, even the unbaptized who are not under his ordinary pastoral care(97). There are many other places and forms of association through which the Church can be present and at work. All are necessary to carry out the word and grace of the Gospel and to correspond to the various circumstances of life in which people find themselves today. In a similar way there exist in the areas of culture, society, education, professions, etc. many other ways for spreading the faith and other settings for the apostolate which cannot have the parish as their center and origin. Nevertheless, in our day the parish still enjoys a new and promising season. At the beginning of his pontificate, Paul VI addressed the Roman clergy in these words: "We believe simply that this old and venerable structure of the parish has an indispensable mission of great contemporary importance: to create the basic community of the Christian people; to initiate and gather the people in the accustomed expression of liturgical life; to conserve and renew the faith in the people of today; to serve as the school for teaching the salvific message of Christ; to put solidarity in practice and work the humble charity of good and brotherly works"(98).

The Synod Fathers for their part have given much attention to the present state of many parishes and have called for a greater effort in their renewal: "Many parishes, whether established in regions affected by urban progress or in missionary territory, cannot do their work effectively because they lack material resources or ordained men or are too big geographically or because of the particular circumstances of some Christians (e.g. exiles and migrants). So that all parishes of this kind may be truly communities of Christians, local ecclesial authorities ought to foster the following: a) adaptation of parish structures according to the full flexibility granted by canon law, especially in promoting participation by the lay faithful in pastoral responsibilities; b) small, basic or so-called "living" communities, where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another; these communities are

true expressions of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization, in communion with their pastors"(99). For the renewal of parishes and for a better assurance of their effectiveness in work, various forms of cooperation even on the institutional level ought to be fostered among diverse parishes in the same area.

The Apostolic Commitment in the Parish

27. It is now necessary to look more closely at the communion and participation of the lay faithful in parish life. In this regard all lay men and women are called to give greater attention to a particularly meaningful, stirring and incisive passage from the Council: "Their activity within Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the Pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness"(100).

This is indeed a particularly important affirmation, which evidently must be interpreted in light of the "ecclesiology of communion". Ministries and charisms, being diverse and complementary, are all necessary for the Church to grow, each in its own way.

The lay faithful ought to be ever more convinced of the special meaning that their commitment to the apostolate takes on in their parish. Once again the Council authoritatively places it in relief: "The parish offers an outstanding example of the apostolate on the community level, inasmuch as it brings together the many human differences found within its boundaries and draws them into the universality of the Church. The lay faithful should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bringing to the Church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which need to be examined together and solved through general discussion. As far as possible the lay faithful ought to collaborate in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their own ecclesial family"(101).

The Council's mention of examining and solving pastoral problems "by general discussion" ought to find its adequate and structured development through a more convinced, extensive and decided appreciation for "Parish Pastoral Councils", on which the Synod Fathers have rightly insisted(102).

In the present circumstances the lay faithful have the ability to do very much and, therefore, ought to do very much towards the growth of an authentic ecclesial communion in their parishes in order to reawaken missionary zeal towards nonbelievers and believers themselves who have abandoned the faith or grown lax in the Christian life.

If indeed, the parish is the Church placed in the neighborhoods of humanity, it lives and is at work through being deeply inserted in human society and intimately bound up with its aspirations and its dramatic events. Oftentimes the social context, especially in certain countries and environments, is violently shaken by elements of disintegration and de-humanization. The individual is lost and disoriented, but there always remains in the human heart the desire to experience and cultivate caring and personal relationships. The response to such a desire can come from the parish, when, with the lay faithful's participation, it adheres to its fundamental vocation and mission, that is, to be a "place" in the world for the community of believers to gather together as a "sign" and "instrument" of the vocation of all to communion, in a word, to be a house of welcome to all and a place of service to all, or, as Pope John XXIII was fond of saying, to be the "village fountain" to which all would have recourse in their thirst.

The Forms of Participation in the Life of the Church

28. The lay faithful together with the clergy and women and men religious, make up the one People of God and the Body of Christ.

Being "members" of the Church takes nothing away from the fact that each Christian as an individual is "unique and irrepeatable". On the contrary, this belonging guarantees and fosters the profound sense of that uniqueness and irrepeatability, in so far as these very qualities are the source of variety and richness for the whole Church. Therefore, God calls the individual in Jesus Christ, each one personally by name. In this sense, the Lord's words "You go into my vineyard too", directed to the Church as a whole, come specially addressed to each member individually.

Because of each member's unique and irrepeatable character, that is, one's identity and actions as a person, each individual is placed at the service of the growth of the ecclesial community while, at the same time, singularly receiving and sharing in the common richness of all the Church. This is the "Communion of Saints" which we profess in the Creed. The good of all becomes the good of each one and the good of each one becomes the good of all. "In the Holy Church", writes Saint Gregory the Great, "all are nourished by each one and each one is nourished by all"(103).

Individual Forms of Participation

Above all, each member of the lay faithful should always be fully aware of being a "member of the Church" yet entrusted with a unique task which cannot be done by another and which is to be fulfilled for the good of all. From this perspective the Council's insistence on the absolute necessity of an apostolate exercised by the individual takes on its full meaning: "The apostolate exercised by the individual-which flows abundantly from a truly Christian life (cf. Jn 4: 11)-is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even in its organized expression, and admits no substitute. Regardless of circumstance, all lay persons (including those who have no opportunity or possibility for collaboration in

associations) are called to this type of apostolate and obliged to engage in it. Such an apostolate is useful at all times and places, but in certain circumstances it is the only one available and feasible"(104).

In the apostolate exercised by the individual, great riches are waiting to be discovered through an intensification of the missionary effort of each of the lay faithful. Such an individual form of apostolate can contribute greatly to a more extensive spreading of the Gospel, indeed it can reach as many places as there are daily lives of individual members of the lay faithful. Furthermore, the spread of the gospel will be continual, since a person's life and faith will be one. Likewise the spread of the gospel will be particularly incisive, because in sharing fully in the unique conditions of the life, work, difficulties and hopes of their sisters and brothers, the lay faithful will be able to reach the hearts of their neighbors, friends, and colleagues, opening them to a full sense of human existence, that is, to communion with God and with all people.

Group Forms of Participation

29. Church communion, already present and at work in the activities of the individual, finds its specific expression in the lay faithful's working together in groups, that is, in activities done with others in the course of their responsible participation in the life and mission of the Church.

In recent days the phenomenon of lay people associating among themselves has taken on a character of particular variety and vitality. In some ways lay associations have always been present throughout the Church's history as various confraternities, third orders and sodalities testify even today. However, in modern times such lay groups have received a special stimulus, resulting in the birth and spread of a multiplicity of group forms: associations, groups, communities, movements. We can speak of a new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful. In fact, "alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted, with a specific feature and purpose, so great is the richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community, and so great is the capacity of initiative and the generosity of our lay people"(105).

Oftentimes these lay groups show themselves to be very diverse from one another in various aspects, in their external structures, in their procedures and training methods, and in the fields in which they work. However, they all come together in an all-inclusive and profound convergence when viewed from the perspective of their common purpose, that is, the responsible participation of all of them in the Church's mission of carrying forth the Gospel of Christ, the source of hope for humanity and the renewal of society.

The actual formation of groups of the lay faithful for spiritual purposes or for apostolic work comes from various sources and corresponds to different demands. In fact, their formation itself expresses the social nature of the person and for this reason leads to a more extensive and incisive effectiveness in work. In reality, a "cultural" effect can be accomplished through work done not so much by an individual alone but by an individual as "a social being", that is, as a member of a group, of a community, of an association, or of a movement. Such work is, then, the source and stimulus leading to the transformation of the surroundings and society as well as the fruit and sign of every other transformation in this regard. This is particularly true in the context of a pluralistic and fragmented society-the case in so many parts of the world today-and in light of the problems which have become greatly complex and difficult. On the other hand, in a secularized world, above all, the various group forms of the apostolate can represent for many a precious help for the Christian life in remaining faithful to the demands of the gospel and to the commitment to the Church's mission and the apostolate.

Beyond this, the profound reason that justifies and demands the lay faithful's forming of lay groups comes from a theology based on ecclesiology, as the Second Vatican Council clearly acknowledged in referring to the group apostolate as a "sign of communion and of unity of the Church of Christ"(106).

It is a "sign" that must be manifested in relation to "communion" both in the internal and external aspects of the various group forms and in the wider context of the Christian community. As mentioned, this reason based on ecclesiology explains, on one hand, the "right" of lay associations to form, and on the other, the necessity of "criteria" for discerning the authenticity of the forms which such groups take in the Church.

First of all, the freedom for lay people in the Church to form such groups is to be acknowledged. Such liberty is a true and proper right that is not derived from any kind of "concession" by authority, but flows from the Sacrament of Baptism, which calls the lay faithful to participate actively in the Church's communion and mission. In this regard the Council is quite clear: "As long as the proper relationship is kept to Church authority, the lay faithful have the right to found and run such associations and to join those already existing"(107). A citation from the recently published Code of Canon Law affirms it as well: "The Christian faithful are at liberty to found and govern associations for charitable and religious purposes or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world; they are free to hold meetings to pursue these purposes in common"(108).

It is a question of a freedom that is to be acknowledged and guaranteed by ecclesial authority and always and only to be exercised in Church communion. Consequently, the right of the lay faithful to form groups is essentially in relation to the Church's life of communion and to her mission.

"Criteria of Ecclesiality" for Lay Groups

30. It is always from the perspective of the Church's communion and mission, and not in opposition to the freedom to associate, that one understands the necessity of having clear and definite criteria for discerning and recognizing such lay groups, also called "Criteria of Ecclesiality".

The following basic criteria might be helpful in evaluating an association of the lay faithful in the Church:

- The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness, as it is manifested "in the fruits of grace which the spirit produces in the faithful"(109) and in a growth towards the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity(110).

In this sense whatever association of the lay faithful there might be, it is always called to be more of an instrument leading to holiness in the Church, through fostering and promoting "a more intimate unity between the everyday life of its members and their faith"(111).

- The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith, embracing and proclaiming the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in obedience to the Church's Magisterium, as the Church interprets it. For this reason every association of the lay faithful must be a forum where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its total content.

- The witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to the Pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal Church(112), and with the local Bishop, "the visible principle and foundation of unity"(113) in the particular Church, and in "mutual esteem for all forms of the Church's apostolate"(114).

The communion with Pope and Bishop must be expressed in loyal readiness to embrace the doctrinal teachings and pastoral initiatives of both Pope and Bishop. Moreover, Church communion demands both an acknowledgment of a legitimate plurality of forms in the associations of the lay faithful in the Church and at the same time, a willingness to cooperate in working together.

-Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals, that is, "the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the Christian formation of people's conscience, so as to enable them to infuse the spirit of the gospel into the various communities and spheres of life"(115).

From this perspective, every one of the group forms of the lay faithful is asked to have a missionary zeal which will increase their effectiveness as participants in a re-evangelization.

-A commitment to a presence in human society, which in light of the Church's social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person.

Therefore, associations of the lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society.

The fundamental criteria mentioned at this time find their verification in the actual fruits that various group forms show in their organizational life and the works they perform, such as: the renewed appreciation for prayer, contemplation, liturgical and sacramental life, the reawakening of vocations to Christian marriage, the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life; a readiness to participate in programmes and Church activities at the local, national and international levels; a commitment to catechesis and a capacity for teaching and forming Christians; a desire to be present as Christians in various settings of social life and the creation and awakening of charitable, cultural and spiritual works; the spirit of detachment and evangelical poverty leading to a greater generosity in charity towards all; conversion to the Christian life or the return to Church communion of those baptized members who have fallen away from the faith.

The Pastors in Service to Communion

31. The Pastors of the Church even if faced with possible and understandable difficulties as a result of such associations and the process of employing new forms, cannot renounce the service provided by their authority, not simply for the well-being of the Church, but also for the well-being of the lay associations themselves. In this sense they ought to accompany their work of discernment with guidance and, above all, encouragement so that lay associations might grow in Church communion and mission.

It is exceedingly opportune that some new associations and movements receive official recognition and explicit approval from competent Church authority to facilitate their growth on both the national and international level. The Council has already spoken in this regard: "Depending on its various forms and goals, the lay apostolate provides for different types of relationships with the hierarchy... Certain forms of the lay apostolate are given explicit recognition by the hierarchy, though in different ways. Because of the demands of the common good of the Church, moreover, ecclesial authority can select and promote in a particular way some of the apostolic associations and projects which have an immediately spiritual purpose, thereby assuming in them a special responsibility"(116).

Among the various forms of the lay apostolate which have a particular relationship to the hierarchy, the Synod Fathers have singled out various movements and associations of Catholic Action in which "indeed, in this organic and stable form, the lay faithful may freely associate under the movement of the Holy Spirit, in communion with their bishop and priests, so that in a way proper to their vocation and with some special method they might be of service through their faithfulness and good works to promote the growth of the entire Christian community, pastoral activities and infusing every aspect of life with the gospel spirit"(117).

The Pontifical Council for the Laity has the task of preparing a list of those associations which have received the official approval of the Holy See, and, at the same time, of drawing up, together with the Pontifical Council for the Union of Christians, the basic conditions on which this approval might be given to ecumenical associations in which there is a majority of Catholics, and determining those cases in which such an approval is not possible(118).

All of us, Pastors and lay faithful, have the duty to promote and nourish stronger bonds and mutual esteem, cordiality and collaboration among the various forms of lay associations. Only in this way can the richness of the gifts and charisms that the Lord offers us bear their fruitful contribution in building the common house: "For the sound building of a common house it is necessary, furthermore, that every spirit of antagonism and conflict be put aside and that the competition be in outdoing one another in showing honour (cf. Rom 12:10), in attaining a mutual affection, a will towards collaboration, with patience, far-sightedness, and readiness to sacrifice which will at times be required"(119).

So as to render thanks to God for the great gift of Church communion which is the reflection in time of the eternal and ineffable communion of the love of God, Three in One, we once again consider Jesus' words: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15:5). The awareness of the gift ought to be accompanied by a strong sense of responsibility for its use: it is, in fact, a gift that, like the talent of the gospel parable, must be put to work in a life of ever-increasing communion.

To be responsible for the gift of communion means, first of all, to be committed to overcoming each temptation to division and opposition that works against the Christian life with its responsibility in the apostolate. The cry of Saint Paul continues to resound as a reproach to those who are "wounding the Body of Christ": "What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ!' Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor 1: 12-13). No, rather let these words of the apostle sound a persuasive call: " I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10).

Thus the life of Church communion will become a sign for all the world and a compelling force that will lead persons to faith in Christ: "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Tn 17:21). In such a way communion leads to mission, and mission itself to communion.

CHAPTER III

I HAVE APPOINTED YOU TO GO FORTH AND BEAR FRUIT

The Coresponsibility of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mission

Mission to Communion

32. We return to the biblical image of the vine and the branches, which immediately and quite appropriately lends itself to a consideration of fruitfulness and life. Engrafted to the vine and brought to life, the branches are expected to bear fruit: "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (Jn 15:5). Bearing fruit is an essential demand of life in Christ and life in the Church. The person who does not bear fruit does not remain in communion: "Each branch of mine that bears no fruit, he (my Father) takes away" (Jn 15: 2).

Communion with Jesus, which gives rise to the communion of Christians among themselves, is an indispensable condition for bearing fruit: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). And communion with others is the most magnificent fruit that the branches can give: in fact, it is the gift of Christ and His Spirit.

At this point communion begets communion: essentially it is likened to a mission on behalf of communion. In fact, Jesus says to his disciples: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15:16).

Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion. It is always the one and the same Spirit who calls together and unifies the Church and sends her to preach the Gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). On her part, the Church knows that the communion received by her as a gift is destined for all people. Thus the Church feels she owes to each individual and to humanity as a whole the gift received from the Holy Spirit that pours the charity of Jesus Christ into the hearts of believers, as a mystical force for internal cohesion and external growth. The mission of the Church flows from her own nature. Christ has willed it to be so: that of "sign and instrument... of unity of all the human race"(120). Such a mission has the purpose of making everyone know and live the "new" communion that the Son of God made man introduced into the history of the world. In this regard, then, the testimony of John the Evangelist defines in an undeniable way the blessed end towards which the entire mission of the Church is directed: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3).

In the context of Church mission, then, the Lord entrusts a great part of the responsibility to the lay faithful, in communion with all other members of the People of God. This fact, fully understood by the Fathers of the Second

Vatican Council, recurred with renewed clarity and increased vigor in all the works of the Synod: "Indeed, Pastors know how much the lay faithful contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. They also know that they themselves were not established by Christ to undertake alone the entire saving mission of the Church towards the world, but they understand that it is their exalted office to be shepherds of the lay faithful and also to recognize the latter's services and charisms that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart"(121).

Proclaiming the Gospel

33. The lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In a very clear and significant passage from the Second Vatican Council we read: "As sharers in the mission of Christ, priest, prophet and king, the lay faithful have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church... Strengthened by their active participation in the liturgical life of their community, they are eager to do their share in apostolic works of that community. They lead to the Church people who are perhaps far removed from it; they earnestly cooperate in presenting the Word of God, especially by means of catechetical instruction; and offer their special skills to make the care of souls and the administration of the temporal goods of the Church more efficient"(122).

The entire mission of the Church, then, is concentrated and manifested in evangelization. Through the winding passages of history the Church has made her way under the grace and the command of Jesus Christ: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15) "... and lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). "To evangelize", writes Paul VI, "is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her most profound identity"(123).

Through evangelization the Church is built up into a community of faith: more precisely, into a community that confesses the faith in full adherence to the Word of God which is celebrated in the Sacraments, and lived in charity, the principle of Christian moral existence. In fact, the "good news" is directed to stirring a person to a conversion of heart and life and a clinging to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; to disposing a person to receive Baptism and the Eucharist and to strengthen a person in the prospect and realization of new life according to the Spirit.

Certainly the command of Jesus: "Go and preach the Gospel" always maintains its vital value and its ever-pressing obligation. Nevertheless, the present situation, not only of the world but also of many parts of the Church, absolutely demands that the word of Christ receive a more ready and generous obedience. Every disciple is personally called by name; no disciple can withhold making a response: "Woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

The Hour Has Come for a Re-Evangelization

34. Whole countries and nations where religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and capable of fostering a viable and working community of faith, are now put to a hard test, and in some cases, are even undergoing a radical transformation, as a result of a constant spreading of an indifference to religion, of secularism and atheism. This particularly concerns countries and nations of the so-called First World, in which economic well-being and consumerism, even if coexistent with a tragic situation of poverty and misery, inspires and sustains a life lived "as if God did not exist". This indifference to religion and the practice of religion devoid of true meaning in the face of life's very serious problems, are not less worrying and upsetting when compared with declared atheism. Sometimes the Christian faith as well, while maintaining some of the externals of its tradition and rituals, tends to be separated from those moments of human existence which have the most significance, such as, birth, suffering and death. In such cases, the questions and formidable enigmas posed by these situations, if remaining without responses, expose contemporary people to an inconsolable delusion or to the temptation of eliminating the truly humanizing dimension of life implicit in these problems.

On the other hand, in other regions or nations many vital traditions of piety and popular forms of Christian religion are still conserved; but today this moral and spiritual patrimony runs the risk of being dispersed under the impact of a multiplicity of processes, including secularization and the spread of sects. Only a re-evangelization can assure the growth of a clear and deep faith, and serve to make these traditions a force for authentic freedom.

Without doubt a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about what is needed is to first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself present in these countries and nations.

At this moment the lay faithful, in virtue of their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, are fully part of this work of the Church. Their responsibility, in particular, is to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response-consciously perceived and stated by all in varying degrees-to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society. This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel.

To all people of today I once again repeat the impassioned cry with which I began my pastoral ministry:

"Do not be afraid! Open, in deed, open wide the doors to Christ!"

Open to his saving power the confines of states, and systems political and economic, as well as the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows 'what is inside a person'. Only he knows! Today too often people do not know what they carry inside, in the deepest recesses of their soul, in their heart. Too often people are uncertain about a sense of life on earth. Invaded by doubts they are led into despair. Therefore-with humility and trust I beg and implore you-allow Christ to speak to the person in you. Only he has the words of life, yes, eternal life"(124).

Opening wide the doors to Christ, accepting him into humanity itself poses absolutely no threat to persons, indeed it is the only road to take to arrive at the total truth and the exalted value of the human individual.

This vital synthesis will be achieved when the lay faithful know how to put the gospel and their daily duties of life into a most shining and convincing testimony, where, not fear but the loving pursuit of Christ and adherence to him will be the factors determining how a person is to live and grow, and these will lead to new ways of living more in conformity with human dignity.

Humanity is loved by God! This very simple yet profound proclamation is owed to humanity by the Church. Each Christian's words and life must make this proclamation resound: God loves you, Christ came for you, Christ is for you "the Way, the Truth and the Life!" (Jn 14:6).

This re-evangelization is directed not only to individual persons but also to entire portions of populations in the variety of their situations, surroundings and cultures. Its purpose is the formation of mature ecclesial communities, in which the faith might radiate and fulfill the basic meaning of adherence to the person of Christ and his Gospel, of an encounter and sacramental communion with him, and of an existence lived in charity and in service.

The lay faithful have their part to fulfill in the formation of these ecclesial communities, not only through an active and responsible participation in the life of the community, in other words, through a testimony that only they can give, but also through a missionary zeal and activity towards the many people who still do not believe and who no longer live the faith received at Baptism.

In the case of coming generations, the lay faithful must offer the very valuable contribution, more necessary than ever, of a systematic work in catechesis. The Synod Fathers have gratefully taken note of the work of catechists, acknowledging that they "have a task that carries great importance in animating ecclesial communities"(125). It goes without saying that Christian parents are the primary and irreplaceable catechists of their children, a task for which they are given the grace by the Sacrament of Matrimony. At the same time, however, we all ought to be aware of the "rights" that each baptized person has to being instructed, educated and supported in the faith and the Christian life.

Go Into the Whole World

35. While pointing out and experiencing the present urgency for a re-evangelization, the Church cannot withdraw from her ongoing mission of bringing the gospel to the multitudes -the millions and millions of men and women-who as yet do not know Christ the Redeemer of humanity. In a specific way this is the missionary work that Jesus entrusted and again entrusts each day to his Church.

The activity of the lay faithful, who are always present in these surroundings, is revealed in these days as increasingly necessary and valuable. As it stands, the command of the Lord "Go into the whole world" is continuing to find a generous response from laypersons who are ready to leave familiar surroundings, their work, their region or country, at least for a determined time, to go into mission territory. Even Christian married couples, in imitation of Aquila and Priscilla (cf. Acts 18; Rom 16:3 ff), are offering a comforting testimony of impassioned love for Christ and the Church through their valuable presence in mission lands. A true missionary presence is exercised even by those who for various reasons live in countries or surroundings where the Church is not yet established and bear witness to the faith.

However, at present the missionary concern is taking on such extensive and serious proportions for the Church that only a truly consolidated effort to assume responsibility by all members of the Church, both individuals and communities, can lead to the hope for a more fruitful response.

The invitation addressed by the Second Vatican Council to the particular Church retains all its value, even demanding at present a more extensive and more decisive acceptance: "Since the particular Churches are bound to mirror the universal Church as perfectly as possible, let them be fully aware that they have been sent also to those who do not believe in Christ"(126).

The Church today ought to take a giant step forward in her evangelization effort, and enter into a new stage of history in her missionary dynamism. In a world where the lessening of distance makes the world increasingly smaller, the Church community ought to strengthen the bonds among its members, exchange vital energies and means, and commit itself as a group to a unique and common mission of proclaiming and living the Gospel. "So-called younger Churches have need of the strength of the older Churches and the older ones need the witness and impulse of the younger, so that individual Churches receive the riches of other Churches"(127).

In this area, younger Churches are finding that an essential and undeniable element in the founding of Churches(128) is the formation not only of local clergy but also of a mature and responsible lay faithful: in this way the community which itself has been evangelized goes forth into a new region of the world so that it too might respond to the mission of proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel of Christ.

The Synod Fathers have mentioned that the lay faithful can favour the relations which ought to be established with followers of various religions through their example in the situations in which they live and in their activities: "Throughout the world today the Church lives among people of various religions... All the Faithful, especially the lay faithful who live among the people of other religions, whether living in their native region or in lands as migrants, ought to be for all a sign of the Lord and his Church, in a way adapted to the actual living situation of each place. Dialogue among religions has a preeminent part, for it leads to love and mutual respect, and takes away, or at least diminishes, prejudices among the followers of various religions and promotes unity and friendship among peoples"(129).

What is first needed for the evangelization of the world are those who will evangelize. In this regard everyone, beginning with the Christian family, must feel the responsibility to foster the birth and growth of vocations, both priestly and religious as well as in the lay state, specifically directed to the missions. This should be done by relying on every appropriate means, but without ever neglecting the privileged means of prayer, according to the very words of the Lord Jesus: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest!" (Mt 9:37, 38).

To Live the Gospel Serving the Person and Society

36. In both accepting and proclaiming the Gospel in the power of the Spirit the Church becomes at one and the same time an "evangelizing and evangelized" community, and for this very reason she is made the servant of all. In her the lay faithful participate in the mission of service to the person and society. Without doubt the Church has the Kingdom of God as her supreme goal, of which "she on earth is its seed and beginning"(130), and is therefore totally consecrated to the glorification of the Father. However, the Kingdom is the source of full liberation and total salvation for all people: with this in mind, then, the Church walks and lives, intimately bound in a real sense to their history.

Having received the responsibility of manifesting to the world the mystery of God that shines forth in Jesus Christ, the Church likewise awakens one person to another, giving a sense of one's existence, opening each to the whole truth about the individual and of each person's final destiny(131). From this perspective the Church is called, in virtue of her very mission of evangelization, to serve all humanity. Such service is rooted primarily in the extraordinary and profound fact that "through the Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion to every person"(132).

For this reason the person "is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: the individual is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads in variably through the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption"(133).

The Second Vatican Council, repeatedly and with a singular clarity and force, expressed these very sentiments in its documents. We again read a particularly enlightening text from the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church not only communicates divine life to all, but in some way casts the reflected light of that divine life over the entire earth. She does this most of all by her healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the human person, by the way in which she strengthens the bonds of human society, and imbues the daily activity of people with a deeper sense and meaning. Thus, through her individual members and the whole community, the Church believes she can contribute much to make the family of man and its history more human"(134).

In this work of contributing to the human family, for which the whole Church is responsible, a particular place falls to the lay faithful, by reason of their "secular character", obliging them, in their proper and irreplaceable way, to work towards the Christian animation of the temporal order.

Promoting the Dignity of the Person

37. To rediscover and make others rediscover the inviolable dignity of every human person makes up an essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service which the Church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family.

Among all other earthly beings, only a man or a woman is a "person", a conscious and free being and, precisely for this reason, the "center and summit" of all that exists on the earth(135).

The dignity of the person is the most precious possession of an individual. As a result, the value of one person transcends all the material world. The words of Jesus, "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and to forfeit his life?" (Mk 8:36) contain an enlightening and stirring statement about the individual: value comes not from what a person "has" even if the person possessed the whole world!-as much as from what a person "is": the goods of the world do not count as much as the good of the person, the good which is the person individually.

The dignity of the person is manifested in all its radiance when the person's origin and destiny are considered: created by God in his image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a "child in the Son" and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for the eternal life of blessed communion with God. For this reason every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offence against the Creator of the individual.

In virtue of a personal dignity the human being is always a value as an individual, and as such demands being considered and treated as a person and never, on the contrary, considered and treated as an object to be used, or as a means, or as a thing.

The dignity of the person constitutes the foundation of the equality of all people among themselves. As a result all forms of discrimination are totally unacceptable, especially those forms which unfortunately continue to divide and degrade the human family, from those based on race or economics to those social and cultural, from political to geographic, etc. Each discrimination constitutes an absolutely intolerable injustice, not so much for the tensions and the conflicts that can be generated in the social sphere, as much as for the dishonour inflicted on the dignity of the person: not only to the dignity of the individual who is the victim of the injustice, but still more to the one who commits the injustice.

Just as personal dignity is the foundation of equality of all people among themselves, so it is also the foundation of participation and solidarity of all people among themselves: dialogue and communion are rooted ultimately in what people "are", first and foremost, rather than on what people "have".

The dignity of the person is the indestructible property of every human being. The force of this affirmation is based on the uniqueness and irrepeatability of every person. From it flows that the individual can never be reduced by all that seeks to crush and to annihilate the person into the anonymity that comes from collectivity, institutions, structures and systems. As an individual, a person is not a number or simply a link in a chain, nor even less, an impersonal element in some system. The most radical and elevating affirmation of the value of every human being was made by the Son of God in his becoming man in the womb of a woman, as we continue to be reminded each Christmas(136).

Respecting the Inviolable Right to Life

38. In effect the acknowledgment of the personal dignity of every human being demands the respect, the defence and the promotion of the rights of the human person. It is a question of inherent, universal and inviolable rights. No one, no individual, no group, no authority, no State, can change-let alone eliminate-them because such rights find their source in God himself.

The inviolability of the person which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the inviolability of human life. Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights-for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture- is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination.

The Church has never yielded in the face of all the violations that the right to life of every human being has received, and continues to receive, both from individuals and from those in authority. The human being is entitled to such rights, in every phase of development, from conception until natural death; and in every condition, whether healthy or sick, whole or handicapped, rich or poor. The Second Vatican Council openly proclaimed: "All offences against life itself, such as every kind of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offences against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons; all these and the like are certainly criminal: they poison human society; and they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator"(137).

If, indeed, everyone has the mission and responsibility of acknowledging the personal dignity of every human being and of defending the right to life, some lay faithful are given a particular title to this task: such as parents, teachers, healthworkers and the many who hold economic and political power.

The Church today lives a fundamental aspect of her mission in lovingly and generously accepting every human being, especially those who are weak and sick. This is made all the more necessary as a "culture of death" threatens to take control. In fact, "the Church family believes that human life, even if weak and suffering, is always a wonderful gift of God's goodness. Against the pessimism and selfishness which casts a shadow over the world, the Church stands for life: in each human life she sees the splendour of that 'Yes', that 'Amen', which is Christ himself (cf. 2 Cor 1:19; Rev 3:14). To the 'No' which assails and afflicts the world, she replies with this living 'Yes', this defending of the human person and the world from all who plot against life"(138). It is the responsibility of the lay faithful, who more directly through their vocation or their profession are involved in accepting life, to make the Church's "Yes" to human life concrete and efficacious.

The enormous development of biological and medical science, united to an amazing power in technology, today provides possibilities on the very frontier of human life which imply new responsibilities. In fact, today humanity is in the position not only of "observing" but even "exercising a control over" human life at its very beginning and in its first stages of development.

The moral conscience of humanity is not able to turn aside or remain indifferent in the face of these gigantic strides accomplished by a technology that is acquiring a continually more extensive and profound dominion over the working

processes that govern procreation and the first phases of human life. Today as perhaps never before in history or in this field, wisdom shows itself to be the only firm basis to salvation, in that persons engaged in scientific research and in its application are always to act with intelligence and love, that is, respecting, even remaining in veneration of, the inviolable dignity of the personhood of every human being, from the first moment of life's existence. This occurs when science and technology are committed with licit means to the defence of life and the cure of disease in its beginnings, refusing on the contrary-even for the dignity of research itself-to perform operations that result in falsifying the genetic patrimony of the individual and of human generative power(139).

The lay faithful, having responsibility in various capacities and at different levels of science as well as in the medical, social, legislative and economic fields must courageously accept the "challenge" posed by new problems in bioethics. The Synod Fathers used these words: "Christians ought to exercise their responsibilities as masters of science and technology, and not become their slaves... In view of the moral challenges presented by enormous new technological power, endangering not only fundamental human rights but the very biological essence of the human species, it is of utmost importance that lay Christians with the help of the universal Church-take up the task of calling culture back to the principles of an authentic humanism, giving a dynamic and sure foundation to the promotion and defence of the rights of the human being in one's very essence, an essence which the preaching of the Gospel reveals to all(140).

Today maximum vigilance must be exercised by everyone in the face of the phenomenon of the concentration of power and technology. In fact such a concentration has a tendency to manipulate not only the biological essence but the very content of people's consciences and life styles, thereby worsening the condition of entire peoples by discrimination and marginization.

Free to Call Upon the Name of the Lord

39. Respect for the dignity of the person, which implies the defence and promotion of human rights, demands the recognition of the religious dimension of the individual. This is not simply a requirement "concerning matters of faith", but a requirement that finds itself inextricably bound up with the very reality of the individual. In fact, the individual's relation to God is a constitutive element of the very "being" and "existence" of an individual: it is in God that we "live, move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Even if not all believe this truth, the many who are convinced of it have the right to be respected for their faith and for their life-choice, individual and communal, that flows from that faith. This is the right of freedom of conscience and religious freedom, the effective acknowledgment of which is among the highest goods and the most serious duties of every people that truly wishes to assure the good of the person and society. "Religious freedom, an essential requirement of the dignity of every person, is a cornerstone of the structure of human rights, and for this reason an irreplaceable factor in the good of individuals and of the whole of society, as well as of the personal fulfilment of each individual. It follows that the freedom of individuals and of communities to profess and practice their religion is an essential element for peaceful human coexistence... The civil and social right to religious freedom, inasmuch as it touches the most intimate sphere of the spirit, is a point of reference for the other fundamental rights and in some way becomes a measure of them"(141).

The Synod did not forget the many brothers and sisters that still do not enjoy such a right and have to face difficulties, marginization, suffering, persecution, and oftentimes death because of professing the faith. For the most part, they are brothers and sisters of the Christian lay faithful. The proclamation of the Gospel and the Christian testimony given in a life of suffering and martyrdom make up the summit of the apostolic life among Christ's disciples, just as the love for the Lord Jesus even to the giving of one's life constitutes a source of extraordinary fruitfulness for the building up of the Church. Thus the mystic vine bears witness to its earnestness in the faith, as expressed by Saint Augustine: "But that vine, as predicted by the prophets and even by the Lord himself, spread its fruitful branches in the world, and becomes the more fruitful the more it is watered by the blood of martyrs"(142).

The whole Church is profoundly grateful for this example and this gift. These sons and daughters give reason for renewing the pursuit of a holy and apostolic life. In this sense the Fathers at the Synod have made it their special duty "to give thanks to those lay people who, despite their restricted liberty, live as tireless witnesses of faith in faithful union with the Apostolic See, although they may be deprived of sacred ministers. They risk everything, even life. In this way the lay faithful bear witness to an essential property of the Church: God's Church is born of God's grace, which is expressed in an excellent way in martyrdom"(143).

Without doubt, all that has been said until now on the subject of respect for personal dignity and the acknowledgment of human rights concerns the responsibility of each Christian, of each person. However, we must immediately recognize how such a problem today has a world dimension: in fact, it is a question which at this moment affects entire groups, indeed entire peoples, who are violently being denied their basic rights. Those forms of unequal development among the so-called different "Worlds" were openly denounced in the recent Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

Respect for the human person goes beyond the demands of individual morality. Instead, it is a basic criterion, an essential element, in the very structure of society, since the purpose of the whole of society itself is geared to the human person.

Thus, intimately connected with the responsibility of service to the person, is the responsibility to serve society, as the general task of that Christian animation of the temporal order to which the lay faithful are called as their proper and specific role.

The Family: Where the Duty to Society Begins

40. The human person has an inherent social dimension which calls a person from the innermost depths of self to communion with others and to the giving of self to others: "God, who has fatherly concern for everyone has willed that all people should form one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood"(144). Thus society as a fruit and sign of the social nature of the individual reveals its whole truth in being a community of persons.

Thus the result is an interdependence and reciprocity between the person and society: all that is accomplished in favour of the person is also a service rendered to society, and all that is done in favour of society redounds to the benefit of the person. For this reason the duty of the lay faithful in the apostolate of the temporal order is always to be viewed both from its meaning of service to the person founded on the individual's uniqueness and irrepeatability as well as on the meaning of service to all people which is inseparable from it.

The first and basic expression of the social dimension of the person, then, is the married couple and the family: "But God did not create man a solitary being. From the beginning 'male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27). This partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons"(145). Jesus is concerned to restore integral dignity to the married couple and solidity to the family (Mt 19:3-9). Saint Paul shows the deep rapport between marriage and the mystery of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:22-6:4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Pt 3:1-7).

The lay faithful's duty to society primarily begins in marriage and in the family. This duty can only be fulfilled adequately with the conviction of the unique and irreplaceable value that the family has in the development of society and the Church herself.

The family is the basic cell of society. It is the cradle of life and love, the place in which the individual "is born" and "grows". Therefore a primary concern is reserved for this community, especially, in those times when human egoism, the anti-birth campaign, totalitarian politics, situations of poverty, material, cultural and moral misery, threaten to make these very springs of life dry up. Furthermore, ideologies and various systems, together with forms of uninterest and indifference, dare to take over the role in education proper to the family.

Required in the face of this is a vast, extensive and systematic work, sustained not only by culture but also by economic and legislative means, which will safeguard the role of family in its task of being the primary place of "humanization" for the person and society.

It is above all the lay faithful's duty in the apostolate to make the family aware of its identity as the primary social nucleus, and its basic role in society, so that it might itself become always a more active and responsible place for proper growth and proper participation in social life. In such a way the family can and must require from all, beginning with public authority, the respect for those rights which in saving the family, will save society itself.

All that is written in the Exhortation Familiaris Consortio about participation in the development of society

(146) and all that the Holy See, at the invitation of the 1980 Synod of Bishops, has formulated with the "Charter of Rights for the Family", represent a complete and coordinated working programme for all those members of the lay faithful who, in various capacities, are interested in the values and the needs of the family. Such a programme needs to be more opportunely and decisively realized as the threats to the stability and fruitfulness of the family become more serious and the attempt to reduce the value of the family and to lessen its social value become more pressing and coordinated.

As experience testifies, whole civilizations and the cohesiveness of peoples depend above all on the human quality of their families. For this reason the duty in the apostolate towards the family acquires an incomparable social value. The Church, for her part, is deeply convinced of it, knowing well that "the path to the future passes through the family"(147)

Charity: The Soul and Sustenance of Solidarity

41. Service to society is expressed and realized in the most diverse ways, from those spontaneous and informal to those more structured, from help given to individuals to those destined for various groups and communities of persons.

The whole Church as such, is directly called to the service of charity: "In the very early days the Church added the agape to the Eucharistic Supper, and thus showed herself to be wholly united around Christ by the bond of charity. So too, in all ages, she is recognized by this sign of love, and while she rejoices in the undertakings of others, she claims works of charity as her own inalienable duty and right. For this reason, mercy to the poor and the sick, works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every kind, are held in special honour in the Church"(148). Charity towards one's neighbor, through contemporary forms of the traditional spiritual and corporal works of mercy, represent the most immediate, ordinary and habitual ways that lead to the Christian animation of the temporal order, the specific duty of the lay faithful.

Through charity towards one's neighbor, the lay faithful exercise and manifest their participation in the kingship of Christ, that is, in the power of the Son of man who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45). They live and manifest such a kingship in a most simple yet exalted manner, possible for everyone at all times because charity is the highest gift offered by the Spirit for building up the Church (cf. 1 Cor 13:13) and for the good of humanity. In fact, charity gives life and sustains the works of solidarity that look to the total needs of the human being.

The same charity, realized not only by individuals but also in a joint way by groups and communities, is and will always be necessary. Nothing and no one will be able to substitute for it, not even the multiplicity of institutions and public initiatives forced to give a response to the needs-oftentimes today so serious and widespread-of entire populations. Paradoxically such charity is made increasingly necessary the more that institutions become complex in their organization and pretend to manage every area at hand. In the end such projects lose their effectiveness as a result of an impersonal functionalism, an overgrown bureaucracy, unjust private interests and an all-too-easy and generalized disengagement from a sense of duty.

Precisely in this context various forms of volunteer work which express themselves in a multiplicity of services and activities continue to come about and to spread, particularly in organized society. If this impartial service be truly given for the good of all persons, especially the most in need and forgotten by the social services of society itself, then, volunteer work can be considered an important expression of the apostolate, in which lay men and women have a primary role.

Public Life: for Everyone and by Everyone

42. A charity that loves and serves the person is never able to be separated from justice. Each in its own way demands the full, effective acknowledgment of the rights of the individual, to which society is ordered in all its structures and institutions(149).

In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in "public life", that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good. The Synod Fathers have repeatedly affirmed that every person has a right and duty to participate in public life, albeit in a diversity and complementarity of forms, levels, tasks and responsibilities. Charges of careerism, idolatry of power, egoism and corruption that are oftentimes directed at persons in government, parliaments, the ruling classes, or political parties, as well as the common opinion that participating in politics is an absolute moral danger, does not in the least justify either skepticism or an absence on the part of Christians in public life.

On the contrary, the Second Vatican Council's words are particularly significant: "The Church regards as worthy of praise and consideration the work of those who, as a service to others, dedicate themselves to the public good of the state and undertake the burdens of this task"(150).

Public life on behalf of the person and society finds its basic standard in the pursuit of the common good, as the good of everyone and as the good of each person taken as a whole, which is guaranteed and offered in a fitting manner to people, both as individuals and in groups, for their free and responsible acceptance. "The political community"-we read in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*-"exists for that common good in which the community finds its full justification and meaning, and from which it derives its basic, proper and lawful arrangement. The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life by which individuals, families, and organizations can achieve more thoroughly their own fulfilment"(151). Furthermore, public life on behalf of the person and society finds its continuous line of action in the defence and the promotion of justice, understood to be a "virtue", an understanding which requires education, as well as a moral "force" that sustains the obligation to foster the rights and duties of each and everyone, based on the personal dignity of each human being.

The spirit of service is a fundamental element in the exercise of political power. This spirit of service, together with the necessary competence and efficiency, can make "virtuous" or "above criticism" the activity of persons in public life which is justly demanded by the rest of the people. To accomplish this requires a fullscale battle and a determination to overcome every temptation, such as the recourse to disloyalty and to falsehood, the waste of public funds for the advantage of a few and those with special interests, and the use of ambiguous and illicit means for acquiring, maintaining and increasing power at any cost.

The lay faithful given a charge in public life certainly ought to respect the autonomy of earthly realities properly understood, as we read in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "It is of great importance, especially in a pluralistic society, to work out a proper vision of the relationship between the political community and the Church, and to distinguish clearly between the activities of Christians, acting individually or collectively, in their own name as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience, and their activity in communion with their Pastors in the name of the Church. The Church by reason of her role and competence, is not identified with any political community nor bound by ties to any political system. She is at once the sign and the safeguard of the transcendental dimension of the human person"(152).At the same time-and this is felt today as a pressing responsibility-the lay faithful must bear witness to those human and gospel values that are intimately connected with political activity itself, such as liberty and justice,

solidarity, faithful and unselfish dedication for the good of all, a simple life-style, and a preferential love for the poor and the least. This demands that the lay faithful always be more animated by a real participation in the life of the Church and enlightened by her social doctrine. In this they can be supported and helped by the nearness of the Christian community and their Pastors(153).

The manner and means for achieving a public life which has true human development as its goal is solidarity. This concerns the active and responsible participation of all in public life, from individual citizens to various groups, from labour unions to political parties. All of us, each and everyone, are the goal of public life as well as its leading participants. In this environment, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, solidarity "is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all"(154).

Today political solidarity requires going beyond single nations or a single block of nations, to a consideration on a properly continental and world level.

The fruit of sound political activity, which is so much desired by everyone but always lacking in advancement, is peace. The lay faithful cannot remain indifferent or be strangers and inactive in the face of all that denies and compromises peace, namely, violence and war, torture and terrorism, concentration camps, militarization of public life, the arms race, and the nuclear threat. On the contrary, as disciples of Jesus Christ, "Prince of Peace" (Is 9:5) and "Our Peace" (Eph 2:14), the lay faithful ought to take upon themselves the task of being "peacemakers" (Mt 5:9), both through a conversion of "heart", justice and charity, all of which are the undeniable foundation of peace(155).

The lay faithful in working together with all those that truly seek peace and themselves serving in specific organizations as well as national and international institutions, ought to promote an extensive work of education intended to defeat the ruling culture of egoism, hate, the vendetta and hostility, and thereby to develop the culture of solidarity at every level. Such solidarity, in fact, "is the way to peace and at the same time to development"(156). From this perspective the Synod Fathers have invited Christians to reject as unacceptable all forms of violence, to promote attitudes of dialogue and peace and to commit themselves to establish a just international and social order(157).

Placing the Individual at the Center of Socio-Economic Life

43. Service to society on the part of the lay faithful finds its essence in the socio-economic question, which depends on the organization of work.

Recently recalled in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, is the seriousness of present problems as they relate to the subject of development and a proposed solution according to the social doctrine of the Church. I warmly desire to again refer its contents to all, in particular, to the lay faithful.

The basis for the social doctrine of the Church is the principle of the universal destination of goods. According to the plan of God the goods of the earth are offered to all people and to each individual as a means towards the development of a truly human life. At the service of this destination of goods is private property, which -precisely for this purpose- possesses an intrinsic social function. Concretely the work of man and woman represents the most common and most immediate instrument for the development of economic life, an instrument that constitutes at one and the same time a right and a duty for every individual.

Once again, all of this comes to mind in a particular way in the mission of the lay faithful. The Second Vatican Council formulates in general terms the purpose and criterion of their presence and their action: "In the socio-economic realm the dignity and total vocation of the human person must be honoured and advanced along with the welfare of society as a whole, for man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all socio-economic life"(158).

In the context of the transformations taking place in the world of economy and work which are a cause of concern, the lay faithful have the responsibility of being in the forefront in working out a solution to the very serious problems of growing unemployment; to fight for the most opportune overcoming of numerous injustices that come from organizations of work which lack a proper goal; to make the workplace become a community of persons respected in their uniqueness and in their right to participation; to develop new solidarity among those that participate in a common work; to raise up new forms of entrepreneurship and to look again at systems of commerce, finance and exchange of technology.

To such an end the lay faithful must accomplish their work with professional competence, with human honesty, and with a Christian spirit, and especially as a way of their own sanctification(159), according to the explicit invitation of the Council: "By work an individual ordinarily provides for self and family, is joined in fellowship to others, and renders them service; and is enabled to exercise genuine charity and be a partner in the work of bringing divine creation to perfection. Moreover, we know that through work offered to God an individual is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, whose labour with his hands at Nazareth greatly ennobled the dignity of work"(160).

Today in an ever-increasingly acute way, the so-called "ecological" question poses itself in relation to socio-economic life and work. Certainly humanity has received from God himself the task of "dominating" the created world and "cultivating the garden" of the world. But this is a task that humanity must carry out in respect for the divine image received, and, therefore, with intelligence and with love, assuming responsibility for the gifts that God has bestowed

and continues to bestow. Humanity has in its possession a gift that must be passed on to future generations, if possible, passed on in better condition. Even these future generations are the recipients of the Lord's gifts: "The dominion granted to humanity by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use and misuse', or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to 'eat of the fruit of the tree' (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity. A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the things of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialization—three considerations which alert our consciences to the moral dimension of development"(161).

Evangelizing Culture and the Cultures of Humanity

44. Service to the individual and to human society is expressed and finds its fulfilment through the creation and the transmission of culture, which especially in our time constitutes one of the more serious tasks of living together as a human family and of social evolution. In light of the Council, we mean by "culture" all those "factors which go to the refining and developing of humanity's diverse spiritual and physical endowments. It means the efforts of the human family to bring the world under its control through its knowledge and its labour; to humanize social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions; to express through its works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of all peoples throughout the ages; finally, to communicate and to preserve them to be an inspiration for the progress of many, indeed of the whole human race"(162). In this sense, culture must be held as the common good of every people, the expression of its dignity, liberty and creativity, and the testimony of its course through history. In particular, only from within and through culture does the Christian faith become a part of history and the creator of history.

The Church is fully aware of a pastoral urgency that calls for an absolutely special concern for culture in those circumstances where the development of a culture becomes disassociated not only from Christian faith but even from human values(163), as well as in those situations where science and technology are powerless in giving an adequate response to the pressing questions of truth and well-being that burn in people's hearts. For this reason the Church calls upon the lay faithful to be present, as signs of courage and intellectual creativity, in the privileged places of culture, that is, the world of education—school and university—in places of scientific and technological research, the areas of artistic creativity and work in the humanities. Such a presence is destined not only for the recognition and possible purification of the elements that critically burden existing culture, but also for the elevation of these cultures through the riches which have their source in the Gospel and the Christian faith. The extensive treatment by the Second Vatican Council of the rapport between the Gospel and culture represents a constant historic fact and at the same time serves as a working ideal of particular and immediate urgency. It is a challenging programme given as a pastoral responsibility to the entire Church, but in a specific way to the lay faithful in her. "The good news of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen humanity; it combats and removes the error and evil which flow from the attraction of sin which are a perpetual threat. She never ceases to purify and to elevate the morality of peoples... In this way the Church carries out her mission and in that very act she stimulates and makes her contribution to human and civic culture. By her action, even in its liturgical forms, she leads people to interior freedom"(164).

Some particularly significant citations from Paul VI's Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* merit recollection here: "The Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims (cf. Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18; 2:4), both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs. Strata of humanity are transformed: for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever-wider geographic areas or to ever-greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were challenging, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation. All this could be expressed in the following words: What matters is to evangelize humanity's culture and the cultures of the human family... the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures"(165).

The privileged way at present for the creation and transmission of culture is the means of social communications(166). The world of the massmedia represents a new frontier for the mission of the Church, because it is undergoing a rapid and innovative development and has an extensive worldwide influence on the formation of mentality and customs. In particular, the lay faithful's responsibility as professionals in this field, exercised both by individual right and through community initiatives and institutions, demands a recognition of all its values, and demands that it be sustained by more adequate resource materials, both intellectual and pastoral.

The use of these instruments by professionals in communication and their reception by the public demand both a work of education in a critical sense, which is animated by a passion for the truth, and a work of defence of liberty, respect for the dignity of individuals, and the elevation of the authentic culture of peoples which occurs through a firm and courageous rejection of every form of monopoly and manipulation.

However, the pastoral responsibility among the lay faithful does not stop with this work of defence. It extends to everyone in the world of communications, even to those professional people of the press, cinema, radio, television and theatre. These also are called to proclaim the gospel that brings salvation.

CHAPTER IV

LABOURERS IN THE LORD'S VINEYARD

Good Stewards of God's Varied Grace

The Variety of Vocations

45. According to the gospel parable, the "householder" calls the labourers for his vineyard at various times during the day: some at dawn, others about nine in the morning, still others about midday and at three, the last, around five (cf. Mt 20:1 ff.). In commenting on these words of the gospel, Saint Gregory the Great makes a comparison between the various times of the call and the different stages in life: "It is possible to compare the different hours", he writes, "to the various stages in a person's life. According to our analogy the morning can certainly represent childhood. The third hour, then, can refer to adolescence; the sun has now moved to the height of heaven, that is, at this stage a person grows in strength. The sixth hour is adulthood, the sun is in the middle of the sky, indeed at this age the fullness of vitality is obvious. Old age represents the ninth hour, because the sun starts its descent from the height of heaven, thus the youthful vitality begins to decline. The eleventh hour represents those who are most advanced in years... The labourers, then, are called and sent forth into the vineyard at different hours, that is to say, one is led to a holy life during childhood, another in adolescence, another in adulthood and another in old age"(167).

We can make a further application of the comments of Saint Gregory the Great to the extraordinary variety of ways the Church becomes "present" in life; one and all are called to work for the coming of the Kingdom of God according to the diversity of callings and situations, charisms and ministries. This variety is not only linked to age, but also to the difference of sex and to the diversity of natural gifts, as well as to careers and conditions affecting a person's life. It is a variety that makes the riches of the Church more vital and concrete.

Young People, Children and Older People

Youth, the Hope of the Church

46. The Synod wished to give particular attention to the young. And rightly so. In a great many countries of the world, they represent half of entire populations, and often constitute in number half of the People of God itself living in those countries. Simply from this aspect youth make up an exceptional potential and a great challenge for the future of the Church. In fact the Church sees her path towards the future in the youth, beholding in them a reflection of herself and her call to that blessed youthfulness which she constantly enjoys as a result of Christ's Spirit. In this sense the Council has defined youth as "the hope of the Church"(168).

In the letter of 31 March 1985 to young men and women in the world we read: "The Church looks to the youth, indeed the Church in a special way looks at herself in the youth, in all of you and in each of you. It has been so from the beginning, from apostolic times. The words of St. John in his First Letter can serve as special testimony: 'I am writing to you, young people, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father... I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you (1 Jn 2:13 ff.)... In our generation, at the end of the Second Millennium after Christ, the Church also sees herself in the youth"(169).

Youth must not simply be considered as an object of pastoral concern for the Church: in fact, young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society.(170) Youth is a time of an especially intensive discovery of a "self" and "a choice of life". It is a time for growth which ought to progress "in wisdom, age and grace before God and people" (Lk 2:52).

The Synod Fathers have commented: "The sensitivity of young people profoundly affects their perceiving of the values of justice, nonviolence and peace. Their hearts are disposed to fellowship, friendship and solidarity. They are greatly moved by causes that relate to the quality of life and the conservation of nature. But they are troubled by anxiety, deceptions, anguishes and fears of the world as well as by the temptations that come with their state"(171).

The Church must seek to rekindle the very special love displayed by Christ towards the young man in the Gospel: "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him" (Mk 10:21). For this reason the Church does not tire of proclaiming Jesus Christ, of proclaiming his Gospel as the unique and satisfying response to the most deep-seated aspirations of young people, as illustrated in Christ's forceful and exalted personal call to discipleship ("Come and follow me." Mk 10:21), that brings about a sharing in the filial love of Jesus for his Father and the participation in his mission for the salvation of humanity.

The Church has so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church. This mutual dialogue, by taking place with great cordiality, clarity and courage, will provide a favorable setting for the meeting and exchange between generations, and will be a source of richness and youthfulness for the Church and civil society. In its

message to young people the Council said: "The Church looks to you with confidence and with love... She is the real youthfulness of the world... Look upon the Church and you will find in her the face of Christ"(172).

Children and the Kingdom of Heaven

47. Children are certainly the object of the Lord Jesus' tender and generous love. To them he gave his blessing, and, even more, to them he promised the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 19:13-15; Mk 10:14). In particular Jesus exalted the active role that little ones have in the Kingdom of God. They are the eloquent symbol and exalted image of those moral and spiritual conditions that are essential for entering into the Kingdom of God and for living the logic of total confidence in the Lord: "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18, 3-5; cf. Lk 9:48).

Children are a continual reminder that the missionary fruitfulness of the Church has its life-giving basis not in human means and merits, but in the absolute gratuitous gift of God. The life itself of innocence and grace of many children, and even the suffering and oppression unjustly inflicted upon them are in virtue of the Cross of Christ a source of spiritual enrichment for them and for the entire Church. Everyone ought to be more conscious and grateful for this fact. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that valuable possibilities exist even in the life's stages of infancy and childhood, both for the building up of the Church and for making society more humane. How often the Council referred to the beneficial and constructive affects for the family, "the domestic Church", through the presence of sons and daughters: "Children as living members of the family, contribute in their in their own way to the sanctification of their parents"(173). The Council's words must also be repeated about children in relation to the local and universal Church. John Gerson, a great theologian and educator of the 15th Century, had already emphasized this fact in stating that "children and young people are in no way a negligible part of the Church"(174).

Older People and the Gift of Wisdom

48. I now address older people, oftentimes unjustly considered as unproductive, if not directly an insupportable burden. I remind older people that the Church calls and expects them to continue to exercise their mission in the apostolic and missionary life. This is not only a possibility for them, but it is their duty even in this time in their life when age itself provides opportunities in some specific and basic way.

The Bible delights in presenting the older person as the symbol of someone rich in wisdom and fear of the Lord (cf. Sir 25:4-6). In this sense the "gift" of older people can be specifically that of being the witness to tradition in the faith both in the Church and in society (cf. Ps 44: 2; Ex 12:26-27), the teacher of the lessons of life (cf. Sir 6:34; 8:11-12), and the worker of charity.

At this moment the growing number of older people in different countries worldwide and the expected retirement of persons from various professions and the workplace provides older people with a new opportunity in the apostolate. Involved in the task is their determination to overcome the temptation of taking refuge in a nostalgia in a never-to-return past or fleeing from present responsibility because of difficulties encountered in a world of one novelty after another. They must always have a clear knowledge that one's role in the Church and society does not stop at a certain age at all, but at such times knows only new ways of application. As the Psalmist says: "They still bring forth fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green, to show that the Lord is upright" (Ps 92:15-16). I repeat all that I said during the celebration of the Older People's Jubilee: "Arriving at an older age is to be considered a privilege: not simply because not everyone has the good fortune to reach this stage in life, but also, and above all, because this period provides real possibilities for better evaluating the past, for knowing and living more deeply the Paschal Mystery, for becoming an example in the Church for the whole People of God... Despite the complex nature of the problems you face: a strength that progressively diminishes, the insufficiencies of social organizations, official legislation that comes late, or the lack of understanding by a self-centered society, you are not to feel yourselves as persons underestimated in the life of the Church or as passive objects in a fast-paced world, but as participants at a time of life which is humanly and spiritually fruitful. You still have a mission to fulfill, a contribution to make. According to the divine plan, each individual human being lives a life of continual growth, from the beginning of existence to the moment at which the last breath is taken"(175).

Women and Men

49. The Synod Fathers gave special attention to the status and role of women, with two purposes in mind: to themselves acknowledge and to invite all others to once again acknowledge the indispensable contribution of women to the building up of the Church and the development of society. They wished as well to work on a more specific analysis of women's participation in the life and mission of the Church.

Making reference to Pope John XXIII, who saw women's greater consciousness of their proper dignity and their entrance into public life as signs of our times(176), the Synod Fathers, when confronted with the various forms of

discrimination and marginization to which women are subjected simply because they are women, time and time again strongly affirmed the urgency to defend and to promote the personal dignity of woman, and consequently, her equality with man.

If anyone has this task of advancing the dignity of women in the Church and society, it is women themselves, who must recognize their responsibility as leading characters. There is still much effort to be done, in many parts of the world and in various surroundings, to destroy that unjust and deleterious mentality which considers the human being as a thing, as an object to buy and sell, as an instrument for selfish interests or for pleasure only. Women themselves, for the most part, are the prime victims of such a mentality. Only through openly acknowledging the personal dignity of women is the first step taken to promote the full participation of women in Church life as well as in social and public life. A more extensive and decisive response must be given to the demands made in the Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* concerning the many discriminations of which women are the victims: "Vigorous and incisive pastoral action must be taken by all to overcome completely these forms of discrimination so that the image of God that shines in all human beings without exception may be fully respected"(177). Along the same lines, the Synod Fathers stated: "As an expression of her mission the Church must stand firmly against all forms of discrimination and abuse of women"(178). And again: "The dignity of women, gravely wounded in public esteem, must be restored through effective respect for the rights of the human person and by putting the teaching of the Church into practice"(179).

In particular when speaking of active and responsible participation in the life and mission of the Church, emphasis should be placed on what has already been stated and clearly urged by the Second Vatican Council: "Since in our days women are taking an increasingly active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate"(180).

The awareness that women with their own gifts and tasks have their own specific vocation, has increased and been deepened in the years following the Council and has found its fundamental inspiration in the Gospel and the Church's history. In fact, for the believer the Gospel, namely, the word and example of Jesus Christ, remains the necessary and decisive point of reference. In no other moment in history is this fact more fruitful and innovative.

Though not called to the apostolate of the Twelve, and thereby, to the ministerial priesthood, many women, nevertheless, accompanied Jesus in his ministry and assisted the group of Apostles (cf. Lk 8:2-3), were present at the foot of the Cross (cf. Lk 23:49), assisted at the burial of Christ (cf. Lk 23:55) received and transmitted the message of resurrection on Easter morn (cf. Lk 24:1-10), and prayed with the apostles in the Cenacle awaiting Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:14).

From the evidence of the Gospel, the Church at its origin detached herself from the culture of the time and called women to tasks connected with spreading the gospel. In his letters the Apostle Paul even cites by name a great number of women for their various functions in service of the primitive Christian community (cf. Rom 16:1-15; Phil 4:2-3; Col 4:15 and 1 Cor 11:5; 1 Tim 5:16). "If the witness of the Apostles founds the Church", stated Paul VI, "the witness of women contributes greatly towards nourishing the faith of Christian communities"(181).

Both in her earliest days and in her successive development the Church, albeit in different ways and with diverse emphases, has always known women who have exercised an oftentimes decisive role in the Church herself and accomplished tasks of considerable value on her behalf. History is marked by grand works, quite often lowly and hidden, but not for this reason any less decisive to the growth and the holiness of the Church. It is necessary that this history continue, indeed that it be expanded and intensified in the face of the growing and widespread awareness of the personal dignity of woman and her vocation, particularly in light of the urgency of a "re-evangelization" and a major effort towards "humanizing" social relations.

Gathering together the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council, which reflect the Gospel's message and the Church's history, the Synod Fathers formulated, among others, this precise "recommendation": "It is necessary that the Church recognize all the gifts of men and women for her life and mission, and put them into practice"(182). And again, "This Synod proclaims that the Church seeks the recognition and use of all the gifts, experiences and talents of men and women to make her mission effective (cf. *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 72)"(183).

Anthropological and Theological Foundations

50. The condition that will assure the rightful presence of woman in the Church and in society is a more penetrating and accurate consideration of the anthropological foundation for masculinity and femininity with the intent of clarifying woman's personal identity in relation to man, that is, a diversity yet mutual complementarity, not only as it concerns roles to be held and functions to be performed, but also, and more deeply, as it concerns her make-up and meaning as a person.

The Synod Fathers have deeply felt this requirement, maintaining that "the anthropological and theological foundations for resolving questions about the true significance and dignity of each sex require deeper study"(184).

Through committing herself to a reflection on the anthropological and theological basis of femininity, the Church enters the historic process of the various movements for the promotion of woman, and, in going to the very basic aspect of woman as a personal being, provides her most precious contribution. But even before this the Church intends, in

such a way, to obey God, who created the individual "in his image", "male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27) and who intended that they would accept the call of God to come to know, reverence and live his plan. It is a plan that "from the beginning" has been indelibly imprinted in the very being of the human person-men and women-and, therefore, in the make-up, meaning and deepest workings of the individual. This most wise and loving plan must be explored to discover all its richness of content-a richness that "from the beginning" came to be progressively manifested and realized in the whole history of salvation, and was brought to completion in "the fullness of time", when "God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Gal 4:4). That "fullness" continues in history: God's plan for woman is read and is to be read within the context of the faith of the Church, and also, in the lives lived by so many Christian women today. Without forgetting the help that can come from different human sciences and cultures, researchers because of an informed discernment, will be able to help gather and clarify the values and requirements that belong to the enduring essential aspects of women and those bound to evolve in history. The Second Vatican Council reminds us: "The Church maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change; these find their ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (cf. Heb 13:8)"(185). The Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Woman gives much attention to the anthropological and theological foundation of woman's dignity as a person. The document seeks to again treat and develop the catechetical reflections of the Wednesday General Audiences devoted over a long period of time to the "theology of the body", while at the same time fulfilling a promise made in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*(186) and serving as a response to the request of the Synod Fathers.

May the reading of the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, in particular, as a biblical theological meditation, be an incentive for everyone, both women and men, and especially for those who devote their lives to the human sciences and theological disciplines, to pursue on the basis of the personal dignity of man and woman and their mutual relationship, a critical study to better and more deeply understand the values and specific gifts of femininity and masculinity, not only in the surroundings of social living but also and above all in living as Christians and as members of the Church.

This meditation on the anthropological and theological foundations of women ought to enlighten and guide the Christian response to the most frequently asked questions, oftentimes so crucial, on the "place" that women can have and ought to have in the Church and in society.

It is quite clear from the words and attitude of Christ, which are normative for the Church, that no discrimination exists on the level of an individual's relation to Christ, in which "there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) and on the level of participation in the Church's life of grace and holiness, as Joel's prophecy fulfilled at Pentecost wonderfully attests: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophecy" (Joel 3:1; cf. Acts 2:17 ff). As the Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Woman reads: "Both women and men... are equally capable of receiving the outpouring of divine truth and love in the Holy Spirit. Both receive his salvific and sanctifying 'visits'"(187).

Mission in the Church and in the World

51. In speaking about participation in the apostolic mission of the Church, there is no doubt that in virtue of Baptism and Confirmation, a woman-as well as a man-is made a sharer in the threefold mission of Jesus Christ, Priest, Prophet and King, and is thereby charged and given the ability to fulfill the fundamental apostolate of the Church: evangelization. However, a woman is called to put to work in this apostolate the "gifts" which are properly hers: first of all, the gift that is her very dignity as a person exercised in word and testimony of life, gifts therefore, connected with her vocation as a woman.

In her participation in the life and mission of the Church a woman cannot receive the Sacrament of Orders, and therefore, cannot fulfil the proper function of the ministerial priesthood. This is a practice that the Church has always found in the expressed will of Christ, totally free and sovereign, who called only men to be his apostles(188); a practice that can be understood from the rapport between Christ, the Spouse, and his Bride, the Church(189). Here we are in the area of function, not of dignity and holiness. In fact, it must be maintained: "Although the Church possesses a 'hierarchical' structure, nevertheless this structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members"(190).

However, as Paul VI has already said, "We cannot change what our Lord did, nor his call to women; but we can recognize and promote the role of women in the mission of evangelization and in the life of the Christian community(191).

Above all the acknowledgment in theory of the active and responsible presence of woman in the Church must be realized in practice. With this in mind this Exhortation addressed to the lay faithful with its deliberate and repeated use of the terms "women and men", must be read. Furthermore the revised Code of Canon Law contains many provisions on the participation of women in the life and mission of the Church: they are provisions that must be more commonly known and, according to the diverse sensibilities of culture and opportuneness in a pastoral situation, be realized with greater timeliness and determination.

An example comes to mind in the participation of women on diocesan and parochial Pastoral Councils as well as Diocesan Synods and particular Councils. In this regard the Synod Fathers have written: "Without discrimination women should be participants in the life of the Church, and also in consultation and the process of coming to decisions"(192).And again: "Women, who already hold places of great importance in transmitting the faith and offering

every kind of service in the life of the Church, ought to be associated in the preparation of pastoral and missionary documents and ought to be recognized as cooperators in the mission of the church in the family, in professional life and in the civil community"(193).

In the more specific area of evangelization and catechesis the particular work that women have in the transmission of the faith, not only in the family but also in the various educational environments, is to be more strongly fostered. In broader terms, this should be applied in all that regard embracing the Word of God, its understanding and its communication, as well as its study, research and theological teaching.

While she is to fulfill her duty to evangelize, woman is to feel more acutely her need to be evangelized. Thus, with her vision illumined by faith (cf. Eph 1:18), woman is to be able to distinguish what truly responds to her dignity as a person and to her vocation from all that, under the pretext of this "dignity" and in the name of "freedom" and "progress", militates against true values. On the contrary, these false values become responsible for the moral degradation of the person, the environment and society. This same "discernment", made possible and demanded from Christian women's participation in the prophetic mission of Christ and his Church, recurs with continued urgency throughout history. This "discernment", often mentioned by the Apostle Paul, is not only a matter of evaluating reality and events in the light of faith, but also involves a real decision and obligation to employ it, not only in Church life but also in human society.

It can be said that the problems of today's world already cited in the second part of the Council's Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which remain unresolved and not at all affected by the passage of time, must witness the presence and commitment of women with their irreplaceable and customary contributions.

In particular, two great tasks entrusted to women merit the attention of everyone.

First of all, the task of bringing full dignity to the conjugal life and to motherhood. Today new possibilities are opened to women for a deeper understanding and a richer realization of human and Christian values implied in the conjugal life and the experience of motherhood. Man himself-husband and father-can be helped to overcome forms of absenteeism and of periodic presence as well as a partial fulfilment of parental responsibilities-indeed he can be involved in new and significant relations of interpersonal communion-precisely as a result of the intelligent, loving and decisive intervention of woman.

Secondly, women have the task of assuring the moral dimension of culture, the dimension, namely of a culture worthy of the person, of an individual yet social life. The Second Vatican Council seems to connect the moral dimension of culture with the participation of the lay faithful in the kingly mission of Christ: "Let the lay faithful by their combined efforts remedy the institutions and conditions of the world when the latter are an inducement to sin, that all such things may be conformed to the norms of justice, and may favor the practice of virtue rather than hindering it. By so doing, they will infuse culture and human works with a moral value"(194).

As women increasingly participate more fully and responsibly in the activities of institutions which are associated with safeguarding the basic duty to human values in various communities, the words of the Council just quoted point to an important field in the apostolate of women: in all aspects of the life of such communities, from the socio-economic to the sociopolitical dimension, the personal dignity of woman and her specific vocation ought to be respected and promoted. Likewise this should be the case in living situations not only affecting the individual but also communities, not only in forms left to personal freedom and responsibility, but even in those guaranteed by just civil laws.

"It is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). God entrusted the human being to woman. Certainly, every human being is entrusted to each and every other human being, but in a special way the human being is entrusted to woman, precisely because the woman in virtue of her special experience of motherhood is seen to have a specific sensitivity towards the human person and all that constitutes the individual's true welfare, beginning with the fundamental value of life. How great are the possibilities and responsibilities of woman in this area, at a time when the development of science and technology is not always inspired and measured by true wisdom, with the inevitable risk of "de-humanizing" human life, above all when it would demand a more intense love and a more generous acceptance.

The participation of women in the life of the Church and society in the sharing of her gifts is likewise the path necessary of her personal fulfillment-on which so many justly insist today-and the basic contribution of woman to the enrichment of Church communion and the dynamism in the apostolate of the People of God.

From this perspective the presence also of men, together with women, ought to be considered.

The Presence and Collaboration of Men Together with Women

52. Many voices were raised in the Synod Hall expressing the fear that excessive insistence given to the status and role of women would lead to an unacceptable omission, that, in point, regarding men. In reality, various sectors in the Church must lament the absence or the scarcity of the presence of men, some of whom abdicate their proper Church responsibilities, allowing them to be fulfilled only by women. Such instances are participation in the liturgical prayer of the Church, education and, in particular, catechesis of their own sons and daughters and other children, presence at religious and cultural meetings, and collaboration in charitable and missionary initiatives.

Therefore, the coordinated presence of both men and women is to be pastorally urged so that the participation of the lay faithful in the salvific mission of the Church might be rendered more rich, complete and harmonious.

The fundamental reason that requires and explains the presence and the collaboration of both men and women is not only, as it was just emphasized, the major source of meaning and efficacy in the pastoral action of the Church, nor even less is it the simple sociological fact of sharing a life together as human beings, which is natural for man and woman. It is, rather, the original plan of the Creator who from the "beginning" willed the human being to be a "unity of the two", and willed man and woman to be the prime community of persons, source of every other community, and, at the same time, to be a "sign" of that interpersonal communion of love which constitutes the mystical, intimate life of God, One in Three.

Precisely for this reason, the most common and widespread way, and at the same time, fundamental way, to assure this coordinated and harmonious presence of men and women in the life and mission of the Church, is the fulfilment of the tasks and responsibilities of the couple and the Christian family, in which the variety of diverse forms of life and love is seen and communicated: conjugal, paternal and maternal, filial and familial. We read in the Exhortation Familiaris Consortio: "Since the Christian family is a community in which the relationships are renewed by Christ through faith and the sacraments, the family's sharing in the Church's mission should follow a community pattern: the spouses together as a couple, the parents and children as a family, must live their service to the Church and to the world... The Christian family also builds up the Kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life: it is thus in the love between husband and wife and between members of the family-a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness-that the Christian family's participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of his Church finds expression and realization"(195).

From this perspective, the Synod Fathers have recalled the meaning that the Sacrament of Matrimony ought to assume in the Church and society in order to illuminate and inspire all the relations between men and women. In this regard they have emphasized an "urgent need for every Christian to live and proclaim the message of hope contained in the relation between man and woman. The Sacrament of Matrimony, which consecrates this relation in its conjugal form and reveals it as a sign of the relation of Christ with his Church, contains a teaching of great importance for the Church's life-a teaching that ought to reach today's world through the Church; all those relations between man and woman must be imbued by this spirit. The Church should even more fully rely on the riches found here"(196). These same Fathers have rightly emphasized that "the esteem for virginity and reverence for motherhood must be respectively restored"(197), and still again they have called for the development of diverse and complementary vocations in the living context of Church communion and in the service of its continued growth.

The Sick and the Suffering

53. People are called to joy. Nevertheless, each day they experience many forms of suffering and pain. The Synod Fathers in addressing men and women affected by these various forms of suffering and pain used the following words in their final Message: "You who are the abandoned and pushed to the edges of our consumer society; you who are sick, people with disabilities, the poor and hungry, migrants and prisoners, refugees, unemployed, abandoned children and old people who feel alone; you who are victims of war and all kinds of violence: the Church reminds you that she shares your suffering. She takes it to the Lord, who in turn associates you with his redeeming Passion. You are brought to life in the light of his resurrection. We need you to teach the whole world what love is. We will do everything we can so that you may find your rightful place in the Church and in society"(198).

In the context of such a limitless world as human suffering, We now turn our attention to all those struck down by sickness in its various forms: sickness is indeed the most frequent and common expression of human suffering.

The Lord addresses his call to each and every one. Even the sick are sent forth as labourers into the Lord's vineyard: the weight that wearies the body's members and dissipates the soul's serenity is far from dispensing a person from working in the vineyard. Instead the sick are called to live their human and Christian vocation and to participate in the growth of the Kingdom of God in a new and even more valuable manner. The words of the apostle Paul ought to become their approach to life or, better yet, cast an illumination to permit them to see the meaning of grace in their very situation: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24). Precisely in arriving at this realization, the apostle is raised up in joy: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" (Col 1:24). In the same way many of the sick can become bearers of the "joy inspired by the Holy Spirit in much affliction" (1 Thes 1:6) and witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. A handicapped person expressed these sentiments in a presentation in the Synod Hall: "It is very important to make clear that Christians who live in situations of illness, pain and old age are called by God not only to unite their suffering to Christ's Passion but also to receive in themselves now, and to transmit to others, the power of renewal and the joy of the risen Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:10-11; 1 Pt 4:13; Rom 8:18 ff)"(199).

On the Church's part-as it reads in the Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris-"Born in the mystery of Redemption in the Cross of Christ, the Church has to try to meet man in a special way on the path of suffering. In this meeting man 'becomes the way for the Church', and this is one of the most important ways"(200). At this moment the suffering individual is the way of the Church because that person is, first of all, the way of Christ Himself, who is the Good

Samaritan who "does not pass by", but "has compassion on him, went to him... bound up his wounds... took care of him" (Lk 10:32-34).

From century to century the Christian community in revealing and communicating its healing love and the consolation of Jesus Christ has reenacted the gospel parable of the Good Samaritan in caring for the vast multitude of persons who are sick and suffering. This came about through the untiring commitment of all those who have taken care of the sick and suffering as a result of science and the medical arts as well as the skilled and generous service of healthcare workers. Today there is an increase in the presence of lay women and men in Catholic hospital and healthcare institutions. At times the lay faithful's presence in these institutions is total and exclusive. It is to just such people-doctors, nurses, other healthcare workers, volunteers-that the call becomes the living sign of Jesus Christ and his Church in showing love towards the sick and suffering.

Renewed Pastoral Action

54. It is necessary that this most precious heritage, which the Church has received from Jesus Christ, "Physician of the body and the spirit"(201), must never diminish but always must come to be more valued and enriched through renewal and decisive initiatives of pastoral activity for and with the sick and suffering. This activity must be capable of sustaining and fostering attention, nearness, presence, listening, dialogue, sharing, and real help toward individuals in moments when sickness and suffering sorely test not only faith in life but also faith in God and his love as Father.

One of the basic objectives of this renewed and intensified pastoral action, which must involve all components of the ecclesial community in a coordinated way, is an attitude which looks upon the sick person, the bearer of a handicap, or the suffering individual, not simply as an object of the Church's love and service, but as an active and responsible participant in the work of evangelization and salvation. From this perspective the Church has to let the good news resound within a society and culture, which, having lost the sense of human suffering, "censors" all talk on such a hard reality of life. The good news is the proclamation that suffering can even have a positive meaning for the individual and for society itself, since each person is called to a form of participation in the salvific suffering of Christ and in the joy of resurrection, as well as, thereby, to become a force for the sanctification and building up of the Church.

The proclamation of this good news gains credibility when it is not simply voiced in words, but passes into a testimony of life, both in the case of all those who lovingly care for the sick, the handicapped and the suffering, as well as the suffering themselves who are increasingly made more conscious and responsible of their place and task within and on behalf of the Church.

In order that "the civilization of love" can flourish and produce fruit in this vast world of human pain, I invite all to reread and meditate on the Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, from which I am pleased to again propose the lines from its conclusion: "There should come together in spirit beneath the Cross of Calvary all suffering people who believe in Christ, and particularly those who suffer because of their faith in him

who is the Crucified and Risen One, so that the offering of their sufferings may hasten the fulfilment of the prayer of the Saviour himself that all may be one. Let there also gather beneath the Cross all people of good will, for on this Cross is the 'Redeemer of Man', the Man of Sorrows, who has taken upon himself the physical and moral sufferings of the people of all times, so that in love they may find the salvific meaning of their sorrow and valid answers to all their questions.

Together with Mary, Mother of Christ, who stood beneath the Cross, we pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man and we ask all of you who suffer to support us. We ask precisely you who are weak to become a source of strength for the Church and humanity. In the terrible battle between the forces of good and evil revealed to our eyes by our modern world, may your sufferings in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious"(202).

The States of Life and Vocations

55. All the members of the People of God -clergy, men and women religious, the lay faithful-are labourers in the vineyard. At one and the same time they all are the goal and subjects of Church communion as well as of participation in the mission of salvation. Every one of us possessing charisms and ministries, diverse yet complementary, works in the one and the same vineyard of the Lord.

Simply in being Christians, even before actually doing the works of a Christian, all are branches of the one fruitful vine which is Christ.

All are living members of the one Body of the Lord built up through the power of the Spirit. The significance of "being" a Christian does not come about simply from the life of grace and holiness which is the primary and more productive source of the apostolic and missionary fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church. Its meaning also arises from the state of life that characterizes the clergy, men and women religious, members of secular institutes and the lay faithful.

In Church Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each

of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service.

Thus the lay state of life has its distinctive feature in its secular character. It fulfills an ecclesial service in bearing witness and, in its own way recalling for priests, women and men religious, the significance of the earthly and temporal realities in the salvific plan of God. In turn, the ministerial priesthood represents in different times and places, the permanent guarantee of the sacramental presence of Christ, the Redeemer. The religious state bears witness to the eschatological character of the Church, that is, the straining towards the Kingdom of God that is prefigured and in some way anticipated and experienced even now through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

All the states of life, whether taken collectively or individually in relation to the others, are at the service of the Church's growth. While different in expression they are deeply united in the Church's "mystery of communion" and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission.

Thus in the diversity of the states of life and the variety of vocations this same, unique mystery of the Church reveals and experiences anew the infinite richness of the mystery of Jesus Christ. The Fathers were fond of referring to the Church as a field of a pleasing and wonderful variety of herbs, plants, flowers and fruits. Saint Ambrose writes: "A field produces many fruits, but the one which has an abundance of both fruits and flowers is far better. The field of holy Church is fruitful in both one and the other. In this field there are the priceless buds of virginity blossoming forth, widowhood stands out boldly as the forest in the plain; elsewhere the rich harvest of weddings blessed by the Church fills the great granary of the world with abundant produce, and the wine-presses of the Lord Jesus overflow with the grapes of a productive vine, enriches Christian marriages"(203).

The Various Vocations in the Lay State

56. The Church's rich variety is manifested still further from within each state of life. Thus within the lay state diverse "vocations" are given, that is, there are different paths in the spiritual life and the apostolate which are taken by individual members of the lay faithful. In the field of a "commonly shared" lay vocation "special" lay vocations flourish. In this area we can also recall the spiritual experience of the flourishing of diverse forms of secular institutes that have developed recently in the Church. These offer the lay faithful, and even priests, the possibility of professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience through vows or promises, while fully maintaining one's lay or clerical state(204). In this regard the Synod Fathers have commented, "The Holy Spirit stirs up other forms of self-giving to which people who remain fully in the lay state devote themselves"(205).

We can conclude by reading a beautiful passage taken from Saint Francis de Sales, who promoted lay spirituality so well(206). In speaking of "devotion", that is, Christian perfection or "life according to the Spirit", he presents in a simple yet insightful way the vocation of all Christians to holiness while emphasizing the specific form with which individual Christians fulfill it: "In creation God commanded the plants to bring forth their fruits, each one after its kind. So does he command all Christians, who are the living plants of his Church, to bring forth the fruits of devotion, each according to his character and vocation. Devotion must be exercised in different ways by the gentleman, the workman, the servant, the prince, the widow, the maid and the married woman. Not only this, but the practice of devotion must also be adapted to the strength, the employment, and the duties of each one in particular... It is an error, or rather a heresy, to try to banish the devout life from the regiment of soldiers, the shop of the mechanic, the court of princes, or the home of married folk. It is true, Philothea, that a purely contemplative, monastic and religious devotion cannot be exercised in such ways of life. But besides these three kinds of devotion, there are several others adapted to bring to perfection those who live in the secular state"(207).

Along the same line the Second Vatican Council states: "This lay spirituality should take its particular character from the circumstances of one's state in life (married and familylife, celibacy, widowhood), from one's state of health and from one's professional and social activity. All should not cease to develop earnestly the qualities and talents bestowed on them in accord with these conditions of life and should make use of the gifts which they have received from the Holy Spirit"(208).

What has been said about the spiritual vocation can also be said-and to a certain degree with greater reason-of the infinite number of ways through which all members of the Church are employed as labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, building up the Mystical Body of Christ. Indeed as a person with a truly unique lifestory, each is called by name, to make a special contribution to the coming of the Kingdom of God. No talent, no matter how small, is to be hidden or left unused (cf. Mt 25:24-27).

In this regard the apostle Peter gives us a stern warning: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt 4:10).

CHAPTER V

THAT YOU BEAR MUCH FRUIT

The Formation of the Lay Faithful in the Lay State

A Continual Process of Maturation

57. The gospel image of the vine and the branches reveals to us another fundamental aspect of the lay faithful's life and mission: the call to growth and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit.

As a diligent vinedresser, the Father takes care of his vine. God's solicitude is so ardently called upon by Israel, that she prays: "Turn again, O God of hosts! / Look down from heaven, and see; / have regard for this vine, / the stock which your right hand has planted" (Ps 80:15-16). Jesus himself speaks of the Father's work: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away. and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15:1-2).

The vitality of the branches depends on their remaining attached to the vine, which is Jesus Christ: "He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

People are approached in liberty by God who calls everyone to grow, develop and bear fruit. A person cannot put off a response nor cast off personal responsibility in the matter. The solemn words of Jesus refer to this exalted and serious responsibility: "If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (Jn 15:6).

In this dialogue between God who offers his gifts, and the person who is called to exercise responsibility, there comes the possibility, indeed the necessity, of a total and ongoing formation of the lay faithful, as the Synod Fathers have rightly emphasized in much of their work. After having described Christian formation as "a continual process in the individual of maturation in faith and a likening to Christ, according to the will of the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit", they have clearly affirmed that the formation of the lay faithful must be placed among the priorities of a diocese. It ought to be so placed within the plan of pastoral action that the efforts of the whole community (clergy, lay faithful and religious) converge on this goal"(209).

To Discover and Live One's Vocation and Mission

58. The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful is an ever-clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfil one's mission.

God calls me and sends me forth as a labourer in his vineyard. He calls me and sends me forth to work for the coming of his Kingdom in history. This personal vocation and mission defines the dignity and the responsibility of each member of the lay faithful and makes up the focal point of the whole work of formation, whose purpose is the joyous and grateful recognition of this dignity and the faithful and generous living-out of this responsibility.

In fact, from eternity God has thought of us and has loved us as unique individuals. Every one of us he called by name, as the Good Shepherd "calls his sheep by name" (Jn 10:3). However, only in the unfolding of the history of our lives and its events is the eternal plan of God revealed to each of us. Therefore, it is a gradual process; in a certain sense, one that happens day by day.

To be able to discover the actual will of the Lord in our lives always involves the following: a receptive listening to the Word of God and the Church, fervent and constant prayer, recourse to a wise and loving spiritual guide, and a faithful discernment of the gifts and talents given by God, as well as the diverse social and historic situations in which one lives.

Therefore, in the life of each member of the lay faithful there are particularly significant and decisive moments for discerning God's call and embracing the mission entrusted by Him. Among these are the periods of adolescence and young adulthood. No one must forget that the Lord, as the master of the labourers in the vineyard, calls at every hour of life so as to make his holy will more precisely and explicitly known. Therefore, the fundamental and continuous attitude of the disciple should be one of vigilance and a conscious attentiveness to the voice of God.

It is not a question of simply knowing what God wants from each of us in the various situations of life. The individual must do what God wants, as we are reminded in the words that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, addressed to the servants at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). However, to act in fidelity to God's will requires a capability for acting and the developing of that capability. We can rest assured that this is possible through the free and responsible collaboration of each of us with the grace of the Lord which is never lacking. Saint Leo the Great says: "The one who confers the dignity will give the strength!"(210).

This, then, is the marvelous yet demanding task awaiting all the lay faithful and all Christians at every moment: to grow always in the knowledge of the richness of Baptism and faith as well as to live it more fully. In referring to birth and growth as two stages in the Christian life the apostle Peter makes the following exhortation: "Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation" (1 Pt 2:2).

A Total Integrated Formation for Living an Integrated Life

59. In discovering and living their proper vocation and mission, the lay faithful must be formed according to the union which exists from their being members of the Church and citizens of human society.

There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called "spiritual" life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called "secular" life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the "places in time" where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility-as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture-are the occasions ordained by Providence for a "continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity"(211).

The Second Vatican Council has invited all the lay faithful to this unity of life by forcefully decrying the grave consequences in separating faith from life, and the gospel from culture: "The Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of one city and the other, to strive to perform their earthly duties faithfully in response to the spirit of the Gospel. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities; for they are forgetting that by faith itself they are more than ever obliged to measure up to these duties, each according to one's vocation... This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age"(212).

Therefore, I have maintained that a faith that does not affect a person's culture is a faith "not fully embraced, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived"(213).

Various Aspects of Formation

60. The many interrelated aspects of a totally integrated formation of the lay faithful are situated within this unity of life.

There is no doubt that spiritual formation ought to occupy a privileged place in a person's life. Everyone is called to grow continually in intimate union with Jesus Christ, in conformity to the Father's will, in devotion to others in charity and justice. The Council writes: "This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual helps available to all the faithful, especially by active participation in the liturgy. Lay people should so make use of these helps in such a way that, while properly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not disassociate union with Christ from that life, but through the very performance of their tasks according to God's will, may they actually grow in it"(214).

The situation today points to an ever-increasing urgency for a doctrinal formation of the lay faithful, not simply in a better understanding which is natural to faith's dynamism but also in enabling them to "give a reason for their hoping" in view of the world and its grave and complex problems. Therefore, a systematic approach to catechesis, geared to age and the diverse situations of life, is an absolute necessity, as is a more decided Christian promotion of culture, in response to the perennial yet always new questions that concern individuals and society today.

This is especially true for the lay faithful who have responsibilities in various fields of society and public life. Above all, it is indispensable that they have a more exact knowledge -and this demands a more widespread and precise presentation-of the Church's social doctrine, as repeatedly stressed by the Synod Fathers in their presentations. They refer to the participation of the lay faithful in public life, in the following words: "But for the lay faithful to take up actively this noble purpose in political matters, it is not enough to exhort them. They must be offered a proper formation of a social conscience, especially in the Church's social teaching, which contains principles - of reflection, criteria for judging and practical directives (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction of Christian Freedom and Liberation, 72), and which must be present in general catechetical instruction and in specialized gatherings, as well as in schools and universities. Nevertheless, this social doctrine of the Church is dynamic; that is, adapted to circumstances of time and place. It is the right and duty of Pastors to propose moral principles even concerning the social order and of all Christians to apply them in defence of human rights Nevertheless, active participation in political parties is reserved to the lay faithful"(215).

The cultivation of human values finds a place in the context of a totally integrated formation, bearing a particular significance for the missionary and apostolic activities of the lay faithful. In this regard the Council wrote: "(the lay faithful) should also hold in high esteem professional skill, family and civic spirit, and the virtues related to social behaviour, namely, honesty, a spirit of justice, sincerity, courtesy, moral courage; without them there is no true Christian life"(216).

In bringing their lives into an organic synthesis, which is, at one and the same time, the manifestation of the unity of "who they are" in the Church and society as well as the condition for the effective fulfilment of their mission, the lay faithful are to be guided interiorly and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of unity and fullness of life.

Collaborators with God the Teacher

61. Where are the lay faithful formed? What are the means of their formation? Who are the persons and the communities called upon to assume the task of a totally integrated formation of the lay faithful?

Just as the work of human education is intimately connected with fatherhood and motherhood, so Christian formation finds its origin and its strength in God the Father who loves and educates his children. Yes, God is the first and great teacher of his People, as it states in the striking passage of the Song of Moses: "He found him in a desert land / and in the howling waste of the wilderness; / he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. / Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, / the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no foreign God with him" (Deut 32:10-12; cf. 8:5).

God's work in forming his people is revealed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ the Teacher, and reaches to the depths of every individual's heart as a result of the living presence of the Spirit. Mother Church is called to take part in the divine work of formation, both through a sharing of her very life, and through her various pronouncements and actions. It is thus that the lay faithful are formed by the Church and in the Church in a mutual communion and collaboration of all her members: clergy, religious and lay faithful. Thus the whole ecclesial community, in its diverse members, receives the fruitfulness of the Spirit and actively cooperates towards that end. With this in mind Methodius of Olympos wrote: "Those not yet perfected are carried and formed by those more perfect, as in the womb of a mother, until the time they are generated and brought forth for the greatness and beauty of virtue"(217). This happened with Saint Paul, who was carried and brought forth in the Church by those who were perfected (in the person of Ananias) and, then Paul in his turn, became perfected and fruitful in bringing forth many children.

First of all the Church is a teacher, in which the Pope takes the "primary" role in the formation of the lay faithful. As successor of Saint Peter, he has the ministry of "confirming his brothers in the faith", instructing all believers in the essential content of vocation and mission in light of the Christian faith and membership in the Church. Therefore, not simply the words coming directly from him, but also those transmitted by the various departments of the Holy See call for a loving and receptive hearing by the lay faithful.

The one and universal Church is present in various parts of the world, in and through the particular Churches. In each of them the Bishop in his person has a responsibility towards the lay faithful, in forming the animation and guidance of their Christian life through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist and the Sacraments.

Situated and at work within the particular Church or diocese is the Parish which has the essential task of a more personal and immediate formation of the lay faithful. In fact, because it is in the position to reach more easily individual persons and singular groups, the parish is called to instruct its members in hearing God's Word, in liturgical and personal dialogue with God, in the life of fraternal charity, and in allowing a more direct and concrete perception of the sense of ecclesial communion and responsibility in the Church's mission.

Internal to the parish, especially if vast and territorially extensive, small Church communities, where present, can be a notable help in the formation of Christians, by providing a consciousness and an experience of ecclesial communion and mission which are more extensive and incisive. The Synod Fathers have said that a post-baptismal catechesis in the form of a catechumenate can also be helpful by presenting again some elements from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults with the purpose of allowing a person to grasp and live the immense, extraordinary richness and responsibility received at Baptism(218).

In the formation that the lay faithful receive from their diocese and parish, especially concerning communion and mission, the help that diverse members of the Church can give to each other is particularly important. This mutual help also aids in revealing the mystery of the Church as Mother and Teacher. Priests and religious ought to assist the lay faithful in their formation. In this regard the Synod Fathers have invited priests and candidates for Orders to "be prepared carefully so that they are ready to foster the vocation and mission of the lay faithful"(219). In turn, the lay faithful themselves can and should help priests and religious in the course of their spiritual and pastoral journey.

Other Places for Formation

62. The Christian family, as the "domestic Church", also makes up a natural and fundamental school for formation in the faith: father and mother receive from the Sacrament of Matrimony the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children, before whom they bear witness and to whom they transmit both human and religious values. While learning their first words, children learn also the praise of God, whom they feel is near them as a loving and providential Father; while learning the first acts of love, children also learn to open themselves to others, and through the gift of self receive the sense of living as a human being. The daily life itself of a truly Christian family makes up the first "experience of Church", intended to find confirmation and development in an active and responsible process of the children's introduction into the wider ecclesial community and civil society. The more that Christian spouses and parents grow in the awareness that their "domestic church" participates in the life and mission of the universal Church, so much the more will their sons and daughters be able to be formed in a "sense of the Church" and will perceive all the beauty of dedicating their energies to the service of the Kingdom of God.

Schools and Catholic universities, as well as centers of spiritual renewal which are becoming ever more widespread in these days, are also important places for formation. In the present social and historical context which is marked by an extensively deep cultural involvement, the Synod Fathers have emphasized that parents' participation in school life-besides being always necessary and without substitution-is no longer enough. What is needed is to prepare the lay faithful to dedicate themselves to the work of rearing their children as a true and proper part of Church mission. What is

needed is to constitute and develop this "formation community" which is together comprised of parents, teachers, clergy, women and men religious and representatives of youth. In order that the school can suitably fulfill its natural function in formation, the lay faithful ought to feel charged to demand from everyone and for everyone a true freedom in education, even through opportune civil legislation(220).

The Synod Fathers expressed words of esteem and encouragement to all those lay faithful, both women and men, who with a civic and Christian spirit, fulfill a task which is involved in the education of children both in schools and institutes of formation. In addition they have emphasized the urgent need in various schools, whether Catholic or not, for teachers and professors among the lay faithful to be true witnesses of the gospel, through their example of life, their professional competence and uprightness, their Christian inspired teaching, preserving always-as is obvious-the autonomy of various sciences and disciplines. It is of singular importance that scientific and technological research done by the faithful be correct from the standpoint of service to an individual in the totality of the context of one's values and needs: to these lay faithful the Church entrusts the task of allowing all to better understand the intimate bond that exists between faith and science, between the gospel and human culture(221).

"This Synod"-we read in the proposition-"appeals to the prophetic task of Catholic schools and universities, and praises teachers and professors, now lay people for the most part, for their dedication to maintaining institutes of Catholic education that can form men and women in whom the new commandment is enfolded. The simultaneous presence of clergy, the lay faithful and men and women religious, offers students a vivid image of the Church and makes recognition of its riches easier (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, Concerning the Lay Educator, Witness of Faith in the Schools)"(222).

Groups, associations and movements also have their place in the formation of the lay faithful. In fact they have the possibility, each with its own method, of offering a formation through a deeply shared experience in the apostolic life, as well as having the opportunity to integrate, to make concrete and specific the formation that their members receive from other persons and communities.

The Reciprocal Formation Received and Given by All

63. Formation is not the privilege of a few, but a right and duty of all. In this regard the Synod Fathers have said: "Possibilities of formation should be proposed to all, especially the poor, who can also be a source of formation for all"; and they added: "Suitable means to help each person fulfill a full, human and Christian vocation should be applied to formation"(223).

For the purpose of a truly incisive and effective pastoral activity the formation of those who will form others is to be developed through appropriate courses or suitable schools. Forming those who, in turn, will be given the responsibility for the formation of the lay faithful, constitutes a basic requirement of assuring the general and widespread formation of all the lay faithful.

According to the explicit invitation of the Synod Fathers special attention ought to be devoted to the local culture in the work of formation: "The formation of Christians will take the greatest account of local human culture, which contributes to formation itself, and will help to discern the value, whether implanted in tradition or proposed in modern affairs. Attention should be paid to diverse cultures which can exist in one and the same people or nation at the same time. The Church, the mother and teacher of peoples, should strive to safeguard, where the need exists, the culture of a less numerous people living in large nations when the situation exists"(224).

In the work of formation some convictions reveal themselves as particularly necessary and fruitful. First of all, there is the conviction that one cannot offer a true and effective formation to others if the individual has not taken on or developed a personal responsibility for formation: this, in fact, is essentially a "formation of self".

In addition, there is the conviction that at one and the same time each of us is the goal and principle of formation: the more we are formed and the more we feel the need to pursue and deepen our formation, still more will we be formed and be rendered capable of forming others.

It is particularly important to know that the work of formation, while having intelligent recourse to the means and methods available from human science, is made more effective the more it is open to the action of God. Only the branch which does not fear being pruned by the heavenly vinedresser can bear much fruit for the individual and for others.

An Appeal and A Prayer

64. At the conclusion of this post-Synodal document I once again put forward the invitation of "the householder", proposed in the gospel: You go into my vineyard too. It can be said that the significance of the Synod on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful might very well consist in this call of the Lord which he addresses to everyone, yet, in a particular way to the lay faithful, both women and men.

The happenings at the Synod have been a great spiritual experience for all the participants. The experience has been that of a Church under the light and the power of the Spirit, intent on discerning and embracing the renewed call of her Lord so that she can again propose to today's world, the mystery of her communion and the dynamism of her mission of

salvation, especially, by centering on the specific place and role of the lay faithful. This Exhortation, then, intends to urge the most abundant possible fruitfulness from this Synod in every part of the Church worldwide. This will come about as a result of an effective hearkening to the Lord's call by the entire People of God, in particular, by the lay faithful.

Therefore I make a strong appeal to one and all, Pastors and faithful, never to become tired of maintaining—indeed always taking an active part to fix deeply in one's mind, heart and life—an ecclesial consciousness, which is ever mindful of what it means to be members of the Church of Jesus Christ, participants in her mystery of communion and in her dynamism in mission and the apostolate.

It is of particular importance that all Christians be aware that through Baptism they have received an extraordinary dignity: through grace we are called to be children loved by the Father, members incorporated in Christ and his Church, living and holy temples of the Spirit. With deep emotion and gratitude, we again hear the words of John the Evangelist: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 Jn 3:1).

While this "Christian newness of life" given to the members of the Church, constitutes for all the basis of their participation in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ and of their vocation to holiness in love, it receives expression and is fulfilled in the lay faithful through the "secular character" which is "uniquely and properly" theirs.

Besides imparting an awareness of a commonly shared Christian dignity, an ecclesial consciousness brings a sense of belonging to the mystery of the Church as Communion. This is a basic and undeniable aspect of the life and mission of the Church. For one and all the earnest prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper, "That all may be one" (Jn 17-21), ought to become daily a required and undeniable programme of life and action.

A real sense of Church communion, the gift of the Spirit that urges our free and generous response, will bring forth as its precious fruit, in the "one and catholic" Church the continuing value of the rich variety of vocations and conditions of life, charisms, ministries, works, and responsibilities, as well as a more demonstrable and decisive collaboration of groups, associations and movements of the lay faithful in keeping with the accomplishment of the commonly shared salvific mission of the Church herself. This communion is already in itself the first great sign in the world of the presence of Christ, the Saviour. At the same time, it promotes and stimulates the proper apostolic and missionary action of the Church.

The whole Church, Pastors and lay faithful alike, standing on the threshold of the Third Millennium, ought to feel more strongly the Church's responsibility to obey the command of Christ, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15), and take up anew the missionary endeavour. A great venture, both challenging and wonderful, is entrusted to the Church—that of a re-evangelization, which is so much needed by the present world. The lay faithful ought to regard themselves as an active and responsible part of this venture, called as they are to proclaim and to live the gospel in service to the person and to society while respecting the totality of the values and needs of both.

Since the Synod of Bishops was celebrated last October during the Marian Year, its work was entrusted in a very special way to the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Redeemer. I too entrust the spiritual fruitfulness of the Synod to her prayerful intercession. Therefore, along with the Synod Fathers, the lay faithful present at the Synod and all the other members of the People of God, I have recourse at the end of this post-Synodal document to the Virgin Mary. At this moment this appeal becomes a prayer:

O Most Blessed Virgin Mary,
Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, With joy and wonder we seek to make our own your
Magnificat, joining you in your hymn of thankfulness and love.

With you we give thanks to God,
"whose mercy
is from generation to generation",
for the exalted vocation
and the many forms of mission
entrusted to the lay faithful.

God has called each of them by name
to live his own communion of love
and holiness
and to be one
in the great family of God's children.
He has sent them forth
to shine with the light of Christ
and to communicate the fire of the Spirit
in every part of society
through their life

inspired by the gospel.

O Virgin of the Magnificat,
fill their hearts
with a gratitude and enthusiasm
for this vocation and mission.

With humility and magnanimity
you were the "handmaid of the Lord";
give us your unreserved willingness
for service to God
and the salvation of the world.

Open our hearts
to the great anticipation
of the Kingdom of God
and of the proclamation of the Gospel
to the whole of creation.
Your mother's heart
is ever mindful of the many dangers
and evils which threaten
to overpower men and women
in our time.

At the same time your heart also takes notice
of the many initiatives
undertaken for good,
the great yearning for values,
and the progress achieved
in bringing forth
the abundant fruits of salvation.

O Virgin full of courage,
may your spiritual strength
and trust in God inspire us,
so that we might know
how to overcome all the obstacles
that we encounter
in accomplishing our mission.
Teach us to treat the affairs
of the world
with a real sense of Christian responsibility
and a joyful hope
of the coming of God's Kingdom, and
of a "new heaven and a new earth".

You who were gathered in prayer
with the Apostles in the Cenacle,
awaiting the coming
of the Spirit at Pentecost,
implore his renewed outpouring
on all the faithful, men and women alike,
so that they might more fully respond
to their vocation and mission,
as branches engrafted to the true vine,
called to bear much fruit
for the life of the world.

O Virgin Mother,
guide and sustain us

so that we might always live
as true sons and daughters
of the Church of your Son.
Enable us to do our part
in helping to establish on earth
the civilization of truth and love,
as God wills it,
for his glory.

Amen

Given at Rome, in St. Peter's, on 30 December, the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in the year 1988, the eleventh of my Pontificate.

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**APOSTOLIC LETTER
MULIERIS DIGNITATEM
OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF
JOHN PAUL II
ON THE
DIGNITY AND VOCATION
OF WOMEN
ON THE OCCASION
OF THE MARIAN YEAR**

Venerable Brothers and dear Sons and Daughters, Health and the Apostolic Blessing.

I - INTRODUCTION

A sign of the times

1. THE DIGNITY AND THE VOCATION OF WOMEN - a subject of constant human and Christian reflection - have gained exceptional prominence in recent years. This can be seen, for example, in the statements of the Church's Magisterium present in various documents of the Second Vatican Council, which declares in its Closing Message: "The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at his moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling".¹ This Message sums up what had already been expressed in the Council's teaching, specifically in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*² and in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.³

Similar thinking had already been put forth in the period before the Council, as can be seen in a number of Pope Pius XII's Discourses⁴ and in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII.⁵ After the Second Vatican Council, my predecessor Paul VI showed the relevance of this "sign of the times", when he conferred the title "Doctor of the Church" upon Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint Catherine of Siena, ⁶ and likewise when, at the request of the 1971 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, he set up a special Commission for the study of contemporary problems concerning the "effective promotion of the dignity and the responsibility of women".⁷ In one of his Discourses Paul VI said: "Within Christianity, more than in any other religion, and since its very beginning, women have had a special dignity, of which the New Testament shows us many important aspects...; it is evident that women are meant to form part of the living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not all their potentialities have yet been made clear".⁸

The Fathers of the recent Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 1987), which was devoted to "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council", once more dealt with the dignity and vocation of women. One of their recommendations was for a further study of the anthropological and theological bases that are needed in order to solve the problems connected with the meaning and dignity of being a woman and being a man. It is a question of understanding the reason for and the consequences of the Creator's decision that the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man. It is only by beginning from these bases, which make it possible to understand the greatness of the dignity and vocation of women, that one is able to speak of their active presence in the Church and in society.

This is what I intend to deal with in this document. The Post-Synodal Exhortation, which will be published later, will present proposals of a pastoral nature on the place of women in the Church and in society. On this subject the Fathers offered some important reflections, after they had taken into consideration the testimonies of the lay Auditors - both women and men - from the particular Churches throughout the world.

The Marian Year

2. The last Synod took place within the Marian Year, which gives special thrust to the consideration of this theme, as the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* points out.⁹ This Encyclical develops and updates the Second Vatican Council's teaching contained in Chapter VIII of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. The title of this chapter is significant: "The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church". Mary - the "woman" of the Bible (cf. Gen 3:15; Jn 2:4; 19:16) - intimately belongs to the salvific mystery of Christ, and is therefore also present in a special way in the mystery of the Church. Since "the Church is in Christ as a sacrament... of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race", ¹⁰ the special presence of the Mother of God in

the mystery of the Church makes us think of the exceptional link between this "woman" and the whole human family. It is a question here of every man and woman, all the sons and daughters of the human race, in whom from generation to generation a fundamental inheritance is realized, the inheritance that belongs to all humanity and that is linked with the mystery of the biblical "beginning": "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"(Gen 1: 27).¹¹

This eternal truth about the human being, man and woman - a truth which is immutably fixed in human experience -at the same time constitutes the mystery which only in "the Incarnate Word takes on light... (since) Christ fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear", as the Council teaches.¹² In this "revealing of man to himself", do we not need to find a special place for that "woman" who was the Mother of Christ? Cannot the "message" of Christ, contained in the Gospel, which has as its background the whole of Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament, say much to the Church and to humanity about the dignity of women and their vocation?

This is precisely what is meant to be the common thread running throughout the present document, which fits into the broader context of the Marian Year, as we approach the end of the second millennium after Christ's birth and the beginning of the third. And it seems to me that the best thing is to give this text the style and character of a meditation.

II - WOMAN-MOTHER OF GOD (THEOTÓKOS)

Union with God

3. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his son, born of woman". With these words of his Letter to the Galatians (4:4), the Apostle Paul links together the principal moments which essentially determine the fulfilment of the mystery "pre-determined in God" (cf. Eph 1:9). The Son, the Word one in substance with the Father, becomes man, born of a woman, at "the fullness of time". This event leads to the turning point of man's history on earth, understood as salvation history. It is significant that Saint Paul does not call the Mother of Christ by her own name "Mary", but calls her "woman": this coincides with the words of the Proto-evangelium in the Book of Genesis (cf. 3:15). She is that "woman" who is present in the central salvific event which marks the "fullness of time": this event is realized in her and through her.

Thus there begins the central event, the key event in the history of salvation: the Lord's Paschal Mystery. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to reconsider it from the point of view of man's spiritual history, understood in the widest possible sense, and as this history is expressed through the different world religions. Let us recall at this point the words of the Second Vatican Council: "People look to the various religions for answers to those profound mysteries of the human condition which, today, even as in olden times, deeply stir the human heart: What is a human being? What is the meaning and purpose of our life? What is goodness and what is sin? What gives rise to our sorrows, and to what intent? Where lies the path to true happiness? What is the truth about death, judgment and retribution beyond the grave? What, finally, is that ultimate and unutterable mystery which engulfs our being, and from which we take our origin and towards which we move?"¹³ "From ancient times down to the present, there has existed among different peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which is present in the course of things and in the events of human life; at times, indeed, recognition can be found of a Supreme Divinity or even a Supreme Father".¹⁴

Against the background of this broad panorama, which testifies to the aspirations of the human spirit in search of God - at times as it were "groping its way" (cf. Acts 17: 27) - the "fullness of time" spoken of in Paul's Letter emphasizes the response of God himself, "in whom we live and move and have our being" (cf. Acts 17:28). This is the God who "in many and various ways spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2). The sending of this Son, one in substance with the Father, as a man "born of woman", constitutes the culminating and definitive point of God's self-revelation to humanity. This self-revelation is salvific in character, as the Second Vatican Council teaches in another passage: "In his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph 1: 9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pt 1:4)".¹⁵

A woman is to be found at the centre of this salvific event. The self-revelation of God, who is the inscrutable unity of the Trinity, is outlined in the Annunciation at Nazareth. "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High" - "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" - "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God... For with God nothing will be impossible" (cf. Lk 1: 31-37).¹⁶

It may be easy to think of this event in the setting of the history of Israel, the Chosen People of which Mary is a daughter, but it is also easy to think of it in the context of all the different ways in which humanity has always sought to answer the fundamental and definitive questions which most beset it. Do we not find in the Annunciation at Nazareth the beginning of that definitive answer by which God himself "attempts to calm people's hearts"?¹⁷ It is not just a matter here of God's words revealed through the Prophets; rather with this response "the Word is truly made flesh" (cf. Jn 1:14). Hence Mary attains a union with God that exceeds all the expectations of the human spirit. It even exceeds the expectations of all Israel, in particular the daughters of this Chosen People, who, on the basis of the promise, could

hope that one of their number would one day become the mother of the Messiah. Who among them, however, could have imagined that the promised Messiah would be "the Son of the Most High"? On the basis of the Old Testament's monotheistic faith such a thing was difficult to imagine. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit, who "overshadowed" her, was Mary able to accept what is "impossible with men, but not with God" (cf. Mk 10: 27).

Theotókos

4. Thus the "fullness of time" manifests the extraordinary dignity of the "woman". On the one hand, this dignity consists in the supernatural elevation to union with God in Jesus Christ, which determines the ultimate finality of the existence of every person both on earth and in eternity. From this point of view, the "woman" is the representative and the archetype of the whole human race: she represents the humanity which belongs to all human beings, both men and women. On the other hand, however, the event at Nazareth highlights a form of union with the living God which can only belong to the "woman", Mary: the union between mother and son. The Virgin of Nazareth truly becomes the Mother of God.

This truth, which Christian faith has accepted from the beginning, was solemnly defined at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.).¹⁸ In opposition to the opinion of Nestorius, who held that Mary was only the mother of the man Jesus, this Council emphasized the essential meaning of the motherhood of the Virgin Mary. At the moment of the Annunciation, by responding with her "fiat", Mary conceived a man who was the Son of God, of one substance with the Father. Therefore she is truly the Mother of God, because motherhood concerns the whole person, not just the body, nor even just human "nature". In this way the name "Theotókos" - Mother of God - became the name proper to the union with God granted to the Virgin Mary.

The particular union of the "Theotókos" with God - which fulfils in the most eminent manner the supernatural predestination to union with the Father which is granted to every human being (filii in Filio) - is a pure grace and, as such, a gift of the Spirit. At the same time, however, through her response of faith Mary exercises her free will and thus fully shares with her personal and feminine "I" in the event of the Incarnation. With her "fiat", Mary becomes the authentic subject of that union with God which was realized in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, who is of one substance with the Father. All of God's action in human history at all times respects the free will of the human "I". And such was the case with the Annunciation at Nazareth.

"To serve means to reign"

5. This event is clearly interpersonal in character: it is a dialogue. We only understand it fully if we place the whole conversation between the Angel and Mary in the context of the words: "full of grace".¹⁹ The whole Annunciation dialogue reveals the essential dimension of the event, namely, its supernatural dimension (***) . Grace never casts nature aside or cancels it out, but rather perfects it and ennobles it. Therefore the "fullness of grace" that was granted to the Virgin of Nazareth, with a view to the fact that she would become "Theotókos", also signifies the fullness of the perfection of "what is characteristic of woman", of "what is feminine". Here we find ourselves, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of women.

When Mary responds to the words of the heavenly messenger with her "fiat", she who is "full of grace" feels the need to express her personal relationship to the gift that has been revealed to her, saying: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38). This statement should not be deprived of its profound meaning, nor should it be diminished by artificially removing it from the overall context of the event and from the full content of the truth revealed about God and man. In the expression "handmaid of the Lord", one senses Mary's complete awareness of being a creature of God. The word "handmaid", near the end of the Annunciation dialogue, is inscribed throughout the whole history of the Mother and the Son. In fact, this Son, who is the true and consubstantial "Son of the Most High", will often say of himself, especially at the culminating moment of his mission: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45).

At all times Christ is aware of being "the servant of the Lord" according to the prophecy of Isaiah (cf. Is 42:1; 49:3, 6; 52:13) which includes the essential content of his messianic mission, namely, his awareness of being the Redeemer of the world. From the first moment of her divine motherhood, of her union with the Son whom "the Father sent into the world, that the world might be saved through him" (cf. Jn 3:17), Mary takes her place within Christ's messianic service.²⁰ It is precisely this service which constitutes the very foundation of that Kingdom in which "to serve... means to reign".²¹ Christ, the "Servant of the Lord", will show all people the royal dignity of service, the dignity which is joined in the closest possible way to the vocation of every person.

Thus, by considering the reality "Woman - Mother of God", we enter in a very appropriate way into this Marian Year meditation. This reality also determines the essential horizon of reflection on the dignity and the vocation of women. In anything we think, say or do concerning the dignity and the vocation of women, our thoughts, hearts and actions must not become detached from this horizon. The dignity of every human being and the vocation corresponding to that dignity find their definitive measure in union with God. Mary, the woman of the Bible, is the most complete expression

of this dignity and vocation. For no human being, male or female, created in the image and likeness of God, can in any way attain fulfilment apart from this image and likeness.

III - THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

The Book of Genesis

6. Let us enter into the setting of the biblical "beginning". In it the revealed truth concerning man as "the image and likeness" of God constitutes the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology.²² "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). This concise passage contains the fundamental anthropological truths: man is the highpoint of the whole order of creation in the visible world; the human race, which takes its origin from the calling into existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation; both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image. This image and likeness of God, which is essential for the human being, is passed on by the man and woman, as spouses and parents, to their descendants: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1: 28). The Creator entrusts dominion over the earth to the human race, to all persons, to all men and women, who derive their dignity and vocation from the common "beginning".

In the Book of Genesis we find another description of the creation of man - man and woman (cf. 2:18-25) - to which we shall refer shortly. At this point, however, we can say that the biblical account puts forth the truth about the personal character of the human being. Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God. What makes man like God is the fact that -unlike the whole world of other living creatures, including those endowed with senses (animalia) - man is also a rational being (animal rationale).²³ Thanks to this property, man and woman are able to "dominate" the other creatures of the visible world (cf. Gen 1:28).

The second description of the creation of man (cf. Gen 2:18-25) makes use of different language to express the truth about the creation of man, and especially of woman. In a sense the language is less precise, and, one might say, more descriptive and metaphorical, closer to the language of the myths known at the time. Nevertheless, we find no essential contradiction between the two texts. The text of Gen 2:18-25 helps us to understand better what we find in the concise passage of Gen 1:27-28. At the same time, if it is read together with the latter, it helps us to understand even more profoundly the fundamental truth which it contains concerning man created as man and woman in the image and likeness of God.

In the description found in Gen 2:18-25, the woman is created by God "from the rib" of the man and is placed at his side as another "I", as the companion of the man, who is alone in the surrounding world of living creatures and who finds in none of them a "helper" suitable for himself. Called into existence in this way, the woman is immediately recognized by the man as "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones" (cf. Gen 2:23) and for this very reason she is called "woman". In biblical language this name indicates her essential identity with regard to man -'is-'issah - something which unfortunately modern languages in general are unable to express: "She shall be called woman ('issah) because she was taken out of man ('is)": Gen 2:23.

The biblical text provides sufficient bases for recognizing the essential equality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity.²⁴ From the very beginning, both are persons, unlike the other living beings in the world about them. The woman is another "I" in a common humanity. From the very beginning they appear as a "unity of the two", and this signifies that the original solitude is overcome, the solitude in which man does not find "a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:20). Is it only a question here of a "helper" in activity, in "subduing the earth" (cf. Gen 1: 28)? Certainly it is a matter of a life's companion, with whom, as a wife, the man can unite himself, becoming with her "one flesh" and for this reason leaving "his father and his mother" (cf. Gen 2: 24). Thus in the same context as the creation of man and woman, the biblical account speaks of God's instituting marriage as an indispensable condition for the transmission of life to new generations, the transmission of life to which marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordered: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28).

Person - Communion - Gift

7. By reflecting on the whole account found in Gen 2:18-25, and by interpreting it in light of the truth about the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27), we can understand even more fully what constitutes the personal character of the human being, thanks to which both man and woman are like God. For every individual is made in the image of God, insofar as he or she is a rational and free creature capable of knowing God and loving him. Moreover, we read that man cannot exist "alone" (cf. Gen 2:18); he can exist only as a "unity of the two", and therefore in relation to another human person. It is a question here of a mutual relationship: man to woman and woman to man. Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other "I". This is a prelude to the definitive self-revelation of the Triune God: a living unity in the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At the beginning of the Bible this is not yet stated directly. The whole Old Testament is mainly concerned with revealing the truth about the oneness and unity of God. Within this fundamental truth about God the New Testament will reveal the inscrutable mystery of God's inner life. God, who allows himself to be known by human beings through Christ, is the unity of the Trinity: unity in communion. In this way new light is also thrown on man's image and likeness to God, spoken of in the Book of Genesis. The fact that man "created as man and woman" is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman, created as a "unity of the two" in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God through the unity of the divinity, exist as persons through the inscrutable divine relationship. Only in this way can we understand the truth that God in himself is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).

The image and likeness of God in man, created as man and woman (in the analogy that can be presumed between Creator and creature), thus also expresses the "unity of the two" in a common humanity. This "unity of the two", which is a sign of interpersonal communion, shows that the creation of man is also marked by a certain likeness to the divine communion ("communio"). This likeness is a quality of the personal being of both man and woman, and is also a call and a task. The foundation of the whole human "ethos" is rooted in the image and likeness of God which the human being bears within himself from the beginning. Both the Old and New Testament will develop that "ethos", which reaches its apex in the commandment of love.²⁵

In the "unity of the two", man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist "side by side" or "together", but they are also called to exist mutually "one for the other".

This also explains the meaning of the "help" spoken of in Genesis 2:1 8-25: "I will make him a helper fit for him". The biblical context enables us to understand this in the sense that the woman must "help" the man - and in his turn he must help her - first of all by the very fact of their "being human persons". In a certain sense this enables man and woman to discover their humanity ever anew and to confirm its whole meaning. We can easily understand that - on this fundamental level - it is a question of a "help" on the part of both, and at the same time a mutual "help". To be human means to be called to interpersonal communion. The text of Genesis 2:18-25 shows that marriage is the first and, in a sense, the fundamental dimension of this call. But it is not the only one. The whole of human history unfolds within the context of this call. In this history, on the basis of the principle of mutually being "for" the other, in interpersonal "communion", there develops in humanity itself, in accordance with God's will, the integration of what is "masculine" and what is "feminine". The biblical texts, from Genesis onwards, constantly enable us to discover the ground in which the truth about man is rooted, the solid and inviolable ground amid the many changes of human existence.

This truth also has to do with the history of salvation. In this regard a statement of the Second Vatican Council is especially significant. In the chapter on "The Community of Mankind" in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, we read: "The Lord Jesus, when he prayed to the Father 'that all may be one... as we are one' (Jn 17: 21-22), opened up vistas closed to human reason. For he implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons and the union of God's children in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self".²⁶

With these words, the Council text presents a summary of the whole truth about man and woman - a truth which is already outlined in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, and which is the structural basis of biblical and Christian anthropology. Man - whether man or woman - is the only being among the creatures of the visible world that God the Creator "has willed for its own sake"; that creature is thus a person. Being a person means striving towards self-realization (the Council text speaks of self-discovery), which can only be achieved "through a sincere gift of self". The model for this interpretation of the person is God himself as Trinity, as a communion of Persons. To say that man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is called to exist "for" others, to become a gift.

This applies to every human being, whether woman or man, who live it out in accordance with the special qualities proper to each. Within the framework of the present meditation on the dignity and vocation of women, this truth about being human constitutes the indispensable point of departure. Already in the Book of Genesis we can discern, in preliminary outline, the spousal character of the relationship between persons, which will serve as the basis for the subsequent development of the truth about motherhood, and about virginity, as two particular dimensions of the vocation of women in the light of divine Revelation. These two dimensions will find their loftiest expression at the "fullness of time" (cf. Gal 4:4) in the "woman" of Nazareth: the Virgin-Mother.

The anthropomorphism of biblical language

8. The presentation of man as "the image and likeness of God" at the very beginning of Sacred Scripture has another significance too. It is the key for understanding biblical Revelation as God's word about himself. Speaking about himself, whether through the prophets, or through the Son" (cf. Heb 1:1, 2) who became man, God speaks in human language, using human concepts and images. If this manner of expressing himself is characterized by a certain anthropomorphism, the reason is that man is "like" God: created in his image and likeness. But then, God too is in some measure "like man", and precisely because of this likeness, he can be humanly known. At the same time, the language

of the Bible is sufficiently precise to indicate the limits of the "likeness", the limits of the "analogy". For biblical Revelation says that, while man's "likeness" to God is true, the "non-likeness"²⁷ which separates the whole of creation from the Creator is still more essentially true. Although man is created in God's likeness, God does not cease to be for him the one "who dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16): he is the "Different One", by essence the "totally Other".

This observation on the limits of the analogy - the limits of man's likeness to God in biblical language - must also be kept in mind when, in different passages of Sacred Scripture (especially in the Old Testament), we find comparisons that attribute to God "masculine" or "feminine" qualities. We find in these passages an indirect confirmation of the truth that both man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God. If there is a likeness between Creator and creatures, it is understandable that the Bible would refer to God using expressions that attribute to him both "masculine" and "feminine" qualities.

We may quote here some characteristic passages from the prophet Isaiah: "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me'. 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you'". (49:14-15). And elsewhere: "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (66: 13). In the Psalms too God is compared to a caring mother: "Like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul. O Israel, hope in the Lord". (Ps 131:2-3). In various passages the love of God who cares for his people is shown to be like that of a mother: thus, like a mother God "has carried" humanity, and in particular, his Chosen People, within his own womb; he has given birth to it in travail, has nourished and comforted it (cf. Is 42:14; 46: 3-4). In many passages God's love is presented as the "masculine" love of the bridegroom and father (cf. Hosea 11:1-4; Jer 3:4-19), but also sometimes as the "feminine" love of a mother.

This characteristic of biblical language - its anthropomorphic way of speaking about God - points indirectly to the mystery of the eternal "generating" which belongs to the inner life of God. Nevertheless, in itself this "generating" has neither "masculine" nor "feminine" qualities. It is by nature totally divine. It is spiritual in the most perfect way, since "God is spirit" (Jn 4:24) and possesses no property typical of the body, neither "feminine" nor "masculine". Thus even "fatherhood" in God is completely divine and free of the "masculine" bodily characteristics proper to human fatherhood. In this sense the Old Testament spoke of God as a Father and turned to him as a Father. Jesus Christ - who called God "Abba Father" (Mk 14: 36), and who as the only-begotten and consubstantial Son placed this truth at the very centre of his Gospel, thus establishing the norm of Christian prayer - referred to fatherhood in this ultra-corporeal, superhuman and completely divine sense. He spoke as the Son, joined to the Father by the eternal mystery of divine generation, and he did so while being at the same time the truly human Son of his Virgin Mother.

Although it is not possible to attribute human qualities to the eternal generation of the Word of God, and although the divine fatherhood does not possess "masculine" characteristics in a physical sense, we must nevertheless seek in God the absolute model of all "generation" among human beings. This would seem to be the sense of the Letter to the Ephesians: "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (3:14-15). All "generating" among creatures finds its primary model in that generating which in God is completely divine, that is, spiritual. All "generating" in the created world is to be likened to this absolute and uncreated model. Thus every element of human generation which is proper to man, and every element which is proper to woman, namely human "fatherhood" and "motherhood", bears within itself a likeness to, or analogy with the divine "generating" and with that "fatherhood" which in God is "totally different", that is, completely spiritual and divine in essence; whereas in the human order, generation is proper to the "unity of the two": both are "parents", the man and the woman alike.

IV - EVE-MARY

The "beginning" and the sin

9. "Although he was made by God in a state of justice, from the very dawn of history man abused his liberty, at the urging of the Evil One. Man set himself against God and sought to find fulfilment apart from God".²⁸ With these words the teaching of the last Council recalls the revealed doctrine about sin and in particular about that first sin, which is the "original" one. The biblical "beginning" - the creation of the world and of man in the world - contains in itself the truth about this sin, which can also be called the sin of man's "beginning" on the earth. Even though what is written in the Book of Genesis is expressed in the form of a symbolic narrative, as is the case in the description of the creation of man as male and female (cf. Gen 2:18-25), at the same time it reveals what should be called "the mystery of sin", and even more fully, "the mystery of evil" which exists in the world created by God.

It is not possible to read "the mystery of sin" without making reference to the whole truth about the "image and likeness" to God, which is the basis of biblical anthropology. This truth presents the creation of man as a special gift from the Creator, containing not only the foundation and source of the essential dignity of the human being - man and woman - in the created world, but also the beginning of the call to both of them to share in the intimate life of God himself. In the light of Revelation, creation likewise means the beginning of salvation history. It is precisely in this beginning that sin is situated and manifests itself as opposition and negation.

It can be said, paradoxically, that the sin presented in the third chapter of Genesis confirms the truth about the image and likeness of God in man, since this truth means freedom, that is, man's use of free will by choosing good or his abuse of it by choosing evil, against the will of God. In its essence, however, sin is a negation of God as Creator in his relationship to man, and of what God wills for man, from the beginning and for ever. Creating man and woman in his own image and likeness, God wills for them the fullness of good, or supernatural happiness, which flows from sharing in his own life. By committing sin man rejects this gift and at the same time wills to become "as God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5), that is to say, deciding what is good and what is evil independently of God, his Creator. The sin of the first parents has its own human "measure": an interior standard of its own in man's free will, and it also has within itself a certain "diabolic" characteristic, 29 which is clearly shown in the Book of Genesis (3:15). Sin brings about a break in the original unity which man enjoyed in the state of original justice: union with God as the source of the unity within his own "I", in the mutual relationship between man and woman ("communio personarum") as well as in regard to the external world, to nature.

The biblical description of original sin in the third chapter of Genesis in a certain way "distinguishes the roles" which the woman and the man had in it. This is also referred to later in certain passages of the Bible, for example, Paul's Letter to Timothy: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:13-14). But there is no doubt that, independent of this "distinction of roles" in the biblical description, that first sin is the sin of man, created by God as male and female. It is also the sin of the "first parents", to which is connected its hereditary character. In this sense we call it "original sin".

This sin, as already said, cannot be properly understood without reference to the mystery of the creation of the human being - man and woman - in the image and likeness of God. By means of this reference one can also understand the mystery of that "non-likeness" to God in which sin consists, and which manifests itself in the evil present in the history of the world. Similarly one can understand the mystery of that "non-likeness" to God, who "alone is good" (cf. Mt 19:17) and the fullness of good. If sin's "non-likeness" to God, who is Holiness itself, presupposes "likeness" in the sphere of freedom and free will, it can then be said that for this very reason the "non-likeness" contained in sin is all the more tragic and sad. It must be admitted that God, as Creator and Father, is here wounded, "offended" - obviously offended - in the very heart of that gift which belongs to God's eternal plan for man.

At the same time, however, as the author of the evil of sin, the human being - man and woman - is affected by it. The third chapter of Genesis shows this with the words which clearly describe the new situation of man in the created world. It shows the perspective of "toil", by which man will earn his living (cf. Gen 3:17-19) and likewise the great "pain" with which the woman will give birth to her children (cf. Gen 3:16). And all this is marked by the necessity of death, which is the end of human life on earth. In this way man, as dust, will "return to the ground, for out of it he was taken": "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (cf. Gen 3:19).

These words are confirmed generation after generation. They do not mean that the image and the likeness of God in the human being, whether woman or man, has been destroyed by sin; they mean rather that it has been "obscured"³⁰ and in a sense "diminished". Sin in fact "diminishes" man, as the Second Vatican Council also recalls.³¹ If man is the image and likeness of God by his very nature as a person, then his greatness and his dignity are achieved in the covenant with God, in union with him, in striving towards that fundamental unity which belongs to the internal "logic" of the very mystery of creation. This unity corresponds to the profound truth concerning all intelligent creatures and in particular concerning man, who among all the creatures of the visible world was elevated from the beginning through the eternal choice of God in Jesus: "He chose us in (Christ) before the foundation of the world, ... He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph 1:4-6). The biblical teaching taken as a whole enables us to say that predestination concerns all human persons, men and women, each and every one without exception.

"He shall rule over you"

10. The biblical description in the Book of Genesis outlines the truth about the consequences of man's sin, as it is shown by the disturbance of that original relationship between man and woman which corresponds to their individual dignity as persons. A human being, whether male or female, is a person, and therefore, "the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake"; and at the same time this unique and unrepeatable creature "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self".³² Here begins the relationship of "communion" in which the "unity of the two" and the personal dignity of both man and woman find expression. Therefore when we read in the biblical description the words addressed to the woman: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16), we discover a break and a constant threat precisely in regard to this "unity of the two" which corresponds to the dignity of the image and likeness of God in both of them. But this threat is more serious for the woman, since domination takes the place of "being a sincere gift" and therefore living "for" the other: "he shall rule over you". This "domination" indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and the woman possess in the "unity of the two": and this is especially to the disadvantage of the woman, whereas only the equality resulting from their dignity as persons can give to their mutual relationship the character of an authentic "communio personarum". While the violation of this equality, which is both a gift and a right deriving from God the

Creator, involves an element to the disadvantage of the woman, at the same time it also diminishes the true dignity of the man. Here we touch upon an extremely sensitive point in the dimension of that "ethos" which was originally inscribed by the Creator in the very creation of both of them in his own image and likeness.

This statement in Genesis 3:16 is of great significance. It implies a reference to the mutual relationship of man and woman in marriage. It refers to the desire born in the atmosphere of spousal love whereby the woman's "sincere gift of self" is responded to and matched by a corresponding "gift" on the part of the husband. Only on the basis of this principle can both of them, and in particular the woman, "discover themselves" as a true "unity of the two" according to the dignity of the person. The matrimonial union requires respect for and a perfecting of the true personal subjectivity of both of them. The woman cannot become the "object" of "domination" and male "possession". But the words of the biblical text directly concern original sin and its lasting consequences in man and woman. Burdened by hereditary sinfulness, they bear within themselves the constant "inclination to sin", the tendency to go against the moral order which corresponds to the rational nature and dignity of man and woman as persons. This tendency is expressed in a threefold concupiscence, which Saint John defines as the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (cf. 1 Jn 2:16). The words of the Book of Genesis quoted previously (3: 16) show how this threefold concupiscence, the "inclination to sin", will burden the mutual relationship of man and woman.

These words of Genesis refer directly to marriage, but indirectly they concern the different spheres of social life: the situations in which the woman remains disadvantaged or discriminated against by the fact of being a woman. The revealed truth concerning the creation of the human being as male and female constitutes the principal argument against all the objectively injurious and unjust situations which contain and express the inheritance of the sin which all human beings bear within themselves. The books of Sacred Scripture confirm in various places the actual existence of such situations and at the same time proclaim the need for conversion, that is to say, for purification from evil and liberation from sin: from what offends neighbour, what "diminishes" man, not only the one who is offended but also the one who causes the offence. This is the unchangeable message of the Word revealed by God. In it is expressed the biblical "ethos" until the end of time.³³

In our times the question of "women's rights" has taken on new significance in the broad context of the rights of the human person. The biblical and evangelical message sheds light on this cause, which is the object of much attention today, by safeguarding the truth about the "unity" of the "two", that is to say the truth about that dignity and vocation that result from the specific diversity and personal originality of man and woman. Consequently, even the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in the biblical words "He shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16) must not under any condition lead to the "masculinization" of women. In the name of liberation from male "domination", women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine "originality". There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not "reach fulfilment", but instead will deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness. It is indeed an enormous richness. In the biblical description, the words of the first man at the sight of the woman who had been created are words of admiration and enchantment, words which fill the whole history of man on earth.

The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different. Hence a woman, as well as a man, must understand her "fulfilment" as a person, her dignity and vocation, on the basis of these resources, according to the richness of the femininity which she received on the day of creation and which she inherits as an expression of the "image and likeness of God" that is specifically hers. The inheritance of sin suggested by the words of the Bible - "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" - can be conquered only by following this path. The overcoming of this evil inheritance is, generation after generation, the task of every human being, whether woman or man. For whenever man is responsible for offending a woman's personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and his own vocation.

Proto-evangelium

11. The Book of Genesis attests to the fact that sin is the evil at man's "beginning" and that since then its consequences weigh upon the whole human race. At the same time it contains the first foretelling of victory over evil, over sin. This is proved by the words which we read in Genesis 3:15, usually called the "Proto-evangelium": "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel". It is significant that the foretelling of the Redeemer contained in these words refers to "the woman". She is assigned the first place in the Proto-evangelium as the progenitrix of him who will be the Redeemer of man.³⁴ And since the redemption is to be accomplished through a struggle against evil - through the "enmity" between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of him who, as "the father of lies" (Jn 8:44), is the first author of sin in human history - it is also an enmity between him and the woman.

These words give us a comprehensive view of the whole of Revelation, first as a preparation for the Gospel and later as the Gospel itself. From this vantage point the two female figures, Eve and Mary, are joined under the name of woman. The words of the Proto-evangelium, re-read in the light of the New Testament, express well the mission of woman in the Redeemer's salvific struggle against the author of evil in human history.

The comparison Eve-Mary constantly recurs in the course of reflection on the deposit of faith received from divine Revelation. It is one of the themes frequently taken up by the Fathers, ecclesiastical writers and theologians.³⁵ As a rule, from this comparison there emerges at first sight a difference, a contrast. Eve, as "the mother of all the living" (Gen 3: 20), is the witness to the biblical "beginning", which contains the truth about the creation of man made in the image and likeness of God and the truth about original sin. Mary is the witness to the new "beginning" and the "new creation" (cf. 2 Cor 5:17), since she herself, as the first of the redeemed in salvation history, is "a new creation": she is "full of grace". It is difficult to grasp why the words of the Protoevangelium place such strong emphasis on the "woman", if it is not admitted that in her the new and definitive Covenant of God with humanity has its beginning, the Covenant in the redeeming blood of Christ. The Covenant begins with a woman, the "woman" of the Annunciation at Nazareth. Herein lies the absolute originality of the Gospel: many times in the Old Testament, in order to intervene in the history of his people, God addressed himself to women, as in the case of the mothers of Samuel and Samson. However, to make his Covenant with humanity, he addressed himself only to men: Noah, Abraham, and Moses. At the beginning of the New Covenant, which is to be eternal and irrevocable, there is a woman: the Virgin of Nazareth. It is a sign that points to the fact that "in Jesus Christ" "there is neither male nor female" (Gal 3:28). In Christ the mutual opposition between man and woman - which is the inheritance of original sin - is essentially overcome. "For you are all one in Jesus Christ", Saint Paul will write (ibid.).

These words concern that original "unity of the two" which is linked with the creation of the human being as male and female, made in the image and likeness of God, and based on the model of that most perfect communion of Persons which is God himself. Saint Paul states that the mystery of man's redemption in Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, resumes and renews that which in the mystery of creation corresponded to the eternal design of God the Creator. Precisely for this reason, on the day of the creation of the human being as male and female "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31). The Redemption restores, in a sense, at its very root, the good that was essentially "diminished" by sin and its heritage in human history.

The "woman" of the Proto-evangelium fits into the perspective of the Redemption. The comparison Eve-Mary can be understood also in the sense that Mary assumes in herself and embraces the mystery of the "woman" whose beginning is Eve, "the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). First of all she assumes and embraces it within the mystery of Christ, "the new and the last Adam" (cf. 1 Cor 15:45), who assumed in his own person the nature of the first Adam. The essence of the New Covenant consists in the fact that the Son of God, who is of one substance with the eternal Father, becomes man: he takes humanity into the unity of the divine Person of the Word. The one who accomplishes the Redemption is also a true man. The mystery of the world's Redemption presupposes that God the Son assumed humanity as the inheritance of Adam, becoming like him and like every man in all things, "yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15). In this way he "fully reveals man to himself and makes man's supreme calling clear", as the Second Vatican Council teaches.³⁶ In a certain sense, he has helped man to discover "who he is" (cf. Ps 8:5).

In the tradition of faith and of Christian reflection throughout the ages, the coupling Adam-Christ is often linked with that of Eve-Mary. If Mary is described also as the "new Eve", what are the meanings of this analogy? Certainly there are many. Particularly noteworthy is the meaning which sees Mary as the full revelation of all that is included in the biblical word "woman": a revelation commensurate with the mystery of the Redemption. Mary means, in a sense, a going beyond the limit spoken of in the Book of Genesis (3: 16) and a return to that "beginning" in which one finds the "woman" as she was intended to be in creation, and therefore in the eternal mind of God: in the bosom of the Most Holy Trinity. Mary is "the new beginning" of the dignity and vocation of women, of each and every woman.³⁷

A particular key for understanding this can be found in the words which the Evangelist puts on Mary's lips after the Annunciation, during her visit to Elizabeth: "He who is mighty has done great things for me" (Lk 1:49). These words certainly refer to the conception of her Son, who is the "Son of the Most High" (Lk1:32), the "holy one" of God; but they can also signify the discovery of her own feminine humanity. He "has done great things for me": this is the discovery of all the richness and personal resources of femininity, all the eternal originality of the "woman", just as God wanted her to be, a person for her own sake, who discovers herself "by means of a sincere gift of self".

This discovery is connected with a clear awareness of God's gift, of his generosity. From the very "beginning" sin had obscured this awareness, in a sense had stifled it, as is shown in the words of the first temptation by the "father of lies" (cf. Genesis 3:1-5). At the advent of the "fullness of time" (cf. Gal 4:4), when the mystery of Redemption begins to be fulfilled in the history of humanity, this awareness bursts forth in all its power in the words of the biblical "woman" of Nazareth. In Mary, Eve discovers the nature of the true dignity of woman, of feminine humanity. This discovery must continually reach the heart of every woman and shape her vocation and her life.

V - JESUS CHRIST

"They marvelled that he was talking with a woman"

12. The words of the Proto-evangelium in the Book of Genesis enable us to move into the context of the Gospel. Man's Redemption, foretold in Genesis, now becomes a reality in the person and mission of Jesus Christ, in which we also recognize what the reality of the Redemption means for the dignity and the vocation of women. This meaning becomes

clearer for us from Christ's words and from his whole attitude towards women, an attitude which is extremely simple, and for this very reason extraordinary, if seen against the background of his time. It is an attitude marked by great clarity and depth. Various women appear along the path of the mission of Jesus of Nazareth, and his meeting with each of them is a confirmation of the evangelical "newness of life" already spoken of.

It is universally admitted - even by people with a critical attitude towards the Christian message - that in the eyes of his contemporaries Christ became a promotor of women's true dignity and of the vocation corresponding to this dignity. At times this caused wonder, surprise, often to the point of scandal: "They marvelled that he was talking with a woman" (Jn 4:27), because this behaviour differed from that of his contemporaries. Even Christ's own disciples "marvelled". The Pharisee to whose house the sinful woman went to anoint Jesus' feet with perfumed oil "said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner'" (Lk 7:39). Even greater dismay, or even "holy indignation", must have filled the self-satisfied hearers of Christ's words: "the tax collectors and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you" (Mt 21:31).

By speaking and acting in this way, Jesus made it clear that "the mysteries of the Kingdom" were known to him in every detail. He also "knew what was in man" (Jn 2:25), in his innermost being, in his "heart". He was a witness of God's eternal plan for the human being, created in his own image and likeness as man and woman. He was also perfectly aware of the consequences of sin, of that "mystery of iniquity" working in human hearts as the bitter fruit of the obscuring of the divine image. It is truly significant that in his important discussion about marriage and its indissolubility, in the presence of "the Scribes", who by profession were experts in the Law, Jesus makes reference to the "beginning". The question asked concerns a man's right "to divorce one's wife for any cause" (Mt 19:3) and therefore also concerns the woman's right, her rightful position in marriage, her dignity. The questioners think they have on their side the Mosaic legislation then followed in Israel: "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" (Mt 19: 7). Jesus answers: "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19: 8). Jesus appeals to the "beginning", to the creation of man as male and female and their ordering by God himself, which is based upon the fact that both were created "in his image and likeness". Therefore, when "a man shall leave his father and mother and is joined to his wife, so that the two become one flesh", there remains in force the law which comes from God himself: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19: 6).

The principle of this "ethos", which from the beginning marks the reality of creation, is now confirmed by Christ in opposition to that tradition which discriminated against women. In this tradition the male "dominated", without having proper regard for woman and for her dignity, which the "ethos" of creation made the basis of the mutual relationships of two people united in marriage. This "ethos" is recalled and confirmed by Christ's words; it is the "ethos" of the Gospel and of Redemption.

Women in the Gospel

13. As we scan the pages of the Gospel, many women, of different ages and conditions, pass before our eyes. We meet women with illnesses or physical sufferings, such as the one who had "a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself" (Lk 13:11); or Simon's mother-in-law, who "lay sick with a fever" (Mk 1:30); or the woman "who had a flow of blood" (cf. Mk 5:25-34), who could not touch anyone because it was believed that her touch would make a person "impure". Each of them was healed, and the last-mentioned - the one with a flow of blood, who touched Jesus' garment "in the crowd" (Mk 5:27) - was praised by him for her great faith: "Your faith has made you well" (Mk 5:34). Then there is the daughter of Jairus, whom Jesus brings back to life, saying to her tenderly: "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mk 5:41). There also is the widow of Nain, whose only son Jesus brings back to life, accompanying his action by an expression of affectionate mercy: "He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep!'" (Lk 7:13). And finally there is the Canaanite woman, whom Christ extols for her faith, her humility and for that greatness of spirit of which only a mother's heart is capable. "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire" (Mt 15:28). The Canaanite woman was asking for the healing of her daughter.

Sometimes the women whom Jesus met and who received so many graces from him, also accompanied him as he journeyed with the Apostles through the towns and villages, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God; and they "provided for them out of their means". The Gospel names Joanna, who was the wife of Herod's steward, Susanna and "many others" (cf. Lk 8:1-3).

Sometimes women appear in the parables which Jesus of Nazareth used to illustrate for his listeners the truth about the Kingdom of God. This is the case in the parables of the lost coin (cf. Lk 15: 8-10), the leaven (cf. Mt 13:33), and the wise and foolish virgins (cf. Mt 25:1-13). Particularly eloquent is the story of the widow's mite. While "the rich were putting their gifts into the treasury... a poor widow put in two copper coins". Then Jesus said: "This poor widow has put in more than all of them... she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had" (Lk 21:1-4). In this way Jesus presents her as a model for everyone and defends her, for in the socio-juridical system of the time widows were totally defenceless people (cf. also Lk 18:1-7).

In all of Jesus' teaching, as well as in his behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women prevalent in his day. On the contrary, his words and works always express the respect and honour due to

women. The woman with a stoop is called a "daughter of Abraham" (Lk 13:16), while in the whole Bible the title "son of Abraham" is used only of men. Walking the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha, Jesus will say to the women: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me" (Lk 23:28). This way of speaking to and about women, as well as his manner of treating them, clearly constitutes an "innovation" with respect to the prevailing custom at that time.

This becomes even more explicit in regard to women whom popular opinion contemptuously labelled sinners, public sinners and adulteresses. There is the Samaritan woman, to whom Jesus himself says: "For you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband". And she, realizing that he knows the secrets of her life, recognizes him as the Messiah and runs to tell her neighbours. The conversation leading up to this realization is one of the most beautiful in the Gospel (cf. Jn 4:7-27).

Then there is the public sinner who, in spite of her condemnation by common opinion, enters into the house of the Pharisee to anoint the feet of Jesus with perfumed oil. To his host, who is scandalized by this, he will say: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much" (cf. Lk 7:37-47).

Finally, there is a situation which is perhaps the most eloquent: a woman caught in adultery is brought to Jesus. To the leading question "In the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?", Jesus replies: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her". The power of truth contained in this answer is so great that "they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest". Only Jesus and the woman remain. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?". "No one, Lord". "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (cf. Jn 8:3-11).

These episodes provide a very clear picture. Christ is the one who "knows what is in man" (cf. Jn 2:25) - in man and woman. He knows the dignity of man, his worth in God's eyes. He himself, the Christ, is the definitive confirmation of this worth. Everything he says and does is definitively fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of the Redemption. Jesus' attitude to the women whom he meets in the course of his Messianic service reflects the eternal plan of God, who, in creating each one of them, chooses her and loves her in Christ (cf. Eph 1:1-5). Each woman therefore is "the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake". Each of them from the "beginning" inherits as a woman the dignity of personhood. Jesus of Nazareth confirms this dignity, recalls it, renews it, and makes it a part of the Gospel and of the Redemption for which he is sent into the world. Every word and gesture of Christ about women must therefore be brought into the dimension of the Paschal Mystery. In this way everything is completely explained.

The woman caught in adultery

14. Jesus enters into the concrete and historical situation of women, a situation which is weighed down by the inheritance of sin. One of the ways in which this inheritance is expressed is habitual discrimination against women in favour of men. This inheritance is rooted within women too. From this point of view the episode of the woman "caught in adultery" (cf. Jn 8:3-11) is particularly eloquent. In the end Jesus says to her: "Do not sin again", but first he evokes an awareness of sin in the men who accuse her in order to stone her, thereby revealing his profound capacity to see human consciences and actions in their true light. Jesus seems to say to the accusers: Is not this woman, for all her sin, above all a confirmation of your own transgressions, of your "male" injustice, your misdeeds?

This truth is valid for the whole human race. The episode recorded in the Gospel of John is repeated in countless similar situations in every period of history. A woman is left alone, exposed to public opinion with "her sin", while behind "her" sin there lurks a man - a sinner, guilty "of the other's sin", indeed equally responsible for it. And yet his sin escapes notice, it is passed over in silence: he does not appear to be responsible for "the other's sin"! Sometimes, forgetting his own sin, he even makes himself the accuser, as in the case described. How often, in a similar way, the woman pays for her own sin (maybe it is she, in some cases, who is guilty of the "other's sin" - the sin of the man), but she alone pays and she pays all alone! How often is she abandoned with her pregnancy, when the man, the child's father, is unwilling to accept responsibility for it? And besides the many "unwed mothers" in our society, we also must consider all those who, as a result of various pressures, even on the part of the guilty man, very often "get rid of" the child before it is born. "They get rid of it": but at what price? Public opinion today tries in various ways to "abolish" the evil of this sin. Normally a woman's conscience does not let her forget that she has taken the life of her own child, for she cannot destroy that readiness to accept life which marks her "ethos" from the "beginning".

The attitude of Jesus in the episode described in John 8:3-11 is significant. This is one of the few instances in which his power - the power of truth - is so clearly manifested with regard to human consciences. Jesus is calm, collected and thoughtful. As in the conversation with the Pharisees (cf. Mt 19:3-9), is Jesus not aware of being in contact with the mystery of the "beginning", when man was created male and female, and the woman was entrusted to the man with her feminine distinctiveness, and with her potential for motherhood? The man was also entrusted by the Creator to the woman - they were entrusted to each other as persons made in the image and likeness of God himself. This entrusting is the test of love, spousal love. In order to become "a sincere gift" to one another, each of them has to feel responsible for the gift. This test is meant for both of them - man and woman - from the "beginning". After original sin, contrary forces are at work in man and woman as a result of the threefold concupiscence, the "stimulus of sin". They act from deep within the human being. Thus Jesus will say in the Sermon on the Mount: "Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28). These words, addressed directly to man, show the

fundamental truth of his responsibility vis-a-vis woman: her dignity, her motherhood, her vocation. But indirectly these words concern the woman. Christ did everything possible to ensure that - in the context of the customs and social relationships of that time - women would find in his teaching and actions their own subjectivity and dignity. On the basis of the eternal "unity of the two", this dignity directly depends on woman herself, as a subject responsible for herself, and at the same time it is "given as a task" to man. Christ logically appeals to man's responsibility. In the present meditation on women's dignity and vocation, it is necessary that we refer to the context which we find in the Gospel. The dignity and the vocation of women - as well as those of men - find their eternal source in the heart of God. And in the temporal conditions of human existence, they are closely connected with the "unity of the two". Consequently each man must look within himself to see whether she who was entrusted to him as a sister in humanity, as a spouse, has not become in his heart an object of adultery; to see whether she who, in different ways, is the cosubject of his existence in the world, has not become for him an "object": an object of pleasure, of exploitation.

Guardians of the Gospel message

15. Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women. Consequently, the women who are close to Christ discover themselves in the truth which he "teaches" and "does", even when this truth concerns their "sinfulness". They feel "liberated" by this truth, restored to themselves: they feel loved with "eternal love", with a love which finds direct expression in Christ himself.

In Christ's sphere of action their position is transformed. They feel that Jesus is speaking to them about matters which in those times one did not discuss with a woman. Perhaps the most significant example of this is the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. Jesus - who knows that she is a sinner and speaks to her about this - discusses the most profound mysteries of God with her. He speaks to her of God's infinite gift of love, which is like a "spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). He speaks to her about God who is Spirit, and about the true adoration which the Father has a right to receive in spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:24). Finally he reveals to her that he is the Messiah promised to Israel (cf. Jn 4:26).

This is an event without precedent: that a woman, and what is more a "sinful woman", becomes a "disciple" of Christ. Indeed, once taught, she proclaims Christ to the inhabitants of Samaria, so that they too receive him with faith (cf. Jn 4:39-42). This is an unprecedented event, if one remembers the usual way women were treated by those who were teachers in Israel; whereas in Jesus of Nazareth's way of acting such an event becomes normal. In this regard, the sisters of Lazarus also deserve special mention: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister (Mary) and Lazarus" (cf. Jn 11:5). Mary "listened to the teaching" of Jesus: when he pays them a visit, he calls Mary's behaviour "the good portion" in contrast to Martha's preoccupation with domestic matters (cf. Lk 10:38-42). On another occasion - after the death of Lazarus - Martha is the one who talks to Christ, and the conversation concerns the most profound truths of revelation and faith: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". "Your brother will rise again". "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day". Jesus said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world" (Jn 11:21-27). After this profession of faith Jesus raises Lazarus. This conversation with Martha is one of the most important in the Gospel.

Christ speaks to women about the things of God, and they understand them; there is a true resonance of mind and heart, a response of faith. Jesus expresses appreciation and admiration for this distinctly "feminine" response, as in the case of the Canaanite woman (cf. Mt 15:28). Sometimes he presents this lively faith, filled with love, as an example. He teaches, therefore, taking as his starting-point this feminine response of mind and heart. This is the case with the "sinful" woman in the Pharisee's house, whose way of acting is taken by Jesus as the starting-point for explaining the truth about the forgiveness of sins: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Lk 7:47). On the occasion of another anointing, Jesus defends the woman and her action before the disciples, Judas in particular: "Why do you trouble this woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me... In pouring this ointment on my body she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mt 26:6-13).

Indeed, the Gospels not only describe what that woman did at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper; they also highlight the fact that women were in the forefront at the foot of the Cross, at the decisive moment in Jesus of Nazareth's whole messianic mission. John was the only Apostle who remained faithful, but there were many faithful women. Not only the Mother of Christ and "his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene" (Jn 19:25) were present, but "there were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him" (Mt 27:55). As we see, in this most arduous test of faith and fidelity the women proved stronger than the Apostles. In this moment of danger, those who love much succeed in overcoming their fear. Before this there were the women on the Via Dolorosa, "who bewailed and lamented him" (Lk 23:27). Earlier still, there was Pilate's wife, who had warned her husband: "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream" (Mt 27:19).

First witnesses of the Resurrection

16. From the beginning of Christ's mission, women show to him and to his mystery a special sensitivity which is characteristic of their femininity. It must also be said that this is especially confirmed in the Paschal Mystery, not only at the Cross but also at the dawn of the Resurrection. The women are the first at the tomb. They are the first to find it empty. They are the first to hear: "He is not here. He has risen, as he said" (Mt 28:6). They are the first to embrace his feet (cf. Mt 28:9). They are also the first to be called to announce this truth to the Apostles (cf. Mt 28:1-10; Lk 24:8-11). The Gospel of John (cf. also Mk 16: 9) emphasizes the special role of Mary Magdalene. She is the first to meet the Risen Christ. At first she thinks he is the gardener; she recognizes him only when he calls her by name: "Jesus said to her, 'Mary'. She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God'. Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her" (Jn 20:16-18).

Hence she came to be called "the apostle of the Apostles".³⁸ Mary Magdalene was the first eyewitness of the Risen Christ, and for this reason she was also the first to bear witness to him before the Apostles. This event, in a sense, crowns all that has been said previously about Christ entrusting divine truths to women as well as men. One can say that this fulfilled the words of the Prophet: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Jl 3:1). On the fiftieth day after Christ's Resurrection, these words are confirmed once more in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, at the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (cf. Act 2:17).

Everything that has been said so far about Christ's attitude to women confirms and clarifies, in the Holy Spirit, the truth about the equality of man and woman. One must speak of an essential "equality", since both of them - the woman as much as the man - are created in the image and likeness of God. Both of them are equally capable of receiving the outpouring of divine truth and love in the Holy Spirit. Both receive his salvific and sanctifying "visits".

The fact of being a man or a woman involves no limitation here, just as the salvific and sanctifying action of the Spirit in man is in no way limited by the fact that one is a Jew or a Greek, slave or free, according to the well-known words of Saint Paul: "For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This unity does not cancel out diversity. The Holy Spirit, who brings about this unity in the supernatural order of sanctifying grace, contributes in equal measure to the fact that "your sons will prophesy" and that "your daughters will prophesy". "To prophesy" means to express by one's words and one's life "the mighty works of God" (Acts 2: 11), preserving the truth and originality of each person, whether woman or man. Gospel "equality", the "equality" of women and men in regard to the "mighty works of God" - manifested so clearly in the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth - constitutes the most obvious basis for the dignity and vocation of women in the Church and in the world. Every vocation has a profoundly personal and prophetic meaning. In "vocation" understood in this way, what is personally feminine reaches a new dimension: the dimension of the "mighty works of God", of which the woman becomes the living subject and an irreplaceable witness.

VI - MOTHERHOOD - VIRGINITY

Two dimensions of women's vocation"

17. We must now focus our meditation on virginity and motherhood as two particular dimensions of the fulfillment of the female personality. In the light of the Gospel, they acquire their full meaning and value in Mary, who as a Virgin became the Mother of the Son of God. These two dimensions of the female vocation were united in her in an exceptional manner, in such a way that one did not exclude the other but wonderfully complemented it. The description of the Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke clearly shows that this seemed impossible to the Virgin of Nazareth. When she hears the words: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus", she immediately asks: "How can this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk 1: 31, 34). In the usual order of things motherhood is the result of mutual "knowledge" between a man and woman in the marriage union. Mary, firm in her resolve to preserve her virginity, puts this question to the divine messenger, and obtains from him the explanation: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" - your motherhood will not be the consequence of matrimonial "knowledge", but will be the work of the Holy Spirit; the "power of the Most High" will "overshadow" the mystery of the Son's conception and birth; as the Son of the Most High, he is given to you exclusively by God, in a manner known to God. Mary, therefore, maintained her virginal "I have no husband" (cf. Lk 1: 34) and at the same time became a Mother. Virginity and motherhood co-exist in her: they do not mutually exclude each other or place limits on each other. Indeed, the person of the Mother of God helps everyone - especially women - to see how these two dimensions, these two paths in the vocation of women as persons, explain and complete each other.

Motherhood

18. In order to share in this "vision", we must once again seek a deeper understanding of the truth about the human person recalled by the Second Vatican Council. The human being - both male and female - is the only being in the world which God willed for its own sake. The human being is a person, a subject who decides for himself. At the same

time, man "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self".³⁹ It has already been said that this description, indeed this definition of the person, corresponds to the fundamental biblical truth about the creation of the human being - man and woman - in the image and likeness of God. This is not a purely theoretical interpretation, nor an abstract definition, for it gives an essential indication of what it means to be human, while emphasizing the value of the gift of self, the gift of the person. In this vision of the person we also find the essence of that "ethos" which, together with the truth of creation, will be fully developed by the books of Revelation, particularly the Gospels.

This truth about the person also opens up the path to a full understanding of women's motherhood. Motherhood is the fruit of the marriage union of a man and woman, of that biblical "knowledge" which corresponds to the "union of the two in one flesh" (cf. Gen 2:24). This brings about - on the woman's part - a special "gift of self", as an expression of that spousal love whereby the two are united to each other so closely that they become "one flesh". Biblical "knowledge" is achieved in accordance with the truth of the person only when the mutual self-giving is not distorted either by the desire of the man to become the "master" of his wife ("he shall rule over you") or by the woman remaining closed within her own instincts ("your desire shall be for your husband": Gen 3:16).

This mutual gift of the person in marriage opens to the gift of a new life, a new human being, who is also a person in the likeness of his parents. Motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person: and this is precisely the woman's "part". In this openness, in conceiving and giving birth to a child, the woman "discovers herself through a sincere gift of self". The gift of interior readiness to accept the child and bring it into the world is linked to the marriage union, which - as mentioned earlier - should constitute a special moment in the mutual self-giving both by the woman and the man. According to the Bible, the conception and birth of a new human being are accompanied by the following words of the woman: "I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1). This exclamation of Eve, the "mother of all the living" is repeated every time a new human being comes into the world. It expresses the woman's joy and awareness that she is sharing in the great mystery of eternal generation. The spouses share in the creative power of God!

The woman's motherhood in the period between the baby's conception and birth is a bio-physiological and psychological process which is better understood in our days than in the past, and is the subject of many detailed studies. Scientific analysis fully confirms that the very physical constitution of women is naturally disposed to motherhood - conception, pregnancy and giving birth - which is a consequence of the marriage union with the man. At the same time, this also corresponds to the psycho-physical structure of women. What the different branches of science have to say on this subject is important and useful, provided that it is not limited to an exclusively bio-physiological interpretation of women and of motherhood. Such a "restricted" picture would go hand in hand with a materialistic concept of the human being and of the world. In such a case, what is truly essential would unfortunately be lost. Motherhood as a human fact and phenomenon, is fully explained on the basis of the truth about the person. Motherhood is linked to the personal structure of the woman and to the personal dimension of the gift: "I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1). The Creator grants the parents the gift of a child. On the woman's part, this fact is linked in a special way to "a sincere gift of self". Mary's words at the Annunciation - "Let it be to me according to your word" - signify the woman's readiness for the gift of self and her readiness to accept a new life.

The eternal mystery of generation, which is in God himself, the one and Triune God (cf. Eph 3:14-15), is reflected in the woman's motherhood and in the man's fatherhood. Human parenthood is something shared by both the man and the woman. Even if the woman, out of love for her husband, says: "I have given you a child", her words also mean: "This is our child". Although both of them together are parents of their child, the woman's motherhood constitutes a special "part" in this shared parenthood, and the most demanding part. Parenthood - even though it belongs to both - is realized much more fully in the woman, especially in the prenatal period. It is the woman who "pays" directly for this shared generation, which literally absorbs the energies of her body and soul. It is therefore necessary that the man be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes a special debt to the woman. No programme of "equal rights" between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account.

Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and "understands" with unique intuition what is happening inside her. In the light of the "beginning", the mother accepts and loves as a person the child she is carrying in her womb. This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings - not only towards her own child, but every human being - which profoundly marks the woman's personality. It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. The man - even with all his sharing in parenthood - always remains "outside" the process of pregnancy and the baby's birth; in many ways he has to learn his own "fatherhood" from the mother. One can say that this is part of the normal human dimension of parenthood, including the stages that follow the birth of the baby, especially the initial period. The child's upbringing, taken as a whole, should include the contribution of both parents: the maternal and paternal contribution. In any event, the mother's contribution is decisive in laying the foundation for a new human personality.

Motherhood in relation to the Covenant

19. Our reflection returns to the biblical exemplar of the "woman" in the Proto-evangelium. The "woman", as mother and first teacher of the human being (education being the spiritual dimension of parenthood), has a specific precedence over the man. Although motherhood, especially in the bio-physical sense, depends upon the man, it places an essential "mark" on the whole personal growth process of new children. Motherhood in the bio-physical sense appears to be passive: the formation process of a new life "takes place" in her, in her body, which is nevertheless profoundly involved in that process. At the same time, motherhood in its personal-ethical sense expresses a very important creativity on the part of the woman, upon whom the very humanity of the new human being mainly depends. In this sense too the woman's motherhood presents a special call and a special challenge to the man and to his fatherhood.

The biblical exemplar of the "woman" finds its culmination in the motherhood of the Mother of God. The words of the Proto-evangelium - "I will put enmity between you and the woman" - find here a fresh confirmation. We see that through Mary - through her maternal "fiat", ("Let it be done to me") - God begins a New Covenant with humanity. This is the eternal and definitive Covenant in Christ, in his body and blood, in his Cross and Resurrection. Precisely because this Covenant is to be fulfilled "in flesh and blood" its beginning is in the Mother. Thanks solely to her and to her virginal and maternal "fiat", the "Son of the Most High" can say to the Father: "A body you have prepared for me. Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (cf. Heb 10:5, 7).

Motherhood has been introduced into the order of the Covenant that God made with humanity in Jesus Christ. Each and every time that motherhood is repeated in human history, it is always related to the Covenant which God established with the human race through the motherhood of the Mother of God.

Does not Jesus bear witness to this reality when he answers the exclamation of that woman in the crowd who blessed him for Mary's motherhood: "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!?" Jesus replies: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:27-28). Jesus confirms the meaning of motherhood in reference to the body, but at the same time he indicates an even deeper meaning, which is connected with the order of the spirit: it is a sign of the Covenant with God who "is spirit" (Jn 4: 24). This is true above all for the motherhood of the Mother of God. The motherhood of every woman, understood in the light of the Gospel, is similarly not only "of flesh and blood": it expresses a profound "listening to the word of the living God" and a readiness to "safeguard" this Word, which is "the word of eternal life" (cf. Jn 6:68). For it is precisely those born of earthly mothers, the sons and daughters of the human race, who receive from the Son of God the power to become "children of God" (Jn 1:12). A dimension of the New Covenant in Christ's blood enters into human parenthood, making it a reality and a task for "new creatures" (cf. 2 Cor 5: 17). The history of every human being passes through the threshold of a woman's motherhood; crossing it conditions "the revelation of the children of God" (cf. Rom 8: 19).

"When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world" (Jn 16: 21). The first part of Christ's words refers to the "pangs of childbirth" which belong to the heritage of original sin; at the same time these words indicate the link that exists between the woman's motherhood and the Paschal Mystery. For this mystery also includes the Mother's sorrow at the foot of the Cross - the Mother who through faith shares in the amazing mystery of her Son's "self-emptying": "This is perhaps the deepest 'kenosis' of faith in human history".⁴⁰

As we contemplate this Mother, whose heart "a sword has pierced" (cf. Lk 2: 35), our thoughts go to all the suffering women in the world, suffering either physically or morally. In this suffering a woman's sensitivity plays a role, even though she often succeeds in resisting suffering better than a man. It is difficult to enumerate these sufferings; it is difficult to call them all by name. We may recall her maternal care for her children, especially when they fall sick or fall into bad ways; the death of those most dear to her; the loneliness of mothers forgotten by their grown up children; the loneliness of widows; the sufferings of women who struggle alone to make a living; and women who have been wronged or exploited. Then there are the sufferings of consciences as a result of sin, which has wounded the woman's human or maternal dignity: the wounds of consciences which do not heal easily. With these sufferings too we must place ourselves at the foot of the Cross.

But the words of the Gospel about the woman who suffers when the time comes for her to give birth to her child, immediately afterwards express joy: it is "the joy that a child is born into the world". This joy too is referred to the Paschal Mystery, to the joy which is communicated to the Apostles on the day of Christ's Resurrection: "So you have sorrow now" (these words were said the day before the Passion); "but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16: 22-23).

Virginity for the sake of the Kingdom

20. In the teaching of Christ, motherhood is connected with virginity, but also distinct from it. Fundamental to this is Jesus' statement in the conversation on the indissolubility of marriage. Having heard the answer given to the Pharisees, the disciples say to Christ: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry" (Mt 19: 10). Independently of the meaning which "it is not expedient" had at that time in the mind of the disciples, Christ takes their mistaken opinion as a starting point for instructing them on the value of celibacy. He distinguishes celibacy which results from natural defects - even though they may have been caused by man - from "celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven". Christ says, "and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the

Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:12). It is, then, a voluntary celibacy, chosen for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, in view of man's eschatological vocation to union with God. He then adds: "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it". These words repeat what he had said at the beginning of the discourse on celibacy (cf. Mt 19:11). Consequently, celibacy for the kingdom of heaven results not only from a free choice on the part of man, but also from a special grace on the part of God, who calls a particular person to live celibacy. While this is a special sign of the Kingdom of God to come, it also serves as a way to devote all the energies of soul and body during one's earthly life exclusively for the sake of the eschatological kingdom.

Jesus' words are the answer to the disciples' question. They are addressed directly to those who put the question: in this case they were men. Nevertheless, Christ's answer, in itself, has a value both for men and for women. In this context it indicates the evangelical ideal of virginity, an ideal which constitutes a clear "innovation" with respect to the tradition of the Old Testament. Certainly that tradition was connected in some way with Israel's expectation of the Messiah's coming, especially among the women of Israel from whom he was to be born. In fact, the ideal of celibacy and virginity for the sake of greater closeness to God was not entirely foreign to certain Jewish circles, especially in the period immediately preceding the coming of Jesus. Nevertheless, celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, or rather virginity, is undeniably an innovation connected with the incarnation of God.

From the moment of Christ's coming, the expectation of the People of God has to be directed to the eschatological Kingdom which is coming and to which he must lead "the new Israel". A new awareness of faith is essential for such a turn-about and change of values. Christ emphasizes this twice: "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it". Only "those to whom it is given" understand it (Mt 19:11). Mary is the first person in whom this new awareness is manifested, for she asks the Angel: "How can this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk 1:34). Even though she is "betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph" (cf. Lk 1:27), she is firm in her resolve to remain a virgin. The motherhood which is accomplished in her comes exclusively from the "power of the Most High", and is the result of the Holy Spirit's coming down upon her (cf. Lk 1:35). This divine motherhood, therefore, is an altogether unforeseen response to the human expectation of women in Israel: it comes to Mary as a gift from God himself. This gift is the beginning and the prototype of a new expectation on the part of all. It measures up to the Eternal Covenant, to God's new and definitive promise: it is a sign of eschatological hope.

On the basis of the Gospel, the meaning of virginity was developed and better understood as a vocation for women too, one in which their dignity, like that of the Virgin of Nazareth, finds confirmation. The Gospel puts forward the ideal of the consecration of the person, that is, the person's exclusive dedication to God by virtue of the evangelical counsels: in particular, chastity, poverty and obedience. Their perfect incarnation is Jesus Christ himself. Whoever wishes to follow him in a radical way chooses to live according to these counsels. They are distinct from the commandments and show the Christian the radical way of the Gospel. From the very beginning of Christianity men and women have set out on this path, since the evangelical ideal is addressed to human beings without any distinction of sex.

In this wider context, virginity has to be considered also as a path for women, a path on which they realize their womanhood in a way different from marriage. In order to understand this path, it is necessary to refer once more to the fundamental idea of Christian anthropology. By freely choosing virginity, women confirm themselves as persons, as beings whom the Creator from the beginning has willed for their own sake.⁴¹ At the same time they realize the personal value of their own femininity by becoming "a sincere gift" for God who has revealed himself in Christ, a gift for Christ, the Redeemer of humanity and the Spouse of souls: a "spousal" gift. One cannot correctly understand virginity - a woman's consecration in virginity - without referring to spousal love. It is through this kind of love that a person becomes a gift for the other.⁴² Moreover, a man's consecration in priestly celibacy or in the religious state is to be understood analogously.

The naturally spousal predisposition of the feminine personality finds a response in virginity understood in this way. Women, called from the very "beginning" to be loved and to love, in a vocation to virginity find Christ first of all as the Redeemer who "loved until the end" through his total gift of self; and they respond to this gift with a "sincere gift" of their whole lives. They thus give themselves to the divine Spouse, and this personal gift tends to union, which is properly spiritual in character. Through the Holy Spirit's action a woman becomes "one spirit" with Christ the Spouse (cf. 1 Cor 6:17).

This is the evangelical ideal of virginity, in which both the dignity and the vocation of women are realized in a special way. In virginity thus understood the so-called radicalism of the Gospel finds expression: "Leave everything and follow Christ" (cf. Mt 19:27). This cannot be compared to remaining simply unmarried or single, because virginity is not restricted to a mere "no", but contains a profound "yes" in the spousal order: the gift of self for love in a total and undivided manner.

Motherhood according to the Spirit

21. Virginity according to the Gospel means renouncing marriage and thus physical motherhood. Nevertheless, the renunciation of this kind of motherhood, a renunciation that can involve great sacrifice for a woman, makes possible a different kind of motherhood: motherhood "according to the Spirit" (cf. Rom 8:4). For virginity does not deprive a woman of her prerogatives. Spiritual motherhood takes on many different forms. In the life of consecrated women, for

example, who live according to the charism and the rules of the various apostolic Institutes, it can express itself as concern for people, especially the most needy: the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned and, in general, people on the edges of society. In this way a consecrated woman finds her Spouse, different and the same in each and every person, according to his very words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Spousal love always involves a special readiness to be poured out for the sake of those who come within one's range of activity. In marriage this readiness, even though open to all, consists mainly in the love that parents give to their children. In virginity this readiness is open to all people, who are embraced by the love of Christ the Spouse.

Spousal love - with its maternal potential hidden in the heart of the woman as a virginal bride - when joined to Christ, the Redeemer of each and every person, is also predisposed to being open to each and every person. This is confirmed in the religious communities of apostolic life, and in a different way in communities of contemplative life, or the cloister. There exist still other forms of a vocation to virginity for the sake of the Kingdom; for example, the Secular Institutes, or the communities of consecrated persons which flourish within Movements, Groups and Associations. In all of these the same truth about the spiritual motherhood of virgins is confirmed in various ways. However, it is not only a matter of communal forms but also of non-communal forms. In brief, virginity as a woman's vocation is always the vocation of a person - of a unique, individual person. Therefore the spiritual motherhood which makes itself felt in this vocation is also profoundly personal.

This is also the basis of a specific convergence between the virginity of the unmarried woman and the motherhood of the married woman. This convergence moves not only from motherhood towards virginity, as emphasized above; it also moves from virginity towards marriage, the form of woman's vocation in which she becomes a mother by giving birth to her children. The starting point of this second analogy is the meaning of marriage. A woman is "married" either through the sacrament of marriage or spiritually through marriage to Christ. In both cases marriage signifies the "sincere gift of the person" of the bride to the groom. In this way, one can say that the profile of marriage is found spiritually in virginity. And does not physical motherhood also have to be a spiritual motherhood, in order to respond to the whole truth about the human being who is a unity of body and spirit? Thus there exist many reasons for discerning in these two different paths - the two different vocations of women - a profound complementarity, and even a profound union within a person's being.

"My little children with whom I am again in travail"

22. The Gospel reveals and enables us to understand precisely this mode of being of the human person. The Gospel helps every woman and every man to live it and thus attain fulfilment. There exists a total equality with respect to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, with respect to the "mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11). Moreover, it is precisely in the face of the "mighty works of God" that Saint Paul, as a man, feels the need to refer to what is essentially feminine in order to express the truth about his own apostolic service. This is exactly what Paul of Tarsus does when he addresses the Galatians with the words: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail" (Gal 4:19). In the First Letter to the Corinthians (7: 38) Saint Paul proclaims the superiority of virginity over marriage, which is a constant teaching of the Church in accordance with the spirit of Christ's words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (19: 10-12); he does so without in any way obscuring the importance of physical and spiritual motherhood. Indeed, in order to illustrate the Church's fundamental mission, he finds nothing better than the reference to motherhood.

The same analogy - and the same truth - are present in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Mary is the "figure" of the Church:⁴³ "For in the mystery of the Church, herself rightly called mother and virgin, the Blessed Virgin came first as an eminent and singular exemplar of both virginity and motherhood.... The Son whom she brought forth is He whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (cf. Rom 8: 29), namely, among the faithful. In their birth and development she cooperates with a maternal love".⁴⁴ "Moreover, contemplating Mary's mysterious sanctity, imitating her charity, and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, the Church herself becomes a mother by accepting God's word in faith. For by her preaching and by baptism she brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God".⁴⁵ This is motherhood "according to the Spirit" with regard to the sons and daughters of the human race. And this motherhood - as already mentioned - becomes the woman's "role" also in virginity. "The Church herself is a virgin, who keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse".⁴⁶ This is most perfectly fulfilled in Mary. The Church, therefore, "imitating the Mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, ... preserves with virginal purity an integral faith, a firm hope, and a sincere charity".⁴⁷

The Council has confirmed that, unless one looks to the Mother of God, it is impossible to understand the mystery of the Church, her reality, her essential vitality. Indirectly we find here a reference to the biblical exemplar of the "woman" which is already clearly outlined in the description of the "beginning" (cf. Gen 3:15) and which precedes from creation, through sin to the Redemption. In this way there is a confirmation of the profound union between what is human and what constitutes the divine economy of salvation in human history. The Bible convinces us of the fact that one can have no adequate hermeneutic of man, or of what is "human", without appropriate reference to what is "feminine". There is an analogy in God's salvific economy: if we wish to understand it fully in relation to the whole of human history, we cannot omit, in the perspective of our faith, the mystery of "woman": virgin-mother-spouse.

VII - THE CHURCH - THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

The "great mystery"

23. Of fundamental importance here are the words of the Letter to the Ephesians: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church" (5:25-32).

In this Letter the author expresses the truth about the Church as the bride of Christ, and also indicates how this truth is rooted in the biblical reality of the creation of the human being as male and female. Created in the image and likeness of God as a "unity of the two", both have been called to a spousal love. Following the description of creation in the Book of Genesis (2:18-25), one can also say that this fundamental call appears in the creation of woman, and is inscribed by the Creator in the institution of marriage, which, according to Genesis 2:24, has the character of a union of persons ("communio personarum") from the very beginning. Although not directly, the very description of the "beginning" (cf. Gen 1:27; 2:24) shows that the whole "ethos" of mutual relations between men and women has to correspond to the personal truth of their being.

All this has already been considered. The Letter to the Ephesians once again confirms this truth, while at the same time comparing the spousal character of the love between man and woman to the mystery of Christ and of the Church. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church - the Church is the Bride of Christ. This analogy is not without precedent; it transfers to the New Testament what was already contained in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah.⁴⁸ The respective passages deserve a separate analysis. Here we will cite only one text. This is how God speaks to his Chosen People through the Prophet: "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer.... For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Is 54:4-8, 10).

Since the human being - man and woman - has been created in God's image and likeness, God can speak about himself through the lips of the Prophet using language which is essentially human. In the text of Isaiah quoted above, the expression of God's love is "human", but the love itself is divine. Since it is God's love, its spousal character is properly divine, even though it is expressed by the analogy of a man's love for a woman. The woman-bride is Israel, God's Chosen People, and this choice originates exclusively in God's gratuitous love. It is precisely this love which explains the Covenant, a Covenant often presented as a marriage covenant which God always renews with his Chosen People. On the part of God the Covenant is a lasting "commitment"; he remains faithful to his spousal love even if the bride often shows herself to be unfaithful.

This image of spousal love, together with the figure of the divine Bridegroom - a very clear image in the texts of the Prophets - finds crowning confirmation in the Letter to the Ephesians (5:23-32). Christ is greeted as the bridegroom by John the Baptist (cf. Jn 3:27-29). Indeed Christ applies to himself this comparison drawn from the Prophets (cf. Mk 2:19-20). The Apostle Paul, who is a bearer of the Old Testament heritage, writes to the Corinthians: "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband" (2 Cor 11:2). But the fullest expression of the truth about Christ the Redeemer's love, according to the analogy of spousal love in marriage, is found in the Letter to the Ephesians: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (5:25), thereby fully confirming the fact that the Church is the bride of Christ: "The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer" (Is 54:5). In Saint Paul's text the analogy of the spousal relationship moves simultaneously in two directions which make up the whole of the "great mystery" ("sacramentum magnum").

The covenant proper to spouses "explains" the spousal character of the union of Christ with the Church, and in its turn this union, as a "great sacrament", determines the sacramentality of marriage as a holy covenant between the two spouses, man and woman. Reading this rich and complex passage, which taken as a whole is a great analogy, we must distinguish that element which expresses the human reality of interpersonal relations from that which expresses in symbolic language the "great mystery" which is divine.

The Gospel "innovation"

24. The text is addressed to the spouses as real women and men. It reminds them of the "ethos" of spousal love which goes back to the divine institution of marriage from the "beginning". Corresponding to the truth of this institution is the exhortation: "Husbands, love your wives", love them because of that special and unique bond whereby in marriage a man and a woman become "one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31). In this love there is a fundamental affirmation of the woman as a person. This affirmation makes it possible for the female personality to develop fully and be enriched. This is precisely the way Christ acts as the bridegroom of the Church; he desires that she be "in splendour, without spot or wrinkle" (Eph 5:27). One can say that this fully captures the whole "style" of Christ in dealing with women. Husbands should make their own the elements of this style in regard to their wives; analogously, all men should do the same in regard to women in every situation. In this way both men and women bring about "the sincere gift of self".

The author of the Letter to the Ephesians sees no contradiction between an exhortation formulated in this way and the words: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife" (5:22-23). The author knows that this way of speaking, so profoundly rooted in the customs and religious tradition of the time, is to be understood and carried out in a new way: as a "mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ" (cf. Eph 5:21). This is especially true because the husband is called the "head" of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church; he is so in order to give "himself up for her" (Eph 5:25), and giving himself up for her means giving up even his own life. However, whereas in the relationship between Christ and the Church the subjection is only on the part of the Church, in the relationship between husband and wife the "subjection" is not one-sided but mutual.

In relation to the "old" this is evidently something "new": it is an innovation of the Gospel. We find various passages in which the apostolic writings express this innovation, even though they also communicate what is "old": what is rooted in the religious tradition of Israel, in its way of understanding and explaining the sacred texts, as for example the second chapter of the Book of Genesis.⁴⁹

The apostolic letters are addressed to people living in an environment marked by that same traditional way of thinking and acting. The "innovation" of Christ is a fact: it constitutes the unambiguous content of the evangelical message and is the result of the Redemption. However, the awareness that in marriage there is mutual "subjection of the spouses out of reverence for Christ", and not just that of the wife to the husband, must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behaviour and customs. This is a call which from that time onwards, does not cease to challenge succeeding generations; it is a call which people have to accept ever anew. Saint Paul not only wrote: "In Christ Jesus... there is no more man or woman", but also wrote: "There is no more slave or freeman". Yet how many generations were needed for such a principle to be realized in the history of humanity through the abolition of slavery! And what is one to say of the many forms of slavery to which individuals and peoples are subjected, which have not yet disappeared from history?

But the challenge presented by the "ethos" of the Redemption is clear and definitive. All the reasons in favour of the "subjection" of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of a "mutual subjection" of both "out of reverence for Christ". The measure of true spousal love finds its deepest source in Christ, who is the Bridegroom of the Church, his Bride.

The symbolic dimension of the "great mystery"

25. In the Letter to the Ephesians we encounter a second dimension of the analogy which, taken as a whole, serves to reveal the "great mystery". This is a symbolic dimension. If God's love for the human person, for the Chosen People of Israel, is presented by the Prophets as the love of the bridegroom for the bride, such an analogy expresses the "spousal" quality and the divine and non-human character of God's love: "For your Maker is your husband... the God of the whole earth he is called" (Is 54:5). The same can also be said of the spousal love of Christ the Redeemer: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). It is a matter, therefore, of God's love expressed by means of the Redemption accomplished by Christ. According to Saint Paul's Letter, this love is "like" the spousal love of human spouses, but naturally it is not "the same". For the analogy implies a likeness, while at the same time leaving ample room for non-likeness.

This is easily seen in regard to the person of the "bride". According to the Letter to the Ephesians, the bride is the Church, just as for the Prophets the bride was Israel. She is therefore a collective subject and not an individual person. This collective subject is the People of God, a community made up of many persons, both women and men. "Christ has loved the Church" precisely as a community, as the People of God. At the same time, in this Church, which in the same passage is also called his "body" (cf. Eph 5:23), he has loved every individual person. For Christ has redeemed all without exception, every man and woman. It is precisely this love of God which is expressed in the Redemption; the spousal character of this love reaches completion in the history of humanity and of the world.

Christ has entered this history and remains in it as the Bridegroom who "has given himself". "To give" means "to become a sincere gift" in the most complete and radical way: "Greater love has no man than this" (Jn 15:13). According to this conception, all human beings - both women and men - are called through the Church, to be the "Bride" of Christ, the Redeemer of the world. In this way "being the bride", and thus the "feminine" element, becomes a symbol of all that

is "human", according to the words of Paul: "There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

From a linguistic viewpoint we can say that the analogy of spousal love found in the Letter to the Ephesians links what is "masculine" to what is "feminine", since, as members of the Church, men too are included in the concept of "Bride". This should not surprise us, for Saint Paul, in order to express his mission in Christ and in the Church, speaks of the "little children with whom he is again in travail" (cf. Gal 4:19). In the sphere of what is "human" - of what is humanly personal - "masculinity" and "femininity" are distinct, yet at the same time they complete and explain each other. This is also present in the great analogy of the "Bride" in the Letter to the Ephesians. In the Church every human being - male and female - is the "Bride", in that he or she accepts the gift of the love of Christ the Redeemer, and seeks to respond to it with the gift of his or her own person.

Christ is the Bridegroom. This expresses the truth about the love of God who "first loved us" (cf. 1 Jn 4:19) and who, with the gift generated by this spousal love for man, has exceeded all human expectations: "He loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). The Bridegroom - the Son consubstantial with the Father as God - became the son of Mary; he became the "son of man", true man, a male. The symbol of the Bridegroom is masculine. This masculine symbol represents the human aspect of the divine love which God has for Israel, for the Church, and for all people. Meditating on what the Gospels say about Christ's attitude towards women, we can conclude that as a man, a son of Israel, he revealed the dignity of the "daughters of Abraham" (cf. Lk 13:16), the dignity belonging to women from the very "beginning" on an equal footing with men. At the same time Christ emphasized the originality which distinguishes women from men, all the richness lavished upon women in the mystery of creation. Christ's attitude towards women serves as a model of what the Letter to the Ephesians expresses with the concept of "bridegroom". Precisely because Christ's divine love is the love of a Bridegroom, it is the model and pattern of all human love, men's love in particular.

The Eucharist

26. Against the broad background of the "great mystery" expressed in the spousal relationship between Christ and the Church, it is possible to understand adequately the calling of the "Twelve". In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner. In doing so, he exercised the same freedom with which, in all his behaviour, he emphasized the dignity and the vocation of women, without conforming to the prevailing customs and to the traditions sanctioned by the legislation of the time. Consequently, the assumption that he called men to be apostles in order to conform with the widespread mentality of his times, does not at all correspond to Christ's way of acting. "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men" (Mt 22:16). These words fully characterize Jesus of Nazareth's behaviour. Here one also finds an explanation for the calling of the "Twelve". They are with Christ at the Last Supper. They alone receive the sacramental charge, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24), which is joined to the institution of the Eucharist. On Easter Sunday night they receive the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins: "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20:23).

We find ourselves at the very heart of the Paschal Mystery, which completely reveals the spousal love of God. Christ is the Bridegroom because "he has given himself": his body has been "given", his blood has been "poured out" (cf. Lk 22:19-20). In this way "he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). The "sincere gift" contained in the Sacrifice of the Cross gives definitive prominence to the spousal meaning of God's love. As the Redeemer of the world, Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride. The Eucharist makes present and realizes anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ, who "creates" the Church, his body. Christ is united with this "body" as the bridegroom with the bride. All this is contained in the Letter to the Ephesians. The perennial "unity of the two" that exists between man and woman from the very "beginning" is introduced into this "great mystery" of Christ and of the Church.

Since Christ, in instituting the Eucharist, linked it in such an explicit way to the priestly service of the Apostles, it is legitimate to conclude that he thereby wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is "feminine" and what is "masculine". It is a relationship willed by God both in the mystery of creation and in the mystery of Redemption. It is the Eucharist above all that expresses the redemptive act of Christ the Bridegroom towards the Church the Bride. This is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry of the Eucharist, in which the priest acts "in persona Christi", is performed by a man. This explanation confirms the teaching of the Declaration Inter Insigniores, published at the behest of Paul VI in response to the question concerning the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood.⁵⁰

The Gift of the Bride

27. The Second Vatican Council renewed the Church's awareness of the universality of the priesthood. In the New Covenant there is only one sacrifice and only one priest: Christ. All the baptized share in the one priesthood of Christ, both men and women, inasmuch as they must "present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (cf. Rom 12:1), give witness to Christ in every place, and give an explanation to anyone who asks the reason for the hope in

eternal life that is in them (cf. 1 Pt 3:15)".⁵¹ Universal participation in Christ's sacrifice, in which the Redeemer has offered to the Father the whole world and humanity in particular, brings it about that all in the Church are "a kingdom of priests" (Rev 5:10; cf. 1 Pt 2:9), who not only share in the priestly mission but also in the prophetic and kingly mission of Christ the Messiah. Furthermore, this participation determines the organic unity of the Church, the People of God, with Christ. It expresses at the same time the "great mystery" described in the Letter to the Ephesians: the bride united to her Bridegroom; united, because she lives his life; united, because she shares in his threefold mission (tria munera Christi); united in such a manner as to respond with a "sincere gift" of self to the inexpressible gift of the love of the Bridegroom, the Redeemer of the world. This concerns everyone in the Church, women as well as men. It obviously concerns those who share in the "ministerial priesthood",⁵² which is characterized by service. In the context of the "great mystery" of Christ and of the Church, all are called to respond - as a bride - with the gift of their lives to the inexpressible gift of the love of Christ, who alone, as the Redeemer of the world, is the Church's Bridegroom. The "royal priesthood", which is universal, at the same time expresses the gift of the Bride.

This is of fundamental importance for understanding the Church in her own essence, so as to avoid applying to the Church - even in her dimension as an "institution" made up of human beings and forming part of history - criteria of understanding and judgment which do not pertain to her nature. Although the Church possesses a "hierarchical" structure,⁵³ nevertheless this structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members. And holiness is measured according to the "great mystery" in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom. She does this "in the Holy Spirit", since "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). The Second Vatican Council, confirming the teaching of the whole of tradition, recalled that in the hierarchy of holiness it is precisely the "woman", Mary of Nazareth, who is the "figure" of the Church. She "precedes" everyone on the path to holiness; in her person "the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph 5:27)".⁵⁴ In this sense, one can say that the Church is both "Marian" and "Apostolic-Petrine".⁵⁵

In the history of the Church, even from earliest times, there were side-by-side with men a number of women, for whom the response of the Bride to the Bridegroom's redemptive love acquired full expressive force. First we see those women who had personally encountered Christ and followed him. After his departure, together with the Apostles, they "devoted themselves to prayer" in the Upper Room in Jerusalem until the day of Pentecost. On that day the Holy Spirit spoke through "the sons and daughters" of the People of God, thus fulfilling the words of the prophet Joel (cf. Acts 2:17). These women, and others afterwards, played an active and important role in the life of the early Church, in building up from its foundations the first Christian community - and subsequent communities - through their own charisms and their varied service. The apostolic writings note their names, such as Phoebe, "a deaconess of the Church at Cenchreae" (cf. Rom 16:1), Prisca with her husband Aquila (cf. 2 Tim 4:19), Euodia and Syntyche (cf. Phil 4:2), Mary, Tryphaena, Persis, and Tryphosa (cf. Rom 16:6, 12). Saint Paul speaks of their "hard work" for Christ, and this hard work indicates the various fields of the Church's apostolic service, beginning with the "domestic Church". For in the latter, "sincere faith" passes from the mother to her children and grandchildren, as was the case in the house of Timothy (cf. 2 Tim 1:5).

The same thing is repeated down the centuries, from one generation to the next, as the history of the Church demonstrates. By defending the dignity of women and their vocation, the Church has shown honour and gratitude for those women who - faithful to the Gospel - have shared in every age in the apostolic mission of the whole People of God. They are the holy martyrs, virgins, and mothers of families, who bravely bore witness to their faith and passed on the Church's faith and tradition by bringing up their children in the spirit of the Gospel.

In every age and in every country we find many "perfect" women (cf. Prov. 31:10) who, despite persecution, difficulties and discrimination, have shared in the Church's mission. It suffices to mention: Monica, the mother of Augustine, Macrina, Olga of Kiev, Matilda of Tuscany, Hedwig of Silesia, Jadwiga of Cracow, Elizabeth of Thuringia, Birgitta of Sweden, Joan of Arc, Rose of Lima, Elizabeth Ann Seton and Mary Ward.

The witness and the achievements of Christian women have had a significant impact on the life of the Church as well as of society. Even in the face of serious social discrimination, holy women have acted "freely", strengthened by their union with Christ. Such union and freedom rooted in God explain, for example, the great work of Saint Catherine of Siena in the life of the Church, and the work of Saint Teresa of Jesus in the monastic life.

In our own days too the Church is constantly enriched by the witness of the many women who fulfil their vocation to holiness. Holy women are an incarnation of the feminine ideal; they are also a model for all Christians, a model of the "sequela Christi", an example of how the Bride must respond with love to the love of the Bridegroom.

VIII - "THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE"

In the face of changes

28. "The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to respond to his supreme destiny".⁵⁶ We can apply these words of the Conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* to the present reflections. The particular reference to the dignity of women and their vocation, precisely in our

time, can and must be received in the "light and power" which the Spirit grants to human beings, including the people of our own age, which is marked by so many different transformations. The Church "holds that in her Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point, and the goal" of man and "of all human history", and she "maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever".⁵⁷

These words of the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World show the path to be followed in undertaking the tasks connected with the dignity and vocation of women, against the background of the significant changes of our times. We can face these changes correctly and adequately only if we go back to the foundations which are to be found in Christ, to those "immutable" truths and values of which he himself remains the "faithful witness" (cf. Rev. 1:5) and Teacher. A different way of acting would lead to doubtful, if not actually erroneous and deceptive results.

The dignity of women and the order of love

29. The passage from the Letter to the Ephesians already quoted (5:21-33), in which the relationship between Christ and the Church is presented as the link between the Bridegroom and the Bride, also makes reference to the institution of marriage as recorded in the Book of Genesis (cf. 2:24). This passage connects the truth about marriage as a primordial sacrament with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:27; 5:1). The significant comparison in the Letter to the Ephesians gives perfect clarity to what is decisive for the dignity of women both in the eyes of God - the Creator and Redeemer - and in the eyes of human beings - men and women. In God's eternal plan, woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root. The order of love belongs to the intimate life of God himself, the life of the Trinity. In the intimate life of God, the Holy Spirit is the personal hypostasis of love. Through the Spirit, Uncreated Gift, love becomes a gift for created persons. Love, which is of God, communicates itself to creatures: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

The calling of woman into existence at man's side as "a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18) in the "unity of the two", provides the visible world of creatures with particular conditions so that "the love of God may be poured into the hearts" of the beings created in his image. When the author of the Letter to the Ephesians calls Christ "the Bridegroom" and the Church "the Bride", he indirectly confirms through this analogy the truth about woman as bride. The Bridegroom is the one who loves. The Bride is loved: it is she who receives love, in order to love in return.

Rereading Genesis in light of the spousal symbol in the Letter to the Ephesians enables us to grasp a truth which seems to determine in an essential manner the question of women's dignity, and, subsequently, also the question of their vocation: the dignity of women is measured by the order of love, which is essentially the order of justice and charity.⁵⁸ Only a person can love and only a person can be loved. This statement is primarily ontological in nature, and it gives rise to an ethical affirmation. Love is an ontological and ethical requirement of the person. The person must be loved, since love alone corresponds to what the person is. This explains the commandment of love, known already in the Old Testament (cf. Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) and placed by Christ at the very centre of the Gospel "ethos" (cf. Mt 22:36-40; Mk 12:28-34). This also explains the primacy of love expressed by Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "the greatest of these is love" (cf. 13:13).

Unless we refer to this order and primacy we cannot give a complete and adequate answer to the question about women's dignity and vocation. When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and structure the interaction between all persons

-men and women. In this broad and diversified context, a woman represents a particular value by the fact that she is a human person, and, at the same time, this particular person, by the fact of her femininity. This concerns each and every woman, independently of the cultural context in which she lives, and independently of her spiritual, psychological and physical characteristics, as for example, age, education, health, work, and whether she is married or single.

The passage from the Letter to the Ephesians which we have been considering enables us to think of a special kind of "prophetic" that belongs to women in their femininity. The analogy of the Bridegroom and the Bride speaks of the love with which every human being - man and woman - is loved by God in Christ. But in the context of the biblical analogy and the text's interior logic, it is precisely the woman - the bride - who manifests this truth to everyone. This "prophetic" character of women in their femininity finds its highest expression in the Virgin Mother of God. She emphasizes, in the fullest and most direct way, the intimate linking of the order of love - which enters the world of human persons through a Woman - with the Holy Spirit. At the Annunciation Mary hears the words: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Lk 1:35).

Awareness of a mission

30. A woman's dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected with the love which she gives in return. The truth about the person and about love is thus

confirmed. With regard to the truth about the person, we must turn again to the Second Vatican Council: "Man, who is the only creature on earth that God willed for its own sake, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self".⁵⁹ This applies to every human being, as a person created in God's image, whether man or woman. This ontological affirmation also indicates the ethical dimension of a person's vocation. Woman can only hand herself by giving love to others.

From the "beginning", woman - like man - was created and "placed" by God in this order of love. The sin of the first parents did not destroy this order, nor irreversibly cancel it out. This is proved by the words of the Proto-evangelium (cf. Gen 3:15). Our reflections have focused on the particular place occupied by the "woman" in this key text of revelation. It is also to be noted how the same Woman, who attains the position of a biblical "exemplar", also appears within the eschatological perspective of the world and of humanity given in the Book of Revelation 60 She is "a woman clothed with the sun", with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of stars (cf. Rev 12:1). One can say she is a Woman of cosmic scale, on a scale with the whole work of creation. At the same time she is "suffering the pangs and anguish of childbirth" (Rev 12:2) like Eve "the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). She also suffers because "before the woman who is about to give birth" (cf. Rev 12:4) there stands "the great dragon... that ancient serpent" (Rev 12:9), already known from the Proto-evangelium: the Evil One, the "father of lies" and of sin (cf. Jn 8:44). The "ancient serpent" wishes to devour "the child". While we see in this text an echo of the Infancy Narrative (cf. Mt 2:13, 16), we can also see that the struggle with evil and the Evil One marks the biblical exemplar of the "woman" from the beginning to the end of history. It is also a struggle for man, for his true good, for his salvation. Is not the Bible trying to tell us that it is precisely in the "woman" - Eve-Mary - that history witnesses a dramatic struggle for every human being, the struggle for his or her fundamental "yes" or "no" to God and God's eternal plan for humanity?

While the dignity of woman witnesses to the love which she receives in order to love in return, the biblical "exemplar" of the Woman also seems to reveal the true order of love which constitutes woman's own vocation. Vocation is meant here in its fundamental, and one may say universal significance, a significance which is then actualized and expressed in women's many different "vocations" in the Church and the world.

The moral and spiritual strength of a woman is joined to her awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way. Of course, God entrusts every human being to each and every other human being. But this entrusting concerns women in a special way - precisely by reason of their femininity - and this in a particular way determines their vocation.

The moral force of women, which draws strength from this awareness and this entrusting, expresses itself in a great number of figures of the Old Testament, of the time of Christ, and of later ages right up to our own day.

A woman is strong because of her awareness of this entrusting, strong because of the fact that God "entrusts the human being to her", always and in every way, even in the situations of social discrimination in which she may find herself. This awareness and this fundamental vocation speak to women of the dignity which they receive from God himself, and this makes them "strong" and strengthens their vocation.

Thus the "perfect woman" (cf. Prov 31:10) becomes an irreplaceable support and source of spiritual strength for other people, who perceive the great energies of her spirit. These "perfect women" are owed much by their families, and sometimes by whole nations.

In our own time, the successes of science and technology make it possible to attain material well-being to a degree hitherto unknown. While this favours some, it pushes others to the edges of society. In this way, unilateral progress can also lead to a gradual loss of sensitivity for man, that is, for what is essentially human. In this sense, our time in particular awaits the manifestation of that "genius" which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human! -and because "the greatest of these is love" (cf. 1 Cor 13:13).

Thus a careful reading of the biblical exemplar of the Woman - from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation - confirms that which constitutes women's dignity and vocation, as well as that which is unchangeable and ever relevant in them, because it has its "ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever".⁶¹ If the human being is entrusted by God to women in a particular way, does not this mean that Christ looks to them for the accomplishment of the "royal priesthood" (1 Pt 2:9), which is the treasure he has given to every individual? Christ, as the supreme and only priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, and as the Bridegroom of the Church, does not cease to submit this same inheritance to the Father through the Spirit, so that God may be "everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:28).⁶²

Then the truth that "the greatest of these is love" (cf. 1 Cor 13:13) will have its definitive fulfillment.

IX - CONCLUSION

If you knew the gift of God

31. "If you knew the gift of God" (Jn 4:10), Jesus says to the Samaritan woman during one of those remarkable conversations which show his great esteem for the dignity of women and for the vocation which enables them to share in his messianic mission.

The present reflections, now at an end, have sought to recognize, within the "gift of God", what he, as Creator and Redeemer, entrusts to women, to every woman. In the Spirit of Christ, in fact, women can discover the entire meaning of their femininity and thus be disposed to making a "sincere gift of self" to others, thereby finding themselves.

During the Marian Year the Church desires to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the "mystery of woman" and for every woman - for that which constitutes the eternal measure of her feminine dignity, for the "great works of God", which throughout human history have been accomplished in and through her. After all, was it not in and through her that the greatest event in human history - the incarnation of God himself - was accomplished?

Therefore the Church gives thanks for each and every woman: for mothers, for sisters, for wives; for women consecrated to God in virginity; for women dedicated to the many human beings who await the gratuitous love of another person; for women who watch over the human persons in the family, which is the fundamental sign of the human community; for women who work professionally, and who at times are burdened by a great social responsibility; for "perfect" women and for "weak" women - for all women as they have come forth from the heart of God in all the beauty and richness of their femininity; as they have been embraced by his eternal love; as, together with men, they are pilgrims on this earth, which is the temporal "homeland" of all people and is transformed sometimes into a "valley of tears"; as they assume, together with men, a common responsibility for the destiny of humanity according to daily necessities and according to that definitive destiny which the human family has in God himself, in the bosom of the ineffable Trinity.

The Church gives thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine "genius" which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and nations; she gives thanks for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the People of God, for all the victories which she owes to their faith, hope and charity: she gives thanks for all the fruits of feminine holiness.

The Church asks at the same time that these invaluable "manifestations of the Spirit" (cf. 1 Cor 12:4ff.), which with great generosity are poured forth upon the "daughters" of the eternal Jerusalem, may be attentively recognized and appreciated so that they may return for the common good of the Church and of humanity, especially in our times. Meditating on the biblical mystery of the "woman", the Church prays that in this mystery all women may discover themselves and their "supreme vocation".

May Mary, who "is a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ",⁶³ obtain for all of us this same "grace", in the Year which we have dedicated to her as we approach the third millennium from the coming of Christ.

With these sentiments, I impart the Apostolic Blessing to all the faithful, and in a special way to women, my sisters in Christ.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 15 August, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the year 1988, the tenth of my Pontificate.

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**Apostolic Letter
"Ecclesia Dei"
Of The Supreme Pontiff
John Paul II
Given Motu Proprio**

1. With great affliction the Church has learned of the unlawful episcopal ordination conferred on 30 June last by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, which has frustrated all the efforts made during the previous years to ensure the full communion with the Church of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X founded by the same Mons. Lefebvre. These efforts, especially intense during recent months, in which the Apostolic See has shown comprehension to the limits of the possible, were all to no avail.(1)

2. This affliction was particularly felt by the Successor Peter to whom in the first place pertains the guardianship of the unity of the Church, (2) even though the number of persons directly involved in these events might be few. For every person is loved by God on his own account and has been redeemed by the blood of Christ shed on the Cross for the salvation of all.

The particular circumstances, both objective and subjective in which Archbishop Lefebvre acted, provide everyone with an occasion for profound reflection and for a renewed pledge of fidelity to Christ and to his Church.

3. In itself, this act was one of disobedience to the Roman Pontiff in a very grave matter and of supreme importance for the unity of the church, such as is the ordination of bishops whereby the apostolic succession is sacramentally perpetuated. Hence such disobedience - which implies in practice the rejection of the Roman primacy - constitutes a schismatic act.(3) In performing such an act, notwithstanding the formal canonical warning sent to them by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops on 17 June last, Mons. Lefebvre and the priests Bernard Fellay, Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, Richard Williamson and Alfonso de Galarreta, have incurred the grave penalty of excommunication envisaged by ecclesiastical law. (4) 4.

The root of this schismatic act can be discerned in an incomplete and contradictory notion of Tradition. Incomplete, because it does not take sufficiently into account the living character of Tradition, which, as the Second Vatican Council clearly taught, "comes from the apostles and progresses in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth".(5)

But especially contradictory is a notion of Tradition which opposes the universal Magisterium of the Church possessed by the Bishop of Rome and the Body of Bishops. It is impossible to remain faithful to the Tradition while breaking the ecclesial bond with him to whom, in the person of the Apostle Peter, Christ himself entrusted the ministry of unity in his Church.(6)

5. Faced with the situation that has arisen I deem it my duty to inform all the Catholic faithful of some aspects which this sad event has highlighted.

a) The outcome of the movement promoted by Mons. Lefebvre can and must be, for all the Catholic faithful, a motive for sincere reflection concerning their own fidelity to the Church's Tradition, authentically interpreted by the ecclesiastical Magisterium, ordinary and extraordinary, especially in the Ecumenical Councils from Nicaea to Vatican II. From this reflection all should draw a renewed and efficacious conviction of the necessity of strengthening still more their fidelity by rejecting erroneous interpretations and arbitrary and unauthorized applications in matters of doctrine, liturgy and discipline.

To the bishops especially it pertains, by reason of their pastoral mission, to exercise the important duty of a clear-sighted vigilance full of charity and firmness, so that this fidelity may be everywhere safeguarded.(7)

However, it is necessary that all the Pastors and the other faithful have a new awareness, not only of the lawfulness but also of the richness for the Church of a diversity of charisms, traditions of spirituality and apostolate, which also constitutes the beauty of unity in variety: of that blended "harmony" which the earthly Church raises up to Heaven under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

b) Moreover, I should like to remind theologians and other experts in the ecclesiastical sciences that they should feel themselves called upon to answer in the present circumstances. Indeed, the extent and depth of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council call for a renewed commitment to deeper study in order to reveal clearly the Council's continuity with Tradition, especially in points of doctrine which, perhaps because they are new, have not yet been well understood by some sections of the Church.

c) In the present circumstances I wish especially to make an appeal both solemn and heartfelt, paternal and fraternal, to all those who until now have been linked in various ways to the movement of Archbishop Lefebvre, that they may fulfil the grave duty of remaining united to the Vicar of Christ in the unity of the Catholic Church, and of ceasing their

support in any way for that movement. Everyone should be aware that formal adherence to the schism is a grave offence against God and carries the penalty of excommunication decreed by the Church's law.(8)

To all those Catholic faithful who feel attached to some previous liturgical and disciplinary forms of the Latin tradition I wish to manifest my will to facilitate their ecclesial communion by means of the necessary measures to guarantee respect for their rightful aspirations. In this matter I ask for the support of the bishops and of all those engaged in the pastoral ministry in the Church.

6. Taking account of the importance and complexity of the problems referred to in this document, by virtue of my Apostolic Authority I decree the following:

a) a Commission is instituted whose task it will be to collaborate with the bishops, with the Departments of the Roman Curia and with the circles concerned, for the purpose of facilitating full ecclesial communion of priests, seminarians, religious communities or individuals until now linked in various ways to the Fraternity founded by Mons. Lefebvre, who may wish to remain united to the Successor Peter in the Catholic Church, while preserving their spiritual and liturgical traditions, in the light of the Protocol signed on 5 May last by Cardinal Ratzinger and Mons. Lefebvre;

b) this Commission is composed of a Cardinal President and other members of the Roman Curia, in a number that will be deemed opportune according to circumstances;

c) moreover, respect must everywhere be shown for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition, by a wide and generous application of the directives already issued some time ago by the Apostolic See for the use of the Roman Missal according to the typical edition of 1962.(9)

7. As this year specially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin is now drawing to a close, I wish to exhort all to join in unceasing prayer that the Vicar of Christ, through the intercession of the Mother of the church, addresses to the Father in the very words of the Son: "That they all may be one!".

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's. 2 July 1988, the tenth year of the pontificate.

Joannes Paulus PP. II

(1) Cf. "Informatory Note" of 16 June 1988: L'Osservatore Romano. English edition, 27 June 1988, pp. 1-2.

(2) Cf. Vatican Council I, Const. Pastor Æternus, cap. 3: DS 3060.

(3) Cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 751.

(4) Cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 1382.

(5) Vatican Council II. Const. Dei Verbum, n. 8. Cf. Vatican Council I, Const. Dei Filius, cap. 4: DS 3020.

(6) Cf. Mt. 16:18; Lk. 10:16; Vatican Council I, Const. Pastor Æternus, cap. 3: DS 3060.

(7) Cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 386; Paul VI. Apost. Exhort. Quinque iam anni, 8 Dec. 1970: AAS 63 (1971) pp. 97-106.

(8) Cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 1364.

(9) Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship, Letter Quattuor abhinc annos. 3 Oct. 1984: AAS 76 (1984) pp. 1088-1089.

Apostolic Constitution
Pastor Bonus
John Paul, Bishop
Servant Of The Servants Of God
For An Everlasting Memorial

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TRANSLATION NOTE

Introduction

1. The Good Shepherd, the Lord Christ Jesus (cf. *Jn* 10: 11, 14), conferred on the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, and in a singular way on the bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, the mission of making disciples in all nations and of preaching the Gospel to every creature. And so the Church was established, the people of God, and the task of its shepherds or pastors was indeed to be that service "which is called very expressively in Sacred Scripture a *diaconia* or ministry."

The main thrust of this service or *diaconia* is for *more and more communion or fellowship to be generated* in the whole body of the Church, and for this communion to thrive and produce good results. As the insight of the Second Vatican Council has taught us, we come, with the gentle prompting of the Holy Spirit, to see the meaning of the mystery of the Church in the manifold patterns within this communion: for the Spirit will guide "the Church in the way of all truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13) and [unify] her in communion and in the work of ministry, he bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts [...]. Constantly he renews her and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse." Wherefore, as the same Council affirms, "fully incorporated into the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who — by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion — are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops."

Not only has this notion of communion been explained in the documents of the Second Vatican Council in general, especially in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, but it also received attention from the Fathers attending the 1985 and 1987 General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops. Into this definition of the Church comes a convergence of the actual mystery of the Church, the orders or constituent elements of the messianic people of God, and the hierarchical constitution of the Church itself. To describe it all in one broad expression, we take the words of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* just mentioned and say that "the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament — a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among the whole of humankind." That is why this sacred communion thrives in the whole Church of Christ, as our predecessor Paul VI so well described it, "which lives and acts in the various Christian communities, namely, in the particular Churches dispersed throughout the whole world."

2. When one thinks about this communion, which is the force, as it were, that glues the whole Church together, then the hierarchical constitution of the Church unfolds and comes into effect. It was endowed by the Lord himself with *a primatial and collegial nature at the same time* when he constituted the apostles "in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from amongst them." Here we are looking at that special concept whereby the pastors of the Church share in the threefold task of Christ — to teach, to sanctify, and to govern: and just as the apostles acted with Peter, so do the bishops together with the bishop of Rome. To use the words of the Second Vatican Council once more: "In that way, then, with priests and deacons as helpers, the bishops received the charge of the community, presiding in God's stead over the flock of which they are the shepherds in that they are teachers of doctrine, ministers of sacred worship and holders of office in government. Moreover, just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as first of the apostles, destined to be transmitted to his successors, is a permanent one, so also endures the office, which the apostles received, of shepherding the Church, a charge destined to

be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops." And so it comes about that "this college" — the college of bishops joined together with the bishop of Rome — "in so far as it is composed of many members, is the expression of the multifariousness and universality of the people of God; and of the unity of the flock of Christ, in so far as it is assembled under one head."

The power and authority of the bishops bears the mark of *diaconia or stewardship*, fitting the example of Jesus Christ himself who "came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mk* 10:45). Therefore the power that is found in the Church is to be understood as the power of being a servant and is to be exercised in that way; before anything else it is the authority of a shepherd.

This applies to each and every bishop in his own particular Church; but all the more does it apply to the bishop of Rome, whose Petrine ministry works for the good and benefit of the universal Church. The Roman Church has charge over the "whole body of charity" and so it is the servant of love. It is largely from this principle that those great words of old have come — "The servant of the servants of God" —, by which Peter's successor is known and defined.

That is why the Roman Pontiff has also taken pains to deal carefully with the business of particular Churches, referred to him by the bishops or in some other way come to his attention, in order to encourage his brothers in the faith (cf. *Lk* 22:32), by means of this wider experience and by virtue of his office as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church. For he was convinced that the reciprocal communion between the bishop of Rome and the bishops throughout the world, bonded in unity, charity, and peace, brought the greatest advantage in promoting and defending the unity of faith and discipline in the whole Church.

3. In the light of the foregoing, it is understood that the *diaconia* peculiar to Peter and his successors is necessarily related to the *diaconia* of the other apostles and their successors, whose sole purpose is to build up the Church in this world.

From ancient times, this essential and interdependent relation of the Petrine ministry with the task and ministry of the other apostles has demanded something of a visible sign, not just by way of a symbol but something existing in reality, and it must still demand it. Deeply conscious of the burden of apostolic toil, our predecessors have given clear and thoughtful expression to this need, as we see, for example, in the words of Innocent III who wrote to the bishops and prelates of France in 1198 when he was sending a legate to them: "Although the Lord has given us the fullness of power in the Church, a power that makes us owe something to all Christians, still we cannot stretch the limits of human nature. Since we cannot deal personally with every single concern — the law of human condition does not suffer it — we are sometimes constrained to use certain brothers of ours as extensions of our own body, to take care of things we would rather deal with in person if the convenience of the Church allowed it."

This gives some insight into the nature of that institution that Peter's successor has used in exercising his mission for the good of the universal Church, and some understanding of the procedures by which the institution itself has had to carry out its task: we mean the Roman Curia, which has worked in the service of the Petrine ministry from ancient times.

For the Roman Curia came into existence for this purpose, that the fruitful communion we mentioned might be strengthened and make ever more bountiful progress, rendering more effective the task of pastor of the Church which Christ entrusted to Peter and his successors, a task that has been growing and expanding from day to day. Our predecessor Sixtus V, in the Apostolic Constitution *Immensa aeterni Dei*, admitted as much: "The Roman Pontiff, whom Christ the Lord constituted as visible head of his body, the Church, and appointed for the care of all the Churches, calls and rallies unto himself many collaborators for this immense responsibility [...]; so that he, the holder of the key of all this power, may share the huge mass of business and responsibilities among them — i.e., the cardinals — and the other authorities of the Roman Curia, and by God's helping grace avoid breaking under the strain."

4. Right from the most ancient times, as a matter of fact, if we may sketch out a few lines of history, the Roman Pontiffs, in the course of their service directed to the welfare of the whole Church, have engaged the help of institutions or individual men selected from that *Church of Rome* which our predecessor Gregory the Great has called the *Church of the Blessed Apostle Peter*.

At first they used the services of priests or deacons belonging to the Church of Rome to function as legates, to be sent on various missions, or to represent the bishops of Rome at ecumenical councils.

When matters of particular importance were to be dealt with, the bishops of Rome called on the help of Roman synods or councils to which they summoned bishops working in the ecclesiastical province of Rome. These councils not only dealt with questions pertaining to doctrine and the magisterium, but also functioned like tribunals, judging cases of bishops referred to the Roman Pontiff.

From the time when the cardinals began to take on a special importance in the Roman Church, especially in the election of the Pope — a function reserved to them from 1059 —, the Roman Pontiffs made more and more use of their services, with the result that the Roman synods and councils gradually lost their importance until they ceased entirely.

So it came about that, especially after the thirteenth century, the Supreme Pontiff carried out all the business of the Church together with the cardinals gathered in consistory. Thus temporary instruments, the councils or synods of Rome, were replaced by another instrument, a permanent one, always available to the Pope.

It was our predecessor Sixtus V who gave the Roman Curia its formal organization through the above-quoted Apostolic Constitution *Immensa aeterni Dei*, on 22 January 1588, the 1587th year from the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

He set up fifteen dicasteries, so that the single College of Cardinals would be replaced by several colleges consisting of certain cardinals whose authority would be confined to a clearly defined field and to a definite subject matter. In this way, the Supreme Pontiffs could enjoy maximum benefit from these collegial counsels. Consequently, the consistory's own original role and importance were greatly diminished.

As the centuries passed and historical outlooks and world conditions were transformed, certain changes and refinements were brought in, especially when the commissions of cardinals were set up in the nineteenth century to give the Pope assistance beyond that of the other dicasteries of the Roman Curia. Then on 29 June 1908, our predecessor Saint Pius X promulgated the Apostolic Constitution *Sapienti consilio*, in which, referring to the plan of collecting the laws of the Church into a *Code of Canon Law*, he wrote: "It has seemed most fitting to start from the Roman Curia so that, structured in a suitable way that everyone can understand, the Curia may more easily and effectively lend its help to the Roman Pontiff and the Church." Here are the principal effects of that reform: the Sacred Roman Rota, which had ceased to function in 1870, was reestablished to deal with judicial cases, while the Congregations lost their judicial competence and became purely administrative organs. The principle was also established whereby the Congregations would enjoy their own rights, deferring to nobody else, so that each individual matter was to be dealt with by its own dicastery, and not by several at the same time.

This reform by Pius X, later confirmed and completed in the *Code of Canon Law* promulgated in 1917 by our predecessor Benedict XV, remained practically unchanged until 1967, not long after the Second Vatican Council in which the Church delved more deeply into the mystery of its own being and gained a more lively vision of its mission.

5. This growing self-awareness of the Church was bound of itself, and in keeping with our times, to produce a certain updating of the Roman Curia. While the Fathers of the Council acknowledged that the Curia had hitherto rendered outstanding assistance to the Roman Pontiff and the pastors of the Church, at the same time they expressed the desire that the dicasteries of the Curia should undergo a reorganization better suited to the needs of the times and of different regions and rites. Our predecessor Paul VI quickly complied with the wishes of the Council and put into effect the reorganization of the Curia with the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae universae* on 15 August 1967.

Through this Constitution, Paul VI laid down more detailed specifications for the structure, competence, and procedures of the already existing dicasteries, and established new ones to support specific pastoral initiatives, while the other dicasteries would carry on their work of jurisdiction or governance. The composition of the Curia came to reflect more clearly the multiform image of the universal Church. Among other things, the Curia coopted diocesan bishops as members and at the same time saw to the internal coordination of the dicasteries by periodic meetings of the cardinals who presided over them, to pool ideas and consider common problems. To provide better protection of the principal rights of the faithful, the Second Section was created in the Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura.

Fully aware that the reform of such ancient institutions needed more careful study, Paul VI ordered the new system to be reexamined more deeply five years after the promulgation of the Constitution, and for a new look to be taken at the question whether it really conformed to the demands of the Second Vatican Council and answered the needs of the Christian people and civil society. As far as necessary, it should be recast in an even more suitable form. To carry out this task, a special group of prelates was set up, chaired by a cardinal, and this Commission worked hard at the project, up to the death of that Pontiff.

6. When by the inscrutable design of Providence we were called to the task of being the shepherd of the universal Church, from the very beginning of our pontificate we took steps not only to seek advice from the dicasteries on this grave matter, but also to ask the opinion of the whole College of Cardinals. These cardinals, twice gathered in general consistory, addressed the question and gave their advice on the ways and means to be followed in the organization of the Roman Curia. It was necessary to consult the cardinals first in this important matter, for they are joined to the ministry of the bishop of Rome by a close and most special bond and they "are also available to [him], either acting collegially, when they are summoned together to deal with questions of major importance, or acting individually, that is, in the offices which they hold in assisting [him] especially in the daily care of the universal Church."

A very broad consultation, as we mentioned above, was again carried out, as was only fitting, among the dicasteries of the Roman Curia. The result of this general consultation was the "Draft of a special law concerning the Roman Curia," worked out over close to two years by a commission of prelates under the chairmanship of a cardinal. This draft was examined by the individual cardinals, the patriarchs of the Oriental Churches, the conferences of bishops through their presidents, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and was discussed at the plenary meeting of cardinals in 1985. As to the conferences of bishops, it was essential that we be thoroughly briefed about their true general feeling on the needs of the particular Churches and what they wanted and expected in this regard from the Roman Curia. In gaining a clear awareness of all this, we had strong and most timely help from the 1985 extraordinary Synod of Bishops, as we have mentioned above.

Then, taking into account the observations and suggestions that had been gathered in the course of these extensive consultations, and bearing in mind the considered judgement of certain private individuals, a commission of cardinals, which had been set up for this express purpose, prepared a particular law for the Roman Curia in harmony with the new *Code of Canon Law*.

It is this particular law that we wish to promulgate by means of this Apostolic Constitution, at the end of the fourth centenary of the afore-mentioned Apostolic Constitution *Immensa aeterni Dei* of Sixtus V, eighty years after the Apostolic Constitution *Sapienti consilio* of Saint Pius X, and scarcely twenty years after the coming into force of the Apostolic Constitution of Paul VI *Regimini Ecclesiae universae*, with which our own is closely linked, since both in some way derive from the Second Vatican Council and both originate from the same inspiration and intent.

7. In harmony with the Second Vatican Council, this inspiration and intent establish and express the steadfast activity of the renewed Curia, as in these words of the Council: "In exercising his supreme, full and immediate authority over the universal Church, the Roman Pontiff employs the various departments of the Roman Curia, which act in his name and by his authority for the good of the Churches and in service of the sacred pastors."

Consequently, it is evident that the function of the Roman Curia, though not belonging to the essential constitution of the Church willed by God, has nevertheless a *truly ecclesial character* because it draws its existence and competence from the pastor of the universal Church. For the Curia exists and operates only insofar as it has a relation to the Petrine ministry and is based on it. But just as the ministry of Peter as the "servant of the servants of God" is exercised in relationship with both the whole Church and the bishops of the entire Church, similarly the Roman Curia, as the servant of Peter's successor, looks only to help the whole Church and its bishops.

This clearly shows that the principal *characteristic* of each and every dicastery of the Roman Curia is that of being *ministerial*, as the already-quoted words of the Decree *Christus Dominus* declare and especially these: "The Roman Pontiff *employs the various departments of the Roman Curia.*" These words clearly show the Curia's instrumental nature, described as a kind of agent in the hands of the Pontiff, with the result that it is endowed with no force and no power apart from what it receives from the same Supreme Pastor. Paul VI himself, in 1963, two years before he promulgated the Decree *Christus Dominus*, defined the Roman Curia "as an instrument of immediate adhesion and perfect obedience," an instrument the Pope uses to fulfill his universal mission. This notion is taken up throughout the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae universae*.

This instrumental and ministerial characteristic seems indeed to define most appropriately the nature and role of this worthy and venerable institution. Its nature and role consist entirely in that the more exactly and loyally the institution strives to dedicate itself to the will of the Supreme Pontiff, the more valuable and effective is the help it gives him.

8. Beyond this ministerial character, the Second Vatican Council further highlighted what we may call the *vicarious character* of the Roman Curia, because, as we have already said, it does not operate by its own right or on its own initiative. It receives its power from the Roman Pontiff and exercises it within its own essential and innate dependence on the Pontiff. It is of the nature of this power that it always joins its own action to the will of the one from whom the power springs. It must display a faithful and harmonious interpretation of his will and manifest, as it were, an identity with that will, for the good of the Churches and service to the bishops. From this character the Roman Curia draws its energy and strength, and in it too finds the boundaries of its duties and its code of behaviour.

The fullness of this power resides in the head, in the very person of the Vicar of Christ, who imparts it to the dicasteries of the Curia according to the competence and scope of each one. Since, as we said earlier, the Petrine function of the Roman Pontiff by its very nature relates to the office of the college of his brother bishops and aims at building up and making firm and expanding the whole Church as well as each and every particular Church, this same *diaconia* of the Curia, which he uses in carrying out his own personal office, necessarily relates in the same way to the personal office of the bishops, whether as members of the college of bishops or as pastors of the particular Churches.

For this reason, not only is the Roman Curia far from being a *barrier or screen* blocking personal communications and dealings between bishops and the Roman Pontiff, or restricting them with conditions, but, on the contrary, it is itself the facilitator for communion and the sharing of concerns, and must be ever more so.

9. By reason of its *diaconia* connected with the Petrine ministry, one concludes, on the one hand, that the Roman Curia is closely bound to the bishops of the whole world, and, on the other, that those pastors and their Churches are the first and principal beneficiaries of the work of the dicasteries. This is proved even by the composition of the Curia.

For the Roman Curia is composed of nearly all the cardinals who, by definition, belong to the Roman Church, and they closely assist the Supreme Pontiff in governing the universal Church. When important matters are to be dealt with, they are all called together into regular or special consistories. So they come to have a strong awareness of the needs of all of God's people, and they labour for the good of the whole Church.

In addition to this, most of the heads of the individual dicasteries have the character and grace of the episcopate, pertaining to the one College of Bishops, and so are inspired by the same solicitude for the whole Church as are all bishops in hierarchical communion with their head, the bishop of Rome.

Furthermore, as some diocesan bishops are coopted onto the dicasteries as members and are "better able to inform the Supreme Pontiff on the thinking, the hopes and the needs of all the Churches," so the collegial spirit between the bishops and their head works through the Roman Curia and finds *concrete* application, and this is extended to the whole Mystical Body which "is a corporate body of Churches."

This collegial spirit is also fostered between the various dicasteries. All the cardinals in charge of dicasteries, or their representatives, when specific questions are to be addressed, meet periodically in order to brief one another on the more important matters and provide mutual assistance in finding solutions, thus providing unity of thought and action in the Roman Curia.

Apart from these bishops, the business of the dicasteries employs a number of collaborators who are of value and service to the Petrine ministry by work that is neither light nor easy and is often obscure.

The Roman Curia calls into its service diocesan priests from all over the world, who by their sharing in the ministerial priesthood are closely united with the bishops, male religious, most of whom are priests, and female religious, all of whom in their various ways lead their lives according to the evangelical counsels, furthering the good of the Church, and bearing special witness for Christ before the world, and lay men and women who by virtue of baptism and confirmation are fulfilling their own apostolic role. By this coalition of many forces, all ranks within the Church join in the ministry of the Supreme Pontiff and more effectively help him by carrying out the pastoral work of the Roman Curia. This kind of service by all ranks in the Church clearly has no equal in civil society and their labour is given with the intent of truly serving and of following and imitating the *diaconia* of Christ himself.

10. From this comes to light that the ministry of the Roman Curia is strongly imbued with a certain note of *collegiality*, even if the Curia itself is not to be compared to any kind of college. This is true whether the Curia be considered in itself or in its relations with the bishops of the whole Church, or because of its purposes and the corresponding spirit of charity in which that ministry has to be conducted. This collegiality enables it to work for the college of bishops and equips it with suitable means for doing so. Even more, it expresses the solicitude that the bishops have for the whole Church, inasmuch as bishops share this kind of care and zeal "with Peter and under Peter."

This comes out most strikingly and takes on a symbolic force when, as we have already said above, the bishops are called to collaborate in the individual dicasteries. Moreover, each and every bishop still has the inviolable right and duty to approach the successor of Saint Peter, especially by means of the visits *ad limina Apostolorum*.

These visits have a special meaning all of their own, in keeping with the ecclesiological and pastoral principles explained above. Indeed, they are first of all an opportunity of the greatest importance, and they constitute, as it were, the centre of the highest ministry committed to the Supreme Pontiff. For then the pastor of the universal Church talks and communicates with the pastors of the particular Churches, who have come to him in order to see Cephas (cf. *Gal* 1:18), to discuss with him the problems of their dioceses, face to face and in private, and so to share with him the solicitude for all the Churches (cf. *2 Cor* 11:28). For these reasons, communion and unity in the innermost life of the Church is fostered to the highest degree through the *ad limina* visits.

These visits also allow the bishops a frequent and convenient way to contact the appropriate dicasteries of the Roman Curia, pondering and exploring plans concerning doctrine and pastoral action, apostolic initiatives, and any difficulties obstructing their mission to work for the eternal salvation of the people committed to them.

11. Thus since the zealous activity of the Roman Curia, united to the Petrine ministry and based on it, is dedicated to the good both of the whole Church and the particular Churches, the Curia is in the first place being called on to fulfill that *ministry of unity* which has been entrusted in a singular way to the Roman Pontiff insofar as he has been set up by God's will as the permanent and visible foundation of the Church. Hence unity in the Church is a precious treasure to be preserved, defended, protected, and promoted, to be for ever exalted with the devoted cooperation of all, and most indeed by those who each in their turn *are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches*.

Therefore the cooperation which the Roman Curia brings to the Supreme Pontiff is rooted in this ministry of unity. This unity is in the first place the *unity of faith*, governed and constituted by the sacred deposit of which Peter's successor is the chief guardian and protector and through which indeed he receives his highest responsibility, that of strengthening his brothers. The unity is likewise the *unity of discipline*, the general discipline of the Church, which constitutes a system of norms and patterns of behaviour, gives shapes to the fundamental structure of the Church, safeguards the means of salvation and their correct administration, together with the ordered structure of the people of God.

Church government safeguards this unity and cares for it at all times. So far from suffering harm from the differences of life and behaviour among various persons and cultures, what with the immense variety of gifts poured out by the Holy Spirit, this same unity actually grows richer year by year, so long as there are no isolationist or centripetal attempts and so long as everything is brought together into the higher structure of the one Church. Our predecessor John Paul I brought this principle to mind quite admirably when he addressed the cardinals about the agencies of the Roman Curia: "[They] provide the Vicar of Christ with the concrete means of giving the apostolic service that he owes the entire Church. Consequently, they guarantee an organic articulation of legitimate autonomies, while maintaining an indispensable respect for that unity of discipline and faith for which Christ prayed on the very eve of his passion."

And so it is that the highest ministry of unity in the universal Church has much respect for lawful customs, for the mores of peoples and for that authority which belongs by divine right to the pastors of the particular Churches. Clearly however, whenever serious reasons demand it, the Roman Pontiff cannot fail to intervene in order to protect unity in faith, in charity, or in discipline.

12. Consequently, since the mission of the Roman Curia is ecclesial, it claims the cooperation of the whole Church to which it is directed. For no one in the Church is cut off from others and each one indeed makes up the one and the same body with all others.

This kind of cooperation is carried out through that communion we spoke of at the beginning, namely of life, charity, and truth, for which the messianic people is set up by Christ Our Lord, taken up by Christ as an instrument of redemption, and sent out to the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Therefore, just as it is the duty of the Roman Curia to communicate with all the Churches, so the pastors of the particular Churches, governing

these Churches "as vicars and legates of Christ," must take steps to communicate with the Roman Curia, so that, dealing thus with each other in all trust, they and the successor of Peter may come to be bound together ever so strongly.

This mutual communication between the centre of the Church and the periphery does not enlarge the scope of anyone's authority but promotes *communio* in the highest degree, in the manner of a living body that is constituted and activated precisely by the interplay of all its members. This was well expressed by our predecessor Paul VI: "It is obvious, in fact, that along with the movement toward the centre and heart of the Church, there must be another corresponding movement, spreading from the centre to the periphery and carrying, so to speak, to each and all of the local Churches, to each and all of the pastors and the faithful, the presence and testimony of that treasure of truth and grace of which Christ has made Us the partaker, depository and dispenser."

All of this means that the ministry of salvation offers more effectively to this one and same people of God, a ministry, we repeat, which before anything else demands mutual help between the pastors of the particular Churches and the pastor of the whole Church, so that all may bring their efforts together and strive to fulfill that supreme law which is the salvation of souls.

History shows that when the Roman Pontiffs established the Roman Curia and adapted it to new conditions in the Church and in the world, they intended nothing other than to work all the better for this salvation of souls. With full justification did Paul VI visualise the Roman Curia as another cenacle or upper room of Jerusalem totally dedicated to the Church. We ourselves have proclaimed to all who work there that the only possible code of action is to set the norm for the Church and to deliver eager service to the Church. Indeed, in this new legislation on the Roman Curia it has been our will to insist that the dicasteries should approach all questions "by a pastoral route and with a pastoral sense of judgement, aiming at justice and the good of the Church and above all at the salvation of souls."

13. Now as we are about to promulgate this Apostolic Constitution, laying down the new physionomy of the Roman Curia, we wish to bring together the ideas and intentions that have guided us.

First of all we wanted the image and features of this Curia to respond to the demands of our time, bearing in mind the changes that have been made by us or our predecessor Paul VI after the publication of the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae universae*.

Then it was our duty to fulfill and complete that renewal of the laws of the Church which was brought in by the publication of the new *Code of Canon Law* or which is to be brought into effect by the revision of the Oriental canonical legislation.

Then we had in mind that the traditional dicasteries and organs of the Roman Curia be made more suitable for the purposes they were meant for, that is, their share in governance, jurisdiction, and administration. For this reason, their areas of competence have been distributed more aptly among them and more distinctly delineated.

Then with an eye to what experience has taught in recent years and to the never ending demands of Church society, we reexamined the juridical form and *raison d'être* of existence of those organs which are rightly called "postconciliar," changing on occasion their shape and organization. We did this in order to make the work of those institutions more and more useful and beneficial, that is, supporting special pastoral activity and research in the Church which, at an ever accelerating pace, are filling pastors with concern and which with the same urgency demand timely and well thought out answers.

Finally, new and more stable measures have been devised to promote mutual cooperation between dicasteries, so that their manner of working may intrinsically bear the stamp of unity.

In a word, our whole steadfast approach has been to make sure that the structure and working methods of the Roman Curia increasingly correspond to the ecclesiology spelled out by the Second Vatican Council, be ever more clearly suitable for achieving the pastoral purposes of its own constitution, and more and more fit to meet the needs of Church and civil society.

It is indeed our conviction that now, at the beginning of the third millennium after the birth of Christ, the zeal of the Roman Curia in no small measure contributes to the Church's fidelity to the mystery of her origin, since the Holy Spirit keeps her ever young by the power of the Gospel.

14. Having given thought to all these matters with the help of expert advisors, sustained by the wise counsel and collegial spirit of the cardinals and bishops, having diligently studied the nature and mission of the Roman Curia, we have commanded that this Apostolic Constitution be drawn up, led by the hope that this venerable institution, so necessary to the government of the Church, may respond to that new pastoral impulse by which all the faithful are moved, laity, priests and particularly bishops, especially now after the Second Vatican Council, to listen ever more deeply and follow what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (cf. *Rev* 2:7).

Just as all the pastors of the Church, and among them in a special way the bishop of Rome, are keenly aware that they are "Christ's servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God" (1 *Cor* 4:1) and seek above all to be utterly loyal helpers whom the Eternal Father may easily use to carry out the work of salvation in the world, so also the Roman Curia has this strong desire, in each and every sphere of its important work, to be filled with the same spirit and the same inspiration; the Spirit, we say, of the Son of Man, of Christ the only begotten of the Father, who "has come to save what was lost" (*Mt* 18:11) and whose single and all-embracing wish is that all men "may have life and have it to the full" (*Jn* 10:10).

Therefore, with the help of God's grace and of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church, we establish and decree the following norms for the Roman Curia.

I – GENERAL NORMS

Notion of Roman Curia

Art. 1 — The Roman Curia is the complex of dicasteries and institutes which help the Roman Pontiff in the exercise of his supreme pastoral office for the good and service of the whole Church and of the particular Churches. It thus strengthens the unity of the faith and the communion of the people of God and promotes the mission proper to the Church in the world.

Structure of the Dicasteries

Art. 2 — § 1. By the word "dicasteries" are understood the Secretariat of State, Congregations, Tribunals, Councils and Offices, namely the Apostolic Camera, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See, and the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See.

§ 2. The dicasteries are juridically equal among themselves.

§ 3. Among the institutes of the Roman Curia are the Prefecture of the Papal Household and the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff.

Art. 3 — § 1. Unless they have a different structure in virtue of their specific nature or some special law, the dicasteries are composed of the cardinal prefect or the presiding archbishop, a body of cardinals and of some bishops, assisted by a secretary, consultants, senior administrators, and a suitable number of officials.

§ 2. According to the specific nature of certain dicasteries, clerics and other faithful can be added to the body of cardinals and bishops.

§ 3. Strictly speaking, the members of a congregation are the cardinals and the bishops.

Art. 4. — The prefect or president acts as moderator of the dicastery, directs it and acts in its name.

The secretary, with the help of the undersecretary, assists the prefect or president in managing the business of the dicastery as well as its human resources.

Art. 5 — § 1. The prefect or president, the members of the body mentioned in art. 3, § 1, the secretary, and the other senior administrators, as well as the consultants, are appointed by the Supreme Pontiff for a five-year term.

§ 2. Once they have completed seventy-five years of age, cardinal prefects are asked to submit their resignation to the Roman Pontiff, who, after considering all factors, will make the decision. Other moderators and secretaries cease from office, having completed seventy-five years of age; members, when they have completed eighty years of age; those who are attached to any dicastery by reason of their office cease to be members when their office ceases.

Art. 6 — On the death of the Supreme Pontiff, all moderators and members of the dicasteries cease from their office. The camerlengo of the Roman Church and the major penitentiary are excepted, who expedite ordinary business and refer to the College of Cardinals those things which would have been referred to the Supreme Pontiff.

The secretaries see to the ordinary operations of the dicasteries, taking care of ordinary business only; they need to be confirmed in office by the Supreme Pontiff within three months of his election.

Art. 7 — The members of the body mentioned in art. 3, § 1, are taken from among the cardinals living in Rome or outside the city, to whom are added some bishops, especially diocesan ones, insofar as they have special expertise in the matters being dealt with; also, depending on the nature of the dicastery, some clerics and other Christian faithful, with this proviso that matters requiring the exercise of power of governance be reserved to those in holy orders.

Art. 8 — Consultants also are appointed from among clerics or other Christian faithful outstanding for their knowledge and prudence, taking into consideration, as much as possible, the international character of the Church.

Art. 9 — Officials are taken from among the Christian faithful, clergy or laity, noted for their virtue, prudence, and experience, and for the necessary knowledge attested by suitable academic degrees, and selected as far as possible from the various regions of the world, so that the Curia may express the universal character of the Church. The suitability of the applicants should be evaluated by test or other appropriate means, according to the circumstances.

Particular Churches, moderators of institutes of consecrated life and of societies of apostolic life will not fail to render assistance to the Apostolic See by allowing their Christian faithful or their members to be available for service at the Roman Curia.

Art. 10 — Each dicastery is to have its own archive where incoming documents and copies of documents sent out are kept safe and in good order in a system of "protocol" organized according to modern methods.

Procedure

Art. 11 — § 1. Matters of major importance are reserved to the general meeting, according to the nature of each dicastery.

§ 2. All members must be called in due time to the plenary sessions, held as far as possible once a year, to deal with questions involving general principles, and for other questions which the prefect or president may have deemed to require treatment. For ordinary sessions it is sufficient to convoke members who reside in Rome.

§ 3. The secretary participates in all sessions with the right to vote.

Art. 12 — Consultors and those who are equivalent to them are to make a diligent study of the matter in hand and to present their considered opinion, usually in writing.

So far as opportunity allows and depending on the nature of each dicastery, consultors can be called together to examine questions in a collegial fashion and, as the case may be, present a common position.

For individual cases, others can be called in for consultation who, although not numbered among the consultors, are qualified by their special expertise in the matter to be treated.

Art. 13 — Depending on their own proper field of competence, the dicasteries deal with those matters which, because of their special importance, either by their nature or by law, are reserved to the Apostolic See and those which exceed the competence of individual bishops and their groupings, as well as those matters committed to them by the Supreme Pontiff. The dicasteries study the major problems of the present age, so that the Church's pastoral action may be more effectively promoted and suitably coordinated, with due regard to relations with the particular Churches. The dicasteries promote initiatives for the good of the universal Church. Finally, they review matters that the Christian faithful, exercising their own right, bring to the attention of the Apostolic See.

Art. 14 — The competence of dicasteries is defined on the basis of subject matter, unless otherwise expressly provided for.

Art. 15 — Questions are to be dealt with according to law, be it universal law or the special law of the Roman Curia, and according to the norms of each dicastery, yet with pastoral means and criteria, attentive both to justice and the good of the Church and, especially, to the salvation of souls.

Art. 16 — Apart from the official Latin language, it is acceptable to approach the Roman Curia in any of the languages widely known today.

For the convenience of the dicasteries, a centre is being established for translating documents into other languages.

Art. 17 — General documents prepared by one dicastery will be communicated to other interested dicasteries, so that the text may be improved with any corrections that may be suggested, and, through common consultation, it may even be proceeded in a coordinated manner to their implementation.

Art. 18 — Decisions of major importance are to be submitted for the approval of the Supreme Pontiff, except decisions for which special faculties have been granted to the moderators of the dicasteries as well as the sentences of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota and the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura within the limits of their proper competence.

The dicasteries cannot issue laws or general decrees having the force of law or derogate from the prescriptions of current universal law, unless in individual cases and with the specific approval of the Supreme Pontiff.

It is of the utmost importance that nothing grave and extraordinary be transacted unless the Supreme Pontiff be previously informed by the moderators of the dicasteries.

Art. 19 — § 1. Hierarchical recourses are received by whichever dicastery has competence in that subject matter, without prejudice to art. 21, § 1.

§ 2. Questions, however, which are to be dealt with judicially are sent to the competent tribunals, without prejudice to arts. 52-53.

Art. 20 — Conflicts of competence arising between dicasteries are to be submitted to the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, unless it pleases the Supreme Pontiff to deal with them otherwise.

Art. 21 — § 1. Matters touching the competence of more than one dicastery are to be examined together by the dicasteries concerned.

To enable them to exchange advice, a meeting will be called by the moderator of the dicastery which has begun to deal with the matter, either on his own initiative or at the request of another dicastery concerned. However, if the subject matter demands it, it may be referred to a plenary session of the dicasteries concerned.

The meeting will be chaired by the moderator of the dicastery who called the meeting or by its secretary, if only the secretaries are meeting.

§ 2. Where needed, permanent interdicasterial commissions will be set up to deal with matters requiring mutual and frequent consultation.

Meetings of Cardinals

Art. 22 — By mandate of the Supreme Pontiff, the cardinals in charge of dicasteries meet together several times a year to examine more important questions, coordinate their activities, so that they may be able to exchange information and take counsel.

Art. 23 — More serious business of a general character can be usefully dealt with, if the Supreme Pontiff so decides, by the cardinals assembled in plenary consistory according to proper law.

Council of Cardinals for the Study of Organizational and Economic Questions of the Apostolic See

Art. 24 — The Council of Cardinals for the Study of Organizational and Economic Questions of the Apostolic See consists of fifteen cardinals who head particular Churches from various parts of the world and are appointed by the Supreme Pontiff for a five-year term of office.

Art. 25 — § 1. The Council is convened by the cardinal secretary of state, usually twice a year, to consider those economic and organizational questions which relate to the administration of the Holy See, with the assistance, as needed, of experts in these affairs.

§ 2. The Council also considers the activities of the special institute which is erected and located within the State of Vatican City in order to safeguard and administer economic goods placed in its care with the purpose of supporting works of religion and charity. This institute is governed by a special law.

Relations with Particular Churches

Art. 26 — § 1. Close relations are to be fostered with particular Churches and groupings of bishops, seeking out their advice when preparing documents of major importance that have a general character.

§ 2. As far as possible, documents of a general character or having a special bearing on their particular Churches should be communicated to the bishops before they are made public.

§ 3. Questions brought before the dicasteries are to be diligently examined and, without delay, an answer or, at least, a written acknowledgement of receipt, insofar as this is necessary, should be sent.

Art. 27 — Dicasteries should not omit to consult with papal legates regarding business affecting the particular Churches where the legates are serving, nor should they omit to communicate to the legates the results of their deliberations.

"Ad limina" Visits

Art. 28 — In keeping with a venerable tradition and the prescriptions of law, bishops presiding over particular Churches visit the tombs of the Apostles at predetermined times and on that occasion present to the Roman Pontiff a report on the state of their diocese.

Art. 29 — These kinds of visits have a special importance in the life of the Church, marking as they do the summit of the relationship of the pastors of each particular Church with the Roman Pontiff. For he meets his brother bishops, and discusses with them matters concerning the good of the Churches and the bishops' role as shepherds, and he confirms and supports them in faith and charity. This strengthens the bonds of hierarchical communion and openly manifests the catholicity of the Church and the unity of the episcopal college.

Art. 30 — The *ad limina* visits also concern the dicasteries of the Roman Curia. For through these visits a helpful dialogue between the bishops and the Apostolic See is increased and deepened, information is shared, advice and timely suggestions are brought forward for the greater good and progress of the Churches and for the observance of the common discipline of the Church.

Art. 31 — These visits are to be prepared very carefully and appropriately so that they proceed well and enjoy a successful outcome in their three principal stages — namely, the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles and their veneration, the meeting with the Supreme Pontiff, and the meetings at the dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

Art. 32 — For this purpose, the report on the state of the diocese should be sent to the Holy See six months before the time set for the visit. It is to be examined with all diligence by the competent dicasteries, and their remarks are to be shared with a special committee convened for this purpose so that a brief synthesis of these may be drawn up and be readily at hand in the meetings.

Pastoral Character of the Activity of the Roman Curia

Art. 33 — The activity of all who work at the Roman Curia and the other institutes of the Holy See is a true ecclesial service, marked with a pastoral character, that all must discharge with a deep sense of duty as well as in a spirit of service, as it is a sharing in the world-wide mission of the bishop of Rome.

Art. 34 — Each individual dicastery pursues its own end, yet dicasteries cooperate with one another. Therefore, all who are working in the Roman Curia are to do so in such a way that their work may come together and be forged into one. Accordingly, all must always be prepared to offer their services wherever needed.

Art. 35 — Although any work performed within the institutes of the Holy See is a sharing in the apostolic action, priests are to apply themselves as best they can to the care of souls, without prejudice however to their own office.

Central Labour Office

Art. 36 — According to its own terms of reference, the Central Labour Office deals with working conditions within the Roman Curia and related questions.

Regulations

Art. 37 — To this Apostolic Constitution is added an *Ordo servandus* or common norms setting forth the ways and means of transacting business in the Curia itself, without prejudice to the norms of this Constitution.

Art. 38 — Each dicastery is to have its own *Ordo servandus* or special norms setting forth the ways and means of transacting business within it.

The *Ordo servandus* of each dicastery shall be made public in the usual manner of the Apostolic See.

II - SECRETARIAT OF STATE

Art. 39 — The Secretariat of State provides close assistance to the Supreme Pontiff in the exercise of his supreme office.

Art. 40 — The Secretariat is presided over by the cardinal secretary of state. It is composed of two sections, the First being the *Section for General Affairs*, under the direct control of the substitute, with the help of the assessor; the Second being the *Section for Relations with States*, under the direction of its own secretary, with the help of the undersecretary. Attached to this latter section is a council of cardinals and some bishops.

First Section

Art. 41 — § 1. It is the task of the First Section in a special way to expedite the business concerning the daily service of the Supreme Pontiff; to deal with those matters which arise outside the ordinary competence of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and of the other institutes of the Apostolic See; to foster relations with those dicasteries and coordinate their work, without prejudice to their autonomy; to supervise the office and work of the legates of the Holy See, especially as concerns the particular Churches. This section deals with everything concerning the ambassadors of States to the Holy See.

§ 2. In consultation with other competent dicasteries, this section takes care of matters concerning the presence and activity of the Holy See in international organizations, without prejudice to art. 46. It does the same concerning Catholic international organizations.

Art. 42 — It is also the task of the First Section:

- 1: to draw up and dispatch apostolic constitutions, decretal letters, apostolic letters, epistles, and other documents entrusted to it by the Supreme Pontiff;
2. to prepare the appropriate documents concerning appointments to be made or approved by the Supreme Pontiff in the Roman Curia and in the other institutes depending on the Holy See;
3. to guard the leaden seal and the Fisherman's ring.

Art. 43 — It is likewise within the competence of this Section:

1. to prepare for publication the acts and public documents of the Holy See in the periodical entitled *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*;
2. through its special office commonly known as the *Press Office*, to publish official announcements of acts of the Supreme Pontiff or of the activities of the Holy See;
3. in consultation with the Second Section, to oversee the newspaper called *L'Osservatore romano*, the Vatican Radio Station, and the Vatican Television Centre.

Art. 44 — Through the *Central Statistical Office*, it collects, organizes, and publishes all data, set down according to statistical standards, concerning the life of the whole Church throughout the world.

Second Section

Art. 45 — The Section for Relations with States has the special task of dealing with heads of government.

Art. 46 — The Section for Relations with States has within its competence:

1. to foster relations, especially those of a diplomatic nature, with States and other subjects of public international law, and to deal with matters of common interest, promoting the good of the Church and of civil society by means of concordats and other agreements of this kind, if the case arises, while respecting the considered opinions of the groupings of bishops that may be affected;
2. in consultation with the competent dicasteries of the Roman Curia, to represent the Holy See at international organizations and meetings concerning questions of a public nature;
3. within the scope of its competence, to deal with what pertains to the papal legates.

Art. 47 — § 1. In special circumstances and by mandate of the Supreme Pontiff, and in consultation with the competent dicasteries of the Roman Curia, this Section sees to the provision of particular Churches and the constitution of and changes to these Churches and their groupings.

§ 2. In other cases, especially where a concordat is in force, and without prejudice to art. 78, this Section has competence to transact business with civil governments.

III – CONGREGATIONS

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Art. 48 — The proper duty of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is to promote and safeguard the doctrine on faith and morals in the whole Catholic world; so it has competence in things that touch this matter in any way.

Art. 49 — Fulfilling its duty of promoting doctrine, the Congregation fosters studies so that the understanding of the faith may grow and a response in the light of the faith may be given to new questions arising from the progress of the sciences or human culture.

Art. 50 — It helps the bishops, individually or in groups, in carrying out their office as authentic teachers and doctors of the faith, an office that carries with it the duty of promoting and guarding the integrity of that faith.

Art. 51 — To safeguard the truth of faith and the integrity of morals, the Congregation takes care lest faith or morals suffer harm through errors that have been spread in any way whatever.

Wherefore:

1. it has the duty of requiring that books and other writings touching faith or morals, being published by the Christian faithful, be subjected to prior examination by the competent authority;

2. it examines carefully writings and opinions that seem to be contrary or dangerous to true faith, and, if it is established that they are opposed to the teaching of the Church, reproves them in due time, having given authors full opportunity to explain their minds, and having forewarned the Ordinary concerned; it brings suitable remedies to bear, if this be opportune.

3. finally, it takes good care lest errors or dangerous doctrines, which may have been spread among the Christian people, do not go without apt rebuttal.

Art. 52 — The Congregation examines offences against the faith and more serious ones both in behaviour or in the celebration of the sacraments which have been reported to it and, if need be, proceeds to the declaration or imposition of canonical sanctions in accordance with the norms of common or proper law.

Art. 53 — It is to examine whatever concerns the privilege of the faith, both in law and in fact.

Art. 54 — Documents being published by other dicasteries of the Roman Curia, insofar as they touch on the doctrine of faith or morals, are to be subjected to its prior judgement.

Art. 55 — Established within the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith are the Pontifical Biblical Commission and the International Theological Commission, which act according to their own approved norms and are presided over by the cardinal prefect of this Congregation.

Congregation for the Oriental Churches

Art. 56 — The Congregation for the Oriental Churches considers those matters, whether concerning persons or things, affecting the Catholic Oriental Churches.

Art. 57 — § 1. The patriarchs and major archbishops of the Oriental Churches, and the president of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity, are *ipso iure* members of this Congregation.

§ 2. The consultors and officials are to be selected in such a way as to reflect as far as possible the diversity of rites.

Art. 58 — § 1. The competence of this Congregation extends to all matters which are proper to the Oriental Churches and which are to be referred to the Apostolic See, whether concerning the structure and organization of the Churches, the exercise of the office of teaching, sanctifying and governing, or the status, rights, and obligations of persons. It also handles everything that has to be done concerning quinquennial reports and the *ad limina* visits in accordance with arts. 31-32.

§ 2. This however does not infringe on the proper and exclusive competence of the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith and for the Causes of Saints, of the Apostolic Penitentiary, the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura or the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, as well as of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for what pertains to dispensation from a marriage *ratum et non consummatum*.

In matters which also affect the faithful of the Latin Church, the Congregation will proceed, if the matter is sufficiently important, in consultation with the dicastery that has competence in the same matter for the faithful of the Latin Church.

Art. 59 — The Congregation pays careful attention to communities of Oriental Christian faithful living within the territories of the Latin Church, and attends to their spiritual needs by providing visitators and even a hierarchy of their

own, so far as possible and where numbers and circumstances demand it, in consultation with the Congregation competent for the establishment of particular Churches in that region.

Art. 60 — In regions where Oriental rites have been preponderant from ancient times, apostolic and missionary activity depends solely on this Congregation, even if it is carried out by missionaries of the Latin Church.

Art. 61 — The Congregation collaborates with the Council for Promoting Christian Unity in matters which concern relations with non-Catholic Oriental Churches and with the Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in matters within the scope of this Council.

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

Art. 62 — The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments does whatever pertains to the Apostolic See concerning the regulation and promotion of the sacred liturgy, primarily of the sacraments, without prejudice to the competence of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Art. 63 — It fosters and safeguards the regulation of the administration of the sacraments, especially regarding their valid and licit celebration. It grants favours and dispensations not contained in the faculties of diocesan bishops in this matter.

Art. 64 — § 1. By effective and suitable means, the Congregation promotes liturgical pastoral activity, especially regarding the celebration of the Eucharist; it gives support to the diocesan bishops so that the Christian faithful may share more and more actively in the sacred liturgy.

§ 2. It sees to the drawing up and revision of liturgical texts. It reviews particular calendars and proper texts for the Mass and the Divine Office for particular Churches and institutes which enjoy that right.

§ 3. It grants the *recognitio* to translations of liturgical books and their adaptations that have been lawfully prepared by conferences of bishops.

Art. 65 — The Congregation fosters commissions or institutes for promoting the liturgical apostolate or sacred music, song or art, and it maintains relations with them. In accordance with the law, it erects associations which have an international character or approves or grants the *recognitio* to their statutes. Finally, it contributes to the progress of liturgical life by encouraging meetings from various regions.

Art. 66 — The Congregation provides attentive supervision to ensure that liturgical norms are accurately observed, and that abuses are avoided and eliminated where they are found to exist.

Art. 67 — This Congregation examines the fact of non-consummation in a marriage and the existence of a just cause for granting a dispensation. It receives all the acts together with the *votum* of the bishop and the remarks of the defender of the bond, weighs them according to its own special procedure, and, if the case warrants it, submits a petition to the Supreme Pontiff requesting the dispensation.

Art. 68 — It is also competent to examine, in accordance with the law, cases concerning the nullity of sacred ordination.

Art. 69 — This Congregation has competence concerning the cult of sacred relics, the confirmation of heavenly patrons and the granting of the title of minor basilica.

Art. 70 — The Congregation gives assistance to bishops so that, in addition to liturgical worship, the prayers and pious exercises of the Christian people, in full harmony with the norms of the Church, may be fostered and held in high esteem.

Congregation for the Causes of Saints

Art. 71 — The Congregation for the Causes of Saints deals with everything which, according to the established way, leads to the canonization of the servants of God.

Art. 72 — § 1. With special norms and timely advice, it assists diocesan bishops, who have competence to instruct the cause.

§ 2. It considers causes that have already been instructed, inquiring whether everything has been carried out in accordance with the law. It thoroughly examines the causes that have thus been reviewed, in order to judge whether everything required is present for a favorable recommendation to be submitted to the Supreme Pontiff, according to the previously established classification of causes.

Art. 73 — The Congregation also is competent to examine what is necessary for the granting of the title of doctor to saints, after having received the recommendation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning outstanding teaching.

Art. 74 — Moreover, it has competence to decide everything concerning the authentication of holy relics and their preservation.

Congregation for Bishops

Art. 75 — The Congregation for Bishops examines what pertains to the establishment and provision of particular Churches and to the exercise of the episcopal office in the Latin Church, without prejudice to the competence of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Art. 76 — This Congregation deals with everything concerning the constitution, division, union, suppression, and other changes of particular Churches and of their groupings. It also erects military ordinariates for the pastoral care of the armed forces.

Art. 77 — It deals with everything concerning the appointment of bishops, even titular ones, and generally with the provision of particular Churches.

Art. 78 — Whenever it is a matter of dealing with civil governments, either in establishing or modifying particular Churches and their groupings or in the provision of these Churches, this Congregation must proceed only after consultation with the Section for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State.

Art. 79 — Furthermore, the Congregation applies itself to matters relating to the correct exercise of the pastoral function of the bishops, by offering them every kind of assistance. For it is part of its duty to initiate general apostolic visitations where needed, in agreement with the dicasteries concerned and, in the same manner, to evaluate their results and to propose to the Supreme Pontiff the appropriate actions to be taken.

Art. 80 — This Congregation has competence over everything involving the Holy See in the matter of personal prelatures.

Art. 81 — For the particular Churches assigned to its care, the Congregation takes care of everything with respect to the *ad limina* visits; so it studies the quinquennial reports, submitted in accordance with art. 32. It is available to the bishops who come to Rome, especially to see that suitable arrangements are made for the meeting with the Supreme Pontiff and for other meetings and pilgrimages. When the visit is completed, it communicates in writing to the diocesan bishops the conclusions concerning their dioceses.

Art. 82 — The Congregation deals with matters pertaining to the celebration of particular councils as well as the erection of conferences of bishops and the *recognitio* of their statutes. It receives the acts of these bodies and, in consultation with the dicasteries concerned, it examines the decrees which require the *recognitio* of the Apostolic See.

Pontifical Commission for Latin America

Art. 83 — § 1. The function of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America is to be available to the particular Churches in Latin America, by counsel and by action, taking a keen interest in the questions that affect the life and progress of those Churches; and especially to help the Churches themselves in the solution of those questions, or to be helpful to those dicasteries of the Curia that are involved by reason of their competence.

§ 2. It is also to foster relations between the national and international ecclesiastical institutes that work for the regions of Latin America and the dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

Art. 84 — § 1. The president of the Commission is the prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, assisted by a bishop as vice-president.

They have as counselors some bishops either from the Roman Curia or selected from the Churches of Latin America.

§ 2. The members of the Commission are selected either from the dicasteries of the Roman Curia or from the *Consejo episcopal latinoamericano*, whether they be from among the bishops of Latin America or from the institutes mentioned in the preceding article.

§ 3. The Commission has its own staff.

Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

Art. 85 — It pertains to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to direct and coordinate throughout the world the actual work of spreading the Gospel as well as missionary cooperation, without prejudice to the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

Art. 86 — The Congregation promotes research in mission theology, spirituality and pastoral work; it likewise proposes principles, norms, and procedures, fitting the needs of time and place, by which evangelization is carried out.

Art. 87 — The Congregation strives to bring the people of God, well aware of their duty and filled with missionary spirit, to cooperate effectively in the missionary task by their prayers and the witness of their lives, by their active work and contributions.

Art. 88 — § 1. It takes steps to awaken missionary vocations, whether clerical, religious, or lay, and advises on a suitable distribution of missionaries.

§ 2. In the territories subject to it, it also cares for the education of the secular clergy and of catechists, without prejudice to the competence of the Congregation of Seminaries and Educational Institutions concerning the general programme of studies, as well as what pertains to the universities and other institutes of higher education.

Art. 89 — Within its competence are mission territories, the evangelization of which is committed to suitable institutes and societies and to particular Churches. For these territories it deals with everything pertaining to the establishment

and change of ecclesiastical circumscriptions and to the provision of these Churches, and it carries out the other functions that the Congregation of Bishops fulfills within the scope of its competence.

Art. 90 — § 1. With regard to members of institutes of consecrated life, whether these are erected in the mission territories or are just working there, the Congregation enjoys competence in matters touching those members as missionaries, individually and collectively, without prejudice to art. 21, § 1.

§ 2. Those societies of apostolic life that were founded for the missions are subject to this Congregation.

Art. 91 — To foster missionary cooperation, even through the effective collection and equal distribution of subsidies, the Congregation chiefly uses the Pontifical Missionary Works, namely, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Society of St. Peter the Apostle, and the Holy Childhood Association, as well as the Pontifical Missionary Union of the Clergy.

Art. 92 — Through a special office, the Congregation administers its own funds and other resources destined for the missions, with full accountability to the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See.

Congregation for the Clergy

Art. 93 — Without prejudice to the right of bishops and their conferences, the Congregation for the Clergy examines matters regarding priests and deacons of the secular clergy, with regard to their persons and pastoral ministry, and with regard to resources available to them for the exercise of this ministry; and in all these matters the Congregation offers timely assistance to the bishops.

Art. 94 — It has the function of promoting the religious education of the Christian faithful of all ages and conditions; it issues timely norms so that catechetical instruction is correctly conducted; it gives great attention so that catechetical formation is properly given; and, with the assent of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it grants the prescribed approval of the Holy See for catechisms and other writings pertaining to catechetical instruction. It is available to catechetical offices and international initiatives on religious education, coordinates their activities and, where necessary, lends assistance.

Art. 95 — § 1. The Congregation is competent concerning the life, conduct, rights, and obligations of clergy.

§ 2. It advises on a more suitable distribution of priests.

§ 3. It fosters the ongoing education of clergy, especially concerning their sanctification and the effective exercise of their pastoral ministry, most of all in the fitting preaching of the Word of God.

Art. 96 — This Congregation deals with everything that has to do with the clerical state as such for all clergy, including religious, in consultation with the dicasteries involved when the matter so requires.

Art. 97 — The Congregation deals with those matters that are within the competence of the Holy See:

1. both those concerning presbyteral councils, colleges of consultors, chapters of canons, pastoral councils, parishes, churches, shrines, or those concerning clerical associations, or ecclesiastical archives and records;
2. and those concerning Mass obligations as well as pious wills in general and pious foundations.

Art. 98 — The Congregation carries out everything that pertains to the Holy See regarding the regulation of ecclesiastical goods, and especially their correct administration; it grants the necessary approvals and *recognitions*, and it further sees to it that serious thought is given to the support and social security of the clergy.

Pontifical Commission for Preserving the Patrimony of Art and History

Art. 99 — At the Congregation for the Clergy there exists the Pontifical Commission for Preserving the Patrimony of Art and History that has the duty of acting as curator for the artistic and historical patrimony of the whole Church.

Art. 100 — To this patrimony belong, in the first place, all works of every kind of art of the past, works that must be kept and preserved with the greatest care. Those works whose proper use has ceased are to be kept in a suitable manner in museums of the Church or elsewhere.

Art. 101 — § 1. Outstanding among valuable historical objects are all documents and materials referring and testifying to pastoral life and care, as well as to the rights and obligations of dioceses, parishes, churches, and other juridical persons in the Church.

§ 2. This historical patrimony is to be kept in archives or also in libraries and everywhere entrusted to competent curators lest testimonies of this kind be lost.

Art. 102 — The Commission lends its assistance to particular Churches and conferences of bishops and together with them, where the case arises, sees to the setting up of museums, archives, and libraries, and ensures that the entire patrimony of art and history in the whole territory is properly collected and safeguarded and made available to all who have an interest in it.

Art. 103 — In consultation with the Congregation for Seminaries and Educational Institutions and the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Commission has the task of striving to make the people of God more and more aware of the need and importance of conserving the artistic and historical patrimony of the Church.

Art. 104 — The president of the Commission is the cardinal prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, assisted by the secretary of the Commission. Moreover, the Commission has its own staff.

Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life

Art. 105 — The principal function of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life is to promote and supervise in the whole Latin Church the practice of the evangelical counsels as they are lived in approved forms of consecrated life and, at the same time, the work of societies of apostolic life.

Art. 106 — § 1. The Congregation erects and approves religious and secular institutes and societies of apostolic life, or passes judgement on the suitability of their erection by the diocesan bishop. It also suppresses such institutes and societies if necessary.

§ 2. The Congregation is also competent to establish, or, if need be, to rescind, the unions or federations of institutes and societies.

Art. 107 — The Congregation for its part takes care that institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life grow and flourish according to the spirit of their founders and healthy traditions, faithfully follow their proper purpose and truly benefit the salvific mission of the Church.

Art. 108 — § 1. It deals with everything which, in accordance with the law, belongs to the Holy See concerning the life and work of the institutes and societies, especially the approval of their constitutions, their manner of government and apostolate, the recruitment and training as well as the rights and obligations of members, dispensation from vows and the dismissal of members, and the administration of goods.

§ 2. However, the organization of philosophical and theological studies and other academic subjects comes within the competence of the Congregation of Seminaries and Institutes of Studies.

Art. 109 — It is the function of this Congregation to establish conferences of major superiors of men and women religious, to grant approval to their statutes and to give great attention in order that their activities are directed to achieving their true purpose.

Art. 110 — The Congregation has competence also regarding eremitical life, the order of virgins and their associations as well as other forms of consecrated life.

Art. 111 — Its competence also embraces the third orders and associations of the faithful which are erected with the intention that, after a period of preparation, they may eventually become institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life.

Congregation of Seminaries and Educational Institutions

Art. 112 — The Congregation of Seminaries and Educational Institutions gives practical expression to the concern of the Apostolic See for the training of those who are called to holy orders, and for the promotion and organization of Catholic education.

Art. 113 — § 1. It is available to the bishops so that in their Churches vocations to the sacred ministry may be cultivated to the highest degree, and seminaries may be established and conducted in accordance with the law, where students may be suitably trained, receiving a solid formation that is human and spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral.

§ 2. It carefully sees to it that the way of life and government of the seminaries be in full harmony with the programme of priestly education, and that the superiors and teachers, by the example of their life and sound doctrine, contribute their utmost to the formation of the personality of the sacred ministers.

§ 3. It is also its responsibility to erect interdiocesan seminaries and to approve their statutes.

Art. 114 — The Congregation makes every effort to see that the fundamental principles of Catholic education as set out by the magisterium of the Church be ever more deeply researched, championed, and known by the people of God.

It also takes care that in this matter the Christian faithful may be able to fulfill their duties and also strive to bring civil society to recognize and protect their rights.

Art. 115 — The Congregation sets the norms by which Catholic schools are governed. It is available to diocesan bishops so that, wherever possible, Catholic schools be established and fostered with the utmost care, and that in every school appropriate undertakings bring catechetical instruction and pastoral care to the Christian pupils.

Art. 116 — § 1. The Congregation labours to ensure that there be in the Church a sufficient number of ecclesiastical and Catholic universities as well as other educational institutions in which the sacred disciplines may be pursued in depth, studies in the humanities and the sciences may be promoted, with due regard for Christian truth, so that the Christian faithful may be suitably trained to fulfill their own tasks.

§ 2. It erects or approves ecclesiastical universities and institutions, ratifies their statutes, exercises the highest supervision over them and ensures that the integrity of the Catholic faith is preserved in teaching doctrine.

§ 3. With regard to Catholic universities, it deals with those matters that are within the competence of the Holy See.

§ 4. It fosters cooperation and mutual help between universities and their associations and serves as a resource for them.

IV - TRIBUNALS

Apostolic Penitentiary

Art. 117 — The competence of the Apostolic Penitentiary regards the internal forum and indulgences.

Art. 118 — For the internal forum, whether sacramental or non-sacramental, it grants absolutions, dispensations, commutations, validations, condonations, and other favours.

Art. 119 — The Apostolic Penitentiary sees to it that in the patriarchal basilicas of Rome there be a sufficient number of penitentiaries supplied with the appropriate faculties.

Art. 120 — This dicastery is charged with the granting and use of indulgences, without prejudice to the right of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to review what concerns dogmatic teaching about them.

Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura

Art. 121 — The Apostolic Signatura functions as the supreme tribunal and also ensures that justice in the Church is correctly administered.

Art. 122 — This Tribunal adjudicates:

1. complaints of nullity and petitions for total reinstatement against sentences of the Roman Rota;
2. in cases concerning the status of persons, recourses when the Roman Rota has denied a new examination of the case;
3. exceptions of suspicion and other proceedings against judges of the Roman Rota arising from the exercise of their functions;
4. conflicts of competence between tribunals which are not subject to the same appellate tribunal.

Art. 123 — § 1. The Signatura adjudicates recourses lodged within the peremptory limit of thirty canonical days against singular administrative acts whether issued by the dicasteries of the Roman Curia or approved by them, whenever it is contended that the impugned act violated some law either in the decision-making process or in the procedure used.

§ 2. In these cases, in addition to the judgement regarding illegality of the act, it can also adjudicate, at the request of the plaintiff, the reparation of damages incurred through the unlawful act.

§ 3. The Signatura also adjudicates other administrative controversies referred to it by the Roman Pontiff or by dicasteries of the Roman Curia, as well as conflicts of competence between these dicasteries.

Art. 124 — The Signatura also has the responsibility:

1. to exercise vigilance over the correct administration of justice, and, if need be, to censure advocates and procurators;
2. to deal with petitions presented to the Apostolic See for obtaining the commission of a case to the Roman Rota or some other favour relative to the administration of justice;
3. to extend the competence of lower tribunals;
4. to grant its approval to tribunals for appeals reserved to the Holy See, and to promote and approve the erection of interdiocesan tribunals.

Art. 125 — The Apostolic Signatura is governed by its own law.

Tribunal of the Roman Rota

Art. 126 — The Roman Rota is a court of higher instance at the Apostolic See, usually at the appellate stage, with the purpose of safeguarding rights within the Church; it fosters unity of jurisprudence, and, by virtue of its own decisions, provides assistance to lower tribunals.

Art. 127 — The judges of this Tribunal constitute a college. Persons of proven doctrine and experience, they have been selected by the Supreme Pontiff from various parts of the world. The Tribunal is presided over by a dean, likewise appointed by the Supreme Pontiff from among the judges and for a specific term of office.

Art. 128 — This Tribunal adjudicates:

1. in second instance, cases that have been decided by ordinary tribunals of first instance and are being referred to the Holy See by legitimate appeal;
2. in third or further instance, cases already decided by the same Apostolic Tribunal and by any other tribunals, unless they have become a *res iudicata*.

Art. 129 — § 1. The Tribunal, however, judges the following in first instance:

1. bishops in contentious matters, unless it is a question of the rights or temporal goods of a juridical person represented by the bishop;
2. abbots primate or abbots superior of a monastic congregation and supreme moderators of religious institutes of pontifical right;
3. dioceses or other ecclesiastical persons, whether physical or juridical, which have no superior below the Roman Pontiff;
4. cases which the Supreme Pontiff commits to this Tribunal.

§ 2. It deals with the same cases even in second and further instances, unless other provisions are made.

Art. 130 — The Tribunal of the Roman Rota is governed by its own law.

V - PONTIFICAL COUNCILS

Pontifical Council for the Laity

Art. 131 — The Pontifical Council for the Laity is competent in those matters pertaining to the Apostolic See regarding the promotion and coordination of the apostolate of the laity and, generally, in those matters respecting the Christian life of laypeople as such.

Art. 132 — The president is assisted by an Advisory Board of cardinals and bishops. Figuring especially among the members of the Council are certain Christian faithful engaged in various fields of activity.

Art. 133 — § 1. The Council is to urge and support laypeople to participate in the life and mission of the Church in their own way, as individuals or in associations, especially so that they may carry out their special responsibility of filling the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel.

§ 2. It fosters joint action among laypeople in catechetical instruction, in liturgical and sacramental life as well as in works of mercy, charity, and social development.

§ 3. The Council attends to and organizes international conferences and other projects concerning the apostolate of the laity.

Art. 134 — Within the parameters of its own competence, the Council performs all activities regarding lay associations of the Christian faithful; it erects associations of an international character and provides approval or *recognitio* for their statutes, without prejudice to the competence of the Secretariat of State. As for secular third orders, the Council deals only with those matters concerning their apostolic activities.

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Art. 135 — It is the function of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to engage in ecumenical work through timely initiatives and activities, labouring to restore unity among Christians.

Art. 136 — § 1. It sees that the decrees of the Second Vatican Council pertaining to ecumenism are put into practice. It deals with the correct interpretation of the principles of ecumenism and enjoins that they be carried out.

§ 2. It fosters, brings together, and coordinates national and international Catholic organizations promoting Christian unity, and supervises their undertakings.

§ 3. After prior consultation with the Supreme Pontiff, the Council maintains relations with Christians of Churches and ecclesial communities that do not yet have full communion with the Catholic Church, and especially organizes dialogue and meetings to promote unity with them, with the help of theological experts of sound doctrine. As often as may seem opportune, the Council deposes Catholic observers to Christian meetings, and it invites observers from other Churches and ecclesial communities to Catholic meetings.

Art. 137 — § 1. Since the Council often deals with matters which by their very nature touch on questions of faith, it must proceed in close connection with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, especially if declarations and public documents have to be issued.

§ 2. In dealing with important matters concerning the separated Oriental Churches, the Council must first hear the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

Art. 138 — Within the Council there exists a Commission to study and deal with matters concerning the Jews from a religious perspective, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews; the president of the Council presides over the Commission.

Pontifical Council for the Family

Art. 139 — The Pontifical Council for the Family promotes the pastoral care of families, protects their rights and dignity in the Church and in civil society, so that they may ever be more able to fulfill their duties.

Art. 140 — The president is assisted by an advisory board of bishops. Figuring above all among the members of the Council are laypeople, both men and women, especially married ones, from all over the world.

Art. 141 — § 1. The Council works for a deeper understanding of the Church's teaching on the family and for its spread through suitable catechesis. It encourages studies in the spirituality of marriage and the family.

§ 2. It works together with the bishops and their conferences to ensure the accurate recognition of the human and social conditions of the family institution everywhere and to ensure a strong general awareness of initiatives that help pastoral work for families.

§ 3. The Council strives to ensure that the rights of the family be acknowledged and defended even in the social and political realm. It also supports and coordinates initiatives to protect human life from the first moment of conception and to encourage responsible procreation.

§ 4. Without prejudice to art. 133, it follows the activities of institutes and associations which work for the good of the family.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

Art. 142 — The goal of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is to promote justice and peace in the world in accordance with the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church.

Art. 143 — § 1. The Council makes a thorough study of the social teaching of the Church and ensures that this teaching is widely spread and put into practice among people and communities, especially regarding the relations between workers and management, relations that must come to be more and more imbued with the spirit of the Gospel.

§ 2. It collects information and research on justice and peace, about human development and violations of human rights; it ponders all this, and, when appropriate, shares its conclusions with the groupings of bishops. It cultivates relationships with Catholic international organizations and other institutions, even ones outside the Catholic Church, which sincerely strive to achieve peace and justice in the world.

§ 3. It works to form among peoples a mentality which fosters peace, especially on the occasion of World Peace Day.

Art. 144 — The Council has a special relationship with the Secretariat of State, especially whenever matters of peace and justice have to be dealt with in public by documents or announcements.

Pontifical Council "Cor unum"

Art. 145 — The Pontifical Council "Cor unum" shows the solicitude of the Catholic Church for the needy, to foster human fraternity and make manifest Christ's charity.

Art. 146 — It is the function of the Council:

1. to stimulate the Christian faithful as participants in the mission of the Church, to give witness to evangelical charity and to support them in this concern;

2. to foster and coordinate the initiatives of Catholic organizations that labour to help peoples in need, especially those who go to the rescue in the more urgent crises and disasters, and to facilitate their relations with public international organizations operating in the same field of assistance and good works;

3. to give serious attention and promote plans and undertakings for joint action and neighbourly help serving human progress.

Art. 147 — The president of this Council is the same as the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who sees to it that the activities of both dicasteries are closely coordinated.

Art. 148 — To ensure that the objectives of the Council are more effectively achieved, among members of the Council are also men and women representing Catholic charitable organizations.

Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People

Art. 149 — The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People brings the pastoral concern of the Church to bear on the special needs of those who have been forced to leave their native land or who do not have one. It also sees to it that these matters are considered with the attention they deserve.

Art. 150 — § 1. The Council ensures that in the particular Churches refugees and exiles, migrants, nomads, and circus workers receive effective and special spiritual care, even, if necessary, by means of suitable pastoral structures.

§ 2. It likewise fosters pastoral solicitude in these same Churches for sailors, at sea and in port, especially through the Apostleship of the Sea, over which it exercises ultimate direction.

§ 3. The Council has the same concern for those who work in airports or airplanes.

§ 4. It works to ensure that the Christian people become aware of the needs of these people and effectively demonstrate a fraternal attitude towards them, especially on the occasion of World Migration Day.

Art. 151 — The Council works to ensure that journeys which Christians undertake for reasons of piety, study, or recreation, contribute to their moral and religious formation, and it is available to the particular Churches in order that all who are away from home receive suitable spiritual care.

Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers

Art. 152 — The Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers shows the solicitude of the Church for the sick by helping those who serve the sick and suffering, so that their apostolate of mercy may ever more effectively respond to people's needs.

Art. 153 — § 1. The Council is to spread the Church's teaching on the spiritual and moral aspects of illness as well as the meaning of human suffering.

§ 2. It lends its assistance to the particular Churches to ensure that health care workers receive spiritual help in carrying out their work according to Christian teachings, and especially that in turn the pastoral workers in this field may never lack the help they need to carry out their work.

§ 3. The Council fosters studies and actions which international Catholic organizations or other institutions undertake in this field.

§ 4. With keen interest it follows new health care developments in law and science so that these may be duly taken into account in the pastoral work of the Church.

Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts

Art. 154 — The function of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts consists mainly in interpreting the laws of the Church.

Art. 155 — With regard to the universal laws of the Church, the Council is competent to publish authentic interpretations confirmed by pontifical authority, after consulting the dicasteries concerned in questions of major importance.

Art. 156 — This Council is at the service of the other Roman dicasteries to assist them to ensure that general executory decrees and instructions which they are going to publish are in conformity with the prescriptions of the law currently in force and that they are drawn up in a correct juridical form.

Art. 157 — Moreover, the general decrees of the conferences of bishops are to be submitted to this Council by the dicastery which is competent to grant them the *recognitio*, in order that they be examined from a juridical perspective.

Art. 158 — At the request of those interested, this Council determines whether particular laws and general decrees issued by legislators below the level of the supreme authority are in agreement or not with the universal laws of the Church.

Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue

Art. 159 — The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue fosters and supervises relations with members and groups of non-Christian religions as well as with those who are in any way endowed with religious feeling.

Art. 160 — The Council fosters suitable dialogue with the followers of other religions and encourages various kinds of relations with them. It promotes appropriate studies and conferences to develop mutual information and esteem, so that human dignity and the spiritual and moral riches of people may ever grow. The Council sees to the formation of those who engage in this kind of dialogue.

Art. 161 — When the matter under consideration so requires, the Council must proceed in the exercise of its own function in consultation with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and, if need be, with the Congregations for the Oriental Churches and for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Art. 162 — This Council has a Commission, under the direction of the president of the Council, for fostering relations with Muslims from a religious perspective.

Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers

Art. 163 — The Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers shows the pastoral solicitude of the Church for those who do not believe in God or who profess no religion.

Art. 164 — It promotes the study of atheism and of the lack of faith and religion, looking into their causes and their consequences with regard to the Christian faith, so that suitable assistance may be given to pastoral action through the work especially of Catholic educational institutions.

Art. 165 — The Council sets up dialogue with atheists and unbelievers whenever they agree to sincere cooperation, and it is represented by true specialists at conferences on this matter.

Pontifical Council for Culture

Art. 166 — The Pontifical Council for Culture fosters relations between the Holy See and the realm of human culture, especially by promoting communication with various contemporary institutions of learning and teaching, so that secular culture may be more and more open to the Gospel, and specialists in the sciences, literature, and the arts may feel themselves called by the Church to truth, goodness, and beauty.

Art. 167 — The Council has its own special structure. The president is assisted by an advisory board and another board, composed of specialists of various disciplines from several parts of the world.

Art. 168 — The Council on its own undertakes suitable projects with respect to culture. It follows through on those which are undertaken by various institutes of the Church, and, so far as necessary, lends them assistance. In consultation with the Secretariat of State, it shows interest in measures adopted by countries and international agencies in support of human culture and, as appropriate, it is present in the principal organizations in the field of culture and fosters conferences.

Pontifical Council for Social Communications

Art. 169 — § 1. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications is involved in questions regarding the means of social communication, so that, also by these means, human progress and the message of salvation may benefit secular culture and mores.

§ 2. In carrying out its functions, the Council must proceed in close connection with the Secretariat of State.

Art. 170 — § 1. The chief task of this Council is to encourage and support in a timely and suitable way the action of the Church and her members in the many forms of social communication. It takes care to see that newspapers and periodicals, as well as films and radio or television broadcasts, are more and more imbued with a human and Christian spirit.

§ 2. With special solicitude the Council looks to Catholic newspapers and periodicals, as well as radio and television stations, that they may truly live up to their nature and function, by transmitting especially the teaching of the Church as it is laid out by the Church's magisterium, and by spreading religious news accurately and faithfully.

§ 3. It fosters relations with Catholic associations active in social communications.

§ 4. It takes steps to make the Christian people aware, especially on the occasion offered by World Communications Day, of the duty of every person to work to ensure that the media are of service to the Church's pastoral mission.

VI - ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Apostolic Camera

Art. 171 — § 1. The Apostolic Camera, presided over by the cardinal camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, assisted by the vice-camerlengo and the other prelates of the Camera, chiefly exercises the functions assigned to it by the special law on the vacancy of the Apostolic See.

§ 2. When the Apostolic See falls vacant, it is the right and the duty of the cardinal camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, personally or through his delegate, to request reports from all the administrations dependent on the Holy See on their patrimonial and economic status as well as information on any extraordinary business that may at that time be under way, and, from the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See he shall request a financial statement on income and expenditures of the previous year and the budgetary estimates for the following year. He is obliged to submit these reports and estimates to the College of Cardinals.

Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See

Art. 172 — It is the function of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See to administer the properties owned by the Holy See in order to provide the funds necessary for the Roman Curia to function.

Art. 173 — This Council is presided over by a cardinal assisted by a board of cardinals; and it is composed of two sections, the Ordinary Section and the Extraordinary, under the control of the prelate secretary.

Art. 174 — The Ordinary Section administers the properties entrusted to its care, calling in the advice of experts if needed; it examines matters concerning the juridical and economic status of the employees of the Holy See; it supervises institutions under its fiscal responsibility; it sees to the provision of all that is required to carry out the ordinary business and specific aims of the dicasteries; it maintains records of income and expenditures, prepares the accounts of the money received and paid out for the past year, and draws up the estimates for the year to come.

Art. 175 — The Extraordinary Section administers its own moveable goods and acts as a guardian for moveable goods entrusted to it by other institutes of the Holy See.

Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See

Art. 176 — The Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See has the function of supervising and governing the temporal goods of the administrations that are dependent on the Holy See, or of which the Holy See has charge, whatever the autonomy these administrations may happen to enjoy.

Art. 177 — The Prefecture is presided over by a cardinal assisted by a board of cardinals, with the collaboration of the prelate secretary and the general accountant.

Art. 178 — § 1. It studies the reports on the patrimonial and economic status of the Holy See, as well as the statements of income and expenditures for the previous year and the budget estimates for the following year of the administrations mentioned in art. 176, by inspecting books and documents, if need be.

§ 2. The Prefecture compiles the Holy See's consolidated financial statement of the previous year's expenditures as well as the consolidated estimates of the next year's expenditures, and submits these at specific times to higher authority for approval.

Art. 179 — § 1. The Prefecture supervises financial undertakings of the administrations and expresses its opinion concerning projects of major importance.

§ 2. It inquires into damages inflicted in whatever manner on the patrimony of the Holy See, and, if need be, lodges penal or civil actions to the competent tribunals.

VII - OTHER INSTITUTES OF THE ROMAN CURIA

Prefecture of the Papal Household

Art. 180 — The Prefecture of the Papal Household looks after the internal organization of the papal household, and supervises everything concerning the conduct and service of all clerics and laypersons who make up the papal chapel and family.

Art. 181 — § 1. It is at the service of the Supreme Pontiff, both in the Apostolic Palace and when he travels in Rome or in Italy.

§ 2. Apart from the strictly liturgical aspect, which is handled by the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff, the Prefecture sees to the planning and carrying out of papal ceremonies and determines the order of precedence.

§ 3. It arranges public and private audiences with the Pontiff, in consultation with the Secretariat of State whenever circumstances so demand and under its direction it arranges the procedures to be followed when the Roman Pontiff meets in a solemn audience with heads of State, ambassadors, members of governments, public authorities, and other distinguished persons.

Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff

Art. 182 — § 1. The Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff is to prepare all that is necessary for the liturgical and other sacred celebrations performed by the Supreme Pontiff or in his name and supervise them according to the current prescriptions of liturgical law.

§ 2. The master of papal liturgical celebrations is appointed by the Supreme Pontiff to a five-year term of office; papal masters of ceremonies who assist him in sacred celebrations are likewise appointed by the secretary of state to a term of the same length.

VIII - ADVOCATES

Art. 183 — Apart from the advocates of the Roman Rota and the advocates for the causes of saints, there is a roster of advocates who, at the request of interested parties, are qualified to represent them in their cases at the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura and to offer assistance in hierarchical recourses lodged before dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

Art. 184 — Candidates can be inscribed in the roster by the cardinal secretary of state, after he has consulted a commission stably constituted for this purpose. Candidates must be qualified by a suitable preparation attested by appropriate academic degrees, and at the same time be recommended by their example of a Christian life, honourable character, and expertise. Should any of this cease to be the case at a later date, the advocate shall be struck from the roster.

Art. 185 — § 1. The body called "Advocates of the Holy See" is composed mainly of advocates listed in the roster of advocates, and its members are able to undertake the representation of cases in civil or ecclesiastical tribunals in the name of the Holy See or the dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

§ 2. They are appointed by the cardinal secretary of state to a five-year term of office on the recommendation of the commission mentioned in art. 184; for serious reasons, they may be removed from office. Once they have completed seventy-five years of age, they cease their office.

IX - INSTITUTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE HOLY SEE

Art. 186 — There are certain institutes, some of ancient origin and some not long established, which do not belong to the Roman Curia in a strict sense but nevertheless provide useful or necessary services to the Supreme Pontiff himself, to the Curia and the whole Church, and are in some way connected with the Apostolic See.

Art. 187 — Among such institutes are the Vatican Secret Archives, where documents of the Church's governance are preserved first of all so that they may be available to the Holy See itself and to the Curia as they carry out their own work, but then also, by papal permission, so that they may be available to everyone engaged in historical research and serve as a source of information on all areas of secular history that have been closely connected with the life of the Church in centuries gone by.

Art. 188 — In the Vatican Apostolic Library, established by the Supreme Pontiffs, the Church has a remarkable instrument for fostering, guarding, and spreading culture. In its various sections, it offers to scholars researching truth a treasure of every kind of art and knowledge.

Art. 189 — To seek the truth and to spread it in the various areas of divine and human sciences there have arisen within the Roman Church various academies, as they are called, among which is the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

Art. 190 — In their constitution and administration, all these institutions of the Roman Church are governed by their own laws.

Art. 191 — Of more recent origin, though partly based on examples of the past, are the Vatican Polyglot Press; the Vatican Publishing House and its bookstore; the daily, weekly and monthly newspapers, among which *L'Osservatore romano*; Vatican Radio; the Vatican Television Centre. These institutes, according to their own regulations, come within the competence of the Secretariat of State or of other agencies of the Roman Curia.

Art. 192 — The Fabric of Saint Peter's deals, according to its own regulations, with matters concerning the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles, with respect to the preservation and decoration of the building and behaviour among the employees and pilgrims who come into the church. Where necessary, the superiors of the Fabric act in cooperation with the Chapter of the Basilica.

Art. 193 — The Office of Papal Charities carries on the work of aid of the Supreme Pontiff toward the poor and is subject directly to him.

We decree the present Apostolic Constitution to be stable, valid, and effective now and henceforth, that it shall receive its full and integral effects from the first day of the month of March of 1989, and that it must in each and everything and in any manner whatsoever be fully observed by all those to whom it applies or in any way shall apply, anything to the contrary notwithstanding, even if it is worthy of most special mention.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, in the presence of the cardinals assembled in consistory, on the vigil of the solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, 28 June in the Marian Year 1988, the tenth of Our pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

APPENDIX I - Pastoral Significance of the Visit *ad limina Apostolorum*

(cf. arts. 28-32)

That pastoral spirit, prominent in the revision of the Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia, has also led to attaching greater significance to bishops' visits *ad limina Apostolorum*, bringing a more adequate light to bear on the pastoral importance which the visits have gained in the present life of the Church.

1. These visits, as we know, take place when the bishops, joined as they are to the Apostolic See with the bond of communion and presiding in charity and service over the particular Churches throughout the world, set out at certain appointed times for Rome to visit the tombs of the Apostles.

On the one hand, these visits give the bishops an opportunity to sharpen their awareness of their responsibilities as successors of the Apostles and to feel more intensely their sense of hierarchical communion with the successor of Peter. On the other hand, the visits in some way constitute the highest and most central point in that universal ministry that the Holy Father is carrying out when he embraces his brother bishops, the pastors of the particular Churches, and takes up with them the business of sustaining their mission in the Church.

2. These *ad limina* visits bring into full view this movement or life-blood between the particular Churches and the Church as a whole that theologians call *perichoresis*. The process may be compared to the diastolic-systolic movements within the human body when the blood is carried to the outer limbs and from there flows back to the heart.

Some trace and example of a first *ad limina* visit is found in Paul's letter to the Galatians, in which the Apostle tells the story of his conversion and the journey he undertook among the pagans. Although he knew that he had been called and instructed personally by Christ who had conquered death, he wrote these words: "[Then] did I go up to Jerusalem to meet Cephas. I stayed fifteen days with him" (*Gal* 1:18). "It was not until fourteen years later that I travelled up to Jerusalem again [...] I expounded the whole gospel that I preach the gentiles, to make quite sure that the efforts I was making and had already made should not be fruitless" (*Gal* 2: 1-2).

3. The natural result of this meeting with Peter's successor, first guardian of the deposit of truth passed on by the Apostles, is to strengthen unity in the same faith, hope and charity, and more and more to recognize and treasure that immense heritage of spiritual and moral wealth that the whole Church, joined with the bishop of Rome by the bond of communion, has spread throughout the world.

During the *ad limina* visit, two men stand face to face together, namely the bishop of a certain particular Church and the bishop of Rome, who is also the successor of Peter. Both carry on their shoulders the burden of office, which they cannot relieve themselves from, but they are not at all divided one from the other, for both of them in their own way represent, and must represent, the sum total of the faithful, the whole of the Church, and the sum total of the bishops, which together constitute the only "we and us" in the body of Christ. It is in their communion that the faithful under their care communicate with one another, and likewise the universal Church and particular Churches communicate with each other.

4. For all these reasons, the *ad limina* visits express *that pastoral solicitude* which thrives in the universal Church. Here we see the meeting of the pastors of the Church, joined together in a collegial unity that is based on apostolic

succession. In this College, each and every one of the bishops displays that solicitude of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, which all have received by way of inheritance.

This indeed is the highest ideal of the apostolate that has to be carried out in the Church and which concerns the bishops together with the successor of Peter. For each one of them stands at the centre of all the apostolate, in all its forms, that is carried out in each particular Church, joined at the same time in the universal dimension of the Church as a whole. All this apostolate, again in all its forms, demands and includes the work and help of all those who are building the Body of Christ in the Church, be it universal or particular: the priests, men and women religious consecrated to God, and the laypeople.

5. Now if the *ad limina* visits are conceived and viewed in this way, they come to be a *specific moment of that communion* which so profoundly determines the nature and essence of the Church, as it was admirably indicated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, especially in chapters II and III. Given that society nowadays is moving towards a greater unification, and the Church experiences herself as "a sign and instrument [...] of communion with God and of unity among the whole of humankind," it seems utterly necessary that a permanent communication between particular Churches and the Apostolic See should be promoted and built up, especially by sharing pastoral solicitude regarding questions, experiences, problems, projects and ideas about life and action.

When pastors converge on Rome and meet together, there comes to pass a remarkable and most beautiful sharing of gifts from among all those riches in the Church, be they universal or local and particular, in accordance with that principle of catholicity by which "each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to attain to fullness in unity."

Furthermore and in the same way, *ad limina* visits aim not only at a direct sharing of information but also and especially to an increase and strengthening of a *collegial structure* in the body of the Church, bringing about a remarkable unity in variety.

This communication in the Church is a two-way movement. On the one hand, the bishops converge towards the centre and the visible foundation of unity. We are referring to that unity which, when it comes to full bloom, casts its benefits on their own groupings or conferences, through each pastor's responsibilities and awareness of his functions and of their fulfilment, or through the *collegial spirit* of all the pastors. On the other hand, there is the commission "which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as the first of the apostles" which serves the ecclesial community and the spread of her mission, in such a way that nothing is left untried that may lead to the advancement and preservation of the unity of the faith and the common discipline of the whole Church, and all become more and more aware that the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel everywhere throughout the world falls chiefly on the body of the pastors.

6. From all the principles established above to describe this most important process, one may deduce in what way that apostolic custom of "seeing Peter" is to be understood and put into practice.

First of all the *ad limina* visit has a *sacred meaning* in that the bishops with religious veneration pay a visit to the tombs of Peter and Paul, the Princes of the Apostles, shepherds and pillars of the Church of Rome.

Then the *ad limina* visit has a *personal meaning* because each individual bishop meets the successor of Peter and talks to him *face to face*.

Finally, the visit has a *curial meaning*, that is, a *hallmark of community*, because the bishops enter into conversation with the moderators of the dicasteries, councils, and offices of the Roman Curia. The Curia, after all, is a certain "community" that is closely joined with the Roman Pontiff in that area of the Petrine ministry which involves solicitude for all the Churches (cf. 2 Cor 11:28).

In the course of the *ad limina* visit, the access that the bishops have to the dicasteries is of a two-fold nature:

— First, it gives them access to each individual agency of the Roman Curia, especially to questions that the agencies are dealing with directly according to their competence, questions that have been referred by law to those agencies because of their expertise and experience.

— Second, bishops coming from all over the world, where each of the particular Churches can be found, are introduced to questions of common pastoral solicitude for the universal Church.

Bearing in mind this specific point of view, the Congregation for Bishops, in consultation with the other interested Congregations, is preparing a "Directory" for publication so that the *ad limina* visits can receive long- and short-term preparation and thus proceed smoothly.

7. Each and every bishop — by the very nature of that "ministry" that has been entrusted to him — is called and invited to visit the "tombs of the Apostles" at certain appointed times.

However, since the bishops living within each territory, nation or region, have already gathered together and now form conferences of bishops — collegial unions with an excellent, broad theoretical basis — it is highly appropriate that the *ad limina* visits should proceed according to this collegial principle, for that carries much significance within the Church.

The institutes of the Apostolic See, and especially the nunciatures and apostolic delegations as well as the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, are most willing to offer assistance in order to ensure that *ad limina* visits be made possible, are suitably prepared and proceed well.

To sum up: the institution of the *ad limina* visit is an instrument of the utmost value, commanding respect because it is an ancient custom and has outstanding pastoral importance. Truly, these visits express the catholicity of the Church and the unity and communion of the College of Bishops, qualities rooted in the successor of Peter and signified by those holy places where the Princes of the Apostles underwent martyrdom, qualities of a theological, pastoral, social, and religious import known to all.

This institution therefore is to be favored and promoted in every possible way, especially at this moment of the history of salvation in which the teachings and magisterium of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council shine out with ever brighter light.

APPENDIX II - *The Collaborators of the Apostolic See as a Work Community*

(cf. arts. 33-36)

1. The principal feature characterizing the revision of the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae universae*, so that it might be adapted to the needs that arose after its promulgation, was certainly to emphasize the pastoral nature of the Roman Curia. Viewed in this way, the true character of the functions fulfilled in the midst, as it were, of the Apostolic See shines bright and clear, so that they provide the Supreme Pontiff with suitable instruments to carry out the mission entrusted to him by Christ Our Lord.

Through that unique ministry which he offers to the Church, the Supreme Pontiff strengthens his brothers in the faith (*Lk 22:32*) — the pastors, namely, and the Christian faithful of the universal Church — looking only to nourish and guard that Church communion in which "there are also particular Churches that retain their own traditions, without prejudice to the Chair of Peter which presides over the whole assembly of charity (cf. S. Ignatius M., *Ad Rom.*, pref., Funk, I, p. 252), and protects their legitimate variety and at the same time keeps watch to ensure that individual differences, so far from being harmful to unity, actually serve its cause."

2. By constant toil, this Petrine ministry reaches out to the whole world and claims the help of persons and other means throughout the Church. Help it does receive in a direct and privileged manner from all those who are called to perform various functions in the Roman Curia and in the various institutions which compose the structure of the Holy See, be they in holy orders as bishops and priests, or men and women consecrated to God in the religious families and secular institutes, or Christian lay men and women.

Out of this diversity emerge certain quite remarkable contours and the considerable importance of these duties, which have absolutely no equivalent at any other level of civil society, with which by its very nature indeed the Roman Curia cannot be compared. On this foundation stands that leading idea of the work community constituted by all those who, being well nourished with the one and the same faith and charity and "united, heart and soul" (*Acts 4:32*), make up those structures of collaboration just mentioned. Therefore those who under whatever title and in any manner help in the universal mission of the Supreme Pontiff to foster the Church community, have a further call to set up a communion of purpose, of undertakings, and of rules of behaviour, that deserves the name of *community* more than does any other form of grouping.

3. The letter of Pope John Paul II of 20 November 1982 on the meaning of work performed for the Apostolic See, took pains to elaborate on the characteristics of this work community. The letter outlined its nature, unique and yet endowed with a variety of functions. All those who share in the "single, incessant activity of the Apostolic See," become in some way brothers. From this consideration the letter went on to conclude that those who shared in this work should be aware "of that specific character of their positions. In any case, such a consciousness has ever been the tradition and pride of those who have chosen to dedicate themselves to that noble service." The letter adds: "This consideration applies to clerics and religious and to laity as well; both to those who occupy posts of high responsibility and to office and manual workers to whom auxiliary functions are assigned."

The same letter points out the special nature of the Apostolic See, which, to preserve the exercise of spiritual freedom and its true and visible immunity, constitutes a sovereign State in its own right and yet "does not possess all ordinary characteristics of a political community," different from all others. The practical results of this condition are seen in the operation of its affairs, especially as regards its economic organization. In the Apostolic See there is a total absence of a taxation system that other states have by right, and it has no economic activity producing goods and income. The "prime basis of sustenance of the Apostolic See is the spontaneous offerings" by reason of a certain universal interdependence emanating from the Catholic family and elsewhere, which to a marvellous degree expresses that communion of charity over which the Apostolic See presides in the world and by which it lives.

From this basic condition flow certain consequences on the practical level and in the behaviour among the staff of the Holy See — "the spirit of thrift," "a readiness always to take account of the real but limited financial possibilities of the Holy See and their source," "a profound trust in Providence." And, over and beyond all these qualities, "those who work for the Holy See must therefore have the profound conviction that their work above all entails an ecclesial responsibility to live in a spirit of authentic faith, and that the juridical-administrative aspects of their relationship with the Apostolic See stand in a particular light."

4. The remuneration owed to the clerical and lay staff at the Holy See, according to their personal conditions of life, is regulated by the major principles of the social teachings of the Church, which have been made quite clear by the

magisterium of the Popes from the time of the publication of Leo XIII's Encyclical Letter *Rerum novarum* up to John Paul II's Encyclicals *Laborem exercens* and *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

While labouring under a grave lack of economic means, the Holy See makes every effort to measure up to the heavy obligations to which it is held with regard to its workers — even granting them certain benefit packages — but subject to that basic situation which is peculiar to the Apostolic See and has been explained in the Pope's Letter, the fact, namely, that the Holy See cannot be compared to any other form of State, since it is deprived of the ordinary means of generating income, except the income that comes from universal charity. However the Holy See is conscious of the fact — and the same Apostolic Letter makes this clear — that the active cooperation of everybody, and especially of the lay members of the staff, is necessary so that regulations and interrelations may be protected, as well as those *rights and duties* that arise out of "social justice" when it is correctly applied to the relations between worker and employer. On this subject, the Apostolic Letter has pointed out the help that workers associations can give in this respect, like the "Associazione Dipendenti Laici Vaticani," recently founded through productive talks among the various administrative levels to promote the spirit of solicitude and justice. The Apostolic Letter however has cautioned us to beware lest this kind of group distort the leading ideal that must govern the work community of the See of Peter. The letter says: "However, a lapse of this type of organization into the field of extremist conflict and class struggle does not correspond to the Church's social teaching. Nor should such associations have a political character or openly or covertly serve partisan interests or other interests with quite different goals."

5. At the same time the Supreme Pontiff declared his firm conviction that associations of this kind — like the one mentioned above — "set forward work problems and develop continuous and constructive dialogue with the competent organisms [and] will not fail to take account in every case of the particular character of the Apostolic See."

Now since the lay staff of Vatican City had very much at heart that there be an ever more suitable fine-tuning of working conditions and of everything touching the labour question, the Supreme Pontiff provided that "suitable executive documents" be prepared "for furthering a work community according to the principles set forth by means of suitable norms and structures."

The outcome of the Pope's concern is now "The Labour Office of the Apostolic See" (L.A.A.S.), which is established by an Apostolic Letter given *motu proprio* together with the document specifying in detail the membership of the Labour Office, its authority, its functions, its regulatory and advisory organs as well as its proper norms to facilitate a fair, rapid, and efficient process; furthermore, as it has been just newly set up, this Office needs a reasonable period of time to operate *ad experimentum* so that its regulations and procedures may be confirmed and its true and objective importance reviewed. This *motu proprio* and the regulations of the new Labour Office are being published at the same time, together with the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution on the renewal of the Roman Curia.

6. The chief purpose of the Labour Office — apart from the practical ends for which it was brought into existence — is to promote and preserve a work community among the various levels of staff of the Apostolic See, especially the laypeople. The spirit of this community should be characteristic of all who have been called to the privilege and responsibility of serving the Petrine ministry.

Again and again it is to be explained that these workers are in duty bound to foster and cultivate within themselves a special awareness of the Church, an awareness making them ever more fitted to fulfill the functions entrusted to them, no matter what these may be. These functions are not mere give and take arrangements — a certain labour given and a certain wage received —, as may happen in institutions in civil society; they constitute rather a service offered to Christ himself "who came not to be served but to serve" (*Mt 20:28*).

Therefore all the workers of the Holy See, clergy and laity, out of a sense of honour and sincerely conscious of their own duty before God and themselves, must resolve that their lives as priests and lay faithful shall be lived at an exemplary level, as is proposed by God's commandments, by the laws of the Church and by the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council, especially in *Lumen gentium*, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, and *Apostolicam actuositatem*. However, this is a free decision, by which with full awareness certain responsibilities are taken on, the force of which is felt not only on the individuals but also on their families and even on the actual work community composed of all the collaborators of the Holy See.

Well may we be asked "of whose spirit we are" (cf. *Lk 9:55* Vulg.): thus the Pope writes at the end of the Apostolic Letter. So each and all, in searching their own sincerity as human beings and as Christians, are bound to be faithful to those promises, and to keep those bonds that they freely accepted when they were chosen to labour at the Holy See.

7. To keep in view the principles and norms indicated by the Pope in the afore-mentioned Apostolic Letter to the cardinal secretary of state, the full text is printed below. In fact, this document must be considered as the foundation and sign of the whole pattern of interdependence in order to maintain full cooperation and understanding within the work community at the service of the Apostolic See.

Apostolic Letter *Apostolica Sedes* by John Paul II on the meaning of work performed for the Apostolic See

1. The Apostolic See, in exercising its mission, has recourse to the valid and precious work of the particular community made up of those men and women, priests, religious and laity who devote their efforts in their dicasteries and offices to the service of the universal Church.

Charges and duties are assigned to the members of this community; each of those charges and duties has its own purpose and dignity, in consideration both of the objective content and value of the work done and of the person who accomplishes it.

This concept of community, applied to those who aid the bishop of Rome in his ministry as pastor of the universal Church, permits us first of all to define the unitary character of functions which are nonetheless diverse among themselves. All persons called to perform them really participate in the single, incessant activity of the Apostolic See; that is, in that "concern for all the Churches" (cf. 2 *Cor.* 11:28) which enlivened the apostles' service from the earliest times and is the prerogative today in outstanding measure of the successors of St. Peter in the Roman See. It is very important that those who are associated in any way with the Apostolic See's activity should have a consciousness of that specific character of their positions. In any case, such a consciousness has ever been the tradition and pride of those who have chosen to dedicate themselves to that noble service.

This consideration applies to clerics and religious and to laity as well, both to those who hold posts of high responsibility, and to office and manual workers to whom auxiliary functions are assigned. It applies to persons attached to the service of the same Apostolic See more directly, inasmuch as they work in those organisms which are altogether known in fact under the name of "Holy See;" and it applies to those who are in the service of the Vatican City State, which is so closely linked with the Apostolic See.

In the recent Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, I recalled the principal truths of the "gospel of labour" and Catholic doctrine on human work, a doctrine always alive in the Church's tradition. There is need for the life of that singular community which operates *sub umbra Petri* — in Peter's shadow —, in such immediate contact with the Apostolic See, to conform itself to these truths.

2. In order to apply these principles to reality, their objective significance must be borne in mind, together with the specific nature of the Apostolic See. This latter does not have the general form of true states even though, as I noted above, the entity described as the Vatican City State is closely linked with it; for true states are subjects of the political sovereignty of particular societies. On the other hand, the Vatican City State is sovereign, yet does not possess all ordinary characteristics of a political community. It is an atypical state. It exists as a fitting means of guaranteeing the exercise of the spiritual liberty of the Apostolic See; that is, as the means of assuring real and visible independence of the same in its activity of government for the sake of the universal Church, as well as of its pastoral work directed toward the whole human race. It does not possess a proper society for the service of which it was established nor does it base itself upon forms of social action which usually determine the structure and organization of every other state. Furthermore, the persons who aid the Apostolic See or even cooperate in government of the Vatican City State are with few exceptions not citizens of this state. Nor, consequently, do they have the rights and duties (those to do with taxation in particular) which ordinarily arise from belonging to a state.

The Apostolic See does not develop nor can it develop economic activity proper to a state, since it transcends the narrow confines of the Vatican City State in a much more important respect and extends its mission to the whole of the earth. Production of economic goods and enrichment by way of revenues are foreign to its institutional purposes. Besides the revenues of the Vatican City State and the limited income afforded by what remains of the funds obtained on the occasion of the Lateran Pacts as indemnity for the Papal States, and ecclesiastical goods passed to the Italian State, the prime basis of sustenance of the Apostolic See is the spontaneous offerings provided by Catholics throughout the world and by other men of good will. This corresponds to a tradition having its origin in the Gospel and the teachings of the apostles. This tradition has taken on various forms over the centuries in relation to the economic structures prevailing in various eras. In conformity with that tradition it must be affirmed that the Apostolic See may and ought to make use of the spontaneous contributions of the faithful and other people of good will, without having recourse to other means which might appear to be less respectful of the character proper to the Apostolic See.

3. The above-mentioned material contributions are the expression of a constant and moving solidarity with the Apostolic See and the activity carried out by it. My profound gratitude goes out to such great solidarity. It ought to be with a sense of responsibility commensurate with the nature of the contributions on the part of the Apostolic See itself, its individual organs and the persons working in them. That is to say that the contributions are to be used solely and always according to the dispositions and will of those offering them: for the general intention which is maintenance of the Apostolic See and the generality of its activities or for particular purposes (missionary, charitable, etc.), when these have been expressly mentioned.

Responsibility and loyalty toward those who show their solidarity with the Apostolic See through their aid and share its pastoral concern in some way are expressed in scrupulous fidelity to all tasks and duties assigned, as well as in the zeal, hard work and professional spirit which ought to distinguish whoever participates in the same Apostolic See's activities. Right intention must likewise be always cultivated, so as to exert watchful administration — in terms of their purposes — over both material goods which are offered and over what is acquired or conserved by means of such goods. This includes safeguarding and enhancing the See of Peter's precious inheritance in the religious-cultural and artistic fields.

In making use of means allocated for these ends, the Apostolic See and those directly collaborating with it must be distinguished not only by a spirit of thrift, but also by readiness always to take account of the real but limited financial possibilities of the Holy See and their source. Obviously such interior dispositions of mind ought to be well assimilated,

becoming ingrained in the minds of religious and clerics through their training. But neither should they be lacking from the minds of laity who through their free choice accept working for and with the Apostolic See.

Moreover, all those who have particular responsibilities in running organisms, offices and services of the Apostolic See, as well as those employed in various functions, will know how to join this spirit of thrift with constant application to making the various activities ever more effective. This can be done through organization of work based, on the one hand, on full respect for persons and the valid contribution made by each according to his proper abilities and functions and, on the other hand, upon use of appropriate structures and technical means, so that the activity engaged in corresponds more and more to the demands of service to the universal Church. Recourse shall be had to everything that experience, science and technology teach; efforts will be made in this way to use human and financial resources with greater effectiveness by avoiding waste, self-interest and pursuit of unjustified privileges, and at the same time by promoting good human relations in every sector and the true and rightful interests of the Apostolic See.

Along with such commitment should go a profound trust in Providence, which, through the offerings of good people, will not allow a lack of the means to pursue the Apostolic See's proper ends. Should a lack of means impede accomplishment of some fundamental objective, a special appeal may be made to the generosity of the people of God, informing them of needs which are not sufficiently well known. In the normal way, however, it is fitting to be content with what bishops, priests, religious institutes and faithful offer spontaneously, since they themselves can see or discern rightful needs.

4. Many of those working with the Apostolic See are clerics. Since they live in celibacy, they have no families to their charge. They deserve remuneration proportional to the tasks performed and capable of assuring them a decent manner of living and means to carry out the duties of their state, including responsibilities which they may have in certain cases toward parents or other family members dependent on them. Nor should the demands of orderly social relationships be neglected, particularly and above all their obligation to assist the needy. This obligation is more impelling for clerics and religious than for the laity, by reason of their evangelical vocation.

Remuneration of the lay employees of the Apostolic See should also correspond to the tasks performed, taking into consideration at the same time their responsibility to support their families. Study should therefore be devoted, in a spirit of lively concern and justice, to ascertaining their objective material needs and those of their families, including needs regarding education of their children and suitable provision for old age, so as to meet those needs properly. The fundamental guidelines in this sector are to be found in Catholic teaching on remuneration for work. Immediate indications for the evaluation of circumstances can be obtained from examining experiences and programs of the society — in particular, the Italian society — to which almost all lay employees of the Apostolic See belong and in which they at any rate live.

A valid collaborative function may be performed by workers' associations such as the Association of Vatican Lay Employees, which recently came into existence, in promoting that spirit of concern and justice, through representing those working within the Apostolic See. Such associations take on a specific character within the Apostolic See. They are an initiative in conformity with the Church's social teaching, for the Church sees them as one instrument for better assuring social justice in relations between worker and employer. However, a lapse of this type of organization into the field of extremist conflict and class struggle does not correspond to the Church's social teaching. Nor should such associations have a political or openly or covertly serve partisan interests or other interests with quite different goals.

I express confidence that associations such as that now existing and just mentioned will perform a useful function in the work community, operating in solid harmony with the Apostolic See, by taking inspiration from the principles of the Church's social teaching. I am likewise certain that as they set forward work problems and develop continuous and constructive dialogue with the competent organisms they will not fail to take account in every case of the particular character of the Apostolic See, as pointed out in the initial part of this letter.

In relation to what has been expounded, Your Eminence will wish to prepare suitable executive documents for furthering a work community according to the principles set forth by means of suitable norms and structures.

5. I emphasized in the Encyclical *Laborem exercens* that the worker's personal dignity requires expression in a particular relationship with the work entrusted to him. This relationship is objectively realizable in various ways according to the kind of work undertaken. It is realized subjectively when the worker lives it as "his own," even though he is working "for wages." Since the work in question here is performed within the Apostolic See and is therefore marked by the characteristics already mentioned, such a relationship calls for heartfelt sharing in that "concern for all the Churches" which is proper to the Chair of Peter.

Those who work for the Holy See must therefore have the profound conviction that their work above all entails an ecclesial responsibility to live in a spirit of authentic faith, and that the juridical-administrative aspects of their relationship with the Apostolic See stand in a particular light.

The Second Vatican Council provided us with copious teaching on the way in which all Christians, clerics, religious and laity can and ought to make such ecclesial concern their own.

So it seems necessary for all, especially those working with the Apostolic See, to deepen personal consciousness above all of the universal apostolic commitment of Christians and that arising from each one's specific vocation: that of the bishop, of the priest, of religious, of the laity. The answers to the present difficulties in the field of human labor are to be sought in the sphere of social justice. But they must also be sought in the area of an interior relationship with the

work that each is called upon to perform. It seems evident that work — of whatever kind — carried out in the employment of the Apostolic See requires this in a quite special measure.

Besides the deepened interior relationship, this work calls for reciprocal respect, if it is to be advantageous and serene, based on human and Christian brotherhood by all and for all concerned. Only when it is allied with such brotherhood (that is, with love of man in truth), can justice manifest itself as true justice. We must try to find "of what spirit we are" (cf. *Lk.* 9:55, Vulg.).

These latter questions have hardly been touched on here. They cannot be adequately formulated in administrative-judicial terms. This does not exempt us, however, from the search and effort necessary for making operative precisely within the circle of the Apostolic See that spirit of human work which comes from our Lord Jesus Christ.

As I entrust these thoughts, Most Reverend Cardinal, to your attentive consideration, I call down an abundance of the gifts of divine assistance upon the future commitment which putting them into practice requires. At the same time I impart my benediction to you from my heart and willingly extend it to all those who offer their meritorious service to the Apostolic See.

JOHN PAUL II

TRANSLATION NOTE

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The Second Vatican Council declared with clear vision that "ours is a new age of history" ¹; and it recognized that efforts are being made everywhere to ensure an ever increasing development of education ² In a period of cultural change the Church notes with concern in the field of education the need to come to grips with the profound cleavage between the Gospel and culture, ³ which undervalues the saving message of Christ and considers it of only marginal importance.

In my address to the members of UNESCO I had occasion to state: "There is no doubt that the first and fundamental cultural fact is the spiritually mature man, that is, a fully educated man, a man capable of educating himself and educating others".⁴ and I noted a certain tendency to "a unilateral shift to instruction" with consequent manipulations which can provoke "a real alienation of education"⁵. I recalled therefore that "the primary and essential task of culture in general and also of all cultures is education. This consists in fact in enabling man to be more man, to 'be' more rather than just to 'have' more and consequently, through everything he 'has', everything he possesses' to 'be' man more fully"⁶ In the numerous meetings I have had with young people in the various continents, in the messages I have given them, and in particular in the Letter which in 1985 I addressed "To the youth of the world", I expressed my intimate conviction that the Church is at their side and indeed must be so. ⁷

I want to recall those same considerations on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the "dies natalis" of a great son of the Church, the holy priest John Bosco, whom my predecessor Pius XI did not hesitate to call "educator princeps".⁸

This auspicious event provides me with the welcome opportunity to offer some remarks not only to you, to your confreres and to all the members of the Salesian Family, but also to the young people who are the beneficiaries of your educational work, together with Christian educators and parents, who are called to carry out so noble a human and ecclesial ministry.

I am also pleased that this commemoration of the Saint is taking place during the Marian Year, which directs our thoughts to "Her who believed": in her generous assent in faith we discover the fruitful source of her educative work⁹, first as Mother of Jesus and then as Mother of the Church and Help of all Christians..

2. John Bosco died at Turin on 31 January 1888. The almost 73 years of his life were accompanied by deep and complex political, social and cultural changes: revolutionary movements, wars and a migration of people from the countryside to the towns, all factors with an emphatic effect on the life of the people, especially of the poorer classes. Close-packed as they were on the outskirts of the towns, the poor in general and the younger ones in particular became victims of exploitation or unemployment: in their human, moral, religious and occupational development they were insufficiently followed up and frequently given no attention at all. Sensitive as they were to every change, the young frequently became insecure and bewildered. Traditional methods of education became disjointed and ineffective in the face of this rootless mass of people, and efforts were made for various motives by philanthropists, educators and ecclesiastics to meet the new needs. One of these who came to the fore in Turin through his clear Christian inspiration, courageous initiatives and the rapid and widespread extension of his work was Don Bosco.

3. He felt within himself that he had received a special vocation and that in the carrying out of his mission he was assisted and almost led by the hand by the Lord and the motherly intervention of the Virgin Mary. His response was such that the Church has officially proposed him to the faithful as a model of holiness. When on Easter Sunday of 1934, at the close of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, my Predecessor Pius XI of undying memory, inscribed him on the roll of Saints, he pronounced an unforgettable eulogy in his praise.

Young John, whose father had died when he was very young, was brought up with profound human and Christian insight by his mother, and was endowed by Providence with gifts which from his early years made him the generous and conscientious friend of his companions. His boyhood years were a sign of an extraordinary mission of education that was to follow. As a priest in a Turin then in a phase of rapid development, he came into contact with young people in prison and with other dramatic human situations.

He had the happy intuition of a real and attentive student of the Church's history, and from his knowledge of such situations and the experience of other apostles, especially St Philip Neri and St Charles Borromeo, he conceived the idea of the "Oratory", a name particularly dear to him in its connotations. The Oratory was to characterise all his work, and he would shape it in line with his original idea and adapt it to the environment, to his boys and to their needs. As principal protector and model for his collaborators he chose St Francis de Sales, the saint so zealous in many directions, because of the great human kindness he displayed especially in dealing with others.

4. The "Work of the Oratories" began in 1841 with a "simple catechism lesson" and subsequently spread in response to pressing needs and situations: hostels for the reception of those with nowhere to go, workshops and schools of arts and trades to enable them to find work and make an honest living, schools for humanities and open to vocational ideals, a healthy press, and recreational initiatives and methods in line with the period (theatre, band, singing, autumn outings).

The happy expression: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much"¹⁰ was the watchword and, even before that, the fundamental educational option of the Saint: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath".¹¹ And indeed he carried out for them a striking series of activities by his words, writings, institutes,

journeys, meetings with civil and religious personalities; for them, above all else, he showed an attentive concern for each one individually, so that in his fatherly love the boys might see a sign of a higher love still.

The dynamic thrust of his love was universal in its extent and prompted him to respond to the call of distant nations and even of missions far overseas for a work of evangelisation which was never disjoined from authentic efforts at human advancement.

Following the same criteria and with the same spirit he tried to find a solution also to the problems of girls and young women. The Lord raised up at his side a co-foundress: St Mary Domenica Mazzarello with a group of young women who had already dedicated themselves at parish level to the Christian formation of girls. His pedagogical approach gave rise to other collaborators, men and women, some of them consecrated by stable vows, others, associated with him through the sharing of his pedagogical and apostolic ideals, and involved also the, prompting them to bear personal witness to the education they had received and to promote it in their turn.

5. So great a spirit of initiative was the result of a profound interior disposition. His stature as a Saint gives him a unique place among the great Founders of religious Institutes in the Church. He is outstanding from many points of view: he initiated a true school of a new and attractive apostolic spirituality; he promoted a special devotion to Mary, Help of Christians and Mother of the Church; he displayed a loyal and courageous ecclesial sense manifested in the delicate mediation work he carried out between Church and State at a time when the relations between the two were difficult; as an apostle he was both realistic and practical, always open to the implications of new discoveries; he was a zealous organiser of foreign missions with truly Catholic sensitivity; he was an eminent example of a preferential love for the young, and especially for the most needy among them, for the good of the Church and society; he was the exponent of an efficacious and attractive pedagogical method which he has left as a precious legacy to be safeguarded and developed.

In this letter I want especially to consider in Don Bosco the fact that he realised his personal holiness through an educative commitment lived with zeal and an apostolic heart, and that at the same time he knew how to propose holiness as the practical objective of his pedagogy. An interchange between and is indeed the characteristic aspect of his personality: he was a, he drew his inspiration from a "holy model" -Francis de Sales, he was the disciple of a "holy spiritual director" -Joseph Cafasso, and he was able to form from among his boys a "holy pupil" -Dominic Savio.

THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF ST JOHN BOSCO, THE EDUCATOR

6. The youth situation at the present day, a hundred years after the saint's death, has changed a great deal and presents a whole variety of different conditions and aspects, as is well known to educators and pastors. And yet today too there remain those same questions, which occupied the mind of the priest John Bosco from the beginning of his ministry in his desire to understand and his determination to work. Who are these young people? What are they looking for? Where are they going to? What are they in need of? These were difficult questions to answer at the time as they still are at the present day, but they are unavoidable and every educator must face up to them.

Today groups of young people can be found all over the world who are genuinely sensitive to spiritual values, and who are desirous of help and support in the maturing of their personalities. On the other hand it is quite clear that youth is a prey to allurements and conditioning elements of a negative kind, the result of various ideological outlooks. The attentive educator will be awake to the practical reality of the youth condition and will know how to intervene with sure competence and wise foresight.. In this he knows that he is prompted, enlightened and sustained by the incomparable educative tradition of the Church. In this he knows that he is prompted, enlightened and.

7. Aware of being the people of whom God is the father and educator, according to the explicit teaching of Sacred Scripture (cf. Deut 1, 31; 8, 5; 32, 10-12; Hos 11, 14; Is 1, 3; Jer 3, 14-15; Prov 3, 11-12; Heb 12, 5-11; Rev 3, 19), the Church, an "expert in humanity", has also every right to call herself an "expert in education". Evidence of this is the long and glorious two thousand years of history written by parents and families, priests and laity-men and women, religious institutions and ecclesial movements, which in educational service have given expression to their own particular charism as an extension of the divine education which has its summit in Christ. Thanks to the work of so many educators and pastors and of numerous Orders and religious Institutes, which have promoted institutions of inestimable human and cultural value, the history of the Church is identified in no small degree with the history of the education of peoples. Indeed, as Vatican II declared, the Church's concern for education is in obedience to the "mandate she received from her divine founder to announce the mystery of salvation to all men and to renew all things in Christ".¹²

8. Speaking of the work of Religious and emphasising the enterprise they showed, Pope Paul VI, of venerable memory, said that their apostolate "is often outstanding in its admirable resourcefulness and initiative".¹³ For St John Bosco, founder of a great spiritual Family, one may say that the peculiar trait of his brilliance is linked with the educational method which he himself called the "Preventive System". In a certain sense this represents the quintessence of his pedagogical wisdom and constitutes the prophetic message which he has left to his followers and to the Church, and which has received attention and recognition from numerous educators and students of pedagogy.

The term "preventive" which he uses is to be understood not so much in its strict linguistic sense as in the richness of the characteristics typical of the Saint's educative skill. It implies in the first place the intention of foreseeing and

preventing anything that might give rise to negative experiences which could compromise youthful energies or commit young people to long and distressing efforts at recovery. But the term also includes deep intuitions, precise options and methodological criteria, all lived with particular intensity: examples are: the art of positive education by putting forward what is good through appropriate experiences which call for the involvement of the pupil and are attractive because of their splendour and lofty nature; the art of producing growth in the young persons "from within" by appealing to their inner freedom to oppose external conditioning and formalism; the art of winning the heart of young people so as to inculcate in them a joyful and satisfied attraction to what is good, correcting deviations and preparing them for the future by means of a solid character formation.

Evidently this pedagogical message supposes in the educator the conviction that in every young person, no matter how far he may seem to be from the straight and narrow, there are hidden sources of good which if properly stimulated can lead to an option for faith and honesty.

We may therefore fittingly reflect briefly on what, as a providential reflection of the Word of God, constitutes one of the most characteristic aspects of the Saint's pedagogy.

9. A man of tireless activity in many forms, Don Bosco has provided by his life a most efficacious teaching, to such an extent that even by his contemporaries he was considered outstanding as an educator. The few pages in which he described his pedagogical experience¹⁴ acquire their full significance only when read in the light of all the long and rich experience he acquired through living in the midst of the young.

Education implied for him a special attitude on the part of the educator and a collection of practices, based on convictions of reason and faith, which serve as guides in pedagogical activity. At the centre of his vision stands pastoral charity", of which he says: he practice of the Preventive System is wholly based on the words of St Paul who says ' Love is patient and kind; it bears all things, but hopes all things and endures all things'.¹⁵ It inclines the educator to love the young person in whatever state he may be found, so as to lead him to the fullness of humanity which is revealed in Christ, to give him the awareness and possibility of living the life of an upright citizen as a son of God. It leads to intuitive understanding and gives strength to what the Saint summed up in the well known threefold formula: "Reason, religion, loving kindness".¹⁶

10. The term "reason" emphasises, in line with the authentic view of Christian humanism, the value of the individual, of conscience, of human nature, of culture, of the world of work, of social living, or in other words of that vast set of values which may be considered the necessary equipment of man in his family, civil and political life. In the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* I recalled that Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church: the way leading from Christ to man".¹⁷ It is significant to note that more than a hundred years ago Don Bosco used to attribute great importance to the human aspects and historical condition of the individual: to his freedom, his preparation for life and a profession, the assuming of civil responsibilities in an atmosphere of joy and generous commitment to his neighbour. He expressed these objectives in trenchant though simple words, like "joy", "study", "devotion", "wisdom", "work" "humanity". His educational ideal is characterised by moderation and realism. In his pedagogical plan there is a successful combination between the permanence of what is essential and the contingency of what is historical, between what is traditional and what is new. The Saint offers young people a programme which is simple but at the same time exacting, happily summed up in an evocative formula: an upright citizen because a good Christian.

In brief the "reason", in which Don Bosk believed as a gift of God and an unailing obligation of the educator, indicates the values of what is good, and also the objectives to be aimed at and the means and manner of using them. "Reason" invites the young to an attitude of sharing in values they have understood and accepted. He called it also "reasonableness" because of its necessary accompaniment by the understanding, dialogue and unailing patience through which the far from easy practice of reasoning finds expression.

It is true that all this takes for granted at the present day an updated and integral anthropology, free from ideological oversimplification. The modern educator must be able to read closely the signs of the times to glean from them the emerging values which are attractive to youth: peace, freedom, justice, communion and sharing, the advancement of woman, solidarity, development, and urgent ecological demands. It is true that all this takes for granted at the present day an updated and integral anthropology, free from ideological oversimplification. The modern educator must be able to read closely the signs of the times to glean from them the emerging values which are attractive to youth: peace, freedom, justice, communion and sharing, the advancement of woman, solidarity, development, and urgent ecological demands.

11. The second term, "Religion", indicates that Don Bosco's pedagogy is essentially transcendent, in so far as the ultimate educational objective at which it aims is the formation of the believer. For him the properly formed and mature man was the citizen with faith, who places at the centre of his life the ideal of the new man proclaimed by Jesus Christ and who bears courageous witness to his own religious convictions.

It is evidently not a question of a speculative and abstract religion, but of a living faith rooted in reality and stemming from presence and communion, from an attitude of listening and from docility to grace. As he liked to put it "the columns of an educational edifice",¹⁸ are the Eucharist, Penance, devotion to Our Lady, love for the Church and its pastors. His educational process was a pathway of prayer, of liturgy, of sacramental life, of spiritual direction: for some it was the response to the call to a special consecration (how many Priests and Religious were formed in the Saint's houses!); for all it was a perspective and a path to holiness.

Don Bosco was a zealous priest who always referred back to its revealed foundation everything that he received, lived and gave to others.

This aspect of religious transcendence, the cornerstone of Don Bosco's pedagogical method, is not only applicable to every culture but can also be profitably adapted even to non-Christian religions.

12. Finally from a methodological point of view comes "loving kindness". Here we are speaking of a daily attitude, which is neither simple human love nor supernatural charity alone. It is really the expression of a complex reality and implies availability, sound criteria and an appropriate style of conduct.

Loving kindness is expressed in practice in the commitment of the educator as a person entirely dedicated to the good of his pupils, present in their midst, ready to accept sacrifices and hard work in the fulfilment of his mission. All this calls for a real availability to the young, a deep empathy and the ability to dialogue with them. Typical and very enlightening is the expression: "Here in your midst I feel completely at home; for me, living means being here with you".¹⁹ With happy intuition he specified: what is important is "not only that the boys be loved, but that they know they are loved".²⁰

The true educator therefore shares the life of the young, is interested in their problems, tries to become aware of how they see things, takes part in their sporting and cultural activities and in their conversations: as a mature and responsible friend he sketches out for them ways and means of doing good, he is ready to intervene to solve problems, to indicate criteria, to correct with prudent and loving firmness blameworthy judgements and behaviour. In this atmosphere of "pedagogical presence" the educator is not looked upon as a "superior", but as a "father, brother, friend".²¹

In a perspective like this priority is given first to personal relationships. Don Bosco liked to use the term "family spirit" to define the correct kind of relationship between educators and pupils. Long experience had convinced him that without familiarity it was not possible to show love, and unless love is shown there cannot arise that confidence which is an indispensable condition for successful educative activity. The picture of the objectives to be achieved, the programme to be followed, the methodological guidelines acquire concrete form and efficacy when they are marked by a genuine "family spirit", i.e. if lived in an undisturbed, joyful and stimulating atmosphere.

In this connection must be recalled at least the ample space and importance given by the Saint to recreational periods, to sport, music, the theatre or (as he liked to express it) the life of the playground. It is there, in spontaneous and joyful relationships, that the shrewd educator finds ways of intervening, as gentle in expression as they are efficacious because of their continuity and the friendly atmosphere in which they are made.²² If an encounter is to be educative there must be a deep and continued interest which leads to the acquiring of a personal knowledge of each individual and at the same time of the elements of the cultural condition they have in common. It needs an intelligent and loving attention to the aspirations, the value assessments, the conditioning factors to which the young are subjected, to their situations of life, to the local models which surround them, their tensions, their claims and their collective proposals. It is a case of detecting the urgent need for formation of conscience, of a family, social and political sense, for maturing in love and in the Christian view of sexuality, for developing the critical faculty and a proper flexibility in the evolution of age and mentality, keeping always clearly in mind that youth is not only a time of transition, but a real time of grace for the building of personality.

Even today, even though in a changed cultural context and with young people of non-Christian religions, this characteristic constitutes one of the very many valid and original elements in Don Bosco's pedagogy.

13. I want to point out, in fact, that these pedagogical criteria are not things of the past: the figure of this Saint, the friend of youth, continues to exert a fascinating attraction for young people of the most widely differing cultures under heaven. It is true that his educational message needs to be studied at still greater depth, to be adapted and renewed with intelligence and courage, precisely because of changed social, cultural, ecclesial and pastoral contexts. It will be well to keep in mind the new lines of thought and the developments that have taken place in many fields, the signs of the times and the indications of Vatican II. Nevertheless the substance of his teaching remains intact; the unique nature of his spirit, his intuitions, his style, his charisma are unchanged, because they draw their inspiration from the transcendent pedagogy of God.

St John Bosco is relevant to the present day for another reason too: he teaches us to integrate the permanent values of tradition with so as to meet in a creative fashion the newly emerging requests and problems: he continues to be our teacher in the present difficult times, and suggests a which is at once both creative and faithful.

"Don Bosco ritorna" - ('Don Bosco comes back') is a traditional hymn of the Salesian Family: it expresses the fervent hope and desire of a "return of Don Bosco" and of a "Return to Don Bosco", so as to be educators able to preserve our fidelity of old, and at the same time be attentive, as he was himself, to the thousand and one needs of today's youth, so as to find in his legacy the starting point for a present-day response to their difficulties and expectations.

TODAY'S URGENT NEED FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

14. The Church feels herself directly implicated in the education question, because she is always there where man is involved since her mission». ²³ This evidently implies a true love of predilection for the young.

Let us go to the young: that is the first and fundamental need in the field of education. "The Lord has sent me for Youth": in this statement of Don Bosco we discern his fundamental apostolic option, directed to poor youth, to those of the lower classes, those most at risk.

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It is useful to recall those striking words of Don Bosco to his boys which form the genuine synthesis of his basic choice: "Remember that whatever my worth, I am here at every moment of the day and night for you. I have no other goal than your physical, mental and moral welfare"²⁴ "For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am even ready to give my life".²⁵

15. So great a dedication of himself to the young, in the midst of difficulties sometimes of an extreme nature, John Bosco attained because of a singular and intense charity, i.e. an interior vitality that united in him in an inseparable manner love of God and love of his neighbour. In this way he was able to establish a synthesis between evangelising activity and educational work.

His concern for the evangelisation of his boys was not limited to catechesis alone, nor to liturgy alone, nor to those religious practices, which call for an explicit exercise of faith and lead to it, but covered the whole vast sector of the youth condition. It forms an integral part therefore of the process of human formation, not losing sight of defects but at the same time optimistic about progressive maturing, in the conviction that the word of the Gospel must be sown in the reality of their daily living so as to lead the boys to a generous commitment of themselves in life. Since they are living through a period of particular importance for their education, the saving message of the Gospel must sustain them throughout the educational process, and faith must become the unifying and enlightening element of their personality.

Some consequences follow from this. The educator must have a special sensitivity for cultural values and institutions, by acquiring a deep knowledge of the human sciences. In this way the competence he achieves will become a valid instrument for sustaining a programme of efficacious evangelisation. Secondly, the educator must follow a specific pedagogical plan, which, while defining precisely the dynamic evolution of the human faculties, inculcates in the pupils the conditions for a free and gradual response.

He will also be concerned to direct the whole educational process to the religious objective of salvation. All this requires a lot more than the insertion in the educational curriculum of a few periods reserved for religious instruction and ritual expression; it implies the very much deeper obligation of helping the pupils to open their minds to absolute values and interpret life and history in accordance with the depth and riches of the Mystery.

16. The educator, therefore, must be clearly conscious of the ultimate objective, because in the art of education the ends aimed at play a decisive part. If they are not completely clear or are mistaken or even forgotten, a unilateral approach or deviations will result, as well as being a sign of incompetence.

"Modern civilisation tries to impose on man - as I said to UNESCO - a series of apparent imperatives, which its spokesmen justify by recourse to the principle of development and progress. Thus for example, instead of respect for life, the 'imperative' of getting rid of life and destroying it; instead of love which is a responsible communion of persons, the 'imperative' of the maximum sexual enjoyment apart from any sense of responsibility; instead of the primacy of the truth in action, the primacy of behaviour that is fashionable, of the subjective, and of immediate success"²⁶

In the Church and in the world the integral educative vision that we see incarnated in John Bosco is a realistic pedagogy of holiness. We need to get back to the true concept of "holiness" as a component of the life of every believer. The originality and boldness of the plan for a "youthful holiness" is intrinsic to the educational art of this great saint, who can rightly be called the "master of youth spirituality". His secret lay in the fact that he did not disappoint the deep aspirations of the young (the need for life, love, expansiveness, joy, freedom, future prospects) but at the same time led them gradually and realistically to discover for themselves that only in the "life of grace", ie in friendship with Christ, does one fully attain the most authentic ideals.

An education of this kind requires at the present day that the young be equipped with a discerning conscience that is able to perceive authentic values and unmask the ideological hegemonies which make use of the means of social communication to enslave public opinion and subjugate minds.

17. The kind of education which, according to Don Bosco's method, fosters an original interaction between evangelisation and human advancement, calls for precise attention to certain points from the heart and mind of the educator: the acquiring of an educational sensitivity, the adopting of an attitude which is both motherly and fatherly, the effort to assess what is happening in the growth of the individual and the group in the light of a formative plan which brings together in wise and vigorous unity the educational purpose itself and the will to find the most suitable means of attaining it.

In modern society educators must pay particular attention to the educational factors of a human and social character which history has shown to be more important, and which are interwoven with grace and the demands of the Gospel.

Perhaps never in the past did education become so vital and social an imperative, implying the taking of a position and the firm will to form mature personalities, as at the present day. Perhaps never in the past has the world had such need of individuals, families and communities which make of education their 'raison d'etre', to which they dedicate themselves as a primary objective and to which they unreservedly devote their efforts and seek collaboration and help, so as to try out and renew with initiative and a sense of responsibility new educational methods. To be an educator

today implies a true individual choice of a way of life, to which those who exercise authority in the ecclesial and civil communities owe a debt of recognition and help.

18. The experience and pedagogical wisdom of the Church ascribe an extraordinary educative significance to the "family", the "school", "work", and the various kinds of "associations" and groups. This is a time for the relaunching of educative institutions and a moment to recall the irreplaceable educational role of the "family", of which I had occasion to speak in the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. Education (or lack of it) in the family remains in fact a decisive factor for good, and unfortunately sometimes for evil; and on the other hand it is always indispensable to educate the younger generations to acquire from the family environment the responsibility for interpreting daily happenings in the light of the perennial teaching of the Gospel, without losing sight of the Gospel, without losing sight of the demands of a necessary renewal.

The central place of the family in the work of education at the present day ranks among the most serious of moral and social problems. "What can be done - I asked of UNESCO - in order that man's education may be carried out above all in the family? The causes of success and failure in the formation of man by his family always lie both within the fundamental creative environment of culture which the family is, and also at a higher level, that of the competence of the State and of the organs on which these causes depend".²⁷

Along with the educational action of the family must be emphasised that of the "school", which is able to open wider and more universal horizons. In John Bosco's view the school, in addition to fostering the cultural, social and professional dimensions of the young, had to provide them with an efficacious structure of moral values and principles. If it failed to do so, the young people would find it impossible to live and act in a consistently positive and upright way in a society characterised by tension and strife.

A further part of the great educational legacy left by the Piedmontese Saint was his preferential interest in the world of work, for which young people had to be carefully prepared. This is something, which is felt as an urgent need at the present day, even amidst the profound changes that have taken place in society. We share Don Bosco's concern for rendering the new generations professionally competent with proper technical skills, as has been done in such praiseworthy fashion for more than a hundred years in the schools of arts and trades and the workshops with such commendable skill by the Salesian Brothers. We share his concern for the fostering of an ever more incisive education to social responsibilities, on the basis of growth in the understanding of the dignity of the subject,²⁸ which Christian faith makes not only lawful, but to which it gives energy with incalculable implications.

A final item to be pointed out is the importance given by the Saint to youth groups and associations in which youthful dynamism and initiative grow and develop. By giving life to a whole variety of activities he created living environments which made good use of free time for the apostolate, study, prayer, joyful occupations, games and cultural pursuits where the young could come together and grow. The notable changes of our own time with respect to the nineteenth century do not exempt the educator from taking a fresh look at situations and conditions of life, allowing the necessary space for the creativity which is typical of youth.

19. Considering then the needs of today's young people and at the same time calling to mind the prophetic message of Don Bosco, the friend of youth, one cannot forget that in addition-or rather, within-any educational structure, those typical educative moments of the personal conversation and meeting with the individual are indispensable: correctly used, they become occasions of true spiritual guidance. This is what the Saint did, employing with particular efficacy the ministry of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In a world so fragmented and so full of contradictory messages, it is a real pedagogical gift to offer the young the possibility of knowing and elaborating their individual life-plan, as they seek out the treasure of their own personal vocation on which depends the pattern of their life. The educative work of one who thought it sufficient to satisfy the requirements, albeit legitimate ones, of profession, culture, and even lawful relaxation, would be incomplete unless he included in it as leaven those objectives which Christ himself put to the young man in the Gospel, and with which he even linked the joy of eternal life or the sadness of selfish possession (cf. Mt 19, 21f.).

The educator loves and truly educates young people when he puts to them ideals of life which transcend them, and agrees to walk side by side with them in the laborious daily maturing of the option they have made.

CONCLUSION

20. In this centenary commemoration of St John Bosco, "the father and teacher of youth", one may say with firm conviction that Divine Providence invites all you who are members of the great Salesian Family, also as parents and educators, to recognise ever more clearly the inflexible need for formation of the young, taking up with fresh enthusiasm the tasks needed to carry it out with the enlightened and generous dedication that belonged to the Saint. Among the educators I address especially, and with deep solicitude arising from the seriousness of the problem, the clergy directly engaged in the care of souls: the education of youth is a challenge directed primarily to them.

I am convinced, and the meetings with young people that I have always asked should be included in the programs of my apostolic journeys support this conviction, that there already exists an abundance of projects and initiatives for the Christian education of youth; but we must not forget that at the present day young people are exposed to dangers and temptations unknown in other ages, such as drugs, violence, terrorism, the pornographic element in many films and

television programs, and obscenity in words and pictures. All this means that in the care of souls the necessary education of youth be given pride of place with appropriate methods and adequate initiatives.

The mind and heart of John Bosco can suggest to priests the proper means to this end. The seriousness of what is at stake demands an increased awareness of the situation: the Lord will certainly ask them for an account of what they have done in this regard. Let priests direct their first concern to young people. On youth depends the future of the Church and of society!

I am well aware, worthy educators, of the difficulties you meet with and of the disappointments you experience at times. Do not be discouraged as you follow the privileged way of love that is education. Be strengthened by the inexhaustible patience of God in his pedagogy towards humanity, the unfailing exercise of fatherhood revealed in the mission of Christ, teacher and shepherd, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, sent to transform the world.

The powerful though hidden efficacy of the Spirit is directed to bringing about the maturity of humanity on the model of Christ. He is the animator of the birth of the new man and the new world (cf. Rom. 8:4-5). In this way, your educational labours will be seen to be a ministry of collaboration with God and will certainly be fruitful.

Your saint, who is our saint too, used to say that education is a "matter of the heart" 29 and that one must "open a way for God in the boy's heart not only in church but also in the classroom and workshop". 30 It is precisely in the human heart that the Spirit of truth is made present as consoler and transformer: he unceasingly enters the history of the world from the heart of man. And as I wrote in the encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, also the "the way of the Church passes through the heart of man"; indeed, she is "the heart of humanity": "with her heart which embraces all human hearts she implores from the Holy Spirit 'the righteousness, the peace and the joy of the Spirit' in which, in the words of St Paul, consists the Kingdom of God" 31 By your work, dear educators, you are sharing in a wondrous manner in the motherly function of the Church 32

Keep always before you Mary most Holy, the most lofty collaborator of the Holy Spirit, who was docile to his inspirations and so became the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. She continues through the centuries "to be a maternal presence as is shown by Christ's words spoken from the Cross: 'Woman, behold your son'; 'Behold your mother'».33

Never take your gaze off Mary; listen to her when she says: "Do what Jesus tells you" (Jn 2, 5). Pray to her too with daily solicitude, that the Lord may continue to raise up generous souls who can say yes to his vocational call.

To her I entrust you, and with you the whole world of youth, that being attracted, animated and guided by her, they may be able to attain through the mediation of your educative work, the stature of new men for a new world: the world of Christ, Master and Lord.

May my Apostolic Blessing, the pledge and promise of heavenly gifts and testimony of my affection, strengthen you in the faith, and may it console and protect all the members of the great Salesian Family.

Given at Rome, from St Peter's, on 31 January, the memorial of St John Bosco, in the year 1988, the tenth of my Pontificate.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

END NOTES

1. Past.Const. on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, 4

2 Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* -preface

3 Cf. PAUL VI, Apost. Exhort. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 20: AAS 68 (1976), p. 19.

4 Address to UNESCO (2 June 1980), 12: AAS 72 (1980), p. 743. S Ibid., 13; I.c., p. 743. 6 Ibid., 11; I.c., p. 742.

7 Letter to the youth of the world *Parati semper* (31 March 1985): A, 4S 77 (1985), pp. 579-628.

8 PIUS XI, Lett. Decret. *Geminata Laetitia* (1 April 1934): AAS 27 (1935), p. 285.

9 Cf. Encyc. Lett. *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 12-19: AAS 79 (1987), pp. 374-384

10 *Il Giovane Provveduto*, Turin 1847, p. 7.

11. *Memorie biografiche di S.Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 18 Turin 1937, p. 258.

12 Declaration on Christian education *Gravissimum Educationis* -preface.

13 Apost. Exhort. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 69: A, 4S 68 (1976), p. 59.

14 Cf. *Il Sistema Preventivo*, in "Regolamento per le case della Società S. Francesco di Sales", Turin, 1877, in GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Scritti Pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.VV.) LAS, Rome 1987, 192ff

15 Ibid-, pp. 194-195

16 Cf. *Il Sistema Preventivo*, in, Turin 1877 in GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.W.), LAS Rome 1987, p. 166 ff.

17 Encyc. Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 13.14: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 282.284-285.

18 Cf. GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.W.), LAS Rome 1987, p. 168.

19 *Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 4, S. Benigno Canavese 1904, p. 654.

- 20 Lettera da Roma, 1884, in GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.W.), LAS Rome 1987, p. 294.
- 21 Ibid., p. 296 22 Concerning the relationship between recreation and education in the thought and practice of John Bosco, it is well known that Salesian Oratories are distinguished for the large amount of time given to sport, music, and every kind of initiative forming part of healthy and formative recreation. 23 Cf. Encyc. Letter Redemptor Hominis (4 March 1979), 13.14: A, 4S 71 (1979), pp. 284-285. 24 *Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 7, Turin 1909, p. 503 27 Ibid, 12; I.c., pp. 742-743 28 Cf. Encyc. Letter I, aborem Exercens (14 September 1981), 6: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 589-592.
29. *Memorie Biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, vol 16, Turin 1935, p.447
30. Ibid, vol 6, pp815-816
31. Ency. Letter Dominum et vivificantem (18 May, 1986), 67 32 Cf CON. ECUM. VATIC. II Declaration on Christian education, 3
- 33 Encyc. Letter Redemptoris Mater (25 March 1987), 24: A, 4S 79 (1987), p. 393.

Apostolic Letter
Sescentesima Anniversaria
Of The Supreme Pontiff
John Paul II
On The Occasion
Of The Sixth Centenary
Of The "Baptism" Of Lithuania

To my Venerable Brother Liudas Povilonis Apostolic Administrator of Kaunas and Vilkaviskis President of the Lithuanian Episcopal Conference and to the other Bishops of Lithuania

1. THE SIX HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY of the "Baptism" of our Nation, which you are solemnly celebrating in this year of grace, is for you and your people an occasion for the deepening of faith, of prayer and of spiritual renewal, in which the whole Church is united with intense and fraternal participation. As I have recalled in various circumstances - and most recently in my homily at the Mass on 1 January last - the whole Church commemorates with you this very significant anniversary and with you gives thanks "to God for his inexpressible gift" (2 Cor 9:15). The Church in Rome and all the sister Churches throughout the world join you in the fervent prayer of thanksgiving that you are raising to the Lord for the inestimable grace of the "Baptism", for the welcome which it met among your people and for the benefits which it brought them, and for the strength and fervour with which your fathers preserved it and developed it amid the vicissitudes of a history six centuries long.

The universal Church is aware of and grateful for the great spiritual wealth which the Lithuanian Catholic community has brought and still brings to the ecclesial communion and recognizes in its centuries-old witness of fidelity to Christ the action of the Holy Spirit, who "by the power of the Gospel makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse".(1)

As you know, in order to manifest this universal communion with you, on 28 June next, simultaneously with the national celebration in Vilnius, I shall preside at the tomb of the Apostle Peter at a solemn concelebration, during which I shall have the joy of beatifying a great son and Pastor of your people, Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis. At my side will be representatives of the Episcopates of the European continent their presence will express visibly our spiritual closeness to the Church which is in Lithuania.

2. The conversion of the Lithuanian peoples to Christianity took place some centuries after that of the neighbouring peoples of old Europe. Squeezed as in a vice between the East, from which the Slav peoples pressed close, and the West, from which came the powerful Teutonic Knights, your forefathers, already at the dawn of the thirteenth century, had consolidated the structures of an autonomous State, and were tenaciously committed to defending its independence and freedom. These specific political and geographical circumstances explain why the Lithuanians for so long resisted accepting the Cross from those who came against them with the sword and threatened to reduce them to subjection.

It was precisely in order to escape from external pressures that, in 1251, the Grand Duke Mindaugas decided to embrace the Catholic faith and placed himself under the special protection of this Apostolic See, obtaining from Pope Innocent IV the royal crown. The Pope at the same time erected the first Lithuanian diocese and decreed that it be subject solely to the Holy See. But the conversion of Mindaugas, which was not adequately prepared, met resistance among the people, who did not follow the example of the Grand Duke. Even before the year 1260 the Bishop had to withdraw and in 1263 the tragic death of Mindaugas put an end to that shortlived spring.

3. Over a century had to go by before the bright day of the "Baptism" shone forth. This was the work and merit of an illustrious son of Lithuania, the Grand Duke Jogaila, who in 1386 agreed to be baptized together with his subjects into the Catholic faith, and obtained the crown of Poland and the hand of Queen Jadwiga, the exemplary figure of a Christian woman, still venerated today in Cracow as Blessed. For the next four centuries, the history of Lithuania is marked by a singular identity of destiny - political and religious - with Poland. In 1387, the King - who had taken the name of Ladislaus II - returned to Vilnius, the capital of the Grand Duchy, and set in hand the conversion of the people, who received mass Baptism, thanks also to the personal dedication of the King. In that year the Diocese of Vilnius was founded and the Franciscan Andrew, who had already been a missionary among your people, was named as the first Bishop.

In 1413 Jogaila, with his cousin the Grand Duke Vytautas, devoted himself to the evangelization of the Lithuanian population of Samogitia. A few years later, the Council of Constance designated for that region certain of its own Legates, in order to erect the Diocese of Medininkai, to consecrate the first Bishop, Matthias, and to bring to completion the conversion of the population. King Jogaila, a man of simple and noble heart, led an exemplary Life of Christian virtue, practising works of piety and mercy and with lively zeal concerning himself with the destiny of the Church. He adopted wise provisions for favouring the free dissemination and establishment of the Christian faith in all the territories of the Grand Duchy.

4. The "Baptism" made your Nation a part of the great family of the Christian peoples of Europe, in that "Christianitas" which profoundly marked the destinies of the continent and constituted its most precious common inheritance and the foundation for the construction of a future of peace, authentic progress and true liberty. Lithuania thus entered also into the great cultural transformation which was beginning in Europe in that century, a transformation permeated by Christian principles and open to the exigencies of a new humanism which in the faith found its loftiest motivations and the cue for the promotion of the great values which have made glorious the history of Europe and made its presence beneficial in other continents.

(2) Lithuania drew from this new and promising membership an exuberance of spiritual energies, which progressively expressed themselves in different forms of culture, art and social organization. Little by little your land became covered with churches and religious houses which were at the same time centres radiating faith and civilization. For in the course of the centuries, and according to the variety of events, the work of evangelization was accompanied by provident initiatives of education and instruction of the people; schools grew up alongside the religious houses, and the life of faith was strengthened by the daily exercise of charity, through a thousand forms of activity for assistance and social promotion. I wish to recall the importance in this regard of the work of the Religious Orders: Dominicans and Franciscans, the first to arrive among your people, and then Benedictines, Franciscans of the new observance (popularly called Bernardines, after Saint Bernardine of Siena), and Basilians.

5. Other Religious Orders and Congregations, after the Council of Trent, gave a fresh impulse to the life of the Church in Lithuania, which after the Protestant Reformation was undergoing a period of languor and suffered numerous defections. Special mention must be made of the work done by the Society of Jesus, which particularly distinguished itself in the implementation of the reform promoted by the Council of Trent. In 1570, the Jesuits opened in Vilnius a famous College which nine years later became the first University of the Nation, a real forge of priests and men of learning.

The comforting revival of the Catholic Church was accompanied by the development of priestly and religious vocations. Initiatives on behalf of the people were promoted, such as libraries, the printing of religious books, houses for needy students, pharmacies for the poor, confraternities and associations, and schools of arts and crafts. But above all there was begun a well organized and intense apostolic activity among the very poor, in the countryside, where there existed particularly sad situations of dependence and indigence and where the need for the liberating message of Gospel charity was most urgently felt.

6. This untiring pastoral work was matched, in a consoling way, by the generosity of the Lithuanian people. Christianity was the true Gospel leaven of the Nation, permeating its daily life, establishing firm roots and becoming, so to say, its very soul.

The people willingly embraced the faith and bore strong and genuine witness to it even in the most difficult moments of its history, in the hour of suffering and sacrifice.

I would like to recall at this point some of the most eloquent expressions of this faith, which was tested like gold in the crucible (cf. 1 Pet 1:7). I refer, in the first place, to the ancient and fervent devotion of the faithful to the Passion of Christ, attested to by the innumerable crosses erected at the roadsides, by the frequent representations of the suffering Jesus, typical expression of popular art, by the places called "Kalvarija" with their stations of the "Via Crucis", which have earned for your land the name of "Land of Crosses".

And how could I forget, on this eve of the inauguration of the Marian Year, the great love which the Lithuanian faithful have for the Mother of God? The Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy, is particularly venerated and invoked at the Dawn Gate in Vilnius, as also in other much frequented shrines: at Siluva, at Zemaiciu Kalvarija, at Krekenava, at Pivasiúnai. For centuries, and still today, to these centres of faith and piety there have come together in pilgrimage the faithful of every diocese, with great fervour and often also with effort and sacrifice. They entrust themselves to her whom Christ on the Cross, in a supreme act of love, gave us as Mother and Mediatrix of Grace.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge before the Lithuanian Catholic community another eloquent sign of indefectible attachment to Christ and of ecclesial vitality: this is the intense love and complete devotion with which that community has always remained united to the See of Peter, to whom the Lord has entrusted the ministry of confirming the brethren and of keeping them united in the communion of his Church, establishing him as the Rock of the spiritual edifice; against which the powers of hell are powerless.

7. The Church was so immersed, and I would say identified, with the reality of the Nation that in every age your forefathers stood firmly together around her, especially in times of trial; in the dark, sad hours which even in recent times have marked the history of your land.

In the Church, in her teaching, in her evangelizing and sanctifying work, in her service of unity and truth, your people always found the meaning of their own history, their particular identity, their reasons for living and hoping. I am happy to repeat here what I said to a group of Latvians who came to Rome to celebrate the Eighth Centenary of the Christianization of Livonia, a region near to you: "Where the word of God, even in the midst of obstacles of every sort, penetrates into the depths of a people's consciousness and is accepted, it forever determines the awareness this people has of itself and of its history. In hearing the word of God, the people recognizes its true identity".(3)

It is all the more significant that, next to the Church, the other defensive bulwark for Lithuanians was the family: yes, the Christian family, the true "domestic Church", (4) solidly anchored to the values of the faith, and living in love,

sacrifice and in mutual giving. In your native country the Christian family has always succeeded in remaining faithful to its vocation to receive, preserve and transmit to its children the precious gift of the "Baptism", thus becoming, in the beautiful expression of the Second Vatican Council, "a school for human enrichment" (5)

The Church and the family, despite many impediments and obstacles, keep faith and culture alive. It is thanks to them that the nation has not lost its own identity and self-awareness. And still today, even though in many respects the times are no more favourable than in the past, Church and family remain the custodians of that sacred and inviolable heritage, the shrine of great human and Christian values: freedom of conscience, the dignity of the person, the heritage of the forefathers, the cultural tradition and the store of moral energy which they contain and in which reposes the hope for the future.

8. Lithuania's six hundred years of Christian life include countless testimonies to the uninterrupted action of the Holy Spirit, who has adorned your Church with his fruits (cf. Gal 5:22), raising up a multitude of men and women worthy of recognition as true disciples of Christ. I would like to recall with you some of the sons and daughters of Lithuania who have left in the hearts of the people the indelible mark of their virtues and apostolic zeal.

Our thoughts and prayers of intercession turn, first of all, to Saint Casimir, whom Pope Urban VIII declared Patron of Lithuania as early as 1636. Three years ago, you solemnly commemorated the five hundredth anniversary of his death, and those jubilee celebrations, with which I deeply associated myself, together with the whole Church, were a great moment of grace for your ecclesial community.

A descendant of the glorious line of the Jagellonians, Prince Casimir was singularly graced with virtue and was "perfected in a short time" (Wis 4:13). In less than a hundred years, he was the mature fruit of the "Baptism" of his people. He was buried in Vilnius, at the heart of the nation, which for five centuries has venerated his relics with unaltered devotion, and it is significant that the jubilee celebrations will reach their climax at his tomb.

A shining example of purity and charity, of humility and service to others, Casimir placed nothing before the love of Christ and earned from his contemporaries the eloquent title of "defender of the poor". Pope Pius XII proclaimed him special Patron of Lithuanian youth and pointed to his "noble and steadfast example" for the generations growing up amid so many adversities and snares.(6)

9. I also wish to recall the Bishop of Samogitia, Merkelis Giedraitis, a true apostle of the Tridentine Reform, whom on the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his death my venerable predecessor Pope John XXIII proposed as a model especially for the pastors of the Lithuanian Church.(7) A man eminent for piety and priestly virtues, strong and wise, Bishop Giedraitis showed in his intense apostolate "what it means to fight for the Catholic Faith and defend it with all one's strength".(8)

In accordance with the teaching of the Apostle Paul to Timothy, he "waged the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience, since by rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim 1:18-19). In the face of spreading heresy and the persistence in certain areas of ancient pagan customs, Bishop Giedraitis became the promoter of authentic spiritual renewal, taking care over the formation of the clergy, building new churches, and doing everything possible, personally, for the catechesis of the people in their native language.

Following in his footsteps as his successor in the Diocese of Samogitia, in the last century, was Bishop Motiejus Valancius. His pastoral government coincided with sad and dark times for the Nation which saw its civil and religious identity being threatened. Amid such perilous difficulties, Bishop Valancius was not only the untiring and provident shepherd of the Lord's flock but he also became a true moral guide for his people. Still famous are his vigorous appeals to priests and Christian parents to be aware of their responsibility to pass on to the younger generation together with the faith of their forefathers all the treasures of the Nation's cultural and religious tradition.

At the same time, Bishop Valancius undertook a difficult and praiseworthy reform of the religious fabric of the people, through catechesis and instruction organized secretly and at great risk. At their mothers' side, the children of the time learned to read and write from the texts of the catechism. The wisdom and great heart of Bishop Valancius, which found a generous and courageous echo in your forefathers, ensured that even in those difficult times the seed of God's Word was not lost, that Word around which the unity of the Nation was formed.

10. On June 28 next I shall have the joy of raising to the honours of the altar another most worthy son of the Lithuanian Church and Nation, the Servant of God Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis, who died barely sixty years ago. A true "servant and apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Pt 1:1), he was in Vilnius the far-sighted and caring Pastor of all his children, even the most remote. Faithful to his episcopal motto: "Conquer Evil with Good", he faced many serious difficulties in the exercise of his ministry, making himself "a slave to all, that he might win the more" (cf. 1 Cor 9:19) and caring only for the good of the Church and for the salvation of souls.

Many pastoral initiatives remain associated with his fruitful ecclesial service, among which I wish to mention the works of lay apostolate and the dissemination of the Church's social teaching, whereby he sought to alert the faithful to their responsibility to restore all things in Christ. We also owe to him the reform of his Congregation of Marian Clerics and the foundation of the Congregation of Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the Congregation of Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Named by Pope Pius XI Apostolic Visitor to Lithuania, this Servant of God worked with prudence and zeal, thus enabling the Pope to establish the Ecclesiastical Province of Lithuania with the Apostolic Constitution *Lituanorum*

Gente (4 April 1926). Catholic life experienced a notable revival in the area of catechetics, priestly and religious vocations, Catholic Action activities and various cultural expressions inspired by the Gospel.

The good seed sown so generously by Archbishop Matulaitis produced a hundredfold, and the Church experienced a new spring. But he himself wished to become a seed which dies in the earth so as not to remain alone but to bear much fruit (cf. Jn 12:21), and this is evident from this touching invocation which he left as a kind of testament in his spiritual diary, and which I wish to repeat with you today: "Jesus, grant that I may immolate myself for your Church, for the salvation of the souls redeemed by your Blood, so that I may live with You, work with You, suffer with You, and, as I hope, also die and reign with You" (9)

11. Finally, I would not like to conclude without also mentioning the numerous bands of the sons and daughters of your land who during these six centuries have openly and courageously professed the faith received in the "Baptism" and whom no trial, however severe, has ever been able to separate from the love of Christ (cf. Rom 8:35). They include bishops, priests, men and women Religious, catechists, and simple faithful, who faced humiliation, discrimination, suffering, sometimes persecution and even exile, imprisonment, deportation and death, rejoicing to suffer dishonour for the name of Jesus (cf. Acts 5:41).

They bear witness to the grace that the Lord promised to his Church "so that moving forward among trial and tribulation, in the weakness of the flesh she may not waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of her Lord; that moved by the Holy Spirit, she may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting".(10) Through them the Spirit has spoken and continues to speak to your Community and to the entire holy Catholic Church. Their cross, embraced in union with the redemptive suff Brings of Jesus, has become an instrument of grace and sanctification.

Theirs is an elect band of confessors and martyrs, for which today you are giving thanks to the Lord, feeling justly happy and proud of them. I exhort you and your faithful to assimilate their shining example: for an ever more convinced and logical life of faith, for an apostolate ever more committed and fruitful in works of charity, for a prompt and clear-sighted acceptance of the will of God, manifested in the vocation proper to each one.

I wish to address myself in a special way to your young people: in their hands they bear the destiny of the Nation, which they will carry into the new Millennium of the Christian era. Young people of faithful and generous Lithuania! Joyfully and trustingly take up the heritage of your fathers! Accept into your hearts the witness, the sometimes heroic witness, which they have bequeathed to you, of love for Christ and the Church! Make this priceless treasure your own, and be worthy of it! In you, may it become the seed of a great hope.

12. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, men and women Religious, and all of you brothers and sisters of a Church that is far away, yet near to me and especially dear to my heart, sons and daughters of a most noble Nation! I, the Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the universal Church, kneel with you before the relics of Saint Casimir, with you I give thanks to God, the Giver of all good things, for the gift of your "Baptism", and for you I pray that he "may make you worthy of his call, and may fulfil every good resolve and work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him" (2 Thess 1:11-12).

In the name of the whole Church, I entrust to God your Nation's heritage of faith, and I implore him: preserve and bless the work you have accomplished in these six centuries!

Almighty Father, be propitious to these your children, whom you have led from darkness into the splendour of your truth. Pour into their hearts your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Counsellor, so that they make present in their Nation the fruitfulness of your Son's Paschal mystery.

Grant to the Pastors of this people, which is your people, piety and wisdom, that they may lead the flock to the pastures of life. Grant, Almighty God, that they may be able to fulfil with serenity and in full freedom their sacred ministry.

Pour your light and your strength into the hearts of those whom you have called to consecrate themselves to you, that they may be persevering and may give themselves without reserve. Increase the number of those who answer the call to the priesthood and to the religious life, sustain their generous resolve and grant that they may go forward without hindrance on the path of your divine service.

Turn your gaze, O Lord, to the families which live united in your love. Grant that they may welcome with joy and responsibility the gift of life. Enable them, by your grace, to grow in mutual love. May parents give their children the gift of faith, together with the concrete testimony of authentic Christian living.

Turn your eyes with particular Love, O God, to the youth of Lithuania. They bear in their hearts a great hope: make them strong and pure, so that with confidence they may build their future. Grant that in freedom they may be enabled to receive the gift of their ancestors' faith, that they may accept it with gratitude, that with generosity they may make it grow.

You are the Lord of the peoples and the Father of all humanity. I invoke your blessing upon this, your Lithuanian family. In harmony with its conscience, may it be able to follow the voice of your call along the paths made known to it for the first time six centuries ago. Let no one consider that its membership of your kingdom of holiness and life is contrary to the well-being of the earthly homeland. May it be able always and everywhere to give you the praise that is your due, and freely and serenely bear witness to truth, justice and love.

Lord, bless this Nation, may your face shine upon it and grant it your peace!

And now, in a spirit of entrusting, I turn to you, sweet Mother of Christ and our Mother, joining my voice to that of your Lithuanian children who pray to you with confidence in your intercession. Mother of Mercy, this people has recourse to you, placing itself under your protection: do not reject its pleas in its necessities, save it from peril, lead it to your Son.

O Mother, you are the memory of the Church. You ponder in your heart the affairs of individuals and of peoples. To you I entrust the memory of the six hundred years of Christian life of our Lithuanian brothers and sisters, and I ask you to help them to be now and forever faithful to Christ and to the Church.

To you, venerable and dear Brothers, to your faithful people, to all Lithuanians throughout the world, with an outpouring of affection I impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 5 June 1987, in the ninth year of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

(1) *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

(2) Cf. *Atto europeo a Santiago de Compostela*, in «*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*», V, 3 (1982), p. 1260.

(3) *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., 18 August 1986, p. 8.

(4) *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

(5) *Gaudium et Spes*, 52.

(6) Cf. *AAS* 42 (1950), pp. 380-82.

(7) Cf. *AAS* 52 (1960), II, pp. 40-43.

(8) *Ibid.*, p. 43.

(9) *Diary*, 17 August 1911.

(10) *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

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**Apostolic Letter
Dilecti Amici
Of Pope
John Paul II
To The Youth Of The World
On The Occasion Of International Youth Year**

Dear Friends,
Good wishes for International Youth Year

1. "Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you". (1)
This is the exhortation that I address to you young people at the beginning of the present year. 1985 has been proclaimed by the United Nations Organization International Youth Year, and this is of great significance, first of all for yourselves, and also for people of all ages-individuals, communities and the whole of society. It is of particular significance also for the Church, as the custodian of fundamental truths and values and at the same time as the minister of the eternal destinies that man the great human family have in God himself.

Since man is the fundamental and at the same time the daily way of the Church, (2) it is easy to understand why the Church attributes special importance to the period of youth as a key stage in the life of every human being. You young people are the ones who embody this youth: you are the youth of the nations and societies, the youth of every family and of all humanity; you are also the youth of the Church. We are all looking to you, for all of us, thanks to you, in a certain sense continually become young again. So your youth is not just your own property, your personal property or the property of a generation: it belongs to the whole of that space that every man traverses in his life's journey, and at the same time it is a special possession belonging to everyone. It is a possession of humanity itself.

In you there is hope, for you belong to the future, just as the future belongs to you. For hope is always linked to the future; it is the expectation of "future good things". As a Christian virtue, it is linked to the expectation of those eternal good things which God has promised to man in Jesus Christ.(3) And at the same time, this hope, as both a Christian and a human virtue, is the expectation of the good things which man will build, using the talents given him by Providence.

In this sense the future belongs to you young people, just as it once belonged to the generation of those who are now adults, and precisely together with them it has become the present reality. Responsibility for this present reality and for its shape and many different forms lies first of all with adults. To you belongs responsibility for what will one day become reality together with yourselves, but which still lies in the future.

When we say that the future belongs to you, we are thinking in categories of human impermanence, which is always a journey towards the future. When we say that the future depends on you, we are thinking in ethical categories, according to the demands of moral responsibility, which requires us to attribute to man as a person-and to the communities and societies which are made up of persons-the fundamental value of human acts, resolves, undertaking and intentions.

This dimension is also a dimension proper to Christian and human hope. And in this dimension the first and principal wish that the Church expresses for you young people, through my lips, in this Year dedicated to Youth, is this: that you should "always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you".(4)

Christ speaks to young people

2. These words, once written by the Apostle Peter to the first generation of Christians, have a relationship with the whole of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps we shall see this relationship more clearly when we meditate upon Christ's conversation with the young man, recorded by the Evangelists.(5) Among the many texts of the Bible this is the one that especially deserves to be recalled at this point.

To the question: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?", Jesus replies first with the question: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone". Then he goes on: "You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother'".(6) With these words Jesus reminds his questioner of some of the main commandments of the Decalogue.

But the conversation does not end here. For the young man declares: "Teacher, all these things I have observed from my youth". Then, writes the Evangelist, "Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me'".(7)

At this point the atmosphere of the meeting changes. The Evangelist writes that "at that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions."(8)

There are still other Gospel passages in which Jesus of Nazareth meets young people-particularly evocative are the two raisings from the dead: of the daughter of Jairus (9) and of the son of the widow of Nain (10)-but we can say without

hesitation that the conversation mentioned above is the meeting which is the most complete and richest in content. It can also be said that this meeting has a more universal and timeless character, in other words that in a certain sense it holds good constantly and continually, throughout the centuries and generations. Christ speaks in this way to a young person, a boy or a girl; his conversation takes place in different parts of the world, in the midst of the different nations, races and cultures. Each of you in this conversation is potentially the one he will speak to.

At the same time, all the elements of the description and all the words uttered in that conversation by both sides have a significance which is absolutely essential, and have a specific weight. One can say that these words contain a particularly profound truth about man in general, and, above all, the truth about youth. They are really important for young people.

Permit me therefore to link my reflections in the present Letter mainly to this meeting and this Gospel text. Perhaps in this way it will be easier for you to develop your own conversation with Christ—a conversation which is of fundamental and essential importance for a young person.

Youth is a special treasure

3. We shall begin from what we find at the end of the Gospel text. The young man goes away sorrowful, "for he had great possessions".

There is no doubt that this expression refers to the material possessions of which the young man was owner or heir. Perhaps this is the situation of some, but it is not typical. And therefore the Evangelist's words suggest another way of putting the matter: it is a question of the fact that youth is in itself (independently of any material goods) a special treasure of man, of a young man or woman, and most often it is lived by young people as a specific treasure. I say most often, but not always, not invariably, for in the world there is no lack of people who for various reasons do not experience youth as a treasure. We shall have to speak of this separately.

There are however reasons—and they are also objective reasons—for thinking of youth as a special treasure that a person experiences at this particular period of his or her life. It is a period which is certainly distinguished from the period of childhood (it is precisely the time when one leaves the years of childhood), just as it is also distinguished from the period of full maturity. For the period of youth is the time of a particularly intense discovery of the human "I" and of the properties and capacities connected with it. Before the inner gaze of the developing personality of the young man or woman, there is gradually and successively revealed that specific and in a sense unique and unrepeatable potentiality of a concrete humanity, in which there is as it were inscribed the whole plan of future life. Life presents itself as the carrying-out of that plan: as "self-fulfillment".

The question naturally deserves an explanation from many points of view; but to express it in a few words, one can say that the treasure which is youth reveals itself in precisely this shape or form. This is the treasure of discovering and at the same time of organizing, choosing, foreseeing and making the first personal decisions, decisions that will be important for the future in the strictly personal dimension of human existence. At the same time, these decisions are of considerable social importance. The young man in the Gospel was precisely in this existential phase, as we can deduce from the questions he asks in his conversation with Jesus. Therefore also the final words about "great possessions"—meaning wealth—can be understood precisely in this sense: the treasure which is youth itself.

But we must ask the question: does this treasure of youth necessarily alienate man from Christ? The Evangelist certainly does not say this: rather, an examination of the text leads us to a different conclusion. The decision to go away from Christ was definitively influenced only by external riches, what the young man possessed ("possessions"). Not by what he was! What he was, as precisely a young man—the interior treasure hidden in youth—had led him to Jesus. And it had also impelled him to ask those questions which in the clearest way concern the plan for the whole of life. What must I do? "What must I do to inherit eternal life?". What must I do so that my life may have full value and full meaning?

The youth of each one of you, dear friends, is a treasure that is manifested precisely in these questions. Man asks himself these questions throughout his life. But in the time of youth they are particularly urgent, indeed insistent. And it is good that this is so. These questions precisely show the dynamism of the development of the human personality, the dynamism which is proper to your age. You ask yourselves these questions sometimes with impatience, and at the same time you yourselves understand that the reply to them cannot be hurried or superficial: the reply must have a specific and definitive weight. It is a question here of a reply that concerns the whole of life, that embraces the whole of human existence.

These essential questions are asked in a special way by those members of your generation whose lives have been weighed down since childhood by suffering: by some physical lack or defect, some handicap or limitation, or by a difficult family or social situation. If at the same time their minds develop normally, the question about the meaning and value of life becomes for them all the more essential and also particularly tragic, for from the very beginning the question is marked by the pain of existence. And how many such young people there are among the multitudes of young people all over the world! In the different nations and societies; in individual families! How many are forced from childhood to live in an institution or hospital, condemned to a certain passivity which can make them begin to feel that they are of no use to humanity!

So can we say that their youth too is an interior treasure? To whom should we put this question? To whom should they put this essential question? It seems that here Christ alone is the competent one to ask, the one whom no one can fully replace.

God is Love

4. Christ replies to the young man in the Gospel. He says: "No one is good but God alone". We have already heard what the young man had asked: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?". How must I act so that my life will have meaning and value? We could translate his question into the language of our own times. In this context Christ's answer means this: only God is the ultimate basis of all values; only he gives the definitive meaning to our human existence.

Only God is good, which means this: in him and him alone all values have their first source and final completion; he is "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end".(11) Only in him do values and their authenticity and definitive confirmation. Without him-without the reference to God-the whole world of created values remains as it were suspended in an absolute vacuum. It also loses its transparency, its expressiveness. Evil is put forward as a good and good itself is rejected. Are we not shown this by the very experience of our own time, wherever God has been removed beyond the limits of evaluations, estimations and actions?

Why is God alone good? Because he is love. Christ gives this answer in the words of the Gospel, and above all by the witness of his own life and death: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son".(12) God is good precisely because he "is love".(13)

As we have said, the question about the value of life, about the meaning of life, forms part of the singular treasure of youth. It comes from the very heart of the riches and the anxieties linked with that plan for life that must be undertaken and carried out. Still more so, when youth is tested by personal suffering, or is profoundly aware of the suffering of others; when it experiences a powerful shock at the sight of the many kinds of evil that exist in the world; finally, when it comes face to face with the mystery of sin, of human iniquity (*mysterium iniquitatis*).⁽¹⁴⁾ Christ's reply is this: "Only God is good"; only God is love. This reply may seem difficult, but at the same time it is firm and it is true; it bears within itself the definitive solution. How I pray that you, my young friends, will hear Christ's reply in the most personal way possible; that you will and the interior path which enables you to grasp it, accept it and undertake its accomplishment!

Such is Christ in the conversation with the young man. Such is Christ in the conversation with each of you. When you say: "Good Teacher", he asks: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone". And therefore: the fact that I am good bears witness to God. "He who has seen me has seen the Father".⁽¹⁵⁾ Thus speaks Christ, the teacher and friend, Christ crucified and risen: always the same yesterday and today and for ever.⁽¹⁶⁾

This is the kernel, the essential point of the reply to these questions which you young people put to him through the treasure which is within you, which is rooted in your youth. Your youth opens different prospects before you; it offers you as a task the plan for the whole of your lives. Hence the question about values; hence the question about the meaning of life, about truth, about good and evil. When Christ in his reply to you tells you to refer all this to God, at the same time he shows you what the source and foundation of this is in yourselves. For each one of you is the image and likeness of God through the very act of creation.⁽¹⁷⁾ Precisely this image and likeness makes you put the questions that you must ask yourselves. These questions show how man without God cannot understand himself, and cannot even fulfil himself without God. Jesus Christ came into the world first of all in order to make each one of us aware of this. Without him this fundamental dimension of the truth about man would easily sink into obscurity. However, "the light has come into the world", ⁽¹⁸⁾ "and the darkness has not overcome it".⁽¹⁹⁾

The question about eternal life

5. What must I do so that my life may have value, have meaning? This earnest question comes from the lips of the young man in the Gospel in the following form: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?". Is a person who puts the question in this form speaking a language still intelligible to the people of today? Are we not the generation whose horizon of existence is completely filled by the world and temporal progress? We think primarily in earthly categories. If we go beyond the limits of our planet, we do so in order to launch interplanetary flights, transmit signals to the other planets and send cosmic probes in their direction.

All this has become the content of our modern civilization. Science together with technology has discovered in an incomparable way man's possibilities with regard to matter, and they have also succeeded in dominating the interior world of his thoughts, capacities, tendencies and passions.

But at the same time it is clear that, when we place ourselves in the presence of Christ, when he becomes the confidant of the questionings of our youth, we cannot put the question differently from how that young man put it: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?". Any other question about the meaning and value of our life would be, in the presence of Christ, insufficient and unessential.

For Christ is not only the "good teacher" who shows the paths of life on earth. He is the witness to that definitive destiny which the human person has in God himself. He is the witness to man's immortality. The Gospel which he proclaimed with his lips is definitively sealed by the Cross and the Resurrection in the Paschal Mystery. "Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him".(20) In his Resurrection Christ has also become the permanent "sign of contradiction"(21) before all programmes incapable of leading man beyond the frontier of death. Indeed at this frontier they silence all man's questionings about the value and meaning of life. In the face of all these programmes, the various ways of looking at the world and the various ideologies, Christ constantly repeats: "I am the resurrection and the life".(22)

And so, dear brothers and dear sisters, if you wish to talk to Christ and to accept all the truth of his testimony, you must on the one hand "love the world"-for God "so loved the world that he gave his only Son"(23)-and at the same time you must acquire interior detachment with regard to all this rich and fascinating reality that makes up "the world". You must make up your mind to ask the question about eternal life. For, the form of this world is passing away ", (24) and each of us is subject to this passing. Man is born with the prospect of the day of his death in the dimension of the visible world; at the same time, man, whose interior reason for existence is to go beyond himself, also bears within himself everything whereby he goes beyond the world.

Everything whereby man, in himself, goes beyond the world- though he is rooted in it-is explained by the image and likeness of God which is inscribed in humanity from the beginning. And everything whereby man goes beyond the world not only justifies the question about eternal life but in fact makes it indispensable. This is the question that people have long been asking themselves, not only in the sphere of Christianity but also outside it. You too must find the courage to ask it, like the young man in the Gospel. Christianity teaches us to understand temporal existence from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, from the perspective of eternal life. Without eternal life, temporal existence, however rich, however highly developed in all aspects, in the end brings man nothing other than the ineluctable necessity of death.

Now there is an opposition between youth and death. Death seems far distant from youth. And it is. But since youth means the plan for the whole of life-the plan drawn up in accordance with the criterion of meaning and value during youth too it is essential to ask the question about the end. Human experience left to itself says the same as Sacred Scripture: "It is appointed for men to die once".(25) The inspired writer adds: "And after that comes judgment".(26) And Christ says: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die".(27) So ask Christ, like the young man in the Gospel: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

On morality and conscience

6. To this question Jesus replies: "You know the commandments", and he immediately lists these commandments, which form part of the Decalogue. Moses received them one day on Mount Sinai, at the moment of the Covenant of God with Israel. They were written on tablets of stone (28) and for every Israelite were the daily indication of the path to be taken.(29) The young man who speaks to Christ naturally knows by heart the commandments of the Decalogue; indeed, he can declare with joy: "All these things I have observed from my youth".(30)

We have to presuppose that in the dialogue which Christ develops with each one of you young people the same question is repeated: "Do you know the commandments?" It will be infallibly repeated, because the commandments form part of the Covenant between God and humanity. The commandments determine the essential bases of behavior, decide the moral value of human acts, and remain in organic relationship with man's vocation to eternal life, with the establishment of God's Kingdom in people and among people. In the words of divine Revelation is inscribed the clear code of morality, of which the tablets of the Decalogue of Mount Sinai remain the key- point, and the culmination of which is found in the Gospel: in the Sermon on the Mount(31) and in the commandment of love.(32)

At the same time this code of morality is written in yet another form. It is inscribed in the moral conscience of humanity, in such a way that those who do not know the commandments, in other words the law revealed by God, "are a law to themselves".(33) Thus writes Saint Paul in his Letter to the Romans, and he immediately adds: "They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness".(34)

Here we touch upon matters of supreme importance for your youth and for that plan of life that emerges from it.

This plan accepts the prospect of eternal life first of all through the truth of the deeds on which it will be built. This truth of deeds has its foundation in that twofold presentation of the moral law: the one written on the tablets of the Decalogue of Moses and in the Gospel, and the one inscribed in man's moral conscience. And the conscience "presents itself as a witness" to that law, as Saint Paul writes. This conscience-in the words of the Letter to the Romans-is the "conflicting thoughts" which "accuse or perhaps excuse them".(35) Everyone knows how closely these words correspond to our interior reality: each of us from our youth experiences the voice of conscience.

Therefore when Jesus, in his conversation with the young man, lists the commandments: "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother", (36) the upright conscience responds with an interior reaction to man's corresponding deeds: it accuses or excuses. But the conscience

must not be distorted; the fundamental formulation of the principles of morality must not surrender to deformation by any kind of relativism or utilitarianism.

Dear young friends! The response which Jesus gives to his questioner in the Gospel is addressed to each one of you. Christ asks you about the state of your moral awareness, and at the same time he questions you about the state of your conscience. This is a key question for man: it is the fundamental question of your youth, one that concerns the whole plan of life which must be formed precisely in youth. Its value is the one most closely connected with the relationship of each of you with moral good and evil. The value of this plan depends in an essential way on the authenticity and rectitude of your conscience. It also depends on its sensitivity.

So we find ourselves here at a crucial moment, when at every step time and eternity meet at a level which is proper to man. It is the level of the conscience, the level of moral values: the conscience is the most important dimension of time and history. For history is written not only by the events which in a certain sense happen "from outside"; it is written first of all "from within": it is the history of human consciences, of moral victories and defeats. Here too the essential greatness of man finds its foundation: his authentically human dignity. This is that interior treasure whereby man continually goes beyond himself in the direction of eternity. If it is true that "it is established that people would die only once", it is also true that man carries with him the treasure of conscience, the deposit of good and evil, across the frontier of death, in order that, in the sight of him who is holiness itself, he may find the ultimate and definitive truth about his whole life: "after that comes judgment".(37)

This is just what happens in the conscience: in the interior truth of our acts, in a certain sense, there is constantly present the dimension of eternal life. And simultaneously the same conscience, through moral values, imprints the most expressive seal upon the life of the generations, upon the history and culture of human environments, societies, nations and of all humanity.

In this field how much depends on each one of you!

"Jesus, looking upon him, loved him"

7. Continuing our examination of Christ's conversation with the young man, we now enter another phase. It is a new and decisive one. The young man has received the essential and fundamental response to the question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", and this response coincides with the whole journey of his

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life up to this point: "All these I have observed from my youth". How ardently I hope that the journey of the life of each one of you up to this point has similarly coincided with Christ's response! Indeed, it is my hope that your youth will provide you with a sturdy basis of sound principles, that your conscience will attain in these years of your youth that mature clearheadedness that during your whole lives will enable each one of you to remain always a "person of conscience", a "person of principles", a "person who inspires trust", in other words, a person who is credible. The moral personality formed in this way constitutes the most important contribution that you can make to life in the community, to the family, to society, to professional activity and also to cultural and political activity, and finally to the community of the Church-to all those spheres with which you are already or will one day be connected.

It is a question here of a full and profound human authenticity and of an equal authenticity of the development of the human personality, female or male, with all the characteristics which make up the unrepeatable features of this personality, and which at the same time and in different ways have an impact on the life of the community and of the various environments, beginning with the family. Each one of you must in some way contribute to the richness of these communities, first of all by means of what he or she is. Is it not in this direction that the youth which is the "personal" treasure of each of you tends? Man sees himself, his own humanity, both as his own interior world and as the specific area of his being "with others", "for others".

Precisely here the commandments of the Decalogue and of the Gospel take on a decisive meaning, especially the commandment of love which opens the human person to God and neighbor. For charity is the "bond of perfection".(38) Through charity, man and human fraternity come to fuller maturity. For this reason, love is the greatest(39) and the first of all the commandments, as Christ teaches; (40) and in it all the others are included and made one.

My wish for each of you therefore is that the paths of your youth may meet in Christ, that you may be able to confirm before him, by the witness of your consciences, this evangelical moral code, to the values of which so many individuals of noble spirit have in the course of the generations in some way drawn near.

This is not the appropriate place for quoting the confirmations of this fact which run through the whole history of humanity. What is certain is that from the most ancient times the dictate of conscience has guided every human subject towards an objective moral norm which finds concrete expression in respect for the other person and in the principle of not doing to that person what one would not wish done to oneself.(41)

Here we see already clearly emerging that objective morality of which Saint Paul declares that it is "written on their hearts" and that "their conscience also bears witness" to it.(42) The Christian readily perceives in it a ray from the creating Word that enlightens every man;(43) and precisely because he is a follower of that Word made flesh he rises to

the higher law of the Gospel which positively imposes upon him-in the commandment of love-the duty to do to neighbor all the good that he would wish to be done to himself. He thus seals the inner voice of conscience with absolute acceptance of Christ and his word.

It is also my hope that, after you have made the discernment of the essential and important questions for you youth, for the plan of the whole life that lies before you, you will experience what the Gospel means when it says: "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him". May you experience a look like that! May you experience the truth that he, Christ, looks upon you with love!

He looks with love upon every human being. The Gospel confirms this at every step. One can also say that this "loving look" of Christ contains, as it were, a summary and synthesis of the entire Good News. If we would seek the beginning of this look, we must turn back to the Book of Genesis, to that instant when, after the creation of man "male and female", God saw that "it was very good".(44) That very first look of the Creator is reflected in the look of Christ which accompanies his conversation with the young man in the Gospel.

We know that Christ will confirm and seal this look with the redemptive Sacrifice of the Cross, because precisely by means of this Sacrifice that "look" reached a particular depth of love. In it is contained an affirmation of man and of humanity such as only he is capable of-Christ the Redeemer and Bridegroom. Only he "knows what is in every man":(45) he knows man's weakness, but he also and above all knows his dignity.

My wish for each of you is that you may discover this look of Christ, and experience it in all its depth. I do not know at what moment in your life. I think that it will happen when you need it most: perhaps in suffering, perhaps together with the witness of a pure conscience, as in the case of that young man in the Gospel, or perhaps precisely in an opposite situation: together with the sense of guilt, with remorse of conscience. For Christ looked at Peter too in the hour of his fall: when he had three times denied his Master. (46)

Man needs this loving look. He needs to know that he is loved, loved eternally and chosen from eternity. (47)

At the same time, this eternal love of divine election accompanies man during life as Christ's look of love. And perhaps most powerfully at the moment of trial, humiliation, persecution, defeat, when our humanity is as it were blotted out in the eyes of other people, insulted and trampled upon. At that moment the awareness that the Father has always loved us in his Son, that Christ always loves each of us, becomes a solid support for our whole human existence. When everything would make us doubt ourselves and the meaning of our life, then this look of Christ, the awareness of the love that in him has shown itself more powerful than any evil and destruction, this awareness enables us to survive.

My wish for you then is that you may experience what the young man in the Gospel experienced: "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him".

"Follow me"

8. From an examination of the Gospel text we see that this look was, so to speak, Christ's response to the testimony which the young man had given of his life up to that moment, of having acted according to God's commandments: "All these I have observed from my youth".

At the same time, this "look of love" was the introduction to the concluding phase of the conversation. In Matthew's account, it was the young man himself who opened this phase, since not only did he declare the personal fidelity to the commandments of the Decalogue which had marked all his previous conduct, but at the same time he asked a new question. In fact he asked: "What do I still lack? ".(48)

This question is a very important one. It shows that in the moral conscience of a person and more precisely of a young person who is forming the plan for his or her whole life, there is hidden an aspiration to "something more". This aspiration makes itself felt in various ways, and we can also observe it among those who seem to be far from our religion.

Among the followers of non-Christian religions, especially Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, we find that for thousands of years there have been hosts of "spiritual men", individuals who often from early youth leave everything in order to live in poverty and purity in the quest for the Absolute that exists beyond the appearances of material things. They strive to attain a state of perfect liberation, they take refuge in God with love and confidence, and with all their souls try to submit to his hidden decrees. They seem impelled by a mysterious inner voice which makes itself heard in their spirit, as it were echoing Saint Paul's words: "The form of this world is passing away", (49) and which guides them to seek things which are greater and more enduring: "Seek the things that are above".(50) They seek the goal with all their strength, working hard to purify their spirit and sometimes reaching the point of making their lives a gift of love to the godhead. They thus become living examples to the people around them, by their very conduct showing the primacy of eternal values over the elusive and sometimes ambiguous values of the society in which they live.

But it is in the Gospel that the aspiration to perfection, to "something more", finds its explicit point of reference. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ confirms the whole moral law, at the centre of which are the Mosaic tablets of the Ten Commandments. But at the same time he confers upon these commandments a new, evangelical meaning. And, as we have already said, it is all concentrated around love, not only as a commandment but also as a gift: "The love of Christ has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us".(51)

In this new context one also comes to understand the programme of the eight Beatitudes which begins the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel.(52)

In this same context the series of commandments which constitute the fundamental code of Christian morality is completed by the series of evangelical counsels, which in a special way express and make concrete Christ's call to perfection, which is a call to holiness.

When the young man asks about the "more": "What do I still lack?", Jesus looks upon him with love, and this love finds here a new meaning. Man is carried interiorly, by the hand of the Holy Spirit, from a life according to the commandments to a life in the awareness of the gift, and Christ's loving look expresses this interior "transition". And Jesus says: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."(53)

Yes, my dear young friends! The Christian is capable of living in the dimension of gift. Indeed, this dimension is not only "higher" than the dimension of mere moral obligations known from the commandments but it is also "deeper" and more fundamental. It bears witness to a fuller expression of that plan of life which we begin to construct in our youth. The dimension of gift also creates the mature outline of every human and Christian vocation, as will be said later on.

At this moment, however, I wish to speak to you about the particular meaning of the words which Christ said to the young man. And I do this in the conviction that Christ addresses them in the Church to some of his young questioners in every generation. In ours too. His words therefore signify a particular vocation in the community of the People of God. The Church finds Christ's "Follow me"(54) at the beginning of every call to service in the ministerial priesthood, which simultaneously in the Catholic Church of the Latin Rite is linked to the conscious and free choice of celibacy. The Church finds the same "follow me" of Christ at the beginning of the religious vocation, whereby, through the profession of the evangelical counsels (chastity, poverty and obedience), a man or woman recognizes as his or her own the programme of life which Christ himself lived on earth, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.(55) By professing religious vows, such individuals commit themselves to bearing a particular witness to the love of God above all things, and likewise to that call to union with God in eternity which is directed to everyone. But there is a need for some to bear an exceptional witness to this before other people.

I limit myself merely to mentioning this matter in the present Letter, since it has already been more fully presented elsewhere and on a number of occasions.(56) I mention it here because in the context of Christ's conversation with the young man it acquires a particular clarity, especially the question of evangelical poverty. I also mention it because Christ's call "Follow me", precisely in this exceptional and charismatic sense, usually makes itself heard in youth; sometimes it is even heard in childhood.

It is for this reason that I wish to say this to all of you young people, in this important phase of the development of your personality as a man or a woman: if such a call comes into your heart, do not silence it! Let it develop into the maturity of a vocation! Respond to it through prayer and fidelity to the commandments! For "the harvest is plentiful" (57) and there is an enormous need for many to be reached by Christ's call "Follow me". There is an enormous need for priests according to the heart of God-and the Church and the world of today have an enormous need of the witness of a life given without reserve to God: the witness of that nuptial love of Christ himself which in a particular way will make the Kingdom of God present among people and bring it nearer to the world.

Permit me then to complete still further the words of Christ the Lord about the harvest being plentiful. Yes, this harvest of the Gospel is plentiful, this harvest of salvation! "But the labourers are few!". Perhaps this is felt more keenly today than in the past, especially in certain countries, as also in certain Institutes of consecrated life and similar Institutes.

"Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest", (58) continues Christ. And these words, especially in our times, become a programme of prayer and action for more priestly and religious vocations. With this programme the Church addresses herself to you, to youth. And you too: pray! And if the fruit of this prayer of the Church comes to life in the depths of your heart, listen to the Master as he says: "Follow me".

The plan of life and the christian vocation

9. These words in the Gospel certainly concern the priestly or religious vocation; but at the same time they help us to understand more deeply the question of vocation in a still wider and more fundamental sense.

One could speak here of the "life" vocation, which in a way is identical with that plan of life which each of you draws up in the period of your youth. But "vocation" means something more than "plan". In this second case I myself am the subject who draws it up, and this corresponds better to the reality of the person which each of you is. This "plan" is a "vocation" inasmuch as in it there make themselves felt the various factors which call. These factors usually make up a particular order of values (also called a "hierarchy of values"), from which emerges an ideal to be realized, an ideal which is attractive to a young heart. In this process the "vocation" becomes a "plan", and the plan begins to be also a vocation.

But given the fact that we are in the presence of Christ and are basing our reflections about youth on Christ's conversation with the young man, that relationship of the "plan of life" to the "life vocation" needs to be stated even more precisely. A human being is a creature and at the same time an adopted child of God in Christ: he is a child of God. Hence during youth a person puts the question, "What must I do?" not only to himself and to other people from

whom he can expect an answer, especially his parents and teachers, but he puts it also to God, as his Creator and Father. He puts it in the context of this particular interior sphere in which he has learned to be in a close relationship with God, above all in prayer. He therefore asks God: "What must I do?", what is your plan for my life? Your creative, fatherly plan? What is your will? I wish to do it.

In this context the "plan" takes on the meaning of a "life vocation", as something which is entrusted by God to an individual as a task. Young people, entering into themselves and at the same time entering into conversation with Christ in prayer, desire as it were to read the eternal thought which God the Creator and Father has in their regard. They then become convinced that the task assigned to them by God is left completely to their own freedom, and at the same time is determined by various circumstances of an interior and exterior nature. Examining these circumstances, the young person, boy or girl, constructs his or her plan of life and at the same time recognizes this plan as the vocation to which God is calling him or her.

I desire therefore to entrust to all of you, the young people to whom this Letter is addressed, this marvelous task which is linked with the discovery before God of each one's life vocation. This is an exciting task. It is a fascinating interior undertaking. In this undertaking your humanity develops and grows, while your young personality acquires ever greater inner maturity. You become rooted in that which each of you is, in order to become that which you must become: for yourself- for other people-for God.

Parallel with the process of discovering one's own "life vocation" there should also be a progressively clearer realization of how this life vocation is at the same time a "Christian vocation".

Here it should be noted that in the period before the Second Vatican Council the concept of "vocation" was applied first of all to the priesthood and religious life, as if Christ had addressed to the young person his evangelical "Follow me" only for these cases. The Council has broadened this way of looking at things. Priestly and religious vocations have kept their particular character and their sacramental and charismatic importance in the life of the People of God. But at the same time the awareness renewed by the Second Vatican Council of the universal sharing of all the baptized in Christ's three-fold prophetic, priestly and kingly mission, (tria munera), as also the awareness of the universal vocation to holiness, (59) have led to a realization of the fact that every human life vocation, as a Christian vocation, corresponds to the evangelical call. Christ's "Follow me" makes itself heard on the different paths taken by the disciples and confessors of the divine Redeemer. There are different ways of becoming imitators of Christ-not only by bearing witness to the eschatological Kingdom of truth and love, but also by striving to bring about the transformation of the whole of temporal reality according to the spirit of the Gospel.(60) It is at this point that there also begins the apostolate of the laity, which is inseparable from the very essence of the Christian vocation.

These are the extremely important premises for the plan of life which corresponds to the essential dynamism of your youth. You must examine this plan-independently of the concrete content "of life" with which it will be filled-in the light of the words addressed by Christ to the young man in the Gospel.

You must also rethink-and very profoundly-the meaning of Baptism and Confirmation. For in these two sacraments is contained the fundamental deposit of the Christian life and vocation. From these there begins the path towards the Eucharist, which contains the fullness of the sacramental gifts granted to the Christian: all the Church's spiritual wealth is concentrated in this Sacrament of love. It is also necessary-and always in relationship with the Eucharist-to reflect on the Sacrament of Penance, which is of irreplaceable importance for the formation of the Christian personality, especially if it is linked with spiritual direction, which is a systematic school of the interior life.

I speak briefly of all this, even though each of the Church's Sacraments has its own definite and specific reference to youth and to young people. I trust that this theme will receive detailed treatment from others, particularly pastoral ministers specially appointed to work with young people.

The Church herself-as the Second Vatican Council teaches-is "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind".(61) Every vocation in life, insofar as it is a "Christian" vocation, is rooted in the sacramentality of the Church: it is therefore formed through the Sacraments of our faith. The Sacraments enable us from our youth to open our human "I" to the saving action of God, that is, of the Most Blessed Trinity. They enable us to share in God's life, living the authentic human life to the full. In this way our human life acquires a new dimension and at the same time its Christian originality: awareness of the demands placed on man by the Gospel is matched by awareness of the gift which surpasses everything. "If you knew the gift of God", (62) said Christ, speaking to the Samaritan woman.

"Great sacrament of marriage"

10. Against this vast background that your youthful plan of life acquires in relation to the idea of the Christian vocation, I wish to examine, together with you young people to whom I am addressing this Letter, the question that in a certain sense is at the heart of the youth of all of you. This is one of the central questions of human life, and at the same time one of the central themes of reflection, creativity and culture. It is also one of the main biblical themes, and one to which I personally have devoted much reflection and analysis. God created human beings: male and female, thereby introducing into the history of the human race that special "duality" together with complete equality, in the matter of

human dignity; and with marvelous complementarity, in the matter of the division of the attributes, properties and tasks linked with the masculinity and femininity of the human being.

Thus, this is a theme that is necessarily inscribed in the personal "I" of each one of you. Youth is the period when this great theme affects in an experimental and creative way the soul and body of every young woman and young man, and manifests itself in the youthful conscience together with the fundamental discovery of the personal "I" in all its manifold potentiality. Then also on the horizon of a young heart a new experience occurs: the experience of love, which from the beginning has to be included in that plan of life which youth spontaneously creates and forms.

In each separate case all of this has its own unrepeatable subjective expression, its affective richness, indeed its metaphysical beauty. At the same time, in all of this there is contained a powerful exhortation not to distort this expression, not to destroy this treasure and not to disfigure this beauty. Be convinced that this call comes from God himself, who created man "in his own image and likeness" precisely "as man and woman". This call flows from the Gospel and makes itself heard in the voice of young consciences, if they have preserved their simplicity and purity: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God".(63) Yes, through that love which is born in you-and wishes to become a part of your whole plan of life-you must see God who is love.(64)

And so I ask you not to break off your conversation with Christ in this extremely important phase of your youth; I ask you rather to commit yourselves even more. When Christ says "Follow me", his call can mean: "I call you to still another love"; but very often it means: "Follow me", follow me who am the Bridegroom of the Church who is my bride; come, you too become the bridegroom of your bride, you too become the bride of your spouse. Both of you become sharers in that mystery, that Sacrament, which the Letter to the Ephesians says is something great: great "in reference to Christ and the Church".(65)

Much depends on the fact that you, on this path too, should follow Christ; that you should not flee from him, when you are occupied with this matter which you rightly consider the great event of your heart, a matter that exists only in you and between you. I want you to believe and to be convinced that this great matter has its definitive dimension in God, who is love-in God, who in the absolute unity of his divinity is also a communion of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I want you to believe and to be convinced that your human "great mystery" has its beginning in God who is the Creator, is rooted in Christ the Redeemer, who as the spouse "gave himself", and who teaches all husbands and wives how to "give themselves" in the full measure of each one's personal dignity. Christ teaches us married love.

To set out on the path of the married vocation means to learn married love day by day, year by year: love according to soul and body, love that "is patient, is kind, that does not insist on its own way... and does not rejoice at wrong": love that "rejoices in the right", love that "endures all things".(66)

It is precisely this love that you young people need if your married future is to "pass the test" of the whole of life. And precisely this test is part of the very essence of the vocation which, through marriage, you intend to include in the plan of your life.

And so I do not cease to pray to Christ and to the Mother of Fair Love for the love that is born in young hearts. Many times in my life it has been my task to accompany in a sense more closely this love of young people. Thanks to this experience I have come to understand just how essential the matter that we are dealing with here is, how important and how great it is. I think that to a large extent the future of humanity is decided along the paths of this love, initially youthful love, which you and she, you and he discover along the paths of your youth. This can be called a great adventure, but it is also a great task.

Today, the principles of Christian morality concerning marriage are in many circles being presented in a distorted way. Attempts are being made to impose on environments and even entire societies a model that calls itself "progressive" and "modern". It then goes unnoticed that this model transforms a human being and perhaps especially a woman from a subject into an object (an object of specific manipulation), and the whole great content of love is reduced to "pleasure", which, even though it involved both parties, would still be selfish in its essence. Finally the child, who is the fruit and the fresh incarnation of the love between the two, becomes ever more "an annoying addition". The materialistic and consumeristic civilization is penetrating this whole wonderful complex of conjugal and paternal and maternal love, and stripping it of that profoundly human content which from the beginning was also permeated by a divine mark and reflection.

Dear young friends! Do not allow this treasure to be taken away from you! Do not inscribe in the plan of your life a deformed, impoverished and falsified content: love "rejoices in the truth". Seek out this truth where it is really to be found! If necessary, be resolved to go against the current of popular opinion and propaganda slogans! Do not be afraid of the love that places clear demands on people. These demands-as you find them in the constant teaching of the Church-are precisely capable of making your love a true love.

If anywhere, it is especially here that I wish to repeat the hope which I expressed at the beginning, namely, that you will be "always prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you!". The Church and humanity entrust to you the great reality of that love which is the basis of marriage, the family and the future. The Church and humanity firmly believe that you will bring about its rebirth; they firmly believe that you will make it beautiful: beautiful in a human and Christian way. In a human and Christian way great, mature and responsible.

Inheritance

11. In the vast sphere in which the plan of life, drawn up in youth, comes into contact with "other people", we have touched upon the most sensitive point. Let us go on to consider that this central point, at which our personal "I" opens up to life "with others" and "for others" in the marriage covenant, finds in Sacred Scripture a very important passage: "Man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife".(67)

This word "leaves" deserves special attention. From its very beginning the history of humanity passes-and will do so until the end- through the family. A man enters the family through the birth which he owes to his parents, his father and mother, and at the right moment he leaves this first environment of life and love in order to pass to a new one. By "leaving father and mother", each one of you at the same time, in a certain sense, bears them within you; you assume the manifold inheritance that has its direct beginning and source in them and in their family. In this way too, when you leave, each one of you remains: the inheritance that you receive links you permanently with those who passed it on to you and to whom you owe so much. And the individual-he and she-will continue to pass on the same inheritance. Thus also the fourth commandment of the Decalogue is of such great importance: "Honour your father and your mother".(68) It is a question here first of all of the heritage of being a human person, and then of being one in a more precisely defined personal and social situation. Here even the physical similarity to one's parents plays its part. Still more important is the whole heritage of culture, at the almost daily centre of which is language. Your parents have taught each one of you to speak the language which constitutes the essential expression of the social bond with other people. This bond is established by limits which are wider than the family itself or a given environment. These are the limits of at least a tribe and most often those of a people or a nation into which you were born.

In this way the family inheritance grows wider. Through your upbringing in your family you share in a specific culture; you also share in the history of your people or nation. The family bond means at the same time membership of a community wider than the family and a still further basis of personal identity. If the family is the first teacher of each one of you, at the same time-through the family-you are also taught by the tribe, people or nation with which you are linked through the unity of culture, language and history.

This inheritance likewise constitutes a call in the ethical sense. By receiving and inheriting faith and the values and elements that make up the culture of your society and the history of your nation, each one of you is spiritually endowed in your individual humanity. Here we come back to the parable of the talents, the talents which we receive from the Creator through our parents and families, and also through the national community to which we belong. In regard to this inheritance we cannot maintain a passive attitude, still less a defeatist one, as did the last of the servants described in the parable of the talents.(69) We must do everything we can to accept this spiritual inheritance, to confirm it, maintain it and increase it. This is an important task for all societies, especially perhaps for those that find themselves at the beginning of their independent existence, or for those that must defend from the danger of destruction from outside or of decay from within the very existence and essential identity of the particular nation.

Writing to you young people, I try to have before my mind's eye the complex and separate situations of the tribes, peoples and nations of our world. Your youth, and the plan of life which during your young years each one of you works out, are from the very beginning part of the history of these different societies, and this happens not "from without" but pre-eminently "from within". It becomes for you a question of family awareness and consequently of national awareness: a question of the heart, a question of conscience. The concept of "homeland" develops immediately after the concept of "family", and in a certain sense one within the other. And as you gradually experience this social bond which is wider than that of the family, you also begin to share in responsibility for the common good of that larger family which is the earthly "homeland" of each one of you. The prominent figures of a nation's history, ancient or modern, also guide your youth and foster the development of that social love which is more often called "love of country".

Talents and tasks

12. This context of family and society which is your homeland gradually comes to include a theme closely connected with the parable of the talents. For little by little you recognize the "talent" or "talents" which each of you has, and you begin to use them in a creative way, you begin to increase them. And this happens through work.

What an enormous range of possible directions, capacities and interests exists in this field! I shall not attempt to list them here even by way of example, since there is a danger of leaving out more than I could take into consideration. I shall therefore pre-suppose all that variety and multiplicity of directions. It also shows the manifold wealth of discoveries which youth brings with it. Referring to the Gospel, we can say that youth is the time for discerning talents. It is also the time when one starts out on the many paths along which all human activity, work and creativity have developed and continue to do so.

I hope that all of you will discover yourselves along these paths. I hope that you will set out upon them with interest, diligence and enthusiasm. Work-all work-is linked to effort: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread", (70) and this experience of hard work is shared by each one of you from your earliest years. At the same time, however, work in a specific way forms man, and in a certain sense creates him. So it is always a question of effort which is creative.

This refers not only to study or mental and intellectual work in general but also to the ordinary kinds of physical work that seemingly have nothing "creative" about them.

The work which characterizes the period of youth is, above all, a preparation for the work of adulthood, and so is linked to the school. As I write these words to you young people, I am therefore thinking of all the schools all over the world to which your young lives are linked for a number of years, at higher and higher levels, according to your degree of intellectual development and your inclinations: from elementary schools to universities. I am also thinking of all the adults, my brothers and sisters, who are your teachers and instructors, the guides of your young minds and characters. How great is their task! What a special responsibility is theirs! But how great too is their merit!

Finally, I am thinking of those groups of young people, your peers, who-especially in certain societies and environments-are deprived of the opportunity of education, often even at the elementary level. This fact is a permanent challenge to all those responsible for education on a national and international scale, that this state of affairs be appropriately improved. For education is one of the fundamental benefits of human civilization. It is especially important for the young. Upon it also depends to a great extent the future of the whole of society.

However, when we discuss the question of education, study, learning and school, there emerges a question of fundamental importance for the human person, and in a special way for a young person. This is the question of truth. Truth is the light of the human intellect. If the intellect seeks, from youth onwards, to know reality in its different dimensions, it does so in order to possess the truth: in order to live the truth. Such is the structure of the human spirit. Hunger for truth is its fundamental aspiration and expression.

Now Christ says: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free".(71) Of the words contained in the Gospel these are certainly among the most important. For they refer to man in his totality. They explain what the dignity and greatness proper to man are built upon from within, in the dimensions of the human spirit. The knowledge which frees man does not depend on education alone, even of university standard-an illiterate person can have it too; though education, the systematic knowledge of reality, should serve the dignity of the human person. It should therefore serve the truth.

The service of truth is also carried out in the work that you will be called upon to perform when you have completed the programme of your education. At school you have to acquire the programme of your education. At school you have to acquire the intellectual, technical and practical skills that will enable you to take your place usefully in the great world of human work. But while it is true that the school has to prepare you for work, including manual work, it is equally true that work itself is a school in which great and important values are learned: it has an eloquence of its own which makes a valid contribution to human culture.

However, in the relationship between education and work, a relationship characteristic of society today, there emerge very serious problems of a practical nature. I am referring in particular to the problem of unemployment, and more generally of the lack of jobs that in various ways is causing difficulties to young people all over the world. As you are well aware, this problem involves still other questions which from your school-days cast a shadow of uncertainty over your future. You ask yourselves: Does society need me? Will I too be able to find a type of work that will enable me to become independent? To bring up a family of my own in dignified living conditions, and, most important of all, in a home of my own? In short, is it really true that society is expecting my contribution?

The seriousness of these questions impels me once more to remind governments and all those responsible for the economy and development of nations that work is a human right; and it is therefore to be guaranteed by ensuring that it receives the most assiduous care and by centering economic policy on making sure that sufficient jobs are created for everyone, and especially for the young, who so often are the victims of unemployment today. We are all convinced that "work is a good thing for man-a good thing for his humanity- because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense becomes 'more a human being". (72)

Self-education and related threats

13. What concerns the school as an institution and environment above all includes youth. But, I would say that the eloquence of Christ's words about truth quoted above still more concern young people themselves. For while there is no doubt that the family educates and that the school teaches and educates, at the same time both the action of the family and that of the school will remain incomplete (and could even be made useless) unless each one of you young people undertakes the work of your own education. Education in the family and at school can only provide you with a certain number of elements for the work of self-education.

And in this sphere Christ's words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free", become an essential programme. Young people, one might say, have an inborn "sense of truth". And truth must be used for freedom: young people also have a spontaneous "desire for freedom". And what does it mean to be free? It means to know how to use one's freedom in truth-to be "truly" free. To be truly free does not at all mean doing everything that pleases me, or doing what I want to do. Freedom contains in itself the criterion of truth, the discipline of truth. To be truly free means to use one's own freedom for what is a true good. Continuing therefore: to be truly free means to be a person of upright conscience, to be responsible, to be a person "for others".

All this constitutes the very kernel of what we call education, and especially what we call self-education. Yes: self-education! For an interior structure of this kind, where "the truth makes us free", -cannot be built only "from outside". Each individual must build this structure "from within"-build it with effort, perseverance and patience (which is not always so easy for young people). And it is precisely this structure which is called self-education. The Lord Jesus also speaks of this when he emphasizes that only "with perseverance" can we "save our souls". (73) "To save our souls": this is the fruit of self- education.

Contained in all this is a new way of looking at youth. Here we are no longer speaking of a simple plan of life that has to be accomplished in the future. It must be accomplished already in the period of youth, if through work, education, and especially through self-education, we create life itself, building the foundation of the successive development of our personality. In this sense, we can say that youth is "the sculptress that shapes the whole of life", and the form that youth gives to the concrete humanity of each of you is consolidated in the whole of life.

If this has an important positive significance, unfortunately it can also have an important negative one. You cannot close your eyes to the threats that lie in wait for you during the period of youth. These too can leave their mark on your whole life.

I am alluding for example to their temptation to bitter criticism, which would like to challenge and review everything; or the temptation to skepticism regarding traditional values, which can easily degenerate into a sort of extreme cynicism when it is a matter of dealing with problems connected with one's work, career or even marriage. Again, how can one pass over in silence the temptations caused by the growth, especially in the more prosperous countries, of a type of entertainment business that distracts people from a serious commitment in life and encourages passivity, selfishness and self-isolation? Dear young people, you are under threat from the bad use of advertising techniques, which plays upon the natural tendency to avoid effort and promises the immediate satisfaction of every desire, while the consumerism that goes with it suggests that man should seek self-fulfillment especially in the enjoyment of material goods. How many young people, succumbing to the fascination of deceptive mirages, give themselves up to the uncontrolled power of the instincts, or venture on to paths which seem full of promise but which in reality are lacking in genuinely human prospects! I feel the need to repeat what I wrote in the Message which I dedicated precisely to you for the World Day of Peace: "Some of you may be tempted to take flight from responsibility: in the fantasy worlds of alcohol and drugs, in shortlived sexual relationships without commitment to marriage and family, in indifference, in cynicism and even in violence. Put yourselves on guard against the fraud of a world that wants to exploit or misdirect your energetic and powerful search for happiness and meaning".(74)

I write all this to you in order to express my great concern for you. For if you must "always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you", then everything that works against this hope must cause concern. And as for all those who try to destroy your youth by holding out various temptations and illusions, I must remind them of the words of Christ with which he speaks about scandal and those who cause it: "Woe to him by whom temptations to sin come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin".(75)

Grave words! Especially grave in the mouth of him who came to reveal love. But whoever carefully reads these words of the Gospel must feel how deep is the antithesis between good and evil, between virtue and sin. He must even more clearly perceive what importance the youth of each one of you has in the eyes of Christ. It was precisely his love for young people that caused him to utter these grave and severe words.

They contain as it were a distant echo of Christ's conversation with the young man in the Gospel, which this Letter constantly refers to.

Youth as "growth"

14. Allow me to conclude this part of my reflections by recalling the words with which the Gospel speaks about the youthful years of Jesus of Nazareth. These words are brief, even though they cover the period of thirty years which he spent in the family home, with Mary and with Joseph the carpenter. The Evangelist Luke writes: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man".(76)

Youth, then, is "growth". In the light of all that has been said so far on this theme, this Gospel passage strikes one as particularly synthetical and evocative. Growth "in stature" refers to an individual's natural relationship with time: this growth is as it were an "upward" stage in the course of a person's life. It is the time of psychophysical development: the growth of all the energies through which normal human individuality is built up. But this process has to be accompanied by "growth" in wisdom and grace.

For all of you, dear young friends, I wish just such "growth". One can say that youth is youth precisely through that growth. In this way youth acquires its own unrepeatable character. In this way it is given to each one of you in your personal and at the same time community experience as a special value. In a similar way, it also becomes consolidated in the experience of adults whose youth is already behind them and who are moving from the "upward" stage towards the "downward" stage, making up the overall pattern of life.

Youth should be a process of "growth" bringing with it the gradual accumulation of all that is true, good and beautiful, even when this growth is linked "from outside" to suffering, the loss of loved ones, and the whole experience of evil that constantly makes itself felt in the world in which we live.

Youth should be "growth". For this purpose, contact with the visible world, with nature, is of immense importance. In one's youth this relationship to the visible world is enriching in a way that differs from knowledge of the world "obtained from books". It enriches us in a direct way. One could say that by being in contact with nature we absorb into our own human existence the very mystery of creation which reveals itself to us through the untold wealth and variety of visible beings, and which at the same time is always beckoning us towards what is hidden and invisible. Wisdom-both from the inspired books (77) as also from the testimony of many brilliant minds-seems in different ways to reveal "the transparency of the world". It is good for people to read this wonderful book-the "book of nature", which lies open for each one of us. What the youthful mind and heart read in this book seems to be in perfect harmony with the exhortation to wisdom: "Acquire wisdom, acquire insight... Do not forsake her and she will keep you; love her and she will guard you".(78)

Man today, especially in the context of highly developed technical and industrial civilization, has become the explorer of nature on a grand scale, often treating it in a utilitarian way, thus destroying many of its treasures and attractions and polluting the natural environment of earthly existence. But nature is also given to us to be admired and contemplated, like a great mirror of the world. It reflects the Creator's covenant with his creature, the centre of which has been, from the beginning, in man, directly created "in the image" of the Creator.

And so my hope for you young people is that your "growth in stature and in wisdom" will come about through contact with nature. Make time for this! Do not miss it! Accept too the fatigue and effort that this contact sometimes involves, especially when we wish to attain particularly challenging goals. Such fatigue is creative, and also constitutes the element of healthy relaxation which is as necessary as study and work.

This fatigue and effort have their own place in the Bible, especially in Saint Paul, who compares the whole Christian life to a race in the sports stadium.(79)

Each one of you needs this fatigue and effort, which not only tempers the body but also enables the whole person to experience the joy of selfmastery and victory over obstacles and barriers. This is certainly one of the elements of "growth" that characterize youth.

I likewise hope that this "growth" will come about through contact with the achievements of humanity, and still more through contact with living people. How great is their richness and variety! Youth seems particularly sensitive to the truth, goodness and beauty contained in the works of humanity. Through contact with people on the level of so many different cultures, of so many arts and sciences, we learn the truth about man (so evocatively expressed also in Psalm 8), the truth which can build up and enrich the humanity of each one of us.

In a special way, however, we study the human person through contact with others. Being young should enable you to "increase in wisdom" through this contact. For youth is the time for new contacts, new companionships and friendships, in a circle wider than the family alone. There unfolds before us the vast field of experience, which is important not only in regard to knowledge but also in relation to education and ethics. This whole youthful experience will be useful to the extent that it gives you the ability to make critical judgments and above all the capacity of discernment in all things human. Your youthful experience will be blessed, you will gradually learn from it that essential truth concerning man-concerning every human being and concerning oneself-the truth that is summed up thus in the famous passage of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself".(80)

In this way therefore we learn to know other human beings, in order to become more fully human through our capacity for "self- giving": for becoming men and women "for others". This truth about man-this anthropology-has its incomparable culmination in Jesus of Nazareth. Hence the great importance of his young years, when she increased in wisdom... and in favour before God and man".

My wish for you too is a similar "growth" through contact with God. For this purpose, contact with nature and with other people can help indirectly, but the special and direct means is prayer. Pray and learn to pray! Open your hearts and your consciences to the one who knows you better than you know yourselves. Talk to him! Deepen your knowledge of the word of the Living God by reading and meditating on the Scriptures.

These are the methods and means for coming close to God and making contact with him. Remember that it is a question of a two- way relationship. God responds also with the most "free gift of self", a gift which in biblical language is called "grace". Strive to live in the grace of God!

So much for the theme of "growth", which I write about in order to indicate only its main aspects, each of which could be discussed at much greater length. I hope that this is happening in youth circles and groups, in movements and organizations, which are becoming so numerous in the various countries and continents, each one being guided by its own method of spiritual work and apostolate. The intention of these bodies, with the assistance of the Pastors of the Church, is to show young people the path of that "growth" which in a certain sense constitutes the evangelical definition of youth.

The great challenge of the future

15. The Church looks to the young; or rather, the Church in a special way sees herself in the young -in you as a group and in each of you as individuals. This is how it has been since the beginning, since apostolic times. The words of Saint John in his First Letter offer a particular testimony of this: "I am writing to you, young people, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father... I write to you, young people, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you".(81)

The words of the Apostle can be linked with Christ's conversation with the young man in the Gospel, and they re-echo loud and clear from generation to generation.

In our own generation, at the close of the second millennium after Christ, the Church continues to see herself in the young. And how does the Church see herself? Let the teaching of the Second Vatican Council be a particular testimony of this. The Church sees herself as a sacrament, or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind".(82) And so she sees herself in relationship to the whole great human family which is in constant growth. She sees herself in worldwide dimensions. She sees herself on the paths of ecumenism, on the paths towards the unity of all Christians, for which Christ himself prayed and which is of unquestionable urgency in our time. She also sees herself in dialogue with the followers of the non-Christian religions, and with all people of good will. This dialogue is a dialogue of salvation, which should also serve the cause of peace in the world and justice among people.

You young people are the hope of the Church that sees herself and her mission in the world precisely in this way. She speaks to you about this mission. An expression of this was the Message of 1 January 1985, for the celebration of the World Day of Peace. That Message was addressed to you, on the basis of the belief that "the path of peace is at the same time the path of the young" (Peace and youth go forward together). This belief is an appeal and at the same time a commitment: once again it is a question of being always "prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" the hope that is linked with you. As you can see, this hope concerns fundamental and at the same time universal matters.

All of you live every day among those dear to you. But this circle gradually expands. An ever increasing number of people come to share in your life, and you yourselves discern the outlines of a communion that unites you with them. This is almost always a community that in some way is made up of different elements. It is differentiated in the way that the Second Vatican Council perceived and declared in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. In some cases your young years are being lived in environments that are uniform from the point of view of religious confession, in others where there are differences of religion, or even on the border-line between faith and unbelief, the latter being in the form either of agnosticism or of atheism in its various expressions.

It seems nevertheless that when faced by certain questions these many different communities of young people feel, think and react in a very similar way. For example, it seems that they are all united by a common attitude towards the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are living in extreme poverty and are even dying of hunger, while at the same time vast sums are being spent on the production of nuclear weapons, the stocks of which at this very moment are capable of bringing about humanity's self-destruction. There are other similar tensions and threats, on a scale never before known in the history of humanity. This is dealt with in the already mentioned Message for the New Year, so I will not go into the problems again here. We are all aware that the horizon of the lives of the billions of people who make up the human family at the close of the second millennium after Christ seems to portend the possibility of calamities and catastrophes on a truly apocalyptic scale.

In this situation you young people can rightly ask the preceding generations: How have we come to this point? Why have we reached such a degree of peril for humanity all over the world? What are the causes of the injustice that affronts our eyes? Why are so many dying of hunger? Why so many millions of refugees at the different borders? Why so many cases in which fundamental human rights are trampled on? So many prisons and concentration camps, so much systematic violence and the murder of innocent people, so much abuse of men and women, so much torture and torment inflicted on human bodies and human consciences? And in the midst of all this there is also the fact of young men who have on their consciences so many innocent victims, because it has been instilled into them that only in this way-through organized terrorism-can the world be made a better place. So again you ask: Why?

You young people can ask all these questions, indeed you must! For this is the world you are living in today, and in which you will have to live tomorrow, when the older generation has passed on. So you rightly ask: Why does humanity's great progress in science and technology-which cannot be compared with any preceding period of history-why does man's progress in mastering the material world turn against humanity itself in so many ways? So you rightly ask, though also with a sense of inner foreboding: Is this state of affairs irreversible? Can it be changed? Shall we succeed in changing it?

You rightly ask this. Yes, this is the fundamental question facing your generation.

This is how your conversation with Christ goes on, the conversation begun one day in the Gospel. That young man asked: "What must I do to have eternal life?". And you put the same question in the style of the times in which it is your turn to be young: "What must we do to ensure that life-the flourishing life of the human family-will not be turned into the graveyard of nuclear death? What must we do to avoid being dominated by the sin of universal injustice? The

sin of holding people in contempt and scorning their dignity, notwithstanding so many declarations confirming all human rights? What must we do? And also: Will we be able to do it.?

Christ answers as he answered the young people of the first generation of the Church through the words of the Apostle: "I am writing to you, young people, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father... I write to you, young people, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you".(83) The words of the Apostle, going back almost two thousand years, are also an answer for today. They use the simple and strong language of faith that bears within itself victory over the evil in the world: "And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith".(84) These words have the strength of the experience of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, the experience of the Apostles and of the generations of Christians that followed them. In this experience the whole of the Gospel is confirmed. These words also confirm the truth contained in Christ's conversation with the young man.

As we approach the end of this Letter, let us therefore pause for a moment to consider these words of the Apostle, which are both a confirmation and a challenge for you. They are also an answer.

In you, in your young hearts, there is a strong desire for genuine brotherhood between all people, without divisions, conflicts or discrimination. Yes! You young people are bearers of the yearning for brotherhood and widespread solidarity-and certainly you do not want conflict between human beings, one against the other, in any form. Does not this yearning for brotherhood (each one is neighbor to the other! all are brothers and sisters of one another!) witness to the fact that, as the Apostle writes, "you have known the Father"? Because there can only be brothers and sisters where there is a father. And only where the Father is are people brothers and sisters.

So if you cherish a desire for brotherhood, this means that "the word of God abides in you". There abides in you that teaching which Christ brought, and which is rightly called the "Good News". And on your lips, or at least in the depths of your hearts, there abides the prayer of the Lord which begins with the words "Our Father". The prayer which reveals the Father and at the same time confirms that people are brothers and sisters of one another -and whose whole essence is contrary to all programmes based on the principle of conflict between human beings in any form. The "Our Father" leads human hearts away from enmity, hatred, violence, terrorism, discrimination-from the situations in which human dignity and human rights are trampled upon.

The Apostle writes that you young people are strong in the strength of divine doctrine: the doctrine contained in Christ's Gospel and summed up in the "Our Father". Yes! You are strong in this divine teaching, you are strong in this prayer. You are strong because it instills into you love, good will, respect for people, for their life, their dignity, their conscience, their beliefs and their rights. If "you know the Father", you are strong with the power of human brotherhood.

You are also strong for the struggle: not for the struggle of one against another in the name of some ideology or practice separated from the very roots of the Gospel, but strong for the struggle against evil, against the real evil: against everything that offends God, against every injustice and exploitation, against every falsehood and deceit, against everything that insults and humiliates, against everything that profanes human society and human relationships, against every crime against life: against every sin.

The Apostle writes: "You have overcome the evil one"! And so it is. It is necessary to keep going back to the origin of evil and of sin in the history of mankind and the universe, just as Christ went back to these same roots in the Paschal Mystery of his Cross and Resurrection. There is no need to be afraid to call the first agent of evil by his name: the Evil One. The strategy which he used and continues to use is that of not revealing himself, so that the evil implanted by him from the beginning may receive its development from man himself, from systems and from relationships between individuals, from classes and nations-so as also to become ever more a "structural" sin, ever less identifiable as "personal" sin. In other words, so that man may feel in a certain sense "freed" from sin but at the same time be ever more deeply immersed in it.

The Apostle says: "Young people, you are strong": all that is needed is that "the word of God abide in you". Then you are strong: thus you will succeed in getting at the hidden workings of evil, its sources, and thus you will gradually succeed in changing the world, transforming it, making it more human, more fraternal-and at the same time more of God. For it is impossible to detach the world from God or set it up in opposition to God in the human heart. Nor is it possible to detach man from God and set him up in opposition to God. For this would be against the nature of man - against the intrinsic truth that constitutes the whole of reality! Truly the human heart is restless until it rests in God.(85) These words of the great Augustine never lose their validity.

Final message

16. So, my young friends, I hand you this Letter which continues the Gospel conversation of Christ with the young man-and flows from the testimony of the Apostles and of the first generations of Christians. I give you this Letter in International Youth Year, as we approach the end of the second Christian millennium. I entrust it to you in the twentieth year since the close of the Second Vatican Council, which called young people "the hope of the Church", (86) and which addressed to the young people of that time-as also to those of today and of all time-a "closing Message" in which the Church is described as the real youth of the world, as the one who "possesses what constitutes strength and

the charm of youth, that is to say, the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly, to renew oneself and to set out again for new conquests".(87) This I do on Palm Sunday, the day on which I am meeting many of you, pilgrims in Saint Peter's Square, here in Rome. Precisely on this day the Bishop of Rome prays together with you for all the young people of the world, for each and every one. We are praying in the community of the Church, so that-against the background of the difficult times in which we live-you "may always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you". Yes, precisely you, because on you depends the future, on you depends also the end of this millennium and the beginning of the next. So do not be passive; take up your responsibilities-in all the fields open to you in our world! For this same intention the Bishops and priests in the different places will pray together with you.

And as we thus pray, in the great community of the young people of the universal Church and of all the Churches, we have before our eyes the image of Mary, who accompanies Christ at the beginning of his mission among men. This is the Mary of Cana of Galilee, who intercedes for the young people, for the newly-married couple when at the marriage feast the wine for the guests runs out. Then Christ's Mother says these words to those serving at the feast: "Do whatever he tells you".(88) He, the Christ.

I repeat these words of the Mother of God and I address them to you, to each one of you young people: "Do whatever Christ tells you". And I bless you in the name of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 31 March, Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Lord's Passion, in the year 1985, the seventh of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

1. 1 Pet 3:15.
2. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Redemptor Hominis, 14: AAS 71 (1979), 284 f.
3. Cf. Rom 8:19, 21; Eph 4:4; Phil 3:10f.; Tit 3:7; Heb 7:19; 1 Pet 1:13.
4. 1 Pet 3:15.
5. Cf. Mk 10:17-22; Mt 19:16-22; Lk 18:18-23.
6. Mk 10: 17-19.
7. Mk 10:20-21.
8. Mk 10:22.
9. Cf. Lk 8:49-56.
10. Cf. Lk 7:11-17.
11. Rev 21:6.
12. Jn 3:16.
13. 1 Jn 4:8, 16.
14. Cf. 2 Thess 2:7.
15. Jn 14:9.
16. Cf. Heb 13:8.
17. Cf. Gen 1:26.
18. Jn 3:19; cf. 1:9.
19. Jn 1:5.
20. Rom 6:9.
21. Lk 2:34.
22. Jn 11:25.
23. Jn 3:16.
24. 1 Cor 7:31.
25. Heb 9:27.
26. Ibidem.
27. Jn 11:25-26.
28. Cf. Ex 34:1; Dt 9:10; 2 Cor 3:3.
29. Cf. Dt 4:5-9.
30. Mk 10:20.
31. Cf. Mt 5-7.
32. Cf. Mt 22:37-40; Mk 12:29-31; Lk 10:27.
33. Rom 2:14.
34. Rom 2:15.
35. Ibidem.
36. Mk 10:19.

37. Heb 9:27.
38. Col 3:14.
39. Cf. 1 Cor 13:13.
40. Cf. Mt 22:38.
41. "The moral law", Confucius says, "is not distant from us... The wise man does not make many mistakes regarding the moral law. He has as his principle: do not do to others what you would not wish done to you" (Chung Yung: Equilibrium and Norm, 13). A Japanese master of ancient times (Dengyo Daishi, also called Saicho, who lived 767-822 A.D.) urges people to be "forgetful of self, doers of good to others: this represents the summit of friendship and compassion" (cf. W.T. De Bary, Sources of Japanese Tradition, New York 1958, Vol I, p. 127). Nor can one fail to mention Mahatma Gandhi, who taught the "power of truth" (satyagraha), which conquers without violence by the dynamism intrinsic to just action.
42. Cf. Rom 2:15.
43. Cf. Jn 1:9; Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 2.
44. Gen 1:31.
45. Cf. Jn 2:25.
46. Cf. Lk 22:61.
47. Cf. Eph 1:4.
48. Mt. 19:20.
49. 1 Cor 7:31.
50. Col 3:1.
51. Rom 5:5.
52. Cf. Mt 5:3-12.
53. Mt 19:21.
54. Cf. Mk 10:21; Jn 1:43; 21:29.
55. Cf. Mt 19:12.
56. Cf. e.g. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum*: AAS 76 (1984), 513-546.
57. Mt. 9:3, 7.
58. Mt. 9:37f.
59. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 39-42.
60. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 43-44.
61. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
62. Jn 4:10.
63. Mt 5:8.
64. Cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16.
65. Cf. Eph 5:32.
66. Cf. 1 Cor 13:4, 5, 6, 7.
67. Gen 2:24; cf. Mt. 19:5.
68. Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16; Mt 15:4.
69. Cf. Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:12-26.
70. Gen 3:19.
71. Jn 8:32.
72. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 9: AAS 73 (1981), 599f.
73. Cf. Lk 21:19.
74. Message for the World Day of Peace 1985, No. 3: AAS 77 (1985), 163.
75. Lk 17:1-2.
76. Lk 2:52.
77. Cf. e.g. Ps 104[103]; Ps 19[18]; Ws 13:1-9; 7:15-20.
78. Pr 4:5-7.
79. Cf. 1 Cor 9:24-27.
80. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
81. 1 Jn 2:13-14.
82. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
83. 1 Jn 2:13-14.
84. 1 Jn 5:4.
85. Cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions* I, 1: CSEL 33, p. 1.
86. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 2.
87. Cf. AAS 58 (1966), 18.
88. Jn 2:5.

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**Post-Synodal
 Apostolic Exhortation
 Reconciliation And Penance
 Of John Paul II
 To The Bishops
 Clergy And Faithful
 On Reconciliation And Penance
 In The Mission Of The Church Today**

INTRODUCTION

ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE DOCUMENT

1. To speak of reconciliation and penance is for the men and women of our time an invitation to rediscover, translated into their own way of speaking, the very words with which our savior and teacher Jesus Christ began his preaching: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel," (1) that is to say, accept the good news of love, of adoption as children of God and hence of brotherhood.

Why does the church put forward once more this subject and this invitation?

The concern to know better and to understand modern man and the contemporary world, to solve their puzzle and reveal their mystery, to discern the ferments of good and evil within them, has long caused many people to direct at man and the world a questioning gaze. It is the gaze of the historian and sociologist, philosopher and theologian, psychologist and humanist, poet and mystic: Above all, it is the gaze, anxious yet full of hope, of the pastor.

In an exemplary fashion this is shown on every page of the important pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* on the church in the modern world, particularly in its wide-ranging and penetrating introduction. It is likewise shown in certain documents issued through the wisdom and charity of my esteemed predecessors, whose admirable pontificates were marked by the historic and prophetic event of that ecumenical council. In common with others, the pastor too can discern among the various unfortunate characteristics of the world and of humanity in our time the existence of many deep and painful divisions.

A Shattered World

2. These divisions are seen in the relationships between individuals and groups, and also at the level of larger groups: nations against nations and blocs of opposing countries in a headlong quest for domination. At the root of this alienation it is not hard to discern conflicts which, instead of being resolved through dialogue, grow more acute in confrontation and opposition.

Careful observers, studying the elements that cause division, discover reasons of the most widely differing kinds: from the growing disproportion between groups, social classes and countries, to ideological rivalries that are far from dead; from the opposition between economic interests to political polarization; from tribal differences to discrimination for social and religious reasons. Moreover, certain facts that are obvious to all constitute as it were the pitiful face of the division of which they are the fruit and demonstrate its seriousness in an inescapably concrete way. Among the many other painful social phenomena of our times one can noted.

The trampling upon the basic rights of the human person, the first of these being the right to life and to a worthy quality of life, which is all the more scandalous in that it coexists with a rhetoric never before known on these same rights.

Hidden attacks and pressures against the freedom of individuals and groups, not excluding the freedom which is most offended against and threatened: the freedom to have, profess and practice one's own faith.

The various forms of discrimination: racial, cultural, religious, etc.

Violence and terrorism.

The use of torture and unjust and unlawful methods of repression.

The stockpiling of conventional or atomic weapons, the arms race with the spending on military purposes of sums which could be used to alleviate the undeserved misery of peoples that are socially and economically depressed.

An unfair distribution of the world's resources and of the assets of civilization, which reaches its highest point in a type of social organization whereby the distance between the human conditions of the rich and the poor becomes ever greater.(2) The overwhelming power of this division makes the world in which we live a world shattered(3) to its very foundations.

Moreover, the church-without identifying herself with the world or being of the world-is in the world and is engaged in dialogue with the world.(4) It is therefore not surprising if one notices in the structure of the church herself repercussions and signs of the division affecting human society. Over and above the divisions between the Christian

communions that have afflicted her for centuries, the church today is experiencing within herself sporadic divisions among her own members, divisions caused by differing views or options in the doctrinal and pastoral field.(5) These divisions too can at times seem incurable.

However disturbing these divisions may seem at first sight, it is only by a careful examination that one can detect their root: It is to be found in a wound in man's inmost self. In the light of faith we call it sin: beginning with original sin, which all of us bear from birth as an inheritance from our first parents, to the sin which each one of us commits when we abuse our own freedom.

Longing for Reconciliation

3. Nevertheless, that same inquiring gaze, if it is discerning enough, detects in the very midst of division an unmistakable desire among people of good will and true Christians to mend the divisions, to heal the wounds and to re-establish at all levels an essential unity. This desire arouses in many people a real longing for reconciliation even in cases where there is no actual use of this word.

Some consider reconciliation as an impossible dream which ideally might become the lever for a true transformation of society. For others it is to be gained by arduous efforts and therefore a goal to be reached through serious reflection and action. Whatever the case, the longing for sincere and consistent reconciliation is without a shadow of doubt a fundamental driving force in our society, reflecting an irrepressible desire for peace. And it is as strongly so as the factors of division, even though this is a paradox.

But reconciliation cannot be less profound than the division itself. The longing for reconciliation and reconciliation itself will be complete and effective only to the extent that they reach in order to heal it-that original wound which is the root of all other wounds: namely sin.

The Synod's View

4. Therefore every institution or organization concerned with serving people and saving them in their fundamental dimensions must closely study reconciliation in order to grasp more fully its meaning and significance and in order to draw the necessary practical conclusions.

The church of Jesus Christ could not fail to make this study. With the devotion of a mother and the understanding of a teacher, she earnestly and carefully applies herself to detecting in society not only the signs of division but also the no less eloquent and significant signs of the quest for reconciliation. For she knows that she especially has been given the ability and assigned the mission to make known the true and profoundly religious meaning of reconciliation and its full scope. She is thereby already helping to clarify the essential terms of the question of unity and peace.

My predecessors constantly preached reconciliation and invited to reconciliation the whole of humanity and every section and portion of the human community that they saw wounded and divided.(6) And I myself, by an interior impulse which I am certain was obeying both an inspiration from on high and the appeals of humanity, decided to emphasize the subject of reconciliation and to do this in two ways, each of them solemn and exacting. In the first place, by convoking the Sixth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops; in the second place, by making reconciliation the center of the jubilee year called to celebrate the 1,950th anniversary of the redemption.(7) Having to assign a theme to the synod, I found myself fully in accord with the one suggested by many of my brothers in the episcopate, namely, the fruitful theme of reconciliation in close connection with the theme of penance.(8)

The term and the very concept of penance are very complex. If we link penance with the metanoia which the synoptics refer to, it means the inmost change of heart under the influence of the word of God and in the perspective of the kingdom.(9) But penance also means changing one's life in harmony with the change of heart, and in this sense doing penance is completed by bringing forth fruits worthy of penance:(10) It is one's whole existence that becomes penitential, that is to say, directed toward a continuous striving for what is better. But doing penance is something authentic and effective only if it is translated into deeds and acts of penance. In this sense penance means, in the Christian theological and spiritual vocabulary, asceticism, that is to say, the concrete daily effort of a person, supported by God's love, his or her own life for Christ as the only means of gaining it;(11) an effort to put off the old man and put on the new;(12) an effort to overcome in oneself what is of the flesh in order that what is spiritual(13) may prevail; a continual effort to rise from the things of here below to the things of above, where Christ is.(14) Penance is therefore a conversion that passes from the heart to deeds and then to the Christian's whole life.

In each of these meanings penance is closely connected with reconciliation, for reconciliation with God, with oneself and with others implies overcoming that radical break which is sin. And this is achieved only through the interior transformation or conversion which bears fruit in a person's life through acts of penance.

The basic document of the synod (also called the lineamenta), which was prepared with the sole purpose of presenting the theme while stressing certain fundamental aspects of it, enabled the ecclesial communities throughout the world to reflect for almost two years on these aspects of a question-that of conversion and reconciliation-which concerns everyone. It also enabled them to draw from it a fresh impulse for the Christian life and Apostolate. That reflection was further deepened in the more immediate preparation for the work of the synod, thanks to the instrumentum laboris

which was sent in due course to the bishops and their collaborators. After that, the synod fathers, assisted by all those called to attend the actual sessions, spent a whole month assiduously dealing with the theme itself and with the numerous and varied questions connected with it. There emerged from the discussions, from the common study and from the diligent and accurate work done, a large and precious treasure which the final propositions sum up in their essence.

The synod's view does not ignore the acts of reconciliation (some of which pass almost unobserved in their daily ordinariness) which, though in differing degrees, serve to resolve the many tensions, to overcome the many conflicts and to conquer the divisions both large and small by restoring unity. But the synod's main concern was to discover in the depth of these scattered acts the hidden root- reconciliation so to speak at the source, " which takes place in people's hearts and minds.

The church's charism and likewise her unique nature vis-a-vis reconciliation, at whatever level it needs to be achieved, lie in the fact that she always goes back to that reconciliation at the source. For by reason of her essential mission, the church feels an obligation to go to the roots of that original wound of sin in order to bring healing and to re-establish, so to speak, an equally original reconciliation which will be the effective principle of all true reconciliation. This is the reconciliation which the church had in mind and which she put forward through the synod.

Sacred Scripture speaks to us of this reconciliation, inviting us to make every effort to attain it.(15) But Scripture also tells us that it is above all a merciful gift of God to humanity.(16) The history of salvation-the salvation of the whole of humanity as well as of every human being of whatever period-is the wonderful history of a reconciliation: the reconciliation whereby God, as Father, in the blood and the cross of his Son made man, reconciles the world to himself and thus brings into being a new family of those who have been reconciled.

Reconciliation becomes necessary because there has been the break of sin from which derive all the other forms of break within man and about him. Reconciliation, therefore, in order to be complete necessarily requires liberation from sin, which is to be rejected in its deepest roots. Thus a close internal link unites conversion and reconciliation. It is impossible to split these two realities or to speak of one and say nothing of the other.

The synod at the same time spoke about the reconciliation of the whole human family and of the conversion of the heart of every individual, of his or her return to God: It did so because it wished to recognize and proclaim the fact that there can be no union among people without an internal change in each individual. Personal conversion is the necessary path to harmony between individuals.(17) When the church proclaims the good news of reconciliation or proposes achieving it through the sacraments, she is exercising a truly prophetic role, condemning the evils of man in their infected source, showing the root of divisions and bringing hope in the possibility of overcoming tensions and conflict and reaching brotherhood, concord and peace at all levels and in all sections of human society. She is changing a historical condition of hatred and violence into a civilization of love. She is offering to everyone the evangelical and sacramental principle of that reconciliation at the source, from which comes every other gesture or act of reconciliation, also at the social level.

It is this reconciliation, the result of conversion, which is dealt with in the present apostolic exhortation. For, as happened at the end of the three previous assemblies of the synod, this time too the fathers who had taken part presented the conclusions of the synod's work to the bishop of Rome, the universal pastor of the church and the head of the College of Bishops, in his capacity as president of the synod. I accepted as a serious and welcome duty of my ministry the task of drawing from the enormous abundance of the synod in order to offer to the people of God, as the fruit of the same synod, a doctrinal and pastoral message on the subject of penance and reconciliation. In the first part I shall speak of the church in the carrying out of her mission of reconciliation, in the work of the conversion of hearts in order to bring about a renewed embrace between man and God, man and his brother, man and the whole of creation. In the second part there will be indicated the radical cause of all wounds and divisions between people, and in the first place between people and God: namely sin. Afterward I shall indicate the means that enable the church to promote and encourage full reconciliation between people and God and, as a consequence, of people with one another.

The document which I now entrust to the sons and daughters of the church and also to all those who, whether they are believers or not, look to the church with interest and sincerity, is meant to be a fitting response to what the synod asked of me. But it is also-and I wish to say this dearly as a duty to truth and justice-something produced by the synod itself. For the contents of these pages come from the synod: from its remote and immediate preparation, from the instrumentum laboris, from the interventions in the Synod Hall and the circuli minores, and especially from the sixty-three propositions. Here we have the result of the joint work of the fathers, who included the representatives of the Eastern churches, whose theological, spiritual and liturgical heritage is so rich and venerable, also with regard to the subject that concerns us here. Furthermore, it was the Council of the Synod Secretariat which evaluated, in two important sessions, the results and orientations of the synod assembly just after it had ended, which highlighted the dynamics of the already mentioned propositions and which then indicated the lines considered most suitable for the preparation of the present document. I am grateful to all those who did this work and, in fidelity to my mission, I wish here to pass on the elements from the doctrinal and pastoral treasure of the synod which seem to me providential for people's lives at this magnificent yet difficult moment in history.

It is appropriate-and very significant-to do this while there remains fresh in people's minds the memory of the Holy Year, which was lived in the spirit of penance, conversion and reconciliation. May this exhortation, entrusted to my

brothers in the episcopate and to their collaborators, the priests and deacons, to men and women religious, and to all men and women of upright conscience, be a means of purification, enrichment and deepening in personal faith. May it also be a leaven capable of encouraging the growth in the midst of the world of peace and brotherhood, hope and joy-values which spring from the Gospel as it is accepted, meditated upon and lived day by day after the example of Mary, mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom it pleased God to reconcile all things to himself.(18)

PART ONE - CONVERSION AND RECONCILIATION: THE CHURCH'S TASK AND COMMITMENT

CHAPTER ONE - A PARABLE OF RECONCILIATION

5. At the beginning of this apostolic exhortation there comes into my mind that extraordinary passage in St. Luke, the deeply religious as well as human substance of which I have already sought to illustrate in a previous document.(19) I refer to the parable of the prodigal son.(20)

From the Brother Who Was Lost...

"There was a man who had two sons; the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me, ' " says Jesus as he begins the dramatic story of that young man: the adventurous departure from his father's house, the squandering of all his property in a loose and empty life, the dark days of exile and hunger, but even more of lost dignity, humiliation and shame and then nostalgia for his own home, the courage to go back, the father's welcome. The father had certainly not forgotten his son, indeed he had kept unchanged his affection and esteem for him. So he had always waited for him, and now he embraces him and he gives orders for a great feast to celebrate the return of him who " was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

This prodigal son is man every human being: bewitched by the temptation to separate himself from his Father in order to lead his own independent existence; disappointed by the emptiness of the mirage which had fascinated him; alone, dishonored, exploited when he tries to build a world all for himself sorely tried, even in the depths of his own misery, by the desire to return to communion with his Father. Like the father in the parable, God looks out for the return of his child, embraces him when he arrives and orders the banquet of the new meeting with which the reconciliation is celebrated.

The most striking element of the parable is the father's festive and loving welcome of the returning son: It is a sign of the mercy of God, who is always willing to forgive. Let us say at once: Reconciliation is principally a gift of the heavenly Father.

... To the Brother Who Stayed at Home

6. But the parable also brings into the picture the elder brother, who refuses to take his place at the banquet. He rebukes his younger brother for his dissolute wanderings, and he rebukes his father for the welcome given to the prodigal son while he himself, a temperate and hard-working person, faithful to father and home, has never been allowed-he says to have a celebration with his friends. This is a sign that he does not understand the father's goodness. To the extent that this brother, too sure of himself and his own good qualities, jealous and haughty, full of bitterness and anger, is not converted and is not reconciled with his father and brother, the banquet is not yet fully the celebration of a reunion and rediscovery.

Man every human being-is also this elder brother. Selfishness makes him jealous, hardens his heart, blinds him and shuts him off from other people and from God. The loving kindness and mercy of the father irritate and enrage him; for him the happiness of the brother who has been found again has a bitter taste.(21) From this point of view he too needs to be converted in order to be reconciled.

The parable of the prodigal son is above all the story of the inexpressible love of a Father-God-who offers to his son when he comes back to him the gift of full reconciliation. But when the parable evokes, in the figure of the elder son, the selfishness which divides the brothers, it also becomes the story of the human family: It describes our situation and shows the path to be followed. The prodigal son, in his anxiety for conversion, to return to the arms of his father and to be forgiven, represents those who are aware of the existence in their inmost hearts of a longing for reconciliation at all levels and without reserve, and who realize with an inner certainty that this reconciliation is possible only if it derives from a first and fundamental reconciliation-the one which brings a person back from distant separation to filial friendship with God, whose infinite mercy is clearly known. But if the parable is read from the point of view of the other son, it portrays the situation of the human family, divided by forms of selfishness. It throws light on the difficulty involved in satisfying the desire and longing for one reconciled and united family. It therefore reminds us of the need for a profound transformation of hearts through the rediscovery of the Father's mercy and through victory over misunderstanding and over hostility among brothers and sisters.

In the light of this inexhaustible parable of the mercy that wipes out sin, the church takes up the appeal that the parable contains and grasps her mission of working, in imitation of the Lord, for the conversion of hearts and for the reconciliation of people with God and with one another-these being two realities that are intimately connected.

CHAPTER TWO - AT THE SOURCES OF RECONCILIATION

In the Light of Christ the Reconciler

7. As we deduce from the parable of the prodigal son, reconciliation is a gift of God, an initiative on his part. But our faith teaches us that this initiative takes concrete form in the mystery of Christ the redeemer, the reconciler and the liberator of man from sin in all its forms. St. Paul likewise does not hesitate to sum up in this task and function the incomparable mission of Jesus of Nazareth, the word and the Son of God made man.

We too can start with this central mystery of the economy of salvation, the key to St. Paul's Christology. "If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, " writes St. Paul, "much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation."(22) Therefore, since "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, " Paul feels inspired to exhort the Christians of Corinth: "Be reconciled to God."(23)

This mission of reconciliation through death on the cross is spoken of in another terminology by the evangelist John, when he observes that Christ had to die " to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."(24)

But it is once more St. Paul who enables us to broaden our vision of Christ's work to cosmic dimensions when he writes that in Christ the Father has reconciled to himself all creatures, those in heaven and those on earth.(25) It can rightly be said of Christ the redeemer that "in the time of wrath he was taken in exchange"(26) and that, if he is "our peace, "(27) he is also our reconciliation.

With every good reason his passion and death, sacramentally renewed in the eucharist, are called by the liturgy the "sacrifice of reconciliation":(28) reconciliation with God and with the brethren, since Jesus teaches that fraternal reconciliation must take place before the sacrifice is offered.(29)

Beginning with these and other significant passages in the New Testament, we can therefore legitimately relate all our reflections on the whole mission of Christ to his mission as the one who reconciles. Thus there must be proclaimed once more the church's belief in Christ's redeeming act, in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, as the cause of man's reconciliation in its twofold aspect of liberation from sin and communion of grace with God.

It is precisely before the sad spectacle of the divisions and difficulties in the way of reconciliation between people that I invite all to look to the *mysterium crucis* as the loftiest drama in which Christ perceives and suffers to the greatest possible extent the tragedy of the division of man from God, so that he cries out in the words of the psalmist: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"(30) and at the same time accomplishes our reconciliation. With our eyes fixed on the mystery of Golgotha we should be reminded always of that "vertical" dimension of division and reconciliation concerning the relationship between man and God, a dimension which in the eyes of faith always prevails over the "horizontal" dimension, that is to say, over the reality of division between people and the need for reconciliation between them. For we know that reconciliation between people is and can only be the fruit of the redemptive act of Christ, who died and rose again to conquer the kingdom of sin, to re-establish the covenant with God and thus break down the dividing wall which sin had raised up between people.

The Reconciling Church

8. But, as Pope St. Leo said, speaking of Christ's passion, "Everything that the Son of God did and taught for the reconciliation of the world we know not only from the history of his past actions, but we experience it also in the effectiveness of what he accomplishes in the present."(32) We experience the reconciliation which he accomplished in his humanity in the efficacy of the sacred mysteries which are celebrated by his church, for which he gave his life and which he established as the sign and also the means of salvation.

This is stated by St. Paul when he writes that God has given to Christ's apostles a share in his work of reconciliation. He says: "God...gave us the ministry of reconciliation...and the message of reconciliation."(33)

To the hands and lips of the apostles, his messengers, the Father has mercifully entrusted a ministry of reconciliation, which they carry but in out in a singular way by virtue of the power to act "in persona Christi. " But the message of reconciliation has also been entrusted to the whole community of believers, to the whole fabric of the church, that is to say, the task of doing everything possible to witness to reconciliation and to bring it about in the world.

It can be said that the Second Vatican Council too, in defining the church as a "sacrament-a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all people, " and in indicating as the church's function that of obtaining "full unity in Christ" for the "people of the present day...drawn ever more closely together by social, technical and cultural bonds, "(34) recognized that the church must strive above all to bring all people to full reconciliation.

In intimate connection with Christ's mission, one can therefore sum up the church's mission, rich and complex as it is, as being her central task of reconciling people: with God, with themselves, with neighbor, with the whole of creation; and this in a permanent manner since, as I said on another occasion, "the church is also by her nature always reconciling."(35)

The church is reconciling inasmuch as she proclaims the message of reconciliation as she has always done throughout her history, from the apostolic Council of Jerusalem(36) down to the latest synod and the recent jubilee of the

redemption. The originality of this proclamation is in the fact that for the church reconciliation is closely linked with conversion of heart: This is the necessary path to understanding among human beings.

The church is also reconciling inasmuch as she shows man the paths and offers the means for reaching this fourfold reconciliation. The paths are precisely those of conversion of heart and victory over sin, whether this latter is selfishness or injustice, arrogance or exploitation of others, attachment to material goods or the unrestrained quest for pleasure. The means are those of faithful and loving attention to God's word; personal and community prayer; and in particular the sacraments, true signs and instruments of reconciliation, among which there excels, precisely under this aspect, the one which we are rightly accustomed to call the sacrament of reconciliation or penance and to which we shall return later on.

The Reconciled Church

9. My venerable predecessor Paul VI commendably highlighted the fact that the church, in order to evangelize, must begin by showing that she herself has been evangelized, that is to say, that she is open to the full and complete proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ in order to listen to it and put it into practice.(37) I too, by bringing together in one document the reflections of the fourth general assembly of the synod, have spoken of a church that is catechized to the extent that she carries out catechesis.(38)

I now do not hesitate to resume the comparison, insofar as it applies to the theme I am dealing with, in order to assert that the church, if she is to be reconciling, must begin by being a reconciled church. Beneath this simple and indicative expression lies the conviction that the church, in order ever more effectively to proclaim and propose reconciliation to the world, must become ever more genuinely a community of disciples of Christ (even though it were only "the little flock" of the first days), united in the commitment to be continually converted to the Lord and to live as new people in the spirit and practice of reconciliation.

To the people of our time, so sensitive to the proof of concrete living witness, the church is called upon to give an example of reconciliation particularly within herself. And for this purpose we must all work to bring peace to people's minds, to reduce tensions, to overcome divisions and to heal wounds that may have been inflicted by brother on brother when the contrast of choices in the field of what is optional becomes acute; and on the contrary we must try to be united in what is essential for Christian faith and life, in accordance with the ancient maxim: In what is doubtful, freedom; in what is necessary, unity; in all things, charity.

It is in accordance with this same criterion that the church must conduct her ecumenical activity. For in order to be completely reconciled, she knows that she must continue the quest for unity among those who are proud to call themselves Christians but who are separated from one another, also as churches or communions, and from the church of Rome. The latter seeks a unity which, if it is to be the fruit and expression of true reconciliation, is meant to be based neither upon a disguising of the points that divide nor upon compromises which are as easy as they are superficial and fragile. Unity must be the result of a true conversion of everyone, the result of mutual forgiveness, of theological dialogue and fraternal relations, of prayer and of complete docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, who is also the Spirit of reconciliation.

Finally, in order that the church may say that she is completely reconciled, she feels that it is her duty to strive ever harder, by promoting the "dialogue of salvation,"(39) to bring the Gospel to those vast sections of humanity in the modern world that do not share her faith, but even, as a result of growing secularism, keep their distance from her and oppose her with cold indifference when they do not actually hinder and persecute her. She feels the duty to say once more to everyone in the words of St. Paul: "Be reconciled to God."(40)

At any rate, the church promotes reconciliation in the truth, knowing well that neither reconciliation nor unity is possible outside or in opposition to the truth.

CHAPTER THREE - GOD'S INITIATIVE AND THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY

10. The church, as a reconciled and reconciling community, cannot forget that at the source of her gift and mission of reconciliation is the initiative, full of compassionate love and mercy, of that God who is love(41) and who out of love created human beings;(42) and he created them so that they might live in friendship with him and in communion with one another.

Reconciliation Comes from God

God is faithful to his eternal plan even when man, under the impulse of the evil one(43) and carried away by his own pride, abuses the freedom given to him in order to love and generously seek what is good, and refuses to obey his Lord and Father. God is faithful even when man, instead of responding with love to God's love, opposes him and treats him like a rival, deluding himself and relying on his own power, with the resulting break of relationship with the one who created him. In spite of this transgression on man's part, God remains faithful in love. It is certainly true that the story of the Garden of Eden makes us think about the tragic consequences of rejecting the Father, which becomes evident in

man's inner disorder and in the breakdown of harmony between man and woman, brother and brother.(44) Also significant is the gospel parable of the two brothers who, in different ways, distance themselves from their father and cause a rift between them. Refusal of God's fatherly love and of his loving gifts is always at the root of humanity's divisions.

But we know that God, "rich in mercy,"(45) like the father in the parable, does not close his heart to any of his children. He waits for them, looks for them, goes to meet them at the place where the refusal of communion imprisons them in isolation and division. He calls them to gather about his table in the joy of the feast of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This initiative on God's part is made concrete and manifest in the redemptive act of Christ, which radiates through the world by means of the ministry of the church.

For, according to our faith, the word of God became flesh and came to dwell in the world; he entered into the history of the world) summing it up and recapitulating it in himself.(46) He revealed to us that God is love, and he gave us the new commandment" of love, (47) at the same time communicating to us the certainty that the path of love is open for all people, so that the effort to establish universal brotherhood is not a vain one.(48) By conquering through his death on the cross evil and the power of sin, by his loving obedience, he brought salvation to all and became "reconciliation for all. In him God reconciled man to himself.

The church carries on the proclamation of reconciliation which Christ caused to echo through the villages of Galilee and all Palestine(49) and does not cease to invite all humanity to be converted and to believe in the good news. She speaks in the name of Christ, making her own the appeal of St. Paul which we have already recalled: "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."(50)

Those who accept this appeal enter into the economy of reconciliation and experience the truth contained in that other affirmation of St. Paul, that Christ "is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility..., so making peace" that he "might reconcile us both to God."(51) This text directly concerns the overcoming of the religious division between Israel-as the chosen people of the Old Testament-and the other peoples, all called to form part of the new covenant. Nevertheless it contains the affirmation of the new spiritual universality desired by God and accomplished by him through the sacrifice of his Son, the word made man, without limits or exclusions of any sort, for all those who are converted and who believe in Christ. We are all therefore called to enjoy the fruits of this reconciliation desired by God: every individual and every people.

The Church, the Great Sacrament of Reconciliation

11. The church has the mission of proclaiming this reconciliation and as it were of being its sacrament in the world. The church is the sacrament, that is to say, the sign and means of reconciliation in different ways which differ in value but which all come together to obtain what the divine initiative of mercy desires to grant to humanity.

She is a sacrament in the first place by her very existence as a reconciled community which witnesses to and represents in the world the work of Christ.

She is also a sacrament through her service as the custodian and interpreter of sacred Scripture, which is the good news of reconciliation inasmuch as it tells each succeeding generation about God's loving plan and shows to each generation the paths to universal reconciliation in Christ.

Finally she is a sacrament by reason of the seven sacraments which, each in its own way, " make the church. "(52) For since they commemorate and renew Christ's paschal mystery, all the sacraments are a source of life for the church and in the church's hands they are means of conversion to God and of reconciliation among people.

Other Means of Reconciliation

12 The mission of reconciliation is proper to the whole church, also and especially to that church which has already been admitted to the full sharing in divine glory with the Virgin Mary, the angels and the saints, who contemplate and adore the thrice-holy God The church in heaven, the-church on earth and the church in purgatory are mysteriously united in this cooperation with Christ in reconciling the world to God.

The first means of this salvific action is that of prayer. It is certain that the Blessed Virgin, mother of Christ and of the church, (53) and the saints, who have now reached the end of their earthly journey and possess God's glory, sustain by their intercession their brethren who are on pilgrimage through the world, in the commitment to conversion, to faith, to getting up again after every fall, to acting in order to help the growth of communion and peace in the church and in the world. In the mystery of the communion of saints, universal reconciliation is accomplished in its most profound form, which is also the most fruitful for the salvation of all.

There is yet another means: that of preaching. The church, since she is the disciple of the one teacher Jesus Christ, in her own turn as mother and teacher untiringly exhorts people to reconciliation. And she does not hesitate to condemn the evil of sin, to proclaim the need for conversion, to invite and ask people to "let themselves be reconciled." In fact, this is her prophetic mission in today's world, just as it was in the world of yesterday. It is the same mission as that of

her teacher and head, Jesus. Like him, the church will always carry out this mission with sentiments of merciful love and will bring to all people those words of forgiveness and that invitation to hope which come from the cross.

There is also the often so difficult and demanding means of pastoral action aimed at bringing back every individual- whoever and wherever he or she may be- to the path, at times a long one, leading back to the Father in the communion of all the brethren.

Finally there is the means of witness, which is almost always silent. This is born from a twofold awareness on the part of the church: that of being in herself "unfailingly holy," (54) but also the awareness of the need to go forward and "daily be further purified and renewed, against the day when Christ will present her to himself in all her glory without spot or wrinkle," for, by reason of her sins, sometimes "the radiance of the church's face shines less brightly" in the eyes of those who behold her. (55) This witness cannot fail to assume two fundamental aspects. This first aspect is that of being the sign of that universal charity which Jesus Christ left as an inheritance to his followers, as a proof of belonging to his kingdom. The second aspect is translation into ever new manifestations of conversion and reconciliation both within the church and outside her, by the overcoming of tensions, by mutual forgiveness, by growth in the spirit of brotherhood and peace which is to be spread throughout the world. By this means the church will effectively be able to work for the creation of what my predecessor Paul VI called the "civilization of love."

PART TWO -THE LOVE THAT IS GREATER THAN SIN

The Tragedy of Man

13. In the words of St. John the apostle, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins." (56) Written at the very dawn of the church, these inspired words introduce better than any other human expression the theme of sin, which is intimately connected with that of reconciliation. These words present the question of sin in its human dimension: sin as an integral part of the truth about man. But they immediately relate the human dimension to its divine dimension, where sin is countered by the truth of divine love, which is just, generous and faithful, and which reveals itself above all in forgiveness and redemption. Thus St. John also writes a little further on that "whatever accusations (our conscience) may raise against us, God is greater than our conscience." (57)

To acknowledge one's sin, indeed- penetrating still more deeply into the consideration of one's own personhood- to recognize oneself as being a sinner, capable of sin and inclined to commit sin, is the essential first step in returning to God. For example, this is the experience of David, who "having done what is evil in the eyes of the Lord" and having been rebuked by the prophet Nathan, (58) exclaims: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (59) Similarly, Jesus himself puts the following significant words on the lips and in the heart of the prodigal son: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you." (60)

In effect, to become reconciled with God presupposes and includes detaching oneself consciously and with determination from the sin into which one has fallen. It presupposes and includes, therefore, doing penance in the fullest sense of the term: repenting, showing this repentance, adopting a real attitude of repentance- which is the attitude of the person who starts out on the road of return to the Father. This is a general law and one which each individual must follow in his or her particular situation. For it is not possible to deal with sin and conversion only in abstract terms.

In the concrete circumstances of sinful humanity, in which there can be no conversion without the acknowledgment of one's own sin, the church's ministry of reconciliation intervenes in each individual case with a precise penitential purpose. That is, the church's ministry intervenes in order to bring the person to the "knowledge of self"- in the words of St. Catherine of Siena (61)- to the rejection of evil, to the re-establishment of friendship with God, to a new interior ordering, to a fresh ecclesial conversion. Indeed, even beyond the boundaries of the church and the community of believers, the message and ministry of penance are addressed to all men and women, because all need conversion and reconciliation. (62)

In order to carry out this penitential ministry adequately, we shall have to evaluate the consequences of sin with "eyes enlightened" (63) by faith. These consequences of sin are the reasons for division and rupture not only within each person, but also within the various circles of a person's life: in relation to the family, to the professional and social environment, as can often be seen from experience; it is confirmed by the passage in the Bible about the city of Babel and its tower. (64) Intent on building what was to be at once a symbol and a source of unity, those people found themselves more scattered than before, divided in speech, divided among themselves, incapable of consensus and agreement.

Why did the ambitious project fail? Why did "the builders labor in vain?" (65) They failed because they had set up as a sign and guarantee of the unity they desired a work of their own hands alone and had forgotten the action of the Lord. They had attended only to the horizontal dimension of work and social life, forgetting the vertical dimension by which they would have been rooted in God, their creator and Lord, and would have been directed toward him as the ultimate goal of their progress.

Now it can be said that the tragedy of humanity today, as indeed of every period in history, consists precisely in its similarity to the experience of Babel.

CHAPTER ONE - THE MYSTERY OF SIN

14 If we read the passage in the Bible on the city and tower of Babel in the new light offered by the Gospel and if we compare it with the other passage on the fall of our first parents, we can draw from it valuable elements for an understanding of the mystery of sin. This expression, which echoes what St. Paul writes concerning the mystery of evil, (66) helps us to grasp the obscure and intangible element hidden in sin. Clearly sin is a product of man's freedom. But deep within its human reality there are factors at work which place it beyond the merely human, in the border area where man's conscience, will and sensitivity are in contact with the dark forces which, according to St. Paul, are active in the world almost to the point of ruling it.(67)

Disobedience to God

A first point which helps us to understand sin emerges from the biblical narrative on the building of the tower of Babel: The people sought to build a city, organize themselves into a society and to be strong and powerful without God, if not precisely against God.(68) In this sense the story of the first sin in Eden and the story of Babel, in spite of notable differences in content and form, have one thing in common: In both there is an exclusion of God through direct opposition to one of his commandments, through an act of rivalry, through the mistaken pretension of being "like him."(69) In the story of Babel the exclusion of God is presented not so much under the aspect of opposition to him as of forgetfulness and indifference toward him, as if God were of no relevance in the sphere of man's joint projects. But in both cases the relationship to God is severed with violence. In the case of Eden there appears in all its seriousness and tragic reality that which constitutes the ultimate essence and darkness of sin: disobedience to God, to His law, to the moral norm that he has given man, inscribing it in his heart and confirming and perfecting it through revelation. Exclusion of God, rupture with God, disobedience to God: Throughout the history of mankind this has been and is, in various forms, sin. It can go as far as a very denial of God and his existence: This is the phenomenon called atheism. It is the disobedience of a person who, by a free act, does not acknowledge God's sovereignty over his or her life, at least at that particular moment in which he or she transgresses God's law.

Division Between Brothers

15. In the biblical narratives mentioned above, man's rupture with God leads tragically to divisions between brothers. In the description of the "first sin," the rupture with Yahweh simultaneously breaks the bond of friendship that had united the human family. Thus the subsequent pages of Genesis show us the man and the woman as if were pointing an accusing finger at each other.(70) Later we have the brother hating his brother and finally taking his life.(71) According to the Babel story, the result of sin is the shattering of the human family, already begun with the first sin and now reaching its most extreme form on the social level. No one wishing to investigate the mystery of sin can ignore this link between cause and effect. As a rupture with God, sin is an act of disobedience by a creature who rejects, at least implicitly, the very one from whom he came and who sustains him in life. It is therefore a suicidal act. Since by sinning man refuses to submit to God, his internal balance is also destroyed and it is precisely within himself that contradictions and conflicts arise. Wounded in this way, man almost inevitably causes damage to the fabric of his relationship with others and with the created world. This is an objective law and an objective reality, verified in so many ways in the human psyche and in the spiritual life as well as in society, where it is easy to see the signs and effects of internal disorder. The mystery of sin is composed of this twofold wound which the sinner opens in himself and in his relationship with his neighbor. Therefore one can speak of personal and social sin: From one point of view, every sin is personal; from another point of view, every sin is social insofar as and because it also has social repercussions.

Personal Sin and Social Sin

16. Sin, in the proper sense, is always a personal act, since it is an act of freedom on the part of an individual person and not properly of a group or community. This individual may be conditioned, incited and influenced by numerous and powerful external factors. He may also be subjected to tendencies, defects and habits linked with his personal condition. In not a few cases such external and internal factors may attenuate, to a greater or lesser degree, the person's freedom and therefore his responsibility and guilt. But it is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free. This truth cannot be disregarded in order to place the blame for individuals' sins on external factors such as structures, systems or other people. Above all, this would be to deny the person's dignity and freedom, which are manifested-even though in a negative and disastrous way-also in this responsibility for sin

committed. Hence there is nothing so personal and untransferable in each individual as merit for virtue or responsibility for sin.

As a personal act, sin has its first and most important consequences in the sinner himself: that is, in his relationship with God, who is the very foundation of human life; and also in his spirit, weakening his will and clouding his intellect. At this point we must ask what was being referred to by those who during the preparation of the synod and in the course of its actual work frequently spoke of social sin.

The expression and the underlying concept in fact have various meanings.

To speak of social sin means in the first place to recognize that, by virtue of human solidarity which is as mysterious and intangible as it is real and concrete, each individual's sin in some way affects others. This is the other aspect of that solidarity which on the religious level is developed in the profound and magnificent mystery of the communion of saints, thanks to which it has been possible to say that "every soul that rises above itself, raises up the world." To this law of ascent there unfortunately corresponds the law of descent. Consequently one can speak of a communion of sin, whereby a soul that lowers itself through sin drags down with itself the church and, in some way, the whole world. In other words, there is no sin, not even the most intimate and secret one, the most strictly individual one, that exclusively concerns the person committing it. With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sin has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and the whole human family. According to this first meaning of the term, every sin can undoubtedly be considered as social sin.

Some sins, however, by their very matter constitute a direct attack on one's neighbor and more exactly, in the language of the Gospel, against one's brother or sister. They are an offense against God because they are offenses against one's neighbor. These sins are usually called social sins, and this is the second meaning of the term. In this sense social sin is sin against love of neighbor, and in the law of Christ it is all the more serious in that it involves the Second Commandment, which is "like unto the first."⁽⁷²⁾ Likewise, the term social applies to every sin against justice in interpersonal relationships, committed either by the individual against the community or by the community against the individual. Also social is every sin against the rights of the human person, beginning with the right to and including the life of the unborn or against a person's physical integrity. Likewise social is every sin against others' freedom, especially against the supreme freedom to believe in God and adore him; social is every sin against the dignity and honor of one's neighbor. Also social is every sin against the common good and its exigencies in relation to the whole broad spectrum of the rights and duties of citizens. The term social can be applied to sins of commission or omission on the part of political, economic or trade union leaders, who though in a position to do so, do not work diligently and wisely for the improvement and transformation of society according to the requirements and potential of the given historic moment; as also on the part of workers who through absenteeism or non-cooperation fail to ensure that their industries can continue to advance the well-being of the workers themselves, of their families and of the whole of society.

The third meaning of social sin refers to the relationships between the various human communities. These relationships are not always in accordance with the plan of God, who intends that there be justice in the world and freedom and peace between individuals, groups and peoples. Thus the class struggle, whoever the person who leads it or on occasion seeks to give it a theoretical justification, is a social evil. Likewise obstinate confrontation between blocs of nations, between one nation and another, between different groups within the same nation all this too is a social evil. In both cases one may ask whether moral responsibility for these evils, and therefore sin, can be attributed to any person in particular. Now it has to be admitted that realities and situations such as those described, when they become generalized and reach vast proportions as social phenomena, almost always become anonymous, just as their causes are complex and not always identifiable. Hence if one speaks of social sin here, the expression obviously has an analogical meaning. However, to speak even analogically of social sins must not cause us to underestimate the responsibility of the individuals involved. It is meant to be an appeal to the consciences of all, so that each may shoulder his or her responsibility seriously and courageously in order to change those disastrous conditions and intolerable situations.

Having said this in the clearest and most unequivocal way, one must add at once that there is one meaning sometimes given to social sin that is not legitimate or acceptable even though it is very common in certain quarters today.⁽⁷⁴⁾ This usage contrasts social sin and personal sin, not without ambiguity, in a way that leads more or less unconsciously to the watering down and almost the abolition of personal sin, with the recognition only of social guilt and responsibilities. According to this usage, which can readily be seen to derive from non-Christian ideologies and systems-which have possibly been discarded today by the very people who formerly officially upheld them-practically every sin is a social sin, in the sense that blame for it is to be placed not so much on the moral conscience of an individual, but rather on some vague entity or anonymous collectivity such as the situation, the system, society, structures or institutions.

Whenever the church speaks of situations of sin or when she condemns as social sins certain situations or the collective behavior of certain social groups, big or small, or even of whole nations and blocs of nations, she knows and she proclaims that such cases of social sin are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins. It is a case of the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference; of those who take refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing

the world and also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required, producing specious reasons of higher order. The real responsibility, then, lies with individuals.

A situation-or likewise an institution, a structure, society itself-is not in itself the subject of moral acts. Hence a situation cannot in itself be good or bad.

At the heart of every situation of sin are always to be found sinful people. So true is this that even when such a situation can be changed in its structural and institutional aspects by the force of law or-as unfortunately more often happens by the law of force, the change in fact proves to be incomplete, of short duration and ultimately vain and ineffective-not to say counterproductive if the people directly or indirectly responsible for that situation are not converted.

Mortal and Venial

17. But here we come to a further dimension in the mystery of sin, one on which the human mind has never ceased to ponder: the question of its gravity. It is a question which cannot be overlooked and one which the Christian conscience has never refused to answer. Why and to what degree is sin a serious matter in the offense it commits against God and in its effects on man? The church has a teaching on this matter which she reaffirms in its essential elements, while recognizing that it is not always easy in concrete situations to define clear and exact limits.

Already in the Old Testament, individuals guilty of several kinds of sins - sins committed deliberately, (75) the various forms of impurity, (76) idolatry, (77) the worship of false gods (78) - were ordered to be "taken away from the people, " which could also mean to be condemned to death.(79) Contrasted with these were other sins especially sins committed through ignorance, that were forgiven by means of a sacrificial offering.(80)

In reference also to these texts, the church has for centuries spoken of mortal sin and venial sin. But it is above all the New Testament that sheds light on this distinction and these terms. Here there are many passages which enumerate and strongly reprove sins that are particularly deserving of condemnation.(81) There is also the confirmation of the Decalogue by Jesus himself.(82) Here I wish to give special attention to two passages that are significant and impressive.

In a text of his First Letter, St. John speaks of a sin which leads to death (*propter thanaton*), as opposed to a sin which does not lead to death (*non propter thanaton*). (83) Obviously, the concept of death here is a spiritual death. It is a question of the loss of the true life or "eternal life, " which for John is knowledge of the Father and the Son, (84) and communion and intimacy with them. In that passage the sin that leads to death seems to be the denial of the Son(85) or the worship of false gods.(86) At any rate, by this distinction of concepts John seems to wish to emphasize the incalculable seriousness of what constitutes the very essence of sin, namely the rejection of God. This is manifested above all in apostasy and idolatry: repudiating faith in revealed truth and making certain created realities equal to God, raising them to the status of idols or false gods.(87) But in this passage the apostle's intention is also to underline the certainty that comes to the Christian from the fact of having been "born of God" through the coming of the Son: The Christian possesses a power that preserves him from falling into sin; God protects him, and "the evil one does not touch him." If he should sin through weakness or ignorance, he has confidence in being forgiven, also because he is supported by the joint prayer of the community.

In another passage of the New Testament, namely in St. Matthew's Gospel, (88) Jesus himself speaks of a "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" that " will not be forgiven" by reason of the fact that in its manifestation, it is an obstinate refusal to be converted to the love of the Father of mercies.

Here of course it is a question of external radical manifestations: rejection of God, rejection of his grace and therefore opposition to the very source of salvation(89)-these are manifestations whereby a person seems to exclude himself voluntarily from the path of forgiveness. It is to be hoped that very few persist to the end in this attitude of rebellion or even defiance of God. Moreover, God in his merciful love is greater than our hearts, as St. John further teaches us, (90) and can overcome all our psychological and spiritual resistance. So that, as St. Thomas writes, "considering the omnipotence and mercy of God, no one should despair of the salvation of anyone in this life."(91)

But when we ponder the problem of a rebellious will meeting the infinitely just God, we cannot but experience feelings of salutary "fear and trembling, " as St. Paul suggests.(92) Moreover, Jesus' warning about the sin "that will not be forgiven" confirms the existence of sins which can bring down on the sinner the punishment of "eternal death."

In the light of these and other passages of sacred Scripture, doctors and theologians, spiritual teachers and pastors have divided sins into mortal and venial. St. Augustine, among others, speaks of *letalia* or *mortifera crimina*, contrasting them with *venialia*, *levia* or *quotidiana*.(93) The meaning which he gives to these adjectives was to influence the successive magisterium of the church. After him, it was St. Thomas who was to formulate in the clearest possible terms the doctrine which became a constant in the church.

In defining and distinguishing between mortal and venial sins, St. Thomas and the theology of sin that has its source in him could not be unaware of the biblical reference and therefore of the concept of spiritual death. According to St. Thomas, in order to live spiritually man must remain in communion with the supreme principle of life, which is God, since God is the ultimate end of man' s being and acting. Now sin is a disorder perpetrated by the human being against this life-principle. And when through sin, the soul commits a disorder that reaches the point of turning away from its ultimate end God to which it is bound by charity, then the sin is mortal; on the other hand, whenever the disorder does

not reach the point of a turning away from God, the sin is venial." (94) For this reason venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity and therefore eternal happiness, whereas just such a deprivation is precisely the consequence of mortal sin.

Furthermore, when sin is considered from the point of view of the punishment it merits, for St. Thomas and other doctors mortal sin is the sin which, if unforgiven, leads to eternal punishment; whereas venial sin is the sin that merits merely temporal punishment (that is, a partial punishment which can be expiated on earth or in purgatory).

Considering sin from the point of view of its matter, the ideas of death, of radical rupture with God, the supreme good, of deviation from the path that leads to God or interruption of the journey toward him (which are all ways of defining mortal sin) are linked with the idea of the gravity of sin's objective content. Hence, in the church's doctrine and pastoral action, grave sin is in practice identified with mortal sin.

Here we have the core of the church's traditional teaching, which was reiterated frequently and vigorously during the recent synod. The synod in fact not only reaffirmed the teaching of the Council of Trent concerning the existence and nature of mortal and venial sins, (95) but it also recalled that mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent. It must be added-as was likewise done at the synod-that some sins are intrinsically grave and mortal by reason of their matter. That is, there exist acts which, per se and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object. These acts, if carried out with sufficient awareness and freedom, are always gravely sinful. (96)

This doctrine, based on the Decalogue and on the preaching of the Old Testament, and assimilated into the kerygma of the apostles and belonging to the earliest teaching of the church, and constantly reaffirmed by her to this day, is exactly verified in the experience of the men and women of all times. Man knows well by experience that along the road of faith and justice which leads to the knowledge and love of God in this life and toward perfect union with him in eternity, he can cease to go forward or can go astray without abandoning the way of God; and in this case there occurs venial sin. This however must never be underestimated, as though it were automatically something that can be ignored or regarded as "a sin of little importance."

For man also knows, through painful experience, that by a conscious and free act of his will he can change course and go in a direction opposed to God's will, separating himself from God (*aversio a Deo*), rejecting loving communion with him, detaching himself from the life principle which God is and consequently choosing death.

With the whole tradition of the church, we call mortal sin the act by which man freely and consciously rejects God, his law, the covenant of love that God offers, preferring to turn in on himself or to some created and finite reality, something contrary to the divine will (*conversio ad creaturam*). This can occur in a direct and formal way in the sins of idolatry, apostasy and atheism; or in an equivalent way as in every act of disobedience to God's commandments in a grave matter. Man perceives that this disobedience to God destroys the bond that unites him with his life principle: It is a mortal sin, that is, an act which gravely offends God and ends in turning against man himself with a dark and powerful force of destruction.

During the synod assembly some fathers proposed a threefold distinction of sins, classifying them as venial, grave and mortal. This threefold distinction might illustrate the fact that there is a scale of seriousness among grave sins. But it still remains true that the essential and decisive distinction is between sin which destroys charity and sin which does not kill the supernatural life: There is no middle way between life and death.

Likewise, care will have to be taken not to reduce mortal sin to an act of "fundamental option"-as is commonly said today-against God, intending thereby an explicit and formal contempt for God or neighbor. For mortal sin exists also when a person knowingly and willingly, for whatever reason, chooses something gravely disordered. In fact, such a choice already includes contempt for the divine law, a rejection of God's love for humanity and the whole of creation; the person turns away from God and loses charity. Thus the fundamental orientation can be radically changed by individual acts. Clearly there can occur situations which are very complex and obscure from a psychological viewpoint and which have an influence on the sinner's subjective culpability. But from a consideration of the psychological sphere one cannot proceed to the construction of a theological category, which is what the "fundamental option" precisely is, understanding it in such a way that it objectively changes or casts doubt upon the traditional concept of mortal sin.

While every sincere and prudent attempt to clarify the psychological and theological mystery of sin is to be valued, the church nevertheless has a duty to remind all scholars in this field of the need to be faithful to the word of God that teaches us also about sin. She likewise has to remind them of the risk of contributing to a further weakening of the sense of sin in the modern world.

The Loss of the Sense of Sin

18. Over the course of generations, the Christian mind has gained from the Gospel as it is read in the ecclesial community a fine sensitivity and an acute perception of the seeds of death contained in sin, as well as a sensitivity and an acuteness of perception for identifying them in the thousand guises under which sin shows itself. This is what is commonly called the sense of sin.

This sense is rooted in man's moral conscience and is as it were its thermometer. It is linked to the sense of God, since it derives from man's conscious relationship with God as his Creator, Lord and Father. Hence, just as it is impossible to

eradicate completely the sense of God or to silence the conscience completely, so the sense of sin is never completely eliminated.

Nevertheless, it happens not infrequently in history, for more or less lengthy periods and under the influence of many different factors, that the moral conscience of many people becomes seriously clouded. "Have we the right idea of conscience?"-I asked two years ago in an address to the faithful" Is it not true

that modern man is threatened by an eclipse of conscience? By a deformation of conscience? By a numbness or 'deadening' of conscience, "(97) Too many signs indicate that such an eclipse exists in our time. This is all the more disturbing in that conscience, defined by the council as "the most secret core and sanctuary of a man, "(98) is "strictly related to human freedom.... For this reason conscience, to a great extent, constitutes the basis of man's interior dignity and, at the same time, of his relationship to God."(99) It is inevitable therefore that in this situation there is an obscuring also of the sense of sin, which is closely connected with the moral conscience, the search for truth and the desire to make a responsible use of freedom. When the conscience is weakened the sense of God is also obscured, and as a result, with the loss of this decisive inner point of reference, the sense of sin is lost. This explains why my predecessor Pius XI, one day declared, in words that have almost become proverbial, that "the sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin."(100)

Why has this happened in our time. A glance at certain aspects of contemporary culture can help us to understand the progressive weakening of the sense of sin, precisely because of the crisis of conscience and crisis of the sense of God already mentioned.

"Secularism" is by nature and definition a movement of ideas and behavior which advocates a humanism totally without God, completely centered upon the cult of action and production and caught up in the heady enthusiasm of consumerism and pleasure seeking, unconcerned with the danger of "losing one's soul." This secularism cannot but undermine the sense of sin. At the very most, sin will be reduced to what offends man. But it is precisely here that we are faced with the bitter experience which I already alluded to in my first encyclical namely, that man can build a world without God, but this world will end by turning against him."(101) In fact, God is the origin and the supreme end of man, and man carries in himself a divine seed.

(102) Hence it is the reality of God that reveals and illustrates the mystery of man. It is therefore vain to hope that there will take root a sense of sin against man and against human values, if there is no sense of offense against God, namely the true sense of sin.

Another reason for the disappearance of the sense of sin in contemporary society is to be found in the errors made in evaluating certain findings of the human sciences. Thus on the basis of certain affirmations of psychology, concern to avoid creating feelings of guilt or to place limits on freedom leads to a refusal ever to admit any shortcoming. Through an undue extrapolation of the criteria of the science of sociology, it finally happens-as I have already said-that all failings are blamed upon society, and the individual is declared innocent of them. Again, a certain cultural anthropology so emphasizes the undeniable environmental and historical conditioning and influences which act upon man, that it reduces his responsibility to the point of not acknowledging his ability to perform truly human acts and therefore his ability to sin.

The sense of sin also easily declines as a result of a system of ethics deriving from a certain historical relativism. This may take the form of an ethical system which relativizes the moral norm, denying its absolute and unconditional value, and as a consequence denying that there can be intrinsically illicit acts independent of the circumstances in which they are performed by the subject. Herein lies a real "overthrowing and downfall of moral values, " and "the problem is not so much one of ignorance of Christian ethics, " but ignorance "rather of the meaning, foundations and criteria of the moral attitude."(103) Another effect of this ethical turning upside down is always such an attenuation of the notion of sin as almost to reach the point of saying that sin does exist, but no one knows who commits it.

Finally the sense of sin disappears when-as can happen in the education of youth, in the mass media and even in education within the family-it is wrongly identified with a morbid feeling of guilt or with the mere transgression of legal norms and precepts.

The loss of the sense of sin is thus a form or consequence of the denial of God: not only in the form of atheism but also in the form of secularism. If sin is the breaking, off of one's filial relationship to God in order to situate one's life outside of obedience to him, then to sin is not merely to deny God. To sin is also to live as if he did not exist, to eliminate him from one's daily life. A model of society which is mutilated or distorted in one sense or another, as is often encouraged by the mass media, greatly favors the gradual loss of the sense of sin. In such a situation the obscuring or weakening of the sense of sin comes from several sources: from a rejection of any reference to the transcendent in the name of the individual's aspiration to personal independence; from acceptance of ethical models imposed by general consensus and behavior, even when condemned by the individual conscience; from the tragic social and economic conditions that oppress a great part of humanity, causing a tendency to see errors and faults only in the context of society; finally and especially, from the obscuring of the notion of God's fatherhood and dominion over man's life.

Even in the field of the thought and life of the church certain trends inevitably favor the decline of the sense of sin. For example, some are inclined to replace exaggerated attitudes of the past with other exaggerations: From seeing sin everywhere they pass to not recognizing it anywhere; from too much emphasis on the fear of eternal punishment they

pass to preaching a love of God that excludes any punishment deserved by sin; from severity in trying to correct erroneous consciences they pass to a kind of respect for conscience which excludes the duty of telling the truth. And should it not be added that the confusion caused in the consciences of many of the faithful by differences of opinions and teachings in theology, preaching, catechesis and spiritual direction on serious and delicate questions of Christian morals ends by diminishing the true sense of sin almost to the point of eliminating it altogether? Nor can certain deficiencies in the practice of sacramental penance be overlooked. These include the tendency to obscure the ecclesial significance of sin and of conversion and to reduce them to merely personal matters; or vice versa, the tendency to nullify the personal value of good and evil and to consider only their community dimension. There also exists the danger, never totally eliminated, of routine ritualism that deprives the sacrament of its full significance and formative effectiveness.

The restoration of a proper sense of sin is the first way of facing the grave spiritual crisis looming over man today. But the sense of sin can only be restored through a clear reminder of the unchangeable principles of reason and faith which the moral teaching of the church has always upheld.

There are good grounds for hoping that a healthy sense of sin will once again flourish, especially in the Christian world and in the church. This will be aided by sound catechetics, illuminated by the biblical theology of the covenant, by an attentive listening and trustful openness to the magisterium of the church, which; never ceases to enlighten consciences, and by an ever more careful practice of the sacrament of penance.

CHAPTER II - "MYSTERIUM PIETATIS"

19. In order to understand sin we have had to direct our attention to its nature as made known to us by the revelation of the economy of salvation: This is the *mysterium iniquitatis*. But in this economy sin is not the main principle, still less the victor. Sin fights against another active principle which-to use a beautiful and evocative expression of St. Paul-we can call the *mysterium* or *sacramentum pietatis*. Man's sin would be the winner and in the end destructive, God's salvific plan would remain incomplete or even totally defeated, if this *mysterium pietatis* were not made part of the dynamism of history in order to conquer man's sin.

We find this expression in one of St. Paul's pastoral letters, the First Letter to Timothy. It appears unexpectedly, as if by an exuberant inspiration. The apostle had previously devoted long paragraphs of his message to his beloved disciple to an explanation of the meaning of the ordering of the community (the liturgical order and the related hierarchical one). Next he had spoken of the role of the heads of the community, before turning to the conduct of Timothy himself in the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth." Then at the end of the passage suddenly, but with a profound purpose, he evokes the element which gives meaning to everything that he has written: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion." (104)

Without in the least betraying the literal sense of the text, we can broaden this magnificent theological insight of St. Paul into a more complete vision of the role which the truth proclaimed by him plays in the economy of salvation: "Great indeed, " we repeat with him, "is the mystery of our religion, " because it conquers sin.

But what is the meaning of this expression, in Paul's mind?

It Is Christ Himself

20. It is profoundly significant that when Paul presents this *mysterium pietatis* he simply transcribes, without making a grammatical link with what he has just written, (105) three lines of a Christological hymn which-in the opinion of authoritative scholars- has used in the Greek-speaking Christian communities.

In the words of that hymn, full of theological content and rich in noble beauty, those first-century believers professed their faith in the mystery of Christ, whereby:

- He was made manifest in the reality of human flesh and was constituted by the Holy Spirit as the Just One who offers himself for the unjust.
- He appeared to the angels, having been made greater than them, and he was preached to the nations as the bearer of salvation.
- He was believed in, in the world, as the one sent by the Father, and by the same Father assumed into heaven as Lord. (106)

The mystery or sacrament of *pietas*, therefore, is the very mystery of Christ. It is, in a striking summary, the mystery of the incarnation and redemption, of the full passover of Jesus, the Son of God and son of Mary: the mystery of his passion and death, of his resurrection and glorification. What St. Paul in quoting the phrases of the hymn wished to emphasize was that this mystery is the hidden vital principle which makes the church the house of God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. Following the Pauline teaching, we can affirm that this same mystery of God's infinite loving kindness toward us is capable of penetrating to the hidden roots of our iniquity! in order to evoke in the soul a movement of conversion, in order to redeem it and set it on course toward reconciliation.

St. John too undoubtedly referring to this mystery, but in his own characteristic language which differs from St. Paul's, was able to write that "anyone born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him."(107) In this Johannine affirmation there is an indication of hope, based on the divine promises: The Christian has received the guarantee and the necessary strength not to sin. It is not a question therefore of a sinlessness acquired through one's own virtue or even inherent in man,

as the Gnostics thought. It is a result of God's action. In order not to sin the Christian has knowledge of God, as St. John reminds us in this same passage. But a little before he had written: "No one born of God commits sin; for God's seed abides in him."(108) If by "God's seed" we understand, as some commentators suggest, Jesus the Son of God, then we can say that in order not to sin or in order to gain freedom from sin the Christian has within himself the presence of Christ and the mystery of Christ, which is the mystery of God's loving kindness.

The Effort of the Christian

21. But there is another aspect to the *mysterium pietatis*: The loving kindness of God toward the Christian must be matched by the piety of the Christian toward God. In this second meaning of the word, piety (*eusebeia*) means precisely the conduct of the Christian who responds to God's fatherly loving kindness with his own filial Piety.

In this sense too we can say with St. Paul that "great indeed is the mystery of our religion. In this sense too piety, as a force for conversion and reconciliation, confronts iniquity and sin. In this case too the essential aspects of the mystery of Christ are the object of piety in the sense that the Christian accepts the mystery, contemplates it and draws from it the spiritual strength necessary for living according to the Gospel. Here too one must say that "no one born of God commits sin"; but the expression has an imperative sense: Sustained by the mystery of Christ as by an interior source of spiritual energy, the Christian, being a child of God, is warned not to sin and indeed receives the commandment not to sin but to live in a manner worthy of "the house of God, that is, the church of the living God."(109)

Toward a Reconciled Life

22. Thus the word of Scripture, as it reveals to us the mystery of *pietas*, opens the intellect to conversion and reconciliation, understood not as lofty abstractions but as concrete Christian values to be achieved in our daily lives.

Deceived by the loss of the sense of sin and at times tempted by an illusion of sinlessness which is not at all Christian, the people of today too need to listen again to St. John's admonition, as addressed to each one of them personally: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,"(110) and indeed, "the whole world is in the power of the evil one."(111) Every individual therefore is invited by the voice of divine truth to examine realistically his or her conscience and to confess that he or she has been brought forth in iniquity, as we say in the *Miserere* psalm."(112)

Nevertheless, though threatened by fear and despair, the people of today can feel uplifted by the divine promise which opens to them the hope of full reconciliation.

The mystery of *pietas*, on God's part, is that mercy in which our Lord and Father-I repeat it again-is infinitely rich.(113) As I said in my encyclical on the subject of divine mercy, (114) it is a love more powerful than sin, stronger than death. When we realize that God's love for us does not cease in the face of our sin or recoil before our offenses, but becomes even more attentive and generous; when we realize that this love went so far as cause the passion and death of the Word made flesh who consented to redeem us at the price of his own blood, then we exclaim in gratitude: "Yes, the Lord is rich in mercy, and even: "The Lord is mercy."

The mystery of *pietas* is the path opened by divine mercy to a reconciled life.

PART THREE - THE PASTORAL MINISTRY OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

Promoting Penance and Reconciliation

23. To evoke conversion and penance in man's heart and to offer him the gift of reconciliation is the specific mission of the church as she continues the redemptive work of her divine founder. It is not a mission which consists merely of a few theoretical statements and the putting forward of an ethical ideal unaccompanied by the energy with which to carry it out. Rather it seeks to express itself in precise ministerial functions directed toward a concrete practice of penance and reconciliation.

We can call this ministry, which is founded on and illumined by the principles of faith which we have explained and which is directed toward precise objectives and sustained by adequate means, the pastoral activity of penance and reconciliation. Its point of departure is the church's conviction that man, to whom every form of pastoral activity is directed but principally that of penance and reconciliation, is the man marked by sin whose striking image is to be found in King David. Rebuked by the prophet Nathan, David faces squarely his own iniquity and confesses: "I have sinned against the Lord,"(115) and proclaims: "I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."(116) But he

also prays: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,"(117) and he receives the response of the divine mercy: "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die."(118)

The church thus finds herself face to face with man-with the whole human world-wounded by sin and affected by sin in the innermost depths of his being. But at the same time he is moved by an unrestrainable desire to be freed from sin and, especially if he is a Christian, he is aware that the mystery of pietas, Christ the Lord, is already acting in him and in the world by the power of the redemption.

The church's reconciling role must therefore be carried out in accordance with that intimate link which closely connects the forgiveness and remission of the sin of each person with the fundamental and full reconciliation of humanity which took place with the redemption. This link helps us to understand that, since sin is the active principle of division-division between man and the nature created by God-only conversion from sin is capable of bringing about a profound and lasting reconciliation wherever division has penetrated.

I do not need to repeat what I have already said about the importance of this "ministry of reconciliation,"(119) and of the pastoral activity whereby it is carried out in the church's consciousness and life. This pastoral activity would be lacking an essential aspect of its being and failing in an indispensable function if the "message of reconciliation"(120) were not proclaimed with clarity and tenacity in season and out of season, and if the gift of reconciliation were not offered to the world. But it is worth repeating that the importance of the ecclesial service of reconciliation extends beyond the confines of the church to the whole world.

To speak of the pastoral activity of penance and reconciliation, then, is to refer to all the tasks incumbent on the church, at all levels, for their promotion. More concretely, to speak of this pastoral-activity is to evoke all the activities whereby the church, through each and every one of her members-pastors and faithful, at all levels and in all spheres, and with all the means at her disposal, words and actions, teaching and prayer-leads people individually or as groups to true penance and thus sets them on the path to full reconciliation.

The fathers of the synod, as representatives of their brother bishops and as leaders of the people entrusted to them, concerned themselves with the most practical and concrete elements of this pastoral activity. And I am happy to echo their concerns by associating myself with their anxieties and hopes, by receiving the results of their research and experiences, and by encouraging them in their plans and achievements. May they find in this part of the present apostolic exhortation the contribution which they themselves made to the synod, a contribution the usefulness of which I wish to extend, through these pages, to the whole church.

I therefore propose to call attention to the essentials of the pastoral activity of penance and reconciliation by emphasizing, with the synod assembly, the following two points:

1. The means used and the paths followed by the church in order to promote penance and reconciliation.
2. The sacrament par excellence of penance and reconciliation.

CHAPTER ONE - THE PROMOTION OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION: WAYS AND MEANS

24. In order to promote penance and reconciliation, the church has at her disposal two principal means which were entrusted to her by her founder himself: catechesis and the sacraments. Their use has always been considered by the church as fully in harmony with the requirements of her salvific mission and at the same time as corresponding to the requirements and spiritual needs of people in all ages. This use can be in forms and ways both old and new, among which it will be a good idea to remember in particular what we can call, in the expression of my predecessor Paul VI, the method of dialogue.

Dialogue

25. For the church, dialogue is in a certain sense a means and especially a way of carrying out her activity in the modern world.

The Second Vatican Council proclaims that "the church, by virtue of her mission to shed on the whole world the radiance of the gospel message, and to unify under one Spirit all people... stands forth as a sign of that fraternal solidarity which allows honest dialogue and invigorates it." The council adds that the church should be capable of "establishing an ever more fruitful dialogue among all those who compose the one people of God" and also of "establishing a dialogue with human society."(122)

My predecessor Paul VI devoted to dialogue a considerable part of his first encyclical, *Ecclesium Suum*, in which he describes it and significantly characterizes it as the dialogue of salvation.(123)

The church in fact uses the method of dialogue in order the better to lead people-both those who through baptism and the profession of faith acknowledge their membership of the Christian community and also those who are outside-to conversion and repentance, along the path of a profound renewal of their own consciences and lives in the light of the mystery of the redemption and salvation accomplished by Christ and entrusted to the ministry of his church. Authentic dialogue, therefore, is aimed above all at the rebirth of individuals through interior conversion and repentance, but always with profound respect for consciences and with patience and at the step-by-step pace indispensable for modern conditions.

Pastoral dialogue aimed at reconciliation continues to be today a fundamental task of the church in different spheres and at different levels.

The church in the first place promotes an ecumenical dialogue, that is, with churches and ecclesial communities which profess faith in Christ, the Son of God and only savior. She also promotes dialogue with the other communities of people who are seeking God and wish to have a relationship of communion with him.

At the basis of this dialogue with the other churches and Christian communities and with the other religions, and as a condition of her credibility and effectiveness, there must be a sincere effort of permanent and renewed dialogue within the Catholic Church herself. She is aware that, by her nature, she is the sacrament of the universal communion of charity;(124) but she is equally aware of the tensions within her, tensions which risk becoming factors of division.

The heartfelt and determined invitation which was already extended by my predecessor in preparation for the 1975 Holy Year(125) is also valid at the present moment. In order to overcome conflicts and to ensure that normal tensions do not prove harmful to the unity of the church, we must all apply to ourselves the word of God; we must relinquish our own subjective views and seek the truth where it is to be found, namely in the divine word itself and in the authentic interpretation of that word provided by the magisterium of the church. In this light, listening to one another, respect, refraining from all hasty judgments, patience, the ability to avoid subordinating the faith which unites to the opinions, fashions and ideological choices which divide-these are all qualities of a dialogue within the church which must be persevering, open and sincere. Obviously dialogue would not have these qualities and would not become a factor of reconciliation if the magisterium were not heeded and accepted.

Thus actively engaged in seeking her own internal communion, the Catholic Church can address an appeal for reconciliation to the other churches with which there does not exist full communion, as well as to the other religions and even to all those who are seeking God with a sincere heart. This she has been doing for some time.

In the light of the council and of the magisterium of my predecessors, whose precious inheritance I have received and am making every effort to preserve and put into effect, I can affirm that the Catholic Church at every level is committed to frank ecumenical dialogue, without facile optimism but also without distrust and without hesitation or delays. The fundamental laws which she seeks to follow in this dialogue are, on the one hand, the conviction that only a spiritual ecumenism-namely an ecumenism founded on common prayer and in a common docility to the one Lord-enables us to make a sincere and serious response to the other exigencies of ecumenical action.(126) The other law is the conviction that a certain facile irenicism in doctrinal and especially dogmatic matters could perhaps lead to a form of superficial and short-lived coexistence, but it could not lead to that profound and stable communion which we all long for. This communion will be reached at the hour willed by divine providence. But in order to reach it, the Catholic Church, for her part, knows that she must be open and sensitive to all "the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren";(127) but she also knows that she must likewise base a frank and constructive dialogue upon a clarity regarding her own positions and upon fidelity and consistency with the faith transmitted and defined in accordance with the perennial tradition of her magisterium. Notwithstanding the threat of a certain defeatism and despite the inevitable slowness which rashness could never correct, the Catholic Church continues with all other Christian brethren to seek the paths to unity, and with the followers of the other religions she continues to seek to have sincere dialogue. May this inter-religious dialogue lead to the overcoming of all attitudes of hostility, distrust, mutual condemnation and even mutual invective, which is the precondition for encounter at least in faith in one God and in the certainty of eternal life for the immortal soul. May the Lord especially grant that ecumenical dialogue will also lead to a sincere reconciliation concerning everything that we already have in common with the other Christian churches- faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, our savior and Lord; a listening to the word; the study of revelation and the sacrament of baptism.

To the extent to which the church is capable of generating active harmony-unity in variety-within herself and of offering herself as a witness to and humble servant of reconciliation with the other churches and ecclesial communities and the other religions, she becomes, in the expressive definition of St. Augustine, a "reconciled world."(128) Then she will be able to be a sign of reconciliation in the world and for the world.

The church is aware of the extreme seriousness of the situation created by the forces of division and war, which today constitute a grave threat not only to the balance and harmony of nations but to the very survival of humanity, and she feels it her duty to offer and suggest her own unique collaboration for the overcoming of conflicts and the restoration of concord.

It is a complex and delicate dialogue of reconciliation in which the church is engaged, especially through the work of the Holy See and its different organisms. The Holy See already endeavors to intervene with the leaders of nations and the heads of the various international bodies or seeks to associate itself with them, conduct a dialogue with them and encourage them to dialogue with one another for the sake of reconciliation in the midst of the many conflicts. It does this not for ulterior motives or hidden interests. since it has none-but "out of a humanitarian concern,"(129) placing its institutional structure and moral authority, which are altogether unique, at the service of concord and peace. It does this in the conviction that as "in war two parties rise against one another" so "in the question of peace there are also necessarily two parties which must know how to commit themselves, " and in this "one finds the true meaning of a dialogue for peace."(130)

The church engages in dialogue for reconciliation also through the bishops in the competency and responsibility proper to them, either individually in the direct;on of their respective local churches or united in their episcopal conferences, with the collaboration of the priests and of all those who make up the Christian communities. They truly fulfill their task when they promote this indispensable dialogue and proclaim the human and Christian need for reconciliation and peace. In communion with their pastors, the laity who have as "their own field of evangelizing activity...the vast and complicated world of politics, society...economics...(and) international life,"(131) are called upon to engage directly in dialogue or to work for dialogue aimed at reconciliation. Through them too the church carries out her reconciling activity. Thus the fundamental presupposition and secure basis for any lasting renewal of society and for peace between nations lies in the regeneration of hearts through conversion and penance.

It should be repeated that, on the part of the church and her members, dialogue, whatever form it takes (and these forms can be and are very diverse since the very concept of dialogue has an analogical value) can never begin from an attitude of indifference to the truth. On the contrary, it must begin from a presentation of the truth, offered in a calm way, with respect for the intelligence and consciences of others. The dialogue of reconciliation can never replace or attenuate the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel, the precise goal of which is conversion from sin and communion with Christ and the church. It must be at the service of the transmission and realization of that truth through the means left by Christ to the church for the pastoral activity of reconciliation, namely catechesis and penance.

Catechesis

26. In the vast area in which the church has the mission of operating through dialogue, the pastoral ministry of penance and reconciliation is directed to the members of the body of the church principally through an adequate catechesis concerning the two distinct and complementary realities to which the synod fathers gave a particular importance and which they emphasized in some of the concluding propositions: These are penance and reconciliation. Catechesis is therefore the first means to be used.

At the basis of the synod's very opportune recommendation is a fundamental presupposition; What is pastoral is not opposed to what is doctrinal. Nor can pastoral action prescind from doctrinal content, from which in fact it draws its substance and real validity. Now if the church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth'(132) and is placed in the world as mother and teacher, how could she neglect the task of teaching the truth which constitutes a path of life?

From the pastors of the church one expects, first of all, catechesis on reconciliation. This must be founded on the teaching of the Bible, especially the New Testament, on the need to rebuild the covenant with God in Christ the redeemer and reconciler. And in the light of this new communion and friendship, and as an extension of it, it must be founded on the teaching concerning the need to be reconciled with one's brethren, even if this means interrupting the offering of the sacrifice.(133) Jesus strongly insists on this theme of fraternal reconciliation: for example, when he invites us to turn the other cheek to the one who strikes us, and to give our cloak too to the one who has taken our coat, (134) or when he instills the law of forgiveness: forgiveness which each one receives in the measure that he or she foresees forgiveness to be offered even to enemies, (136) forgiveness to be granted seventy times seven times, (137) which means in practice without any limit. On these conditions, which are realizable only in a genuinely evangelical climate, it is possible to have a true reconciliation between individuals, families, communities, nations and peoples. From these biblical data on reconciliation there will naturally derive a theological catechesis, which in its synthesis will also integrate the elements of psychology, sociology and the other human sciences which can serve to clarify situations, describe problems accurately and persuade listeners or readers to make concrete resolutions.

The pastors of the church are also expected to provide catechesis on penance. Here too the richness of the biblical message must be its source. With regard to penance this message emphasizes particularly its value for conversion, which is the term that attempts to translate the word in the Greek text, *metanoia*, (138) which literally means to allow the spirit to be overturned in order to make it turn toward God. These are also the two fundamental elements which emerge from the parable of the son who was lost and found: his "coming to himself"(139) and his decision to return to his father. There can be no reconciliation unless these attitudes of conversion come first, and catechesis should explain them with concepts and terms adapted to people's various ages and their differing cultural, moral and social backgrounds.

This is a first value of penance and it extends into a second: Penance also means repentance. The two meanings of *metanoia* appear in the significant instruction given by Jesus: "If your brother repents (returns to you), forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times and says, 'I repent, ' you must forgive him."(140) A good catechesis will show how repentance, just like conversion, is far from being a superficial feeling but a real overturning of the soul.

A third value is contained in penance, and this is the movement whereby the preceding attitudes of conversion and repentance are manifested externally: This is doing penance. This meaning is clearly perceptible in the term *metanoia*, as used by John the Baptist in the texts of the synoptics.(141) To do penance means above all to reestablish the balance and harmony broken by sin, to change direction even at the cost of sacrifice.

A catechesis on penance, therefore, and one that is as complete and adequate as possible, is absolutely essential at a time like ours when dominant attitudes in psychology and social behavior are in such contrast with the threefold value

just illustrated. Contemporary man seems to find it harder than ever to recognize his own mistakes and to decide to retrace his steps and begin again after changing course. He seems very reluctant to say "I repent" or "I am sorry." He seems to refuse instinctively and often irresistibly anything that is penance in the sense of a sacrifice accepted and carried out for the correction of sin. In this regard I would like to emphasize that the church's penitential discipline, even though it has been mitigated for some time, cannot be abandoned without grave harm both to the interior life of individual Christians and of the ecclesial community and also to their capacity for missionary influence. It is not uncommon for non-Christians to be surprised at the negligible witness of true penance on the part of Christ's followers. It is clear, however, that Christian penance will only be authentic if it is inspired by love and not by mere fear; if it consists in a serious effort to crucify the "old man" so that the "new" can be born by the power of Christ; if it takes as its model Christ, who though he was innocent chose the path of poverty, patience, austerity and, one can say, the penitential life.

As the synod recalled, the pastors of the church are also expected to provide catechesis on conscience and its formation. This too is a very relevant topic in view of the fact that in the upheavals to which our present culture is subjected this interior sanctuary, man's innermost self, his conscience, is too often attacked, put to the test, confused and obscured. Valuable guidelines for a wise catechesis on conscience can be found both in the doctors of the church and in the theology of the Second Vatican Council, and especially in the documents on the church in the modern world(142) and on religious liberty.(143) Along these same lines, Pope Paul VI often reminded us of the nature and role of conscience in our life.(144) I myself, following his footsteps, miss no opportunity to throw light on this most lofty element of man's greatness and dignity,

(145) this "sort of moral sense which leads us to discern what is good and what is evil...like an inner eye, a visual capacity of the spirit, able to guide our steps along the path of good." And I have reiterated the need to form one's conscience, lest it become "a force which is destructive of the true humanity of the person, rather than that holy place where God reveals to him his true good."(146)

On other points too, of no less relevance for reconciliation, one looks to the pastors of the church for catechesis.

On the sense of sin, which, as I have said, has become considerably weakened in our world.

On temptation and temptations: The Lord Jesus himself, the Son of God, "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin,"(147) allowed himself to be tempted by the evil one(148) in order to show that, like himself, his followers too would be subjected to temptation, and in order to show how one should behave when subjected to temptation. For those who beseech the Father not to be tempted beyond their own strength(149) and not to succumb to temptation, (150) and for those who do not expose themselves to occasions of sin, being subjected to temptation does not mean that they have sinned; rather it is an opportunity for growing in fidelity and consistency through humility and watchfulness.

Catechesis is also expected on fasting: This can be practiced in old forms and new as a sign of conversion, repentance and personal mortification and, at the same time, as a sign of union with Christ crucified and of solidarity with the starving and suffering.

Catechesis on almsgiving: This is a means of making charity a practical thing by sharing what one possesses with those suffering the consequences of poverty.

Catechesis on the intimate connection which links the overcoming of divisions in the world with perfect communion with God and among people, which is the eschatological purpose of the church.

Catechesis on the concrete circumstances in which reconciliation has to be achieved (in the family, in the civil community, in social structures) and particularly catechesis on the four reconciliations which repair the four fundamental rifts; reconciliation of man with God, with self, with the brethren and with the whole of creation.

Nor can the church omit, without serious mutilation of her essential message, a constant catechesis on what the traditional Christian language calls the four last things of man: death, judgment (universal and particular), hell and heaven. In a culture which tends to imprison man in the earthly life at which he is more or less successful, the pastors of the church are asked to provide a catechesis which will reveal and illustrate with the certainties of faith what comes after the present life: beyond the mysterious gates of death, an eternity of joy in communion with God or the punishment of separation from him. Only in this eschatological vision can one realize the exact nature of sin and feel decisively moved to penance and reconciliation.

Pastors who are zealous and creative never lack opportunities for imparting this broad and varied catechesis, taking into account the different degrees of education and religious formation of those to whom they speak. Such opportunities are often given by the biblical readings and the rites of the Mass and the sacraments, as also by the circumstances of their celebration. For the same purpose many initiatives can be taken such as sermons, lectures, discussions, meetings, courses of religious education, etc., as happens in many places. Here I wish to point out in particular the importance and effectiveness of the old-style popular missions for the purposes of such catechesis. If adapted to the peculiar needs of the present time, such missions can be, today as yesterday, a useful instrument of religious education also regarding penance and reconciliation.

In view of the great relevance of reconciliation based on conversion in the delicate field of human relationships and social interaction at all levels, including the international level, catechesis cannot fail to inculcate the valuable contribution of the church's social teaching. The timely and precise teaching of my predecessors from Pope Leo XIII

onward, to which was added the substantial contribution the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council and the contributions of the different episcopates elicited by various circumstances in their respective countries, has made up an ample and solid body of doctrine. This regards the many different needs inherent in the life of the human community, in relationships between individuals, families, groups in their different spheres and in the very constitution of a society that intends to follow the moral law, which is the foundation of civilization.

At the basis of this social teaching of the church there is obviously to be found the vision which the church draws from the word of God concerning the rights and duties of individuals, the family and the community; concerning the value of liberty and the nature of justice, concerning the primacy of charity, concerning the dignity of the human person and the exigencies of the common good to which politics and the economy itself must be directed. Upon these fundamental principles of the social magisterium, which confirm and repropose the universal dictates of reason and of the conscience of peoples, there rests in great part the hope for a peaceful solution to many social conflicts and, in short, the hope for universal reconciliation.

The Sacraments

27. The second divinely instituted means which the church offers for the pastoral activity of penance and reconciliation is constituted by the sacraments.

In the mysterious dynamism of the sacraments, so rich in symbolism and content, one can discern one aspect which is not always emphasized: Each sacrament, over and above its own proper grace, is also a sign of penance and reconciliation. Therefore in each of them it is possible to relive these dimensions of the spirit.

Baptism is of course a salvific washing which, as St Peter says, is effective "not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience." (151) It is death, burial and resurrection with the dead, buried and risen Christ. (152) It is a gift of the Holy Spirit through Christ. (153) But this essential and original constituent of Christian baptism, far from eliminating the penitential element already present in the baptism which Jesus himself received from John "to fulfill all righteousness," (154) in fact enriches it. In other words, it is a fact of conversion and of reintegration into the right order of relationships with God, of reconciliation with God, with the elimination of the original stain and the consequent introduction into the great family of the reconciled.

Confirmation likewise, as a ratification of baptism and together with baptism a sacrament of initiation, in conferring the fullness of the Holy Spirit and in bringing the Christian life to maturity, signifies and accomplishes thereby a greater conversion of the heart and brings about a more intimate and effective membership of the same assembly of the reconciled, which is the church of Christ.

The definition which St. Augustine gives of the eucharist as "sacramentum pietatis, signum unitatis, vinculum caritatis" (155) clearly illustrates the effects of personal sanctification (*pietas*) and community reconciliation (*unitas* and *caritas*) which derive from the very essence of the eucharistic mystery as an unbloody renewal of the sacrifice of the cross, the source of salvation and of reconciliation for all people.

However, it must be remembered that the church, guided by faith in this great sacrament, teaches that no Christian who is conscious of grave sin can receive the eucharist before having obtained God's forgiveness. This we read in the instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* which, duly approved by Paul VI, fully confirms the teaching of the Council of Trent: "The eucharist is to be offered to the faithful also 'as a remedy, which frees us from daily faults and preserves us from mortal sin' and they are to be shown the fitting way of using the penitential parts of the liturgy of the Mass. The person who wishes to receive holy communion is to be reminded of the precept: Let a man examine himself" (1 Cor 11:28). And the church's custom shows that such an examination is necessary, because no one who is conscious of being in mortal sin, however contrite he may believe himself to be, is to approach the holy eucharist without having first made a sacramental confession. If this person finds himself in need and has no means of going to confession, he should first make an act of perfect contrition." (116)

The sacrament of orders is intended to give to the church the pastors who, besides being teachers and guides, are called to be witnesses and workers of unity, builders of the family of God, and defenders and preservers of the communion of this family against the sources of division and dispersion.

The sacrament of matrimony, the exaltation of human love under the action of grace, is a sign of the love of Christ for the church. But it is also a sign of the victory which Christ grants to couples in resisting the forces which deform and destroy love, in order that the family born from this sacrament may be a sign also of the reconciled and reconciling church for a world reconciled in all its structures and institutions.

Finally, the anointing of the sick in the trial of illness and old age and especially at the Christian's final hour is a sign of definitive conversion to the Lord and of total acceptance of suffering and death as a penance for sins. And in this is accomplished supreme reconciliation with the Father.

However, among the sacraments there is one which, though it has often been called the sacrament of confession because of the accusation of sins which takes place in it, can more appropriately be considered by *antonomasia* the sacrament of penance, as it is in fact called. And thus it is the sacrament of conversion and reconciliation. The recent synod particularly concerned itself with this sacrament because of its importance with regard to reconciliation.

CHAPTER TWO - THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

28. In all its phases and at all its levels the synod considered with the greatest attention that sacramental sign which represents and at the same time accomplishes penance and reconciliation. This sacrament in itself certainly does not contain all possible ideas of conversion and reconciliation. From the very beginning, in fact, the church has recognized and used many and varying forms of penance. Some are liturgical or paraliturgical and include the penitential act in the Mass, services of atonement and pilgrimages; others are of an ascetical character, such as fasting. But of all such acts none is more significant, more divinely efficacious or more lofty and at the same time easily accessible as a rite than the sacrament of penance.

From its preparatory stage and then in the numerous interventions during the sessions, in the group meetings and in the final propositions, the synod took into account the statement frequently made with varying nuances and emphases, namely: The sacrament of penance is in crisis. The synod took note of this crisis. It recommended a more profound catechesis, but it also recommended a no less profound analysis of a theological, historical, psychological, sociological and juridical character of penance in general and of the sacrament of penance in particular. In all of this the synod's intention was to clarify the reasons for the crisis and to open the way to a positive solution for the good of humanity. Meanwhile, from the synod itself the church has received a clear confirmation of its faith regarding the sacrament which gives to every Christian and to the whole community of believers the certainty of forgiveness through the power of the redeeming blood of Christ.

It is good to renew and reaffirm this faith at a moment when it might be weakening, losing something of its completeness or entering into an area of shadow and silence, threatened as it is by the negative elements of the above-mentioned crisis. For the sacrament of confession is indeed being undermined, on the one hand by the obscuring of the mortal and religious conscience, the lessening of a sense of sin, the distortion of the concept of repentance and the lack of effort to live an authentically Christian life. And on the other hand, it is being undermined by the sometimes widespread idea that one can obtain forgiveness directly from God, even in a habitual way, without approaching the sacrament of reconciliation. A further negative influence is the routine of a sacramental practice sometimes lacking in fervor and real spontaneity, deriving perhaps from a mistaken and distorted idea of the effects of the sacrament.

It is therefore appropriate to recall the principal aspects of this great sacrament.

"Whose Sins You Shall Forgive"

29. The books of the Old and New Testament provide us with the first and fundamental fact concerning the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. In the Psalms and in the preaching of the prophets, the name merciful is perhaps the one most often given to the Lord, in contrast to the persistent cliché whereby the God of the Old Testament is presented above all as severe and vengeful. Thus in the Psalms there is a long sapiential passage drawing from the Exodus tradition, which recalls God's kindly action in the midst of his people. This action, though represented in an anthropomorphic way, is perhaps one of the most eloquent Old Testament proclamations of the divine mercy. Suffice it to quote the verse: "Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often, and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again."(157)

In the fullness of time the Son of God, coming as the lamb who takes away and bears upon himself the sin of the world appears as the one who has the power both to judge(159) and to forgive sins, (160) and who has come not to condemn but to forgive and save.(161)

Now this power to "forgive sins" Jesus confers through the Holy Spirit upon ordinary men, themselves subject to the snare of sin, namely his apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."(162) This is one of the most awe-inspiring innovations of the Gospel! He confers this power on the apostles also as something which they can transmit-as the church has understood it from the beginning-to their successors, charged by the same apostles with the mission and responsibility of continuing their work as proclaimers of the Gospel and ministers of Christ's redemptive work.

Here there is seen in all its grandeur the figure of the minister of the sacrament of penance who by very ancient custom is called the confessor.

Just as at the altar where he celebrates the eucharist and just as in each one of the sacraments, so the priest, as the minister of penance, acts "in persona Christi" The Christ whom he makes present and who accomplishes the mystery of the forgiveness of sins is the Christ who appears as the brother of man, (163) the merciful high priest, faithful and compassionate, (164) the shepherd intent on finding the lost sheep,

(165) the physician who heals and comforts, (166) the one master who teaches the truth and reveals the ways of God, (167) the judge of the living and the dead, (168) who judges according to the truth and not according to appearances.(169)

This is undoubtedly the most difficult and sensitive, the most exhausting and demanding ministry of the priest, but also one of the most beautiful and consoling. Precisely for this reason and with awareness also of the strong recommendation of the synod, I will never grow weary of exhorting my brothers, the bishops and priests, to the faithful and diligent performance of ministry.(170) Before the consciences of the faithful, who open up to him with a mixture

of fear and trust, the confessor is called to a lofty task which is one of service and penance and human reconciliation. It is a task of learning the weaknesses and falls of those faithful people, assessing their desire for renewal and their efforts to achieve it, discerning the action of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, imparting to them a forgiveness which God alone can grant, "celebrating" their reconciliation with the Father, portrayed in the parable of the prodigal son, reinstating these redeemed sinners in the ecclesial community with their brothers and sisters, and paternally admonishing these penitents with a firm, encouraging and friendly "Do not sin again."(171)

For the effective performance of this ministry, the confessor must necessarily have human qualities of prudence, discretion, discernment and a firmness tempered by gentleness and kindness. He must likewise have a serious and careful preparation, not fragmentary but complete and harmonious, in the different branches of theology, pedagogy and psychology, in the methodology of dialogue and above all in a living and communicable knowledge of the word of God. But it is even more necessary that he should live an intense and genuine spiritual life. In order to lead others along the path of Christian perfection the minister of penance himself must first travel this path. More by actions than by long speeches he must give proof of real experience of lived prayer, the practice of the theological and moral virtues of the Gospel, faithful obedience to the will of God, love of the church and docility to her magisterium.

All this fund of human gifts, Christian virtues and pastoral capabilities has to be worked for and is only acquired with effort. Every priest must be trained for the ministry of sacramental penance from his years in the seminary, not only through the study of dogmatic, moral, spiritual and pastoral theology (which are simply parts of a whole), but also through the study of the human sciences, training in dialogue and especially in how to deal with people in the pastoral context. He must then be guided and looked after in his first activities. He must always ensure his own improvement and updating by means of permanent study. What a wealth of grace, true life and spiritual radiation would be poured out on the church if every priest were careful never to miss through negligence or various excuses the appointment with the faithful in the confessional and if he were even more careful never to go to it unprepared or lacking the necessary human qualities and spiritual and pastoral preparation!

In this regard I cannot but recall with devout admiration those extraordinary apostles of the confessional such as St. John Nepomucene, St. John Vianney, St. Joseph Cafasso and St. Leopold of Castelnuovo, to mention only the best-known confessors whom the church has added to the list of her saints. But I also wish to pay homage to the innumerable host of holy and almost always anonymous confessors to whom is owed the salvation of so many souls who have been helped by them in conversion, in the struggle against sin and temptation, in spiritual progress and, in a word, in achieving holiness. I do not hesitate to say that even the great canonized saints are generally the fruit of those confessionals, and not only the saints but also the spiritual patrimony of the church and the flowering of a civilization permeated with the Christian spirit! Praise then to this silent army of our brothers who have served well and serve each day the cause of reconciliation through the ministry of sacramental penance!

The Sacrament of Forgiveness

30. From the revelation of the value of this ministry and power to forgive sins, conferred by Christ on the apostles and their successors, there developed in the church an awareness of the sign of forgiveness, conferred through the sacrament of penance. It is the certainty that the Lord Jesus himself instituted and entrusted to the church-as a gift of his goodness and loving kindness(172) to be offered to all-a special sacrament for the forgiveness of sins committed after baptism.

The practice of this sacrament, as regards its celebration and form, has undergone a long process of development as is attested to by the most ancient sacramentaries, the documents of councils and episcopal synods, the preaching of the fathers and the teaching of the doctors of the church. But with regard to the substance of the sacrament there has always remained firm and unchanged in the consciousness of the church the certainty that, by the will of Christ, forgiveness is offered to each individual by means of sacramental absolution given by the ministers of penance. It is a certainty reaffirmed with particular vigor both by the Council of Trent(173) and by the Second Vatican Council: "Those who approach the sacrament of penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offenses committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example and by prayer works for their conversion."(174) And as an essential element of faith concerning the value and purpose of penance it must be reaffirmed that our savior Jesus Christ instituted in his church the sacrament of penance so that the faithful who have fallen into sin after baptism might receive grace and be reconciled with God (175)

The church's faith in this sacrament involves certain other fundamental truths which cannot be disregarded. The sacramental rite of penance, in its evolution and variation of actual forms, has always preserved and highlighted these truths. When it recommended a reform of this rite, the Second Vatican Council intended to ensure that it would express these truths even more clearly, (176) and this has come about with the new Rite of Penance.(177) For the latter has made its own the whole of the teaching brought together by the Council of Trent, transferring it from its particular historical context (that of a resolute effort to clarify doctrine in the face of the serious deviations from the church's genuine teaching), in order to translate it faithfully into terms more in keeping with the context of our own time.

Some Fundamental Convictions

31. The truths mentioned above, powerfully and clearly confirmed by the synod and contained in the propositions, can be summarized in the following convictions of faith, to which are connected all the other affirmations of the Catholic doctrine on the sacrament of penance.

I. The first conviction is that for a Christian the sacrament of penance is the primary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sin committed after baptism. Certainly the Savior and his salvific action are not so bound to a sacramental sign as to be unable in any period or area of the history of salvation to work outside and above the sacraments. But in the school of faith we learn that the same Savior desired and provided that the simple and precious sacraments of faith would ordinarily be the effective means through which his redemptive power passes and operates. It would therefore be foolish, as well as presumptuous, to wish arbitrarily to disregard the means of grace and salvation which the Lord has provided and, in the specific case, to claim to receive forgiveness while doing without the sacrament which was instituted by Christ precisely for forgiveness. The renewal of the rites carried out after the council does not sanction any illusion or alteration in this direction. According to the church's intention, it was and is meant to stir up in each one of us a new impulse toward the renewal of our interior attitude; toward a deeper understanding of the nature of the sacrament of penance; toward a reception of the sacrament which is more filled with faith, not anxious but trusting; toward a more frequent celebration of the sacrament which is seen to be completely filled with the Lord's merciful love.

II. The second conviction concerns the function of the sacrament of penance for those who have recourse to it. According to the most ancient traditional idea, the sacrament is a kind of judicial action; but this takes place before a tribunal of mercy rather than of strict and rigorous justice, which is comparable to human tribunals only by analogy namely insofar as sinners reveal their sins and their condition as creatures subject to sin; they commit themselves to renouncing and combating sin; accept the punishment (sacramental penance) which the confessor imposes on them and receive absolution from him.

But as it reflects on the function of this sacrament, the church's consciousness discerns in it, over and above the character of judgment in the sense just mentioned, a healing of a medicinal character. And this is linked to the fact that the Gospel frequently presents Christ as healer, (179) while his redemptive work is often called, from Christian antiquity, *medicina salutis*. "I wish to heal, not accuse," St. Augustine said, referring to the exercise of the pastoral activity regarding penance, (180) and it is thanks to the medicine of confession that the experience of sin does not degenerate into despair.(181) The Rite of Penance alludes to this healing aspect of the sacrament, (182) to which modern man is perhaps more sensitive, seeing as he does in sin the element of error but even more the element of weakness and human frailty.

Whether as a tribunal of mercy or a place of spiritual healing, under both aspects the sacrament requires a knowledge of the sinner's heart in order to be able to judge and absolve, to cure and heal. Precisely for this reason the sacrament involves on the part of the penitent a sincere and complete confession of sins. This therefore has a *raison d'être* not only inspired by ascetical purposes (as an exercise of humility and mortification), but one that is inherent in the very nature of the sacrament.

III. The third conviction, which is one that I wish to emphasize, concerns the realities or parts which make up the sacramental sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. Some of these realities are acts of the penitent, of varying importance but each indispensable either for the validity, the completeness or the fruitfulness of the sign.

First of all, an indispensable condition is the rectitude and clarity of the penitent's conscience. People cannot come to true and genuine repentance until they realize that sin is contrary to the ethical norm written in their inmost being;(183) until they admit that they have had a personal and responsible experience of this contrast; until they say not only that "sin exists" but also "I have sinned"; until they admit that sin has introduced a division into their consciences which then pervades their whole being and separates them from God and from their brothers and sisters. The sacramental sign of this clarity of conscience is the act traditionally called the examination of conscience, an act that must never be one of anxious psychological introspection, but a sincere and calm comparison with the interior moral law, with the evangelical norms proposed by the church, with Jesus Christ himself, who is our teacher and model of life, and with the heavenly Father, who calls us to goodness and perfection.(184)

But the essential act of penance, on the part of the penitent, is contrition, a clear and decisive rejection of the sin committed, together with a resolution not to commit it again, (185) out of the love which one has for God and which is reborn with repentance. Understood in this way, contrition is therefore the beginning and the heart of conversion, of that evangelical *metanoia* which brings the person back to God like the prodigal son returning to his father, and which has in the sacrament of penance its visible sign and which perfects attrition. Hence "upon this contrition of heart depends the truth of penance."(186)

While reiterating everything that the church, inspired by God's word, teaches about contrition, I particularly wish to emphasize here just one aspect of this doctrine. It is one that should be better known and considered. Conversion and contention are often considered under the aspect of the undeniable demands which they involve and under the aspect of the mortification which they impose for the purpose of bringing about a radical change of life. But we all too well to recall and emphasize the fact that contrition and conversion are even more a drawing near to the holiness of God, a rediscovery of one's true identity, which has been upset and disturbed by sin, a liberation in the very depth of self and

thus a regaining of lost joy, the joy of being saved, (187) which the majority of people in our time are no longer capable of experiencing.

We therefore understand why, from the earliest Christian times, in line with the apostles and with Christ, the church has included in the sacramental sign of penance the confession of sins. This latter takes on such importance that for centuries the usual name of the sacrament has been and still is that of confession. The confession of sins is required, first of all, because the sinner must be known by the person who in the sacrament exercises the role of judge. He has to evaluate both the seriousness of the sins and the repentance of the penitent; he also exercises the role of the healer and must acquaint himself with the condition of the sick person in order to treat and heal him. But the individual confession also has the value of a sign: a sign of the meeting of the sinner with the mediation of the church in the person of the minister, a sign of the person's revealing of self as a sinner in the sight of God and the church, of facing his own sinful condition in the eyes of God. The confession of sins therefore cannot be reduced to a mere attempt at psychological self-liberation even though it corresponds to that legitimate and natural need, inherent in the human heart, to open oneself to another. It is a liturgical act, solemn in its dramatic nature, yet humble and sober in the grandeur of its meaning. It is the act of the prodigal son who returns to his Father and is welcomed by him with the kiss of peace. It is an act of honesty and courage. It is an act of entrusting oneself, beyond sin, to the mercy that forgives.(188) Thus we understand why the confession of sins must ordinarily be individual not collective, just as sin is a deeply personal matter. But at the same time this confession in a way forces sin out of the secret of the heart and thus out of the area of pure individuality, emphasizing its social character as well, for through the minister of penance it is the ecclesial community, which has been wounded by sin, that welcomes anew the repentant and forgiven sinner.

The other essential stage of the sacrament of penance this time along to the confessor as judge and healer, a figure of God the Father welcoming and forgiving the one who returns: This is the absolution. The words which express it and the gestures that accompany it in the old and in the new Rite of Penance are significantly simple in their grandeur. The sacramental formula "I absolve you" and the imposition of the hand and the Sign of the Cross made over the penitent show that at this moment the contrite and converted sinner comes into contact with the power and mercy of God. It is the moment at which, in response to the penitent, the Trinity becomes present in order to blot out sin and restore innocence. And the saving power of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus is also imparted to the penitent as the "mercy stronger than sin and offense, " as I defined it in my encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*. God is always the one who is principally offended by sin-"Tibi soli peccavi!"-and God alone can forgive. Hence the absolution that the priest, the minister of forgiveness, though himself a sinner, grants to the penitent is the effective sign of the intervention of the Father in every absolution and the sign of the "resurrection" from "spiritual death" which is renewed each time that the sacrament of penance is administered. Only faith can give us certainty that at that moment every sin is forgiven and blotted out by the mysterious intervention of the Savior.

Satisfaction is the final act which crowns the sacramental sign of penance. In some countries the act which the forgiven and absolved penitent agrees to perform after receiving absolution is called precisely the penance. What is the meaning of this satisfaction that one makes or the penance that one performs? Certainly it is not a price that one pays for the sin absolved and for the forgiveness obtained: No human price can match what is obtained, which is the fruit of Christ's precious blood. Acts of satisfaction-which, while remaining simple and humble, should be made to express more clearly all that they signify-mean a number of valuable things: They are the sign of the personal commitment that the Christian has made to God in the sacrament to begin a new life (and therefore they should not be reduced to mere formulas to be recited, but should consist of acts of worship, charity, mercy or reparation). They include the idea that the pardoned sinner is able to join his own physical and spiritual mortification-which has been sought after or at least accepted-to the passion of Jesus, who has obtained the forgiveness for him. They remind us that even after absolution there remains in the Christian a dark area due to the wound of sin, to the imperfection of love in repentance, to the weakening of the spiritual faculties. It is an area in which there still operates an infectious source of sin which must always be fought with mortification and penance. This is the meaning of the humble but sincere act of satisfaction.(189)

IV. There remains to be made a brief mention of other important convictions about the sacrament of penance.

First of all, it must be emphasized that nothing is more personal and intimate than this sacrament, in which the sinner stands alone before God with his sin, repentance and trust. No one can repent in his place or ask forgiveness in his name. There is a certain solitude of the sinner in his sin, and this can be seen dramatically represented in Cain with sin "crouching at his door, " as the Book of Genesis says so effectively, and with the distinctive mark on his forehead;(190) in David, admonished by the prophet Nathan;(191) or in the prodigal son when he realizes the condition to which he has reduced himself by staying away from his father and decides to return to him.(192) Everything takes place between the individual alone and God. But at the same time one cannot deny the social nature of this sacrament, in which the whole church-militant, suffering and glorious in heaven- comes to the aid of the penitent and welcomes him again into her bosom, especially as it was the whole church which had been offended and wounded by his sin. As the minister of penance, the priest by virtue of his sacred office appears as the witness and representative of this ecclesial nature of the sacrament. The individual nature and ecclesial nature are two complementary aspects of the sacrament which the

progressive reform of the Rite of Penance, especially that contained in the Ordo Paenitentiae promulgated by Paul VI, has sought to emphasize and to make more meaningful in its celebration.

V. Second, it must be emphasized that the most precious result of the forgiveness obtained in the sacrament of penance consists in reconciliation with God, which takes place in the inmost heart of the son who was lost and found again, which every penitent is. But it has to be added that this reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations which repair the breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his own true identity. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way attacked and wounded. He is reconciled with the church. He is reconciled with all creation.

As a result of an awareness of this, at the end of the celebration there arises in the penitent a sense of gratitude to God for the gift of divine mercy received, and the church invites the penitent to have this sense of gratitude.

Every confessional is a special and blessed place from which, with divisions wiped away, there is born new and uncontaminated a reconciled individual—a reconciled world!

VI. Last, I particularly wish to speak of one final consideration, one which concerns all of us priests, who are the ministers of the sacrament of penance.⁽¹⁹³⁾ The priest's celebration of the eucharist and administration of the other sacraments, his pastoral zeal, his relationship with the faithful his communion with his brother priests, his collaboration with his bishop, his life of prayer—in a word, the whole of his priestly existence, suffers an inexorable decline if by negligence or for some other reason he fails to receive the sacrament of penance at regular intervals and in a spirit of genuine faith and devotion. If a priest were no longer to go to confession or properly confess his sins, his priestly being and his priestly action would feel its effects very soon and this would also be noticed by the community of which he was the pastor.

But I also add that even in order to be a good and effective minister of penance the priest needs to have recourse to the source of grace and holiness present in this sacrament. We priests, on the basis of our personal experience, can certainly say that the more careful we are to receive the sacrament of penance and to approach it frequently and with good dispositions, the better we fulfill our own ministry as confessors and ensure that our penitents benefit from it. And on the other hand, this ministry would lose much of its effectiveness if in some way we were to stop being good penitents. Such is the internal logic of this great sacrament. It invites all of us priests of Christ to pay renewed attention to our personal confession.

Personal experience in its turn becomes and must become today an incentive for the diligent, regular, patient and fervent exercise of the sacred ministry of penance, to which we are committed by the very fact of our priesthood and our vocation as pastors and servants of our brothers and sisters. Also with this present exhortation I therefore address an earnest invitation to all the priests of the world, especially to my brothers in the episcopacy and to pastors of souls, an invitation to make every effort to encourage the faithful to make use of this sacrament. I urge them to use all possible and suitable means to ensure that the greatest possible number of our brothers and sisters receive the "grace that has been given to us" through penance for the reconciliation of every soul and of the whole world with God in Christ.

Forms of Celebration

32. Following the suggestions of the Second Vatican Council, the Ordo Paenitentiae provided three rites which, while always keeping intact the essential elements, make it possible to adapt the celebration of the sacrament of penance to particular pastoral circumstances.

The first form—reconciliation of individual penitents—is the only normal and ordinary way of celebrating the sacrament, and it cannot and must not be allowed to fall into disuse or be neglected. The second form—reconciliation of a number of penitents with individual confession and absolution—even though in the preparatory acts it helps to give greater emphasis to the community aspects of the sacrament, is the same as the first form in the culminating sacramental act, namely individual confession and individual absolution of sins. It can thus be regarded as equal to the first form as regards the normality of the rite. The third form however—reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution—is exceptional in character. It is therefore not left to free choice but is regulated by a special discipline.

The first form makes possible a highlighting of the more personal—and essential—aspects which are included in the penitential process. The dialogue between penitent and confessor, the sum of the elements used (the biblical texts, the choice of the forms of "satisfaction," etc.), make the sacramental celebration correspond more closely to the concrete situation of the penitent. The value of these elements are perceived when one considers the different reasons that bring a Christian to sacramental penance: a need for personal reconciliation and readmission to friendship with God by regaining the grace lost by sin; a need to check one's spiritual progress and sometimes a need for a more accurate discernment of one's vocation; on many other occasions a need and a desire to escape from a state of spiritual apathy and religious crisis. Thanks then to its individual character, the first form of celebration makes it possible to link the sacrament of penance with something which is different but readily linked with it: I am referring to spiritual direction. So it is certainly true that personal decision and commitment are clearly signified and promoted in this first form.

The second form of celebration, precisely by its specific dimension, highlights certain aspects of great importance: The word of God listened to in common has a remarkable effect as compared to its individual reading and better emphasizes

the ecclesial character of conversion and reconciliation. It is particularly meaningful at various seasons of the liturgical year and in connection with events of special pastoral importance. The only point that needs mentioning here is that for celebrating the second form there should be an adequate number of confessors present.

It is therefore natural that the criteria for deciding which of the two forms of celebration to use should be dictated not by situational and subjective reasons, but by a desire to secure the true spiritual good of the faithful in obedience to the penitential discipline of the church.

We shall also do well to recall that, for a balanced spiritual and pastoral orientation in this regard, great importance must continue to be given to teaching the faithful also to make use of the sacrament of penance for venial sins alone, as is borne out by a centuries-old doctrinal tradition and practice.

Though the church knows and teaches that venial sins are forgiven in other ways too—for instance, by acts of sorrow, works of charity, prayer, penitential rites—she does not cease to remind everyone of the special usefulness of the sacramental moment for these sins too. The frequent use of the sacrament—to which some categories of the faithful are in fact held—strengthens the awareness that even minor sins offend God and harm the church, the body of Christ. Its celebration then becomes for the faithful "the occasion and the incentive to conform themselves more closely to Christ and to make themselves more docile to the voice of the Spirit." (194) Above all it should be emphasized that the grace proper to the sacramental celebration has a great remedial power and helps to remove the very roots of sin.

Attention to the actual celebration, (195) with special reference to the importance of the word of God which is read, recalled and explained, when this is possible and suitable, to the faithful and with them, will help to give fresh life to the practice of the sacrament and prevent it from declining into a mere formality and routine. The penitent will be helped rather to discover that he or she is living a salvific event capable of inspiring fresh life and giving true peace of heart. This careful attention to the celebration will also lead the individual churches to arrange special times for the celebration of the sacrament. It will also be an incentive to teaching the faithful especially children and young people, to accustom themselves to keeping to these times except in cases of necessity, when the parish priest must always show a ready willingness to receive whoever comes to him.

Celebration of the Sacrament with General Absolution

33. The new liturgical regulation and, more recently, the Code of Canon Law, 196 specify the conditions which make it lawful to use "the rite of reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution." The norms and regulations given on this point, which are the result of mature and balanced consideration, must be accepted and applied in such a way as to avoid any sort of arbitrary interpretation.

It is opportune to reflect more deeply on the reasons which order the celebration of penance in one of the first two forms and permit the use of the third form. First of all, there is the reason of fidelity to the will of the Lord Jesus, transmitted by the doctrine of the church, and also the reason of obedience to the church's laws. The synod repeated in one of its propositions the unchanged teaching which the church has derived from the most ancient tradition, and it repeated the law with which she has codified the ancient penitential practice: The individual and integral confession of sins with individual absolution constitutes the only ordinary way in which the faithful who are conscious of serious sin are reconciled with God and with the church. From this confirmation of the church's teaching it is clear that every serious sin must always be stated, with its determining circumstances, in an individual confession.

Then there is a reason of the pastoral order. While it is true that, when the conditions required by canonical discipline occur, use may be made of the third form of celebration, it must not be forgotten that this form cannot become an ordinary one, and it cannot and must not be used—as the synod repeated—except "in cases of grave necessity." And there remains unchanged the obligation to make an individual confession of serious sins before again having recourse to another general absolution. The bishop therefore, who is the only one competent in his own diocese to assess whether the conditions actually exist which canon law lays down for the use of the third form, will give this judgment with a grave obligation on his own conscience, with full respect for the law and practice of the church and also taking into account the criteria and guidelines agreed upon—on the basis of the doctrinal and pastoral considerations explained above—with the other members of the episcopal conference. Equally it will always be a matter of genuine pastoral concern to lay down and guarantee the conditions that make recourse to the third form capable of producing the spiritual fruits for which it is meant. The exceptional use of the third form of celebration must never lead to a lesser regard for, still less an abandonment of, the ordinary forms nor must it lead to this form being considered an alternative to the other two forms. It is not in fact left to the freedom of pastors and the faithful to choose from among these forms the one considered most suitable. It remains the obligation of pastors to facilitate for the faithful the practice of integral and individual confession of sins, which constitutes for them not only a duty but also an inviolable and inalienable right, besides being something needed by the soul. For the faithful, the use of the third form of celebration involves the obligation of following all the norms regulating its exercise, including that of not having recourse again to general absolution before a normal integral and individual confession of sins, which must be made as soon as possible. Before granting absolution the priest must inform and instruct the faithful about this norm and about the obligation to observe it.

With this reminder of the doctrine and the law of the church I wish to instill into everyone the lively sense of responsibility which must guide us when we deal with sacred things like the sacraments, which are not our property, or like consciences, which have a right not to be left in uncertainty and confusion. The sacraments and consciences, I repeat, are sacred, and both require that we serve them in truth. This is the reason for the church's law.

Some More Delicate Cases

34. I consider it my duty to mention at this point, if very briefly, a pastoral case that the synod dealt with-insofar as it was able to do so-and which it also considered in one of the propositions. I am referring to certain situations, not infrequent today, affecting Christians who wish to continue their sacramental religious practice, but who are prevented from doing so by their personal condition, which is not in harmony with the commitments freely undertaken before God and the church. These are situations which seem particularly delicate and almost inextricable.

Numerous interventions during the synod, expressing the general thought of the fathers, emphasized the coexistence and mutual influence of two equally important principles in relation to these cases. The first principle is that of compassion and mercy, whereby the church, as the continuer in history of Christ's presence and work, not wishing the death of the sinner but that the sinner should be converted and live, (197) and careful not to break the bruised reed or to quench the dimly burning wick, (198) ever seeks to offer, as far as possible, the path of return to God and of reconciliation with him. The other principle is that of truth and consistency, whereby the church does not agree to call good evil and evil good. Basing herself on these two complementary principles, the church can only invite her children who find themselves in these painful situations to approach the divine mercy by other ways, not however through the sacraments of penance and the eucharist until such time as they have attained the required dispositions.

On this matter, which also deeply torments our pastoral hearts, it seemed my precise duty to say clear words in the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, as regards the case of the divorced and remarried, (199) and likewise the case of Christians living together in an irregular union.

At the same time and together with the synod, I feel that it is my clear duty to urge the ecclesial communities and especially the bishops to provide all possible assistance to those priests who have fallen short of the grave commitments which they undertook at their ordination and who are living in irregular situations. None of these brothers of ours should feel abandoned by the church.

For all those who are not at the present moment in the objective conditions required by the sacrament of penance, the church's manifestations of maternal kindness, the support of acts of piety apart from sacramental ones, a sincere effort to maintain contact with the Lord, attendance at Mass and the frequent repetition of acts of faith, hope, charity and sorrow made as perfectly as possible can prepare the way for full reconciliation at the hour that providence alone knows.

CONCLUDING EXPRESSION OF HOPE

35. At the end of this document I hear echoing within me and I desire to repeat to all of you the exhortation which the first bishop of Rome, at a critical hour of the beginning of the church, addressed "to the exiles of the dispersion...chosen and destined by God the Father...: Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind."(200) The apostle urged: "Have unity of spirit." But he immediately went on to point out the sins against harmony and peace which must be avoided: "Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing." And he ended with a word of encouragement and hope: "Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right?"(201)

At an hour of history which is no less critical, I dare to join my exhortation to that of the prince of the apostles, the first to occupy this See of Rome as a witness to Christ and as pastor of the church, and who here "presided in charity" before the entire world. In communion with the bishops who are the successors of the apostles and supported by the collegial reflection that many of them, meeting in the synod, devoted to the topics and problems of reconciliation, I too wish to speak to you with the same spirit of the fisherman of Galilee when he said to our brothers and sisters in the faith, distant in time but so closely linked in heart: "Have unity of spirit.... Do not return evil for evil.... Be zealous for what is right."(202) And he added: "It is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong."(203)

This exhortation is completely permeated by words which Peter had heard from Jesus himself and by ideas which formed part of his "good news": the new commandment of love of neighbor; the yearning for and commitment to unity; the beatitudes of mercy and patience in persecution for the sake of justice; the repaying of evil with good; the forgiveness of offenses; the love of enemies. In these words and ideas is the original and transcendent synthesis of the Christian ethic or, more accurately and more profoundly, of the spirituality of the new covenant in Jesus Christ.

I entrust to the Father, rich in mercy, I entrust to the Son of God, made man as our redeemer and reconciler, I entrust to the Holy Spirit, source of unity and peace, this call of mine, as father and pastor, to penance and reconciliation. May the

most holy and adorable Trinity cause to spring up in the church and in the world the small seed which at this hour I plant in the generous soil of many human hearts.

In order that in the not too distant future abundant fruits may come from it, I invite you all to join me in turning to Christ's heart, the eloquent sign of the divine mercy, the "propitiation for our sins, " "our peace and reconciliation, "(204) that we may draw from it an interior encouragement to hate sin and to be converted to God, and find in it the divine kindness which lovingly responds to human repentance.

I likewise invite you to turn with me to the immaculate heart of Mary, mother of Jesus, in whom "is effected the reconciliation of God with humanity..., is accomplished the work of reconciliation, because she has received from God the fullness of grace in virtue of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ."(205) Truly Mary has been associated with God, by virtue of her divine motherhood, in the work of reconciliation.(206)

Into the hands of this mother, whose fiat marked the beginning of that "fullness of time" in which Christ accomplished the reconciliation of humanity with God, to her immaculate heart-to which we have repeatedly entrusted the whole of humanity, disturbed by sin and tormented by so many tensions and conflicts-I now in a special way entrust this intention: that through her intercession humanity may discover and travel the path of penance, the only path that can lead it to full reconciliation.

To all of you who in a spirit of ecclesial communion in obedience and faith(207) receive the indications, suggestions and directives contained in this document and seek to put them into living pastoral practice, I willingly impart my apostolic blessing.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's on December 2, the first Sunday of Advent, in the year 1984, the seventh of my pontificate.

NOTES

1. Mk 1:15.

2. Cf Pope John Paul II, opening speech at the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate: AAS 71 (1979), 198-204.

3. The idea of a "shattered world" is seen in the works of numerous contemporary writers, both Christian and non-Christian, witnesses of man's condition in this tormented period of history.

4. Cf Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 3, 43 and 44; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12; Pope Paul VI, encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: AAS 56 (1964), 609-659.

5. At the very beginning of the church, the apostle Paul wrote with words of fire about division in the body of the church, in the famous passage 1 Cor 1:10-16. Years later, St. Clement of Rome was also to write to the Corinthians, to condemn the wounds inside that community: cf Letter to the Corinthians, III-VI; LVII: *Patres Apostolici*, ed. Funk, I, 103-109;171-173. We know that from the earliest fathers onward Christ's seamless robe, which the soldiers did not divide, became an image of the church's unity: cf St. Cyprian, *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, 7: CCL 3/1, 254f; St. Augustine, In *Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 118, 4: CCL 36, 656f; St. Bede the Venerable, In *Marci Evangelium Expositio*, IV, 15: CCL 120, 630i In *Lucae Evangelium Expositio*, VI, 23: CCL 120, 403; In *S. Ioannis Evangelium Expositio*, 19: PL 92, 911f.

6. The encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII's spiritual testament, is often considered a "social document" and even a "political message, " and in fact it is if these terms are understood in their broadest sense. As is evident more than twenty years after its publication, the document is in fact more than a strategy for the peaceful coexistence of people and nations; it is a pressing reminder of the higher values without which peace on earth becomes a mere dream. One of these values is precisely that of reconciliation among people, and John XXIII often referred to this subject. With regard to Paul VI, it will suffice to recall that in calling the church and the world to celebrate the Holy Year of 1975, he wished "renewal and reconciliation" to be the central idea of that important event. Nor can one forget the catechesis which he devoted to this key theme, also in explaining the jubilee itself.

7. As I wrote in the bull of indiction of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption: "This special time, when all Christians are called upon to realize more profoundly their vocation to reconciliation with the Father in the Son, will only reach its full achievement if it leads to a fresh commitment by each and every person to the service of reconciliation, not only among all the disciples of Christ but also among all men and women": bull *Aperite Portas Redemptori*, 3: AAS 75 (1983), 93.

8. The theme of the synod was, more precisely, "Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church."

9. Cf Mt 4:17; Mk 1:15.

10. Cf Lk 3:8.

11. Cf Mt 16:24-26; Mk 8:34-36; Lk 9:23-25.

12. Eph 4:23f.

13. Cf 1 Cor 3:1-20.

14. Cf Col 3:1f.

15. "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God": 2 Cor 5:20.

16. "We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation": Rom 5:11; cf Col 1:20.
17. The Second Vatican Council noted: "The dichotomy affecting the modern world is, in fact, a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is in man himself. He is the meeting point of many conflicting forces. In his condition as a created being he is subject to a thousand shortcomings, but feels untrammelled in his inclinations and destined for a higher form of life. Torn by a welter of anxieties he is compelled to choose between them and repudiate some among them. Worse still, feeble and sinful as he is, he often does the very thing he hates and does not do what he wants (cf Rom 7:14ff). And so he feels himself divided, and the result is a host of discords in social life." *Gaudium et Spes*, 10.
18. Cf Col 1:19f.
19. Cf Pope John Paul II, encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, 5-6: AAS 72 (1980), 1193-1199.
20. Cf Lk 15:11-32.
21. In the Old Testament, the Book of Jonah is a wonderful anticipation and figure of this aspect of the parable. Jonah's sin is that he was "displeased...exceedingly and he was angry" because God is "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil. His sin is also that of pitying a castor oil plant "which came into being in a night and perished in a night" and not understanding that the Lord pities Nineveh. cf Jon 4.
22. Cf Rom 5:10f.; cf Col 1:20-22.
23. Cf 2 Cor 5:18, 20.
24. Jn 11:52.
25. Cf Col 1:20.
26. Cf Sir 44:17.
27. Eph 2:14.
28. Eucharistic Prayer 3.
29. Cf Mt 5:23f.
30. *Ibid.*, 27:46; Mk 15:34, Ps 22(21):2.
31. Cf Eph 2:14-16.
32. St. Leo the Great, *Tractatus* 63 (*De Passione Domini*, 12), 6: CCL 138/A, 386.
33. Cf 2 Cor 5:18f.
34. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
35. "The church is also by her nature always reconciling, handing on to others the gift that she herself has received, the gift of having been forgiven and made one with God": Pope John Paul II, Homily at Liverpool, May 30, 1982: *Insegnamenti*, V, 2 (1982), 1992.
36. Cf Acts 15:2-33.
37. Cf Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 13: AAS 68 (1976), 12f.
38. Cf Pope John Paul II, apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 24: AAS 71 (1979), 1297.
39. Cf Pope Paul VI, encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*: ASS 56 (1964), 609-659.
40. Cf 2 Cor 5:20.
41. Cf 1 Jn 4:8.
42. Cf Wis 11:23-26; Gn 1:27; Ps 8:4-8.
43. Cf Wis 2:24.
44. Cf Gn 3:12f; 4:1-16.
45. Cf Eph 2:4.
46. Cf *ibid.*, 1:10.
47. Jn 13:34.
48. Cf Second Vatican Council Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 38.
49. Cf Mk 1:15.
50. Cf 2 Cor 5:20.
51. Cf Eph 2:14-16.
52. Cf St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XXII 17: CCL 48, 835f; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III pars, q. 64, art. 2 ad tertium.
53. Cf Pope Paul VI, Allocution at the Closing of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, November 21, 1964: ASS 56 (1964), 1015-1018.
54. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 39.
55. *Ibid.*, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.
- 56.1 Jn 1:8-9.
57. 1 Jn 3:20; cf my reference to this passage in my address at the general audience of March 14, 1984: *Insegnamenti*, VII, 1 (1984) 683.
58. Cf 2 Sm 11-12.
59. Cf Ps 50(51):3-4.
60. Cf Lk 15:18, 21.
61. *Lettere*, Florence 1970, I, pp.3f; *II Dialogo della Divina Provvidenza*, Rome 1980, *passim*.

62. Cf Rom 3:23-26.
63. Cf Eph 1:18.
64. Cf Gn 11:1-9.
65. Cf Ps 127 (126):1.
66. Cf 2 1 hes 2:7.
67. Cf Rom 7:7-25; Eph 2:2; 6:12.
68. The terminology used in the Septuagint Greek translation and in the New Testament for sin is significant. The most common term for sin is hamartia, with its various derivatives. It expresses the concept of offending more or less gravely against a norm or law, or against a person or even a divinity. But sin is also called adikia, and the concept here is of acting unjustly. The Bible also speaks of parabasis (transgression), asebeis (impiety) and other concepts. They all convey the image of sin.
69. Gn 3:5: "And you will be like God, knowing good and evil"; cf also v. 22.
70. Cf *ibid.*, 3:12.
71. Cf *ibid.*, 4:2-16.
72. The expression from the French writer Elizabeth Leseur, *Journal et Pensees de Chaque Jour*, Paris 1918, p. 31.
73. Cf Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27f.
74. Cf Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation Libertatis Nuntius*; August 6, 1984 IV, 14-15: ASS 76 (1984), 885f.
75. Cf Nm 15:30.
76. Cf Lv 18:26-30.
77. Cf *ibid.*, 19:4.
78. Cf *ibid.*, 20:1-7.
79. Cf Ex 21:17.
80. Cf Lv 4:2ff; 5:1ff; Nm 15:22-29.
81. Cf Mt 5:28; 6:23; 12:31f; 15:19; Mk 3:28-30; Rom 1:29-31; 13:13; Jas 4.
82. Cf Mt 5:17; 15:1-10; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20.
83. Cf 1 Jn 5:16f.
84. Cf 1 Jn 17:3.
85. Cf 1 Jn 2:22.
86. Cf 1 Jn 5:21.
87. Cf 1 Jn 5:16-21.
88. Cf Mt 12:31f.
89. Cf St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 14, aa. 1-8.
90. Cf 1 Jn 3:20.
91. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 14, a. 3, ad primum.
92. Cf Phil 2:12.
93. Cf St. Augustine, *De Spintu et Littera*, XXVIII: CSEL 60, 202f; *Enarrat. in ps. 39, 22*: CCL 38, 441; *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de Fide et Spe et Cantate*, XIX, 71: CCL 46, 88; *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 12, 3, 14: CCL 36, 129.
94. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 72, a. 5.
95. Cf Council of Trent, Session VI, *De Iustificatione*, Chap. 2 and Canons 23, 25, 27: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, 671 and 680f (DS 1573, 1575, 1577).
96. Cf Council of Trent, Session IV *De Iustificatione*, Chapt. 15: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. dt. 677 (DS 1544).
97. Pope John Paul II, *Angelus Message of March 14, 1982*: *Insegnamenti* V, 1 (1982), 861.
98. *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.
99. Pope John Paul II, *Angelus Message of March 14, 1982*: *Insegnamenti* V, 1 (1982), 860.
100. Pope Pius XII, *Radio Message to the U.S. National Catechetical Congress in Boston (October 26, 1946)*: *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi VIII* (1946) 288.
101. Cf Pope John Paul II, *encyclical Redemptor Hominis*, 15: AAS 71 (1979), 286-289.
102. Cf *Gaudium et Spes*, 3; cf 1 Jn 3:9.
103. Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of the Eastern Region of France (April 1, 1982)*, 2: *Insegnamenti* V, 1 (1982), 1081.
- 104.1 Tm 3:15f.
105. The text presents a certain difficulty, since the relative pronoun which opens the literal translation does not agree with the neuter mysterion. Some late manuscripts have adjusted the text in order to correct the grammar. But it was Paul's intention merely to put next to what he had written a venerable text which for him was fully explanatory.
106. The early Christian community expresses its faith in the crucified and glorified Christ, whom the angels adore and who is the Lord. But the striking element of this message remains the phrase "manifested in the flesh": that the eternal Son of God became man is the "great mystery".
107. 1 Jn 5:18f.

108. Ibid., 3:9.
109. 1 Tm 3:15.
110. 1 Jn 1:8.
111. Ibid., 5:19.
112. Cf Ps. 51(50):5.
113. Cf Eph. 2:4.
- 114 Cf Pope John Paul II, Dives in Misericordia, 8; 15: AAS 72 (1980), 1203-1207; 1231.
115. 2 Sm 12:13.
116. Ps 51(50):3.
117. Ibid., 51(50):7.
118. 2 Sm 12:13.
119. Cf 2 Cor 5:18.
120. Cf 2 Cor 5:19.
121. Gaudium et Spes, 92.
122. Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 13; cf Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 8; Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 11-12.
123. Cf Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, III: AAS 56 (1964), 639-659.
124. *Lumen Gentium*, 1, 9, 13.
125. Pope Paul VI, apostolic exhortation *Paterna Cum Benevolentia*: AAS 67 (1975), 5-23.
126. Cf *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7-8.
127. Ibid., 4.
128. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 96, 7: PL 38, 588.
129. Pope John Paul II, Speech to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See January 15, 1983), 4, 6, 1 1: AAS 75 (1983), 376, 378f, 381.
130. Pope John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for the 16th World Day of Peace (January 1, 1983), 6: *Insegnamenti* VI, 1 (1983), 7.
131. Pope Paul VI, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70: AAS 68 (1976), 59f.
132. 1 Tm 3:15.
133. Cf Mt 5:23f.
134. Cf *ibid.*, 5:38-40.
135. Cf *ibid.*, 6:12.
136. Cf *ibid.*, 5:43ff.
137. Cf *ibid.*, 18:21f.
138. Cf Mk 1:14; Mt 3:2; 4:17; Lk 3:8.
139. Cf Lk 15:17.
140. Ibid., 17:3f.
141. Cf Mt 3:2; Mk 1:2-6; Lk 3:1-6.
142. Cf *Gaudium et Spes*, 8, 16, 19, 26, 41, 48.
143. Cf Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2, 3, 4.
144. Cf among many others the addresses at the general audiences of March 28, 1973: *Insegnamenti* XI (1973), 294ff; August 8, 1973: *ibid.*, 772ff; November 7, 1973: *ibid.*, 1054ff; March 13, 1974: *Insegnamenti* XII (1974), 230ff; May 8, 1974: *ibid.*, 402ff; February 12, 1975: *Insegnamenti* XIII (1975), *ibid.*, 290ff; July 13, 1977: *Insegnamenti* XV (1977), 710ff.
145. Cf Pope John Paul II, Angelus Message of March 17, 1982: *Insegnamenti* V, 1 (1982), 860f.
146. Cf Pope John Paul II, General Audience Address of August 17, 1983, 1-3: *Insegnamenti* VI, 2 (1983), 256f.
147. Heb 4:15.
148. Cf Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12f; Lk 4:1-13.
149. Cf 1 Cor 10:13.
150. Cf Mt 6:13; Lk 11:4.
151. 1 Pt 3:21.
152. Cf Rom 6:3f; Col 2:12.
153. Cf Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16.
154. Cf Mt 3:15.
155. St. Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 26, 13: CCL 36, 266.
156. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (May 25, 1967) 35 AAS 59 (1967), 560f.
157. Ps 78(77):38f.
158. Cf Jn 1:29; Is 53:7-12.
159. Cf Jn 5:27.
160. Cf Mt 9:2-7; Lk 5.-18-25; 7:47-49; Mk 2:3-12.

161. Cf Jn 3:17.
162. Jn 20:22; Mt 18:18; cf also, as regards Peter, Mt 16:19. Blessed Isaac of Stella in one of his talks emphasizes the full communion of Christ with the church in the forgiveness of sins: "The church can forgive nothing without Christ and Christ does not wish to forgive anything without the church. The church can forgive nothing except to a penitent, that is to say, to a person whom Christ has touched with his grace: Christ does not wish to consider anything forgiven in a person who despises the church": *Sermo 11* (In Dominica II Post Epiphaniam, 1): PL 194, 1729.
163. Cf Mt 12:49f; Mk 3:33f; Lk 8:20f; Rom 8:29: "the firstborn among many brethren."
164. Cf Heb 2:17; 4:15.
165. Cf Mt 18:12f; Lk 15:4-6.
166. Cf Lk 5:31f.
167. Cf Mt 22:16.
168. Cf Acts 10:42.
169. Cf Jn 8:16.
170. Cf the address to the penitentiaries of the Roman patriarchal basilicas and to the priest confessors at the closing of the Jubilee of the Redemption July 9, 1984): *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 9-10, 1984.
171. Jn 8:11.
172. Cf Ti 3:4.
173. Cf Council of Trent, Session XIV De Sacramento Poenitentiae, Chap. 1 and Canon 1: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 703f, 711 (DS 1668-1670, 1701).
174. *Lumen Gentium*, 11.
175. Cf Council of Trent, Session XIV, De Sacramento Poenitentiae, Chap. 1 and Canon 1: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. cit., 703f, 711 (DS 1668-1670, 1701).
176. Cf Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Suaosantum Concilium*, 72.
177. Cf *Rituale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Conalii Oecumenici Vaticani II Instauratum*, Auctoritate Pauli VI Promulgatum: *Ordo Paenitentiae*, Vatican Polyglot Press, 1974.
178. The Council of Trent uses the attenuated expression "ad instar actus iudicialis" (Session XIV De Sacramento Poenitentiae, Chap. 6: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. dt., 707 (DS 1685), in order to emphasize the difference from human tribunals. The new Rite of Penance makes reference to this function, Nos. 6b and 10a.
179. Cf Lk 5:31f: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" concluding: "I have...come to call...sinners to repentance"; Lk 9:2: "And he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal." The image of Christ the physician takes on new and striking elements if we compare it with the figure of the Servant of Yahweh, of whom the Book of Isaiah prophesies that "he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" and that with his stripes we are healed" (Is 53:4f).
180. St. Augustine, *Sermo 82*, 8: PL 38, 511.
181. *Ibid.*, *Sermo*, 352, 3, 8:9: PL 39, 1558f.
182. Cf *Ordo Paenitentiae*, 6c.
183. Even the pagans recognized the existence of "divine" moral laws which have "always" existed and which are written in the depths of the human heart, cf Sophocles (*Antigone*, w. 450-460) and Aristotle (*Rhetor.*, Book I, Chap.15, 1375 a-b).
184. On the role of conscience cf what I said at the general audience of March 14, 1984, 3: *Insegnamenti VII*, 1 (1984), 683.
185. Cf Council of Trent, Session XIV De Sacramento Poenitentiae, Chap.4 De Contritione: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. cit., 705 (DS 1676-1677). Of course, in order to approach the sacrament of penance it is sufficient to have attrition, or imperfect repentance, due more to fear than to love. But in the sphere of the sacrament, the penitent, under the action of the grace that he receives, "ex attrito fit conmtus," since penance really operates in the person who is welldisposed to conversion in love: cf Council of Trent, *ibid.*, ed. cit., 705 (DS 1678).
186. *Ordo Paenitentiae*, 6c.
187. Cf Ps 51(50):12.
188. I had occasion to speak of these fundamental aspects of penance at the general audiences of May 19, 1982: *Insegnamenti V*, 2 (1982), 1758ff; February 28, 1979: *Insegnamenti II* (1979), 475-478; March 21, 1984: *Insegnamenti VII*, 1 (1984) 720-722. See also the norms of the Code of Canon Law concerning the place for administering the sacrament and concerning confessionals (Canon 964, 2-3)
189. I dealt with this subject concisely at the general audience of March 7, 1984: *Insegnamenti VII*, 1 (1984), 631-633.
190. Cf Gn 4:7, 15.
191. Cf 2 Sm 12.
192. Cf Lk 15:17-21.
193. Cf *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 18.
194. *Ordo Paenitentiae*, 7b.
195. Cf *ibid.*, 17.

196. Canons 961-963.
197. Cf Ez 18:23.
198. Cf Is 42:3; Mt 12:20.
199. Cf Familiaris Consortio, 84: AAS 74 (1982), 184-186.
200. Cf 1 Pt 1:1f; 3:8.
201. Ibid., 3:9, 13.
202. Ibid., 3:8, 9, 13.
203. Ibid., 3:17.
204. Litany of the Sacred Heart, cf 1 Jn 2:2; Eph 2:14; Rom 3:25; 5:11.
205. Pope John Paul II, General Audience Address of December 7, 1983, No. 2: Insegnamenti, VI, 2 (1983), 1264.
206. Ibid., General Audience Address of January 4, 1984: Insegnamenti, VII, 1 (1984), 16-18.
207. Cf Rom 1:5; 16:26.

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Apostolic Exhortation
Redemptionis Donum
Of His Holiness
Pope John Paul II
To Men And Women Religious
On Their Consecration
In The Light Of
The Mystery Of The Redemption

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus!

I - GREETING

1. The gift of the Redemption, which this extraordinary Jubilee Year emphasizes, brings with it a particular call to conversion and reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ. While the outward reason for this extraordinary Jubilee is of an historical nature for what is being celebrated is the 1950th anniversary of the crucifixion and resurrection-at the same time it is the interior motive that is dominant, the motive that is connected with the very depth of the mystery of the Redemption. The Church was born from that mystery, and it is by that mystery that she lives throughout her history. The period of the extraordinary Jubilee has an exceptional character. The call to conversion and reconciliation with God means that we must meditate more deeply on our life and our Christian vocation in the light of the mystery of the Redemption, in order to fix that life and vocation ever more firmly in that mystery.

While this call concerns everyone in the Church, in a special way it concerns you, men and women religious, who, in your consecration to God through the vows of the evangelical counsels, strive towards a particular fullness of Christian life. Your special vocation and the whole of your life in the Church and the world take their character and their spiritual power from the same depth of the mystery of the Redemption. By following Christ along the "narrow and...hard" way, (1) you experience in an extraordinary manner how true it is that "with him is plenteous redemption": *copiosa apud eum redemptio*.(2)

2. Therefore, as this Holy Year moves towards its close, I wish to address myself in a particular way to all of you, the men and women religious, who are entirely consecrated to contemplation or vowed to the various works of the apostolate. I have already done so in numerous places and on various occasions, confirming and extending the evangelical teaching contained in the whole of the Church's Tradition, especially in the Magisterium of the recent Ecumenical Council, from the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* to the Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, in the spirit of the indications of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio* of my Predecessor, Paul VI. The Code of Canon Law, which recently came into force and which in a way can be considered the final conciliar document, will be for all of you a valuable aid and a sure guide in concretely stating the means for faithfully and generously living your magnificent vocation in the Church.

I greet you with the affection of the Bishop of Rome and Successor of St. Peter, with whom your communities are united in a characteristic way. From the same See of Rome there also reach you, with an unceasing echo, the words of St. Paul: "I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband."(3) The Church, which receives after the Apostles the treasure of marriage to the divine Spouse, looks with the greatest love towards all her sons and daughters who, by the profession of the evangelical counsels and through her own mediation, have made a special covenant with the Redeemer of the world.

Accept this word of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption precisely as a word of love, spoken by the Church for you. Accept it, wherever you may be: in the cloister of the contemplative communities, or in the commitment to the many different forms of apostolic service: in the missions, in pastoral work, in hospitals or other places where the suffering are served, in educational institutions, schools or universities-in fact, in every one of your houses where, "gathered in the name of Christ, " you live in the knowledge that the Lord is "in your midst."(4)

May the Church's loving word, addressed to you in the Jubilee of the Redemption, be the reflection of that loving word that Christ Himself said to each one of you when He spoke one day that mysterious "Follow me"(5) from which your vocation in the Church began.

II - VOCATION

"And Jesus, Looking Upon Him, Loved Him"

3. "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him, "(6) and said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."(7) Even though we know that those words,

addressed to the rich young man, were not accepted by the one being called, their content deserves to be carefully reflected upon, for they present the interior structure of a vocation.

"And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him." This is the love of the Redeemer: a love that flows from all the human and divine depths of the Redemption. This love reflects the eternal love of the Father, who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."(8) The Son, invested with that love, accepted the mission from the Father in the Holy Spirit and became the Redeemer of the world. The Father's love was revealed in the Son as redeeming love. It is precisely this love that constitutes the true price of the Redemption of man and the world. Christ's Apostles speak of the price of the Redemption with profound emotion: "You were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot,"(9) writes St. Peter And St. Paul states: "You were bought with a price."(10)

The call to the way of the evangelical counsels springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ, which is a redeeming love. Christ calls precisely through this love of His. In the structure of a vocation, the encounter with this love becomes something specifically personal. When Christ "looked upon you and loved you, " calling each one of you, dear religious, that redeeming love of His was directed towards a particular person, and at the same time it took on a spousal character: it became a love of choice. This love embraces the whole person, soul and body, whether man or woman, in that person's unique and unrepeatable personal "I." The One who, given eternally to the Father, "gives" Himself in the mystery of the Redemption, has now called man in order that he in his turn should give himself entirely to the work of the Redemption through membership in a community of brothers or sisters, recognized and approved by the Church. Surely it is precisely to this call that St. Paul's words can be applied: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...? You are not your own; you were bought with a price."(11)

Yes, Christ's love has reached each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, with that same "price" of the Redemption. As a consequence of this, you have realized that you are not your own, but belong to Christ. This new awareness was the fruit of Christ's "loving look" in the secret of your heart. You replied to that look by choosing Him who first chose each one of you, calling you with the measurelessness of His redeeming love. Since He calls "by name, " His call always appeals to human freedom. Christ says: "If you wish...." And the response to this call is, therefore, a free choice. You have chosen Jesus of Nazareth, the Redeemer of the world, by choosing the way that He has shown you.

"If You Wish To Be Perfect..."

4. This way is also called the way of perfection. Speaking to the young man, Christ says: "If you wish to be perfect...." Thus the idea of the "way of perfection" has its motivation in the very Gospel source. Moreover, do we not hear, in the Sermon on the Mount: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"(12)? The calling of man to perfection was in a certain way perceived by thinkers and moralists of the ancient world and also afterwards, in the different periods of history. But the biblical call has a completely original nature: it is particularly demanding when it indicates to man perfection in the likeness of God Himself.(13) Precisely in this form the call corresponds to the whole of the internal logic of Revelation, according to which man was created in the image and likeness of God Himself. He must therefore seek the perfection proper to him in the line of this image and likeness. As St. Paul will write in the letter to the Ephesians: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."(14)

Thus the call to perfection belongs to the very essence of the Christian vocation. On the basis of this call we must also understand the words which Christ addressed to the young man in the Gospel. These words are in a particular way linked to the mystery of the Redemption of man in the world. For this Redemption gives back to God the work of creation which had been contaminated by sin, showing the perfection which the whole of creation, and in particular man, possesses in the thought and intention of God Himself Especially man must be given and restored to God, if he is to be fully restored to himself. From this comes the eternal call: "Return to me, for I have redeemed you."(15) Christ's words: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor,..." clearly bring us into the sphere of the evangelical counsel of poverty, which belongs to the very essence of the religious vocation and profession.

At the same time these words can be understood in a wider and, in a sense, essential way. The Teacher from Nazareth invites the person He is addressing to renounce a program of life in which the first place is seen to be occupied by the category of possessing, of "having, " and to accept in its place a program centered upon the value of the human person: upon personal "being" with all the transcendence that is proper to it.

Such an understanding of Christ's words constitutes as it were a wider setting for the ideal of evangelical poverty, especially that poverty which, as an evangelical counsel, belongs to the essential content of your mystical marriage with the divine Spouse in the Church. Reading Christ's words in the light of the superiority of "being" over "having, " especially if the latter is understood in a materialistic and utilitarian sense, we as it were touch the very anthropological bases of a vocation in the Gospel. In the framework of the development of contemporary civilization, this is a particularly relevant discovery. And for this reason the very vocation to "the way of perfection" as laid down by Christ becomes equally relevant. In today's civilization, especially in the context of the world of well being based on consumerism, man bitterly experiences the essential incompleteness of personal "being" which affects his humanity because of the abundant and various forms of "having"; he then becomes more inclined to accept this truth about

vocation which was expressed once and for all in the Gospel. Yes, the call which you, dear brothers and sisters, accepted when you set out on the way of religious profession touches upon the very roots of humanity, the roots of man's destiny in the temporal world. The evangelical "state of perfection" does not cut you off from these roots. On the contrary, it enables you to anchor yourselves even more firmly in the elements that make man man, permeating this humanity-which in various ways is burdened by sin-with the divine and human leaven of the mystery of the Redemption.

"You Will Have Treasure in Heaven"

5. Vocation carries with it the answer to the question: Why be a human person-and how? This answer adds a new dimension to the whole of life and establishes its definitive meaning. This meaning emerges against the background of the Gospel paradox of losing one's life in order to save it, and on the other hand saving one's life by losing it "for Christ's sake and for the sake of the Gospel," as we read in Mark.(16)

In the light of these words, Christ's call becomes perfectly clear: "Go, sell what you possess, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."(17) Between this "go" and the subsequent "come, follow me" there is a close connection. It can be said that these latter words determine the very essence of vocation. For a vocation is a matter of following the footsteps of Christ (sequi-to follow, hence sequela Christi). The terms "go...sell...give" seem to lay down the precondition of a vocation. Nevertheless, this condition is not "external" to a vocation but is already inside it. For a person discovers the new sense of his or her humanity not only in order "to follow" Christ but to the extent that he or she actually does follow Him. When a person "sells what he possesses" and "gives it to the poor," he discovers that those possessions and the comforts he enjoyed were not the treasure to hold on to. The treasure is in his heart, which Christ makes capable of "giving" to others by the giving of self. The rich person is not the one who possesses but the one who "gives," the one who is capable of giving.

At this point the Gospel paradox becomes particularly expressive. It becomes a program of being. To be poor in the sense given to this "being" by the Teacher from Nazareth is to become a dispenser of good through one's own human condition. This also means to discover "the treasure." This treasure is indestructible. It passes together with man into the dimension of the eternal. It belongs to the divine eschatology of man. Through this treasure man has his definitive future in God. Christ says: "You will have treasure in heaven." This treasure is not so much a "reward" after death for the good works done following the example of the divine Teacher, but rather the eschatological fulfillment of what was hidden behind these good works here on earth, in the inner "treasure" of the heart. Christ Himself, in fact, when He invited His hearers in the Sermon on the Mount(18) to store up treasure in heaven, added: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."(19) These words indicate the eschatological character of the Christian vocation. They indicate even more the eschatological nature of the vocation that is realized through spiritual marriage to Christ by the practice of the evangelical counsels.

6. The structure of this vocation, as seen from the words addressed to the young man in the synoptic Gospels, (20) is traced little by little as one discovers the fundamental treasure of one's own humanity in the perspective of that "treasure" which man "has in heaven." In this perspective the fundamental treasure of one's own humanity is connected to the fact of "being, by giving oneself." The direct point of reference in such a vocation is the living person of Jesus Christ. The call to the way of perfection takes shape from Him and through Him in the Holy Spirit, who continually "recalls" to new people, men and women, at different times of their lives but especially in their youth, all that Christ "has said,"(21) and especially what He "said" to the young man who asked him: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"(22) Through the reply of Christ, who "looks upon" His questioner "with love," the strong leaven of the mystery of the Redemption penetrates the consciousness, heart and will of a person who is searching with truth and sincerity.

Thus the call to the way of the evangelical counsels always has its beginning in God: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."(23) The vocation in which a person discovers in depth the evangelical law of giving, a law inscribed in human nature, is itself a gift! It is a gift overflowing with the deepest content of the Gospel, a gift which reflects the divine and human image of the mystery of the Redemption of the world. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins."(24)

III - CONSECRATION

Religious Profession Is a "Fuller Expression" of Baptismal Consecration

7. Your vocation, dear brothers and sisters, has led you to religious profession, whereby you have been consecrated to God through the ministry of the Church, and have been at the same time incorporated into your religious family. Hence, the Church thinks of you, above all, as persons who are "consecrated": consecrated to God in Jesus Christ as His exclusive possession. This consecration determines your place in the vast community of the Church, the People of God. And at the same time this consecration introduces into the universal mission of this people a special source of spiritual

and supernatural energy: a particular style of life, witness and apostolate, in fidelity to the mission of your institute and to its identity and spiritual heritage. The universal mission of the People of God is rooted in the messianic mission of Christ Himself-Prophet, Priest and King-a mission in which all share in different ways. The form of sharing proper to "consecrated" persons corresponds to your manner of being rooted in Christ. The depth and power of this being rooted in Christ is decided precisely by religious profession.

Religious profession creates a new bond between the person and the One and Triune God, in Jesus Christ. This bond develops on the foundation of the original bond that is contained in the Sacrament of Baptism. Religious profession "is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it."(25) In this way religious profession, in its constitutive content, becomes a new consecration: the consecration and giving of the human person to God, loved above all else. The commitment undertaken by means of the vows to practice the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, according to the determinations proper to each religious family as laid down in the constitutions, is the expression of a total consecration to God and, at the same time, the means that leads to its achievement. This is also the source of the manner proper to consecrated persons of bearing witness and of exercising the apostolate. And yet it is necessary to seek the roots of that conscious and free consecration and of the subsequent giving of self to God as His possession in Baptism, the sacrament that leads us to the Paschal Mystery as the apex and center of the Redemption accomplished by Christ.

Therefore, in order to highlight fully the reality of religious profession, we must turn to the vibrant words of St. Paul in the letter to the Romans: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ...we too might walk in newness of life" (26); "Our old self was crucified with him so that...we might no longer be enslaved to sin"(27); "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."(28)

Upon the sacramental basis of Baptism in which it is rooted, religious profession is a new "burial in the death of Christ": new, because it is made with awareness and by choice; new, because of love and vocation; new, by reason of unceasing "conversion." This "burial in death" causes the person "buried together with Christ" to "walk like Christ in newness of life." In Christ crucified is to be found the ultimate foundation both of baptismal consecration and of the profession of the evangelical counsels, which-in the words of the Second Vatican Council-"constitutes a special consecration." It is at one and the same time both death and liberation. St. Paul writes: "Consider yourselves dead to sin." At the same time he calls this death "freedom from the slavery of sin." Above all, though, religious consecration, through its sacramental foundation in holy Baptism, constitutes a new life "for God in Jesus Christ."

In this way, simultaneously with the profession of the evangelical counsels, in a much more mature and conscious manner, "the old nature is put off" and likewise "the new nature is put on, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness, " to use once more the words of the letter to the Ephesians.(29)

A Covenant of Spousal Love

8. Thus, then, dear brothers and sisters, all of you who throughout the Church live the covenant of the profession of the evangelical counsels: renew in this Holy Year of the Redemption your awareness of your special sharing in the Redeemer's death on the cross-that sharing through which you have risen with Him, and continually rise with Him to a new life. The Lord speaks to each of you, just as He once spoke through the prophet Isaiah: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."(30)

The evangelical call: "If you would be perfect, ...follow me"(31) guides us with the light of the words of the divine Teacher. From the depth of the Redemption there comes Christ's call, and from that depth it reaches the human soul. By virtue of the grace of the Redemption, this saving call assumes, in the soul of the person called, the actual form of the profession of the evangelical counsels. In this form is contained your answer to the call of redeeming love, and it is also an answer of love: a love of self-giving, which is the heart of consecration, of the consecration of the person. The words of Isaiah-"I have redeemed you... you are mine"-seem to seal precisely this love, which is the love of a total and exclusive consecration to God.

This is how the special covenant of spousal love is made, in which we seem to hear an unceasing echo of the words concerning Israel, whom the Lord "has chosen as his own possession." For in every consecrated person the Israel of the new and eternal covenant is chosen. The whole messianic people, the entire Church, is chosen in every person whom the Lord selects from the midst of this people; in every person who is consecrated for everyone to God as His exclusive possession. While it is true that not even the greatest saint can repeat the words of Christ: "For their sake I consecrate myself"(33) in the full force of these words, nevertheless, through self-giving love, through the offering of oneself to God as His exclusive possession, each one can through faith stand within the radius of these words.

Are we not reminded of this by the other words of the Apostle in the letter to the Romans that we so often repeat and meditate upon: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"(34)? These words are as it were a distant echo of the One who, when He comes into the world and becomes man, says to the Father: "You have prepared a body for me.... Lo, I have come to do your will, O God."(35)

In this particular context of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, let us then go back again to the mystery of the body and soul of Christ, as the complete subject of spousal and redemptive love: spousal because it is redemptive. For love He offered Himself, for love He gave His body "for the sin of the world." By immersing yourselves in the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer through the consecration of the religious vows, you desire, through the love of total giving, to fill your souls and your bodies with the spirit of sacrifice, even as St. Paul invites you to do in the words of the letter to the Romans, just quoted: "to offer your bodies as a sacrifice."⁽³⁶⁾ In this way the likeness of that love which in the heart of Christ is both redemptive and spousal is imprinted on the religious profession. And such love should fill each of you, dear brothers and sisters, from the very source of that particular consecration which-on the sacramental basis of holy Baptism-is the beginning of your new life in Christ and in the Church: it is the beginning of the new creation. Together with this love, may there grow deeper in each one of you the joy of belonging exclusively to God, of being a particular inheritance of the most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now and then repeat with the psalmist the inspired words:

"Whom else have I in heaven?
And when I am with you,
the earth delights me not.
Though my flesh and my heart waste away,
God is the rock of my heart
and my portion for ever."⁽³⁷⁾

or:

"I say to the Lord, my Lord are you.
Apart from you I have no good.
O Lord, my allotted portion and my cup,
You it is who hold fast my lot."⁽³⁸⁾

May the knowledge of belonging to God Himself in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world and Spouse of the Church, seal your hearts, ⁽³⁹⁾ all your thoughts, words and deeds, with the sign of the biblical spouse. As you know, this intimate and profound knowledge of Christ is actuated and grows deeper day by day through the life of personal, community and liturgical prayer proper to each of your religious families. In this too, and especially so, the men and women religious who are dedicated essentially to contemplation are a powerful aid and a stimulating support for their brothers and sisters devoted to the works of the apostolate. May this knowledge of belonging to Christ open your hearts, thoughts and deeds-with the key of the mystery of the Redemption to all the sufferings, needs and hopes of individuals and of the world, in the midst of which your evangelical consecration has been planted as a particular sign of the presence of God for whom all live, ⁽⁴⁰⁾ embraced by the invisible dimension of His kingdom.

The words "Follow me, " spoken by Christ when He "looked upon and loved" each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, also have this meaning: you take part, in the most complete and radical way possible, in the shaping of that "new creation"⁽⁴¹⁾ which must emerge from the Redemption of the world by means of the power of the Spirit of Truth operating from the abundance of the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

IV - EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

The Economy of Redemption

9. Through your profession, the way of the evangelical counsels opens up before each one of you. In the Gospel there are many exhortations that go beyond the measure of the commandment, indicating not only what is "necessary" but what is "better." Thus, for example, the exhortation not to judge, ⁽⁴²⁾ to lend "expecting nothing in return, "⁽⁴³⁾ to comply with all the requests and desires of our neighbor, ⁽⁴⁴⁾ to invite the poor to a meal, ⁽⁴⁵⁾ to pardon always⁽⁴⁶⁾ and many other invitations. If, in accordance with Tradition, the profession of the evangelical counsels has concentrated on the three points of chastity, poverty and obedience, this usage seems to emphasize sufficiently clearly their importance as key elements and in a certain sense as a "summing up" of the entire economy of salvation. Everything in the Gospel that is a counsel enters indirectly into the program of that way to which Christ calls when He says: "Follow me." But chastity, poverty and obedience give to this way a particular Christocentric characteristic and imprint upon it a specific sign of the economy of the Redemption.

Essential to this "economy" is the transformation of the entire cosmos through the heart of man, from within: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God... and will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God."⁽⁴⁷⁾ This transformation takes place in step with that love which Christ's call infuses in the depth of the individual-that love which constitutes the very substance of consecration: a man or woman's vowing of self to God in religious profession, on the foundation of the sacramental consecration of

Baptism. We can discover the bases of the economy of Redemption by reading the words of the first letter of St. John: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."(48)

Religious profession places in the heart of each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, the love of the Father: that love which is in the heart of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It is love which embraces the world and everything in it that comes from the Father, and which at the same time tends to overcome in the world everything that "does not come from the Father." It tends therefore to conquer the threefold lust. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" are hidden within man as the inheritance of original sin, as a result of which the relationship with the world, created by God and given to man to be ruled by him, (49) was disfigured in the human heart in various ways. In the economy of the Redemption the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience constitute the most radical means for transforming in the human heart this relationship with "the world": with the external world and with one's personal "I"-which in some way is the central part "of the world" in the biblical sense, if what "does not come from the Father" begins within it.

Against the background of the phrases taken from the first letter of St. John, it is not difficult to see the fundamental importance of the three evangelical counsels in the whole economy of Redemption. Evangelical chastity helps us to transform in our interior life everything that has its sources in the lust of the flesh; evangelical poverty, everything that finds its source in the lust of the eyes; and evangelical obedience enables us to transform in a radical way that which in the human heart arises from the pride of life. We are deliberately speaking here of an overcoming as a transformation, for the entire economy of the Redemption is set in the framework of the words spoken in the priestly prayer to the Father: "I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to guard them from the evil one."(50) The evangelical counsels in their essential purpose aim at "the renewal of creation": "the world," thanks to them, is to be subjected to man and given to him in such a way that man himself may be perfectly given to God.

Participation in the Self-emptying of Christ

10. The internal purpose of the evangelical counsels leads to the discovery of yet other aspects that emphasize the close connection of the counsels with the economy of the Redemption. We know that the economy of the Redemption finds its culminating point in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, in whom there are joined self-emptying through death and birth to a new life through the resurrection. The practice of the evangelical counsels contains a deep reflection of this paschal duality (51): the inevitable destruction of what in each of us is sin and its inheritance, and the possibility of being reborn each day to a more profound good hidden in the human soul. This good is manifested under the action of grace, towards which the practice of chastity, poverty and obedience renders the human soul particularly sensitive. The entire economy of Redemption is realized precisely through this sensitivity to the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, the direct Author of all holiness. Along this path the profession of the evangelical counsels opens out in each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, a wide space for the "new creation"(52) that emerges in your human "I" precisely from the economy of the Redemption and, through this human "I," also into the interpersonal and social dimensions. At the same time it emerges in humanity as part of the world created by God: that world that the Father loved "anew" in the eternal Son, the Redeemer of the world.

Of this Son St. Paul says that "though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."(53) The characteristic of self-emptying contained in the practice of the evangelical counsels is therefore a completely Christocentric characteristic. And for this reason also the Teacher from Nazareth explicitly indicates the cross as the condition for following in His footsteps. He who once said to each one of you "Follow me" has also said: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"(54) (that is to say, walk in my footsteps). And He said this to all His listeners, not just to the disciples. The law of renunciation belongs therefore to the very essence of the Christian vocation. But it belongs in a particular way to the essence of the vocation linked to the profession of the evangelical counsels. To those who walk the way of this vocation even those difficult expressions that we read in the letter to the Philippians speak in a comprehensible language: for him "I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him."(55)

Renunciation therefore-the reflection of the mystery of Calvary-in order "to be" more fully in the crucified and risen Christ; renunciation in order to recognize fully in Him the mystery of one's own human nature, and to confirm this on the path of that wonderful process of which the same Apostle writes in another place: "Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day."(56) In this way the economy of the Redemption transfers the power of the Paschal Mystery to the level of humanity, docile to Christ's call to life in chastity, poverty and obedience, that is, to a life according to the evangelical counsels.

V - CHASTITY POVERTY OBEDIENCE

Chastity

11. The paschal character of this call makes itself known from various points of view, in connection with each individual counsel.

It is indeed according to the measure of the economy of the Redemption that one must also judge and practice that chastity which each of you has promised by vow, together with poverty and obedience. There is contained in this the response to Christ's words, which are at the same time an invitation: "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."(57) Prior to this Christ had emphasized: "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given."(58) These last words clearly show that this invitation is a counsel. To this also the Apostle Paul devoted a special reflection in the first letter to the Corinthians.(59) This counsel is addressed in a particular way to the love of the human heart. It places greater emphasis on the spousal character of this love, while poverty and still more obedience seem to emphasize primarily the aspect of redemptive love contained in religious consecration. As you know, it is a question here of chastity in the sense "of making themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," a question, that is, of virginity or celibacy as an expression of spousal love for the Redeemer Himself. In this sense the Apostle teaches that they "do well" who choose matrimony but they "do better who choose virginity."(60) The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, "(61) and "the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit."(62)

There is contained neither in the words of Christ nor in those of Paul any lack of esteem for matrimony. The evangelical counsel of chastity is only an indication of that particular possibility which for the human heart, whether of a man or of a woman, constitutes the spousal love of Christ Himself, of Jesus the "Lord." "To make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" is not in fact merely a free renunciation of marriage and family life, but a charismatic choice of Christ as one's exclusive Spouse. This choice not only specifically enables one to be "anxious about the affairs of the Lord" but-when it is made "for the kingdom of heaven"-it brings this eschatological kingdom of God close to the life of all people in the conditions of temporality, and makes it in a certain way present in the midst of the world.

In this way, consecrated persons accomplish the interior purpose of the entire economy of the Redemption. For this purpose expresses itself in bringing near the kingdom of God in its definitive, eschatological dimension. Through the vow of chastity, consecrated persons share in the economy of the Redemption through the free renunciation of the temporal joys of married and family life; on the other hand, precisely by their "having made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," they bring into the midst of this passing world the announcement of the future resurrection(63) and of eternal life: life in union with God Himself through the beatific vision and the love which contains in itself and completely pervades all the other loves of the human heart.

Poverty

12. How very expressive in the matter of poverty are the words of the second letter to the Corinthians which constitute a concise synthesis of all that we hear on this theme in the Gospel! "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."(64) According to these words poverty actually enters into the interior structure of the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ. Without poverty it is not possible to understand the mystery of the gift of divinity to man, a gift which is accomplished precisely in Jesus Christ. For this reason also it is found at the very center of the Gospel, at the beginning of the message of the eight beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."(65) Evangelical poverty reveals to the eyes of the human soul the perspective of the whole mystery, "hidden for ages in God."(66) Only those who are "poor" in this way are also interiorly capable of understanding the poverty of the one who is infinitely rich. The poverty of Christ conceals in itself this infinite richness of God; it is indeed an infallible expression of it. A richness, in fact, such as the Divinity itself could not have been adequately expressed in any created good. It can be expressed only in poverty. Therefore it can be properly understood only by the poor, the poor in spirit. Christ, the God-man, is the first of these: He who "though he was rich became poor" is not only the teacher but also the spokesman and guarantor of that salvific poverty which corresponds to the infinite richness of God and to the inexhaustible power of His grace.

And thus it is also true-as the Apostle writes-that "by his poverty we have become rich." It is the teacher and spokesman of poverty who makes us rich. For this very reason He says to the young man of the synoptic Gospels: "Sell what you possess and give...and you will have treasure in heaven."(67) In these words there is a call to enrich others through one's own poverty, but in the depths of this call there is hidden the testimony of the infinite richness of God which, transferred to the human soul in the mystery of grace, creates in man himself, precisely through poverty, a source for enriching others not comparable with any other resource of material goods, a source for bestowing gifts on others in the manner of God Himself. This giving is accomplished in the context of the mystery of Christ, who "has made us rich by his poverty." We see how this process of enrichment unfolds in the pages of the Gospel, finding its culmination in the paschal event; Christ, the poorest in His death on the cross, is also the One who enriches us infinitely with the fullness of new life, through the resurrection.

Dear brothers and sisters, poor in spirit through your evangelical profession, receive into the whole of your life this salvific profile of the poverty of Christ. Day by day seek its ever greater development! Seek above all "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" and the other things "shall be yours as well."(68) May there be accomplished in you and through you the evangelical blessedness reserved for the poor, (69) for the poor in spirit!(70)

Obedience

13. Christ, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."(71)

Here, in these words of the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians, we touch the very essence of the Redemption. In this reality is inscribed in a primary and constitutive way the obedience of Jesus Christ. Other words of the Apostle, taken this time from the letter to the Romans, confirm this: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."(72)

The evangelical counsel of obedience is the call which derives from this obedience of Christ "unto death." Those who accept this call, expressed by the words "Follow me, " decide-as the Council says-to follow Christ "who, by an obedience which carried Him even to death on the cross, redeemed humanity and made it holy."(73) By living out the evangelical counsel of obedience, they reach the deep essence of the entire economy of the Redemption. By fulfilling this counsel they desire to gain a special sharing in the obedience of that "one alone" by whose obedience all "will be made righteous."

It can therefore be said that those who decide to live according to the counsel of obedience are placed in a unique way between the mystery of sin(74) and the mystery of justification and salvific grace. They are in this "place" with all the sinful background of their own human nature, with all the inheritance "of the pride of life, " with all the selfish tendencies to dominate rather than to serve, and precisely by means of the vow of obedience they decide to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, who "redeemed humanity and made it holy by his obedience." In the counsel of obedience they desire to find their own role in the Redemption of Christ and their own way of sanctification.

This is the way which Christ marked out in the Gospel, speaking many times of fulfilling the will of God, of ceaselessly searching for it. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work."(75) "Because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."(76) "He who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him."(77) "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me."(78) This constant fulfilling of the will of the Father also reminds us of that messianic confession of the psalmist in the Old Testament: "Behold, I come; in the written scroll it is prescribed for me. To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart."(79)

This obedience of the Son-full of joy-reaches its zenith in the face of the passion and cross: "Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done."(80) From the prayer in Gethsemane onwards, Christ's readiness to do the will of the Father is filled to the very brim of suffering, becoming that obedience "unto death, even death on a cross" spoken of by St. Paul.

Through the vow of obedience consecrated persons decide to imitate with humility the obedience of the Redeemer in a special way. For although submission to the will of God and obedience to His law are for every state a condition of Christian life, nevertheless, in the "religious state, " in the "state of perfection, " the vow of obedience establishes in the heart of each of you, dear brothers and sisters, the duty of a particular reference to Christ "obedient unto death." And since this obedience of Christ constitutes the essential nucleus of the work of the Redemption, as is seen from the words of the Apostle quoted above, therefore, also in the fulfilling of the evangelical counsel of obedience we must discern a particular moment in that "economy of the Redemption" which pervades your whole vocation in the Church.

From this derives that "total availability to the Holy Spirit" who is at work above all in the Church, as my Predecessor Paul VI puts it in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio*, (81) and who is likewise manifested in the constitutions of your institutes. From this derives that religious submission which in a spirit of faith consecrated persons show to their legitimate superiors, who hold the place of God.(82) In the letter to the Hebrews we find on this theme a very significant indication: "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account." And the author of the letter adds: "Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you."(83)

On the other hand, superiors will bear in mind that they must exercise in a spirit of service the power conferred on them through the ministry of the Church, and they will show willingness to listen to their brothers or sisters in order to discern more clearly what the Lord asks of each one. At the same time they retain the authority proper to them to decide and order what they consider appropriate.

Hand in hand with submission-obedience thus conceived goes the attitude of service which animates your whole life after the example of the Son of Man, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."(84) And His Mother, at the decisive moment of the Annunciation-Incarnation, entering from the very beginning into the whole salvific economy of the Redemption, said: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."(85)

Remember also, dear brothers and sisters, that the obedience to which you committed yourselves by consecrating yourselves without reserve to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a particular expression of interior freedom, just as the definitive expression of Christ's freedom was His obedience "unto death": "I lay down my life, that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."(86)

VI - LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

Witness

14. In the Jubilee Year of the Redemption the entire Church wishes to renew her love for Christ, the Redeemer of man and of the world, her Lord and also her divine Spouse. And so in this Holy Year the Church looks with special attention to you, dear brothers and sisters, who, as consecrated persons, occupy a special place both in the universal community of the People of God and in every local community. While the Church wishes also your love for Christ to be renewed through the grace of the extraordinary Jubilee, at the same time she is fully aware that this love constitutes a special possession of the whole People of God. The Church is aware that in the love that Christ receives from consecrated persons, the love of the entire Body is directed in a special and exceptional way towards the Spouse, who at the same time is the Head of this Body. The Church expresses to you, dear brothers and sisters, her gratitude for your consecration and for your profession of the evangelical counsels, which are a special witness of love. She also expresses anew her great confidence in you who have chosen a state of life that is a special gift of God to the Church. She counts upon your complete and generous collaboration in order that, as faithful stewards of this precious gift, you may "think with the Church" and always act in union with her, in conformity with the teachings and directives of the Magisterium of Peter and of the pastors in communion with him, fostering, at the personal and community level, a renewed ecclesial awareness. And at the same time the Church prays for you, that your witness of love may never fail, (87) and she also asks you to accept in this spirit the present message of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption.

Precisely in this way the Apostle Paul prayed in his letter to the Philippians, "that your love may abound more and more...with all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness..."(88)

Through the work of Christ's Redemption "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."(89) I constantly ask the Holy Spirit to grant to each one of you, according to your own gift, (90) to bear special witness to this love. May "the law of the Spirit that gives life in Christ Jesus..." be victorious within you, in a way worthy of your vocation, that law that has "set us free from the law of death."(91) Live then this new life in the measure of your consecration and also in the measure of the different gifts of God which correspond to the vocation of your individual religious families. The profession of the evangelical counsels shows each of you how with the help of the Spirit you can put to death(92) everything that is contrary to life and serves sin and death; everything that is opposed to true love of God and others. The world needs the authentic "contradiction" provided by religious consecration, as an unceasing stimulus of salvific renewal. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."(93) After the special period of experimentation and renewal provided for by the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae sanctae*, your institutes have recently received or are preparing to receive the Church's approval of your renewed constitutions. May this gift of the Church encourage you to know them, to love them and, above all, to live them in generosity and fidelity, remembering that obedience is an unambiguous manifestation of love.

It is precisely this witness of love that the world today and all humanity need. They need this witness to the Redemption as this is imprinted upon the profession of the evangelical counsels. These counsels, each in its own way and all of them together in their intimate connection, "bear witness" to the Redemption which, by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection, leads the world and humanity in the Holy Spirit towards that definitive fulfillment which man and-through man-the whole of creation find in God, and only in God. Your witness is therefore of inestimable value. You must constantly strive to make it fully transparent and fully fruitful in the world. A further aid to this will be the faithful observance of the Church's norms regarding also the outward manifestation of your consecration and of your commitment to poverty.(94)

Apostolate

15. From this witness of spousal love for Christ, through which the entire salvific truth of the Gospel becomes particularly visible, there also comes, dear brothers and sisters, as something proper to your vocation, a sharing in the Church's apostolate, in her universal mission which is accomplished contemporaneously in every nation in many different ways and through many different charisms. Your specific mission is in harmony with the mission of the Apostles, whom the Lord sent "to the whole world" to "teach all nations,"(95) and it is also linked to the mission of the hierarchical order. In the apostolate which consecrated persons exercise, their spousal love for Christ becomes, in an organic way as it were, love for the Church as the Body of Christ, for the Church as the People of God, for the Church which is at one and the same time Spouse and Mother.

It is difficult to describe, or even to list, the many different ways in which consecrated persons fulfill their love for the Church through the apostolate. This apostolate is always born from that particular gift of your founders, which, received from God and approved by the Church, has become a charism for the whole community. That gift corresponds to the different needs of the Church and the world at particular moments of history, and in its turn it is extended and strengthened in the life of the religious communities as one of the enduring elements of the Church's life and apostolate. In each of these elements, in each field-both of contemplation, so fruitful for the apostolate, and of direct apostolic action-the Church's constant blessing accompanies you, as does at the same time her pastoral and maternal solicitude, with regard to the spiritual identity of your life and the correctness of your activity in the midst of the great universal community of the vocations and charisms of the whole People of God. Through each of the institutes separately and through their organic integration in the whole of the Church's mission, special emphasis is given to that economy of the Redemption, the profound sign of which each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, bears within himself or herself through the consecration and profession of the evangelical counsels.

And thus, even though the many different apostolic works that you perform are extremely important, nevertheless the truly fundamental work of the apostolate remains always what (and at the same time who) you are in the Church. Of each one of you can be repeated, with special appropriateness, these words of St. Paul: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."(96) And at the same time this "being hidden with Christ in God" makes it possible to apply to you the words of the Master Himself: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."(97)

For the sake of this light with which you must "shine before men, " of great importance among you is the witness of mutual love, linked to the fraternal spirit of each community, for the Lord has said: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."(98)

The fundamentally community nature of your religious life, nourished by the teaching of the Gospel, by the sacred liturgy and above all by the Eucharist, is a special way of accomplishing this interpersonal and social dimension: by caring for one another, by bearing one another's burdens, you show by your unity that Christ is living in your midst.(99) Important for your apostolate in the Church is every kind of sensitivity to the needs and sufferings of the individual, which are seen so clearly and so movingly in today's world. For the Apostle Paul teaches: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, "(100) and he adds that "love is the fulfilling of the law."(101)

Your mission must be seen! Deep, very deep must be the bond which links it to the Church!(102) Through everything that you do, and especially through everything that you are, may the truth be proclaimed and reconfirmed that "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her"(103): the truth that is at the basis of the whole economy of the Redemption. From Christ, the Redeemer of the world, may the inexhaustible source of your love for the Church pour forth!

VII - CONCLUSION

The Eyes Enlightening the Heart

16. This exhortation which I address to you on the Solemnity of the Annunciation in the Jubilee Year of the Redemption is meant to be an expression of that love which the Church has for men and women religious. You, dear brothers and sisters, are truly a special treasure of the Church. And this treasure becomes more understandable through meditation on the reality of the Redemption, for which the present Holy Year offers a continuous opportunity and a welcome encouragement. Recognize, therefore, in this light, your identity and your dignity. May the Holy Spirit-through Christ's cross and resurrection-"having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, " enable you "to know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints."(104)

These "eyes enlightening the heart" the Church unceasingly asks for each one of you who have already taken the road of the profession of the evangelical counsels. The Church, together with you, asks for the same "enlightened eyes" for many Christians, especially for young men and women, that they may discover this way and not be afraid to enter upon it, that-even in the midst of the adverse circumstances of life today-they may hear Christ's "Follow me."(105) You too must strive for this through your prayer and also through the witness of that love whereby "God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."(106) May this witness become present everywhere and universally clear. May the people of our times, in their spiritual weariness, find in it both support and hope. Therefore, serve your brethren with the joy that wells up from a heart in which Christ has His dwelling. "And may the world of our time...be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected and discouraged...but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ."(107)

The Church, in her love for you, does not cease "kneeling before the Father, "(108) that He may effect in you "...the strengthening of the inner nature, "(109) and as in you, so also in many others of your baptized brothers and sisters, especially young people, so that they may find the same way to holiness which in the course of history so many generations have traveled together with Christ, the Redeemer of the world and Spouse of souls, often leaving behind them the bright radiance of God's light against the dark and gray background of human existence.

To all of you who travel this road in the present phase of the history of the Church and the world there is addressed this fervent hope of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, that "you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."(110)

Message of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

17. On the feast of the Annunciation in this Holy Year of the Redemption, I place the present exhortation in the heart of the immaculate Virgin. Among all persons consecrated unreservedly to God, she is the first. She-the Virgin of Nazareth-is also the one most fully consecrated to God, consecrated in the most perfect way. Her spousal love reached its height in the divine Motherhood through the power of the Holy Spirit. She, who as Mother carries Christ in her arms, at the same time fulfills in the most perfect way His call: "Follow me." And she follows Him-she, the Mother-as her Teacher of chastity, poverty and obedience.

How poor she was on Bethlehem night and how poor on Calvary! How obedient she was at the moment of the Annunciation, and then-at the foot of the cross-obedient even to the point of assenting to the death of her Son, who became obedient "unto death"! How dedicated she was in all her earthly life to the cause of the kingdom of heaven through most chaste love.

If the entire Church finds in Mary her first model, all the more reason do you find her so-you as consecrated individuals and communities within the Church! On the day that calls to mind the inauguration of the Jubilee of the Redemption, which took place last year, I address myself to you with this present message, to invite you to renew your religious consecration according to the model of the consecration of the very Mother of God.

Beloved brothers and sisters! "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."(111) Persevering in fidelity to Him who is faithful, strive to find a very special support in Mary! For she was called by God to the most perfect communion with His Son. May she, the faithful Virgin, also be the Mother of your evangelical way: may she help you to experience and to show to the world how infinitely faithful is God Himself!

With these hopes I bless you with all my heart.

From the Vatican, on March 25, in the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, 1984, the sixth of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

1. Cf. Mt. 7:14.
2. Ps. 130 [129]:7.
3. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:2.
4. Cf Mt. 18:20.
5. Cf. Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22.
6. Mt. 19:21.
7. Mk. 10:21.
8. Jn. 3:16.
9. 1 Pt. 1:18-19.
10. 1 Cor. 6:20.
11. 1 Cor. 6:19-20.
12. Mt. 5:48.
13. Cf. Lv. 19:2; 11:44.
14. Eph. 5:1-2.
15. Is. 44:22.
16. Mk. 8:35; cf. Mt. 10:39; Lk. 9:24.
17. Mt. 19:21.
18. Cf. Mt. 6:19-20.
19. Mt. 6:21.
20. Cf. Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22.
21. Cf. Jn. 14:26.
22. Mt. 19:16.
23. Jn. 15:16.
24. 1 Jn. 4:10.
25. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 5; cf. also Document of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (May 31, 1983), nos. 5ff.
26. Rom. 6:3-4.

27. Rom. 6:6.
28. Rom. 6:11.
29. Cf. Eph. 4:22-24.
30. Is. 43:1.
31. Mt. 19:21.
32. Ps. 135 [134]:4.
33. Jn. 17:19.
34. Rom. 12:1.
35. Heb. 10:5, 7.
36. Rom. 12:1.
37. Ps. 73 [72]:25-26.
38. Ps. 16 [15]:2, 5.
39. Cf. Sg. 8:6.
40. Cf. Lk. 20:38.
41. 2 Cor. 5:17.
42. Cf. Mt. 7:1.
43. Lk. 6:35.
44. Cf. Mt. 5:40-42.
45. Cf. Lk. 14:13-14.
46. Cf. Mt. 6:14-15.
47. Rom. 8:19-21.
48. 1 Jn. 2:15-17.
49. Cf. Gn. 1:28.
50. Jn. 17:15.
51. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree Perfectae caritatis, no. 5.
52. 2 Cor. 5:17.
53. Phil. 2:6-7.
54. Mk. 8:34; Mt. 16:24.
55. Phil. 3:8-9.
56. 2 Cor. 4:16.
57. Mt. 19:12.
58. Mt. 19:11.
59. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:28-40.
60. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:38.
61. 1 Cor. 7:32.
62. 1 Cor. 7:34.
63. Cf. Lk. 20:34-36; Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25.
64. 2 Cor. 8:9.
65. Mt. 5:3.
66. Eph. 3:9.
67. Mt. 19:21; cf. Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22.
68. Mt. 6:33.
69. Lk. 6:20.
70. Mt. 5:3.
71. Phil. 2:6-8.
72. Rom. 5:19.
73. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree Perfectae caritatis, no. 14.
74. "Mysterium iniquitatis"; cf. 2 Thes. 2:7.
75. Jn. 4:34.
76. Jn. 5:30.
77. Jn. 8:29.
78. Jn. 6:38.
79. Ps. 40 [39]:8-9; cf. Heb. 10:7.
80. Lk. 22:42; cf. Mk. 14:36; Mt. 26:42.
81. Cf. Evangelica testificatio, no. 6: AAS 63 (1971), p. 500.
82. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree Perfectae caritatis, no. 14.
83. Heb. 13:17.
84. Mk. 10:45.
85. Lk. 1:38.
86. Jn. 10:17-18.

87. Cf. Lk. 22:32.
88. Phil. 1:9-11.
89. Rom. 5:5.
90. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:7.
91. Rom. 8:2.
92. Cf Rom. 8:13.
93. Rom. 12:2.
94. Cf. CIC, Canon 669.
95. Cf. Mt. 28:19.
96. Col. 3:3.
97. Mt. 5:16.
98. Jn. 13:35.
99. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree Perfectae caritatis, no. 15.
100. Gal. 6:2.
101. Rom. 13:10.
102. The Code of Canon Law explicitly mentions this with regard to apostolic activity: cf. Canon 675, par. 3.
103. Eph. 5:25.
104. Eph. 1:18.
105. Lk. 5:27.
106. 1 Jn. 4:12.
107. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi, no. 80: AAS 68 (1976), p. 75.
108. Cf. Eph. 3:14.
109. Cf. Eph. 3:16.
110. Eph. 3:17-19.
111. 1 Cor. 1:9.

Apostolic Letter
Salvifici Doloris
Of The Supreme Pontiff
John Paul II
To The Bishops, To The Priests,
To The Religious Families
And To The Faithful
Of The Catholic Church
On The Christian Meaning
Of Human Suffering

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I - INTRODUCTION

1. Declaring the power of salvific suffering, the Apostle Paul says: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church"(1).

These words seem to be found at the end of the long road that winds through the suffering which forms part of the history of man and which is illuminated by the Word of God. These words have as it were the value of a final discovery, which is accompanied by joy. For this reason Saint Paul writes: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake"(2). The joy comes from the discovery of the meaning of suffering, and this discovery, even if it is most personally shared in by Paul of Tarsus who wrote these words, is at the same time valid for others. The Apostle shares his own discovery and rejoices in it because of all those whom it can help-just as it helped him-to understand the salvific meaning of suffering.

2. The theme of suffering - precisely under the aspect of this salvific meaning - seems to fit profoundly into the context of the Holy Year of the Redemption as an extraordinary Jubilee of the Church. And this circumstance too clearly favours the attention it deserves during this period. Independently of this fact, it is a universal theme that accompanies man at every point on earth: in a certain sense it co-exists with him in the world, and thus demands to be constantly reconsidered. Even though Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, wrote that "the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now"(3), even though man knows and is close to the sufferings of the animal world, nevertheless what we express by the word "suffering" seems to be particularly essential to the nature of man. It is as deep as man himself, precisely because it manifests in its own way that depth which is proper to man, and in its own way surpasses it. Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense "destined" to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way.

3. The theme of suffering in a special way demands to be faced in the context of the Holy Year of the Redemption, and this is so, in the first place, because the Redemption was accomplished through the Cross of Christ, that is, through his suffering. And at the same time, during the Holy Year of the Redemption we recall the truth expressed in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*: in Christ "every man becomes the way for the Church"(4). It can be said that man in a special fashion becomes the way for the Church when suffering enters his life. This happens, as we know, at different moments in life, it takes place in different ways, it assumes different dimensions; nevertheless, in whatever form, suffering seems to be, and is, almost inseparable from man's earthly existence.

Assuming then that throughout his earthly life man walks in one manner or another on the long path of suffering, it is precisely on this path that the Church at all times - and perhaps especially during the Holy Year of the Redemption - should meet man. Born of the mystery of Redemption in the Cross of Christ, the Church has to try to meet man in a special way on the path of his suffering. In this meeting man "becomes the way for the Church", and this way is one of the most important ones.

4. This is the origin also of the present reflection, precisely in the Year of the Redemption: a meditation on suffering. Human suffering evokes compassion; it also evokes respect, and in its own way it intimidates. For in suffering is contained the greatness of a specific mystery. This special respect for every form of human suffering must be set at the beginning of what will be expressed here later by the deepest need of the heart, and also by the deep imperative of faith. About the theme of suffering these two reasons seem to draw particularly close to each other and to become one: the need of the heart commands us to overcome fear, and the imperative of faith-formulated, for example, in the words of Saint Paul quoted at the beginning-provides the content, in the name of which and by virtue of which we dare to touch what appears in every man so intangible: for man, in his suffering, remains an intangible mystery.

II - THE WORLD OF HUMAN SUFFERING

5. Even though in its subjective dimension, as a personal fact contained within man's concrete and unrepeatable interior, suffering seems almost inexpressible and not transferable, perhaps at the same time nothing else requires as much as does suffering, in its "objective reality", to be dealt with, meditated upon, and conceived as an explicit problem; and that therefore basic questions be asked about it and the answers sought. It is evident that it is not a question here merely of giving a description of suffering. There are other criteria which go beyond the sphere of description, and which we must introduce when we wish to penetrate the world of human suffering.

Medicine, as the science and also the art of healing, discovers in the vast field of human sufferings the best known area, the one identified with greater precision and relatively more counterbalanced by the methods of "reaction" (that is, the methods of therapy). Nonetheless, this is only one area. The field of human suffering is much wider, more varied, and multi-dimensional. Man suffers in different ways, ways not always considered by medicine, not even in its most advanced specializations. Suffering is something which is still wider than sickness, more complex and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself. A certain idea of this problem comes to us from the distinction between physical suffering and moral suffering. This distinction is based upon the double dimension of the human being and indicates the bodily and spiritual element as the immediate or direct subject of suffering. Insofar as the words "suffering" and "pain", can, up to a certain degree, be used as synonyms, physical suffering is present when "the body is hurting" in some way, whereas moral suffering is "pain of the soul". In fact, it is a question of pain of a spiritual nature, and not only of the "psychological" dimension of pain which accompanies both moral and physical suffering. The vastness and the many forms of moral suffering are certainly no less in number than the forms of physical suffering. But at the same time, moral suffering seems as it were less identified and less reachable by therapy.

6. Sacred Scripture is a great book about suffering. Let us quote from the books of the Old Testament a few examples of situations which bear the signs of suffering, and above all moral suffering: the danger of death (5), the death of one's own children(6) and, especially, the death of the firstborn and only son(7); and then too: the lack of offspring(8), nostalgia for the homeland(9), persecution and hostility of the environment (10), mockery and scorn of the one who suffers(11), loneliness and abandonment(12); and again: the remorse of conscience(13), the difficulty of understanding why the wicked prosper and the just suffer(14), the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of friends and neighbours(15); and finally: the misfortunes of one's own nation(16).

In treating the human person as a psychological and physical "whole", the Old Testament often links "moral" sufferings with the pain of specific parts of the body: the bones(17), kidneys(18), liver(19), viscera (20), heart(21). In fact one cannot deny that moral sufferings have a "physical" or somatic element, and that they are often reflected in the state of the entire organism.

7. As we see from the examples quoted, we find in Sacred Scripture an extensive list of variously painful situations for man. This varied list certainly does not exhaust all that has been said and constantly repeated on the theme of suffering by the book of the history of man (this is rather an "unwritten book"), and even more by the book of the history of humanity, read through the history of every human individual.

It can be said that man suffers whenever he experiences any kind of evil. In the vocabulary of the Old Testament, suffering and evil are identified with each other. In fact, that vocabulary did not have a specific word to indicate "suffering". Thus it defined as "evil" everything that was suffering(22). Only the Greek language, and together with it the New Testament (and the Greek translations of the Old Testament), use the verb * = "I am affected by.... I experience a feeling, I suffer"; and, thanks to this verb, suffering is no longer directly identifiable with (objective) evil, but expresses a situation in which man experiences evil and in doing so becomes the subject of suffering. Suffering has indeed both a subjective and a passive character (from "patior"). Even when man brings suffering on himself, when he is its cause, this suffering remains something passive in its metaphysical essence.

This does not however mean that suffering in the psychological sense is not marked by a specific "activity". This is in fact that multiple and subjectively differentiated "activity" of pain, sadness, disappointment, discouragement or even despair, according to the intensity of the suffering subject and his or her specific sensitivity. In the midst of what constitutes the psychological form of suffering there is always an experience of evil, which causes the individual to suffer.

Thus the reality of suffering prompts the question about the essence of evil: what is evil?

This question seems, in a certain sense, inseparable from the theme of suffering. The Christian response to it is different, for example, from the one given by certain cultural and religious traditions which hold that existence is an evil from which one needs to be liberated. Christianity proclaims the essential good of existence and the good of that which exists, acknowledges the goodness of the Creator and proclaims the good of creatures. Man suffers on account of evil, which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good. We could say that man suffers because of a good in which he does not share, from which in a certain sense he is cut off, or of which he has deprived himself. He particularly suffers when he ought"- in the normal order of things- to have a share in this good and does not have it.

Thus, in the Christian view, the reality of suffering is explained through evil, which always, in some way, refers to a good.

8. In itself human suffering constitutes as it were a specific "world" which exists together with man, which appears in him and passes, and sometimes does not pass, but which consolidates itself and becomes deeply rooted in him. This world of suffering, divided into many, very many subjects, exists as it were "in dispersion". Every individual, through

personal suffering, constitutes not only a small part of that a world", but at the same time" that world" is present in him as a finite and unrepeatable entity. Parallel with this, however, is the interhuman and social dimension. The world of suffering possesses as it were its own solidarity. People who suffer become similar to one another through the analogy of their situation, the trial of their destiny, or through their need for understanding and care, and perhaps above all through the persistent question of the meaning of suffering. Thus, although the world of suffering exists "in dispersion", at the same time it contains within itself a singular challenge to communion and solidarity. We shall also try to follow this appeal in the present reflection.

Considering the world of suffering in its personal and at the same time collective meaning, one cannot fail to notice the fact that this world, at some periods of time and in some eras of human existence, as it were becomes particularly concentrated. This happens, for example, in cases of natural disasters, epidemics, catastrophes, upheavals and various social scourges: one thinks, for example, of a bad harvest and connected with it - or with various other causes - the scourge of famine.

One thinks, finally, of war. I speak of this in a particular way. I speak of the last two World Wars, the second of which brought with it a much greater harvest of death and a much heavier burden of human sufferings. The second half of our century, in its turn, brings with it-as though in proportion to the mistakes and transgressions of our contemporary civilization-such a horrible threat of nuclear war that we cannot think of this period except in terms of an incomparable accumulation of sufferings, even to the possible self-destruction of humanity. In this way, that world of suffering which in brief has its subject in each human being, seems in our age to be transformed-perhaps more than at any other moment-into a special "world": the world which as never before has been transformed by progress through man's work and, at the same time, is as never before in danger because of man's mistakes and offences.

III - THE QUEST FOR AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

9. Within each form of suffering endured by man, and at the same time at the basis of the whole world of suffering, there inevitably arises the question: why? It is a question about the cause, the reason, and equally, about the purpose of suffering, and, in brief, a question about its meaning. Not only does it accompany human suffering, but it seems even to determine its human content, what makes suffering precisely human suffering.

It is obvious that pain, especially physical pain, is widespread in the animal world. But only the suffering human being knows that he is suffering and wonders why; and he suffers in a humanly speaking still deeper way if he does not find a satisfactory answer. This is a difficult question, just as is a question closely akin to it, the question of evil. Why does evil exist? Why is there evil in the world? When we put the question in this way, we are always, at least to a certain extent, asking a question about suffering too.

Both questions are difficult, when an individual puts them to another individual, when people put them to other people, as also when man puts them to God. For man does not put this question to the world, even though it is from the world that suffering often comes to him, but he puts it to God as the Creator and Lord of the world. And it is well known that concerning this question there not only arise many frustrations and conflicts in the relations of man with God, but it also happens that people reach the point of actually denying God. For, whereas the existence of the world opens as it were the eyes of the human soul to the existence of God, to his wisdom, power and greatness, evil and suffering seem to obscure this image, sometimes in a radical way, especially in the daily drama of so many cases of undeserved suffering and of so many faults without proper punishment. So this circumstance shows-perhaps more than any other-the importance of the question of the meaning of suffering; it also shows how much care must be taken both in dealing with the question itself and with all possible answers to it.

10. Man can put this question to God with all the emotion of his heart and with his mind full of dismay and anxiety; and God expects the question and listens to it, as we see in the Revelation of the Old Testament. In the Book of Job the question has found its most vivid expression.

The story of this just man, who without any fault of his own is tried by innumerable sufferings, is well known. He loses his possessions, his sons and daughters, and finally he himself is afflicted by a grave sickness. In this horrible situation three old acquaintances come to his house, and each one in his own way tries to convince him that since he has been struck down by such varied and terrible sufferings, he must have done something seriously wrong. For suffering-they say-always strikes a man as punishment for a crime; it is sent by the absolutely just God and finds its reason in the order of justice. It can be said that Job's old friends wish not only to convince him of the moral justice of the evil, but in a certain sense they attempt to justify to themselves the moral meaning of suffering. In their eyes suffering can have a meaning only as a punishment for sin, therefore only on the level of God's justice, who repays good with good and evil with evil.

The point of reference in this case is the doctrine expressed in other Old Testament writings which show us suffering as punishment inflicted by God for human sins. The God of Revelation is the Lawgiver and Judge to a degree that no temporal authority can see. For the God of Revelation is first of all the Creator, from whom comes, together with existence, the essential good of creation. Therefore, the conscious and free violation of this good by man is not only a transgression of the law but at the same time an offence against the Creator, who is the first Lawgiver. Such a transgression has the character of sin, according to the exact meaning of this word, namely the biblical and theological

one. Corresponding to the moral evil of sin is punishment, which guarantees the moral order in the same transcendent sense in which this order is laid down by the will of the Creator and Supreme Lawgiver. From this there also derives one of the fundamental truths of religious faith, equally based upon Revelation, namely that God is a just judge, who rewards good and punishes evil: "For thou art just in all that thou hast done to us, and all thy works are true and thy ways right, and all thy judgments are truth. Thou hast executed true judgments in all that thou hast brought upon us... for in truth and justice thou hast brought all this upon us because of our sins"(23).

The opinion expressed by Job's friends manifests a conviction also found in the moral conscience of humanity: the objective moral order demands punishment for transgression, sin and crime. From this point of view, suffering appears as a "justified evil". The conviction of those who explain suffering as a punishment for sin finds support in the order of justice, and this corresponds to the conviction expressed by one of Job's friends: "As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same"(24).

11. Job however challenges the truth of the principle that identifies suffering with punishment for sin. And he does this on the basis of his own opinion. For he is aware that he has not deserved such punishment, and in fact he speaks of the good that he has done during his life. In the end, God himself reproves Job's friends for their accusations and recognizes that Job is not guilty. His suffering is the suffering of someone who is innocent and it must be accepted as a mystery, which the individual is unable to penetrate completely by his own intelligence.

The Book of Job does not violate the foundations of the transcendent moral order, based upon justice, as they are set forth by the whole of Revelation, in both the Old and the New Covenants. At the same time, however, this Book shows with all firmness that the principles of this order cannot be applied in an exclusive and superficial way. While it is true that suffering has a meaning as punishment, when it is connected with a fault, it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment. The figure of the just man Job is a special proof of this in the Old Testament. Revelation, which is the word of God himself, with complete frankness presents the problem of the suffering of an innocent man: suffering without guilt. Job has not been punished, there was no reason for inflicting a punishment on him, even if he has been subjected to a grievous trial. From the introduction of the Book it is apparent that God permitted this testing as a result of Satan's provocation. For Satan had challenged before the Lord the righteousness of Job: "Does Job fear God for nought?... Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face"(25). And if the Lord consents to test Job with suffering, he does it to demonstrate the latter's righteousness. The suffering has the nature of a test.

The Book of Job is not the last word on this subject in Revelation. In a certain way it is a foretelling of the Passion of Christ. But already in itself it is sufficient argument why the answer to the question about the meaning of suffering is not to be unreservedly linked to the moral order, based on justice alone. While such an answer has a fundamental and transcendent reason and validity, at the same time it is seen to be not only unsatisfactory in cases similar to the suffering of the just man Job, but it even seems to trivialize and impoverish the concept of justice which we encounter in Revelation.

12. The Book of Job poses in an extremely acute way the question of the "why" of suffering; it also shows that suffering strikes the innocent, but it does not yet give the solution to the problem.

Already in the Old Testament we note an orientation that begins to go beyond the concept according to which suffering has a meaning only as a punishment for sin, insofar as it emphasizes at the same time the educational value of suffering as a punishment. Thus in the sufferings inflicted by God upon the Chosen People there is included an invitation of his mercy, which corrects in order to lead to conversion: "... these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people"(26).

Thus the personal dimension of punishment is affirmed. According to this dimension, punishment has a meaning not only because it serves to repay the objective evil of the transgression with another evil, but first and foremost because it creates the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the subject who suffers.

This is an extremely important aspect of suffering. It is profoundly rooted in the entire Revelation of the Old and above all the New Covenant. Suffering must serve for conversion, that is, for the rebuilding of goodness in the subject, who can recognize the divine mercy in this call to repentance. The purpose of penance is to overcome evil, which under different forms lies dormant in man. Its purpose is also to strengthen goodness both in man himself and in his relationships with others and especially with God.

13. But in order to perceive the true answer to the "why" of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists. Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery: we are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations. Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the "why" of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love.

In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, following the revealed word of God, we must open ourselves wide to the human subject in his manifold potentiality. We must above all accept the light of Revelation not only insofar as it expresses the transcendent order of justice but also insofar as it illuminates this order with Love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is: also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

IV - JESUS CHRIST SUFFERING CONQUERED BY LOVE

14. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"(27). These words, spoken by Christ in his conversation with Nicodemus, introduce us into the very heart of God's salvific work. They also express the very essence of Christian soteriology, that is, of the theology of salvation. Salvation means liberation from evil, and for this reason it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering. According to the words spoken to Nicodemus, God gives his Son to "the world" to free man from evil, which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering. At the same time, the very word "gives" ("gave") indicates that this liberation must be achieved by the only-begotten Son through his own suffering. And in this, love is manifested, the infinite love both of that only-begotten Son and of the Father who for this reason "gives" his Son. This is love for man, love for the "world": it is salvific love.

We here find ourselves-and we must clearly realize this in our shared reflection on this problem-faced with a completely new dimension of our theme. It is a different dimension from the one which was determined and, in a certain sense, concluded the search for the meaning of suffering within the limit of justice. This is the dimension of Redemption, to which in the Old Testament, at least in the Vulgate text, the words of the just man Job already seem to refer: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last... I shall see God..."(28). Whereas our consideration has so far concentrated primarily and in a certain sense exclusively on suffering in its multiple temporal dimension (as also the sufferings of the just man Job), the words quoted above from Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus refer to suffering in its fundamental and definitive meaning. God gives his only-begotten Son so that man "should not perish" and the meaning of these words "should not perish" is precisely specified by the words that follow: "but have eternal life".

Man "perishes" when he loses "eternal life". The opposite of salvation is not, therefore, only temporal suffering, any kind of suffering, but the definitive suffering: the loss of eternal life, being rejected by God, damnation. The only-begotten Son was given to humanity primarily to protect man against this definitive evil and against definitive suffering. In his salvific mission, the Son must therefore strike evil right at its transcendental roots from which it develops in human history. These transcendental roots of evil are grounded in sin and death: for they are at the basis of the loss of eternal life. The mission of the only-begotten Son consists in conquering sin and death. He conquers sin by his obedience unto death, and he overcomes death by his Resurrection.

15. When one says that Christ by his mission strikes at evil at its very roots, we have in mind not only evil and definitive, eschatological suffering (so that man "should not perish, but have eternal life"), but also-at least indirectly toil and suffering in their temporal and historical dimension. For evil remains bound to sin and death. And even if we must use great caution in judging man's suffering as a consequence of concrete sins (this is shown precisely by the example of the just man Job), nevertheless suffering cannot be divorced from the sin of the beginnings, from what Saint John calls "the sin of the world"(29), from the sinful background of the personal actions and social processes in human history. Though it is not licit to apply here the narrow criterion of direct dependance (as Job's three friends did), it is equally true that one cannot reject the criterion that, at the basis of human suffering, there is a complex involvement with sin.

It is the same when we deal with death. It is often awaited even as a liberation from the suffering of this life. At the same time, it is not possible to ignore the fact that it constitutes as it were a definitive summing-up of the destructive work both in the bodily organism and in the psyche. But death primarily involves the dissolution of the entire psychophysical personality of man. The soul survives and subsists separated from the body, while the body is subjected to gradual decomposition according to the words of the Lord God, pronounced after the sin committed by man at the beginning of his earthly history: "You are dust and to dust you shall return"(30). Therefore, even if death is not a form of suffering in the temporal sense of the word, even if in a certain way it is beyond all forms of suffering, at the same time the evil which the human being experiences in death has a definitive and total character. By his salvific work, the only-begotten Son liberates man from sin and death. First of all he blots out from human history the dominion of sin, which took root under the influence of the evil Spirit, beginning with Original Sin, and then he gives man the possibility of living in Sanctifying Grace. In the wake of his victory over sin, he also takes away the dominion of death, by his Resurrection beginning the process of the future resurrection of the body. Both are essential conditions of "eternal life", that is of man's definitive happiness in union with God; this means, for the saved, that in the eschatological perspective suffering is totally blotted out.

As a result of Christ's salvific work, man exists on earth with the hope of eternal life and holiness. And even though the victory over sin and death achieved by Christ in his Cross and Resurrection does not abolish temporal suffering from human life, nor free from suffering the whole historical dimension of human existence, it nevertheless throws a new light upon this dimension and upon every suffering: the light of salvation. This is the light of the Gospel, that is, of the Good News. At the heart of this light is the truth expounded in the conversation with Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son"(31). This truth radically changes the picture of man's history and his earthly situation: in spite of the sin that took root in this history both as an original inheritance and as the "sin of the world" and as the sum of personal sins, God the Father has loved the only-begotten Son, that is, he loves him in a lasting way; and

then in time, precisely through this all-surpassing love, he "gives" this Son, that he may strike at the very roots of human evil and thus draw close in a salvific way to the whole world of suffering in which man shares.

16. In his messianic activity in the midst of Israel, Christ drew increasingly closer to the world of human suffering. "He went about doing good"(32), and his actions concerned primarily those who were suffering and seeking help. He healed the sick, consoled the afflicted, fed the hungry, freed people from deafness, from blindness, from leprosy, from the devil and from various physical disabilities, three times he restored the dead to life. He was sensitive to every human suffering, whether of the body or of the soul. And at the same time he taught, and at the heart of his teaching there are the eight beatitudes, which are addressed to people tried by various sufferings in their temporal life. These are "the poor in spirit" and "the afflicted" and "those who hunger and thirst for justice" and those who are "persecuted for justice sake", when they insult them, persecute them and speak falsely every kind of evil against them for the sake of Christ...(33). Thus according to Matthew; Luke mentions explicitly those "who hunger now"(34).

At any rate, Christ drew close above all to the world of human suffering through the fact of having taken this suffering upon his very self. During his public activity, he experienced not only fatigue, homelessness, misunderstanding even on the part of those closest to him, but, more than anything, he became progressively more and more isolated and encircled by hostility and the preparations for putting him to death. Christ is aware of this, and often speaks to his disciples of the sufferings and death that await him: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise"(35). Christ goes towards his Passion and death with full awareness of the mission that he has to fulfil precisely in this way. Precisely by means of this suffering he must bring it about "that man should not perish, but have eternal life". Precisely by means of his Cross he must strike at the roots of evil, planted in the history of man and in human souls. Precisely by means of his Cross he must accomplish the work of salvation. This work, in the plan of eternal Love, has a redemptive character.

And therefore Christ severely reproves Peter when the latter wants to make him abandon the thoughts of suffering and of death on the Cross(36). And when, during his arrest in Gethsemane, the same Peter tries to defend him with the sword, Christ says, " Put your sword back into its place... But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?(37)". And he also says, "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"(38). This response, like others that reappear in different points of the Gospel, shows how profoundly Christ was imbued by the thought that he had already expressed in the conversation with Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"(39). Christ goes toward his own suffering, aware of its saving power; he goes forward in obedience to the Father, but primarily he is united to the Father in this love with which he has loved the world and man in the world. And for this reason Saint Paul will write of Christ: "He loved me and gave himself for me"(40).

17. The Scriptures had to be fulfilled. There were many messianic texts in the Old Testament which foreshadowed the sufferings of the future Anointed One of God. Among all these, particularly touching is the one which is commonly called the Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant, in the Book of Isaiah. The Prophet, who has rightly been called "the Fifth Evangelist", presents in this Song an image of the sufferings of the Servant with a realism as acute as if he were seeing them with his own eyes: the eyes of the body and of the spirit. In the light of the verses of Isaiah, the Passion of Christ becomes almost more expressive and touching than in the descriptions of the Evangelists themselves. Behold, the true Man of Sorrows presents himself before us:

"He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"(41).

The Song of the Suffering Servant contains a description in which it is possible, in a certain sense, to identify the stages of Christ's Passion in their various details: the arrest, the humiliation, the blows, the spitting, the contempt for the prisoner, the unjust sentence, and then the scourging, the crowning with thorns and the mocking, the carrying of the Cross, the crucifixion and the agony.

Even more than this description of the Passion, what strikes us in the words of the Prophet is the depth of Christ's sacrifice. Behold, He, though innocent, takes upon himself the sufferings of all people, because he takes upon himself the sins of all. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all": all human sin in its breadth and depth becomes the true cause of the Redeemer's suffering. If the suffering "is measured" by the evil suffered, then the words of the Prophet enable us to understand the extent of this evil and suffering with which Christ burdened himself. It can be said that this is "substitutive" suffering; but above all it is "redemptive". The Man of Sorrows of that prophecy is truly that "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"(42). In his suffering, sins are cancelled out precisely because he alone as the only-begotten Son could take them upon himself, accept them with that love for the Father which overcomes the evil of every sin; in a certain sense he annihilates this evil in the spiritual space of the relationship between God and humanity, and fills this space with good.

Here we touch upon the duality of nature of a single personal subject of redemptive suffering.

He who by his Passion and death on the Cross brings about the Redemption is the only-begotten Son whom God "gave". And at the same time this Son who is consubstantial with the Father suffers as a man. His suffering has human dimensions; it also has unique in the history of humanity-a depth and intensity which, while being human, can also be an incomparable depth and intensity of suffering, insofar as the man who suffers is in person the only-begotten Son himself: " God from God". Therefore, only he-the only-begotten Son-is capable of embracing the measure of evil contained in the sin of man: in every sin and in "total" sin, according to the dimensions of the historical existence of humanity on earth.

18. It can be said that the above considerations now brings us directly to Gethsemane and Golgotha, where the Song of the Suffering Servant, contained in the Book of Isaiah, was fulfilled. But before going there, let us read the next verses of the Song, which give a prophetic anticipation of the Passion at Gethsemane and Golgotha. The Suffering Servant-and this in its turn is essential for an analysis of Christ's Passion-takes on himself those sufferings which were spoken of, in a totally voluntary way:

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so he opened not his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered that
he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth"(43).

Christ suffers voluntarily and suffers innocently. With his suffering he accepts that question which-posed by people many times-has been expressed, in a certain sense, in a radical way by the Book of Job. Christ, however, not only carries with himself the same question (and this in an even more radical way, for he is not only a man like Job but the only-begotten Son of God), but he also carries the greatest possible answer to this question. One can say that this answer emerges from the very master of which the question is made up. Christ gives the answer to the question about suffering and the meaning of suffering not only by his teaching, that is by the Good News, but most of all by his own suffering, which is integrated with this teaching of the Good News in an organic and indissoluble way. And this is the final, definitive word of this teaching: "the word of the Cross", as Saint Paul one day will say(44).

This "word of the Cross" completes with a definitive reality the image of the ancient prophecy. Many episodes, many discourses during Christ's public teaching bear witness to the way in which from the beginning he accepts this suffering which is the will of the Father for the salvation of the world. However, the prayer in Gethsemane becomes a definitive point here. The words: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt"(45), and later: "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done"(46), have a manifold eloquence. They prove the truth of that love which the only-begotten Son gives to the Father in his obedience. At the same time, they attest to the truth of his suffering. The words of that prayer of Christ in Gethsemane prove the truth of love through the truth of suffering. Christ's words confirm with all simplicity this human truth of suffering, to its very depths: suffering is the undergoing of evil before which man shudders. He says: let it pass from me", just as Christ says in Gethsemane.

His words also attest to this unique and incomparable depth and intensity of suffering which only the man who is the only-begotten Son could experience; they attest to that depth and intensity which the prophetic words quoted above in

their own way help us to understand. Not of course completely (for this we would have to penetrate the divine-human mystery of the subject), but at least they help us to understand that difference (and at the same time the similarity) which exists between every possible form of human suffering and the suffering of the God-man. Gethsemane is the place where precisely this suffering, in all the truth expressed by the Prophet concerning the evil experienced in it, is revealed as it were definitively before the eyes of Christ's soul.

After the words in Gethsemane come the words uttered on Golgotha, words which bear witness to this depth-unique in the history of the world-of the evil of the suffering experienced. When Christ says: "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?", his words are not only an expression of that abandonment which many times found expression in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and in particular in that Psalm 22 [21] from which come the words quoted(47). One can say that these words on abandonment are born at the level of that inseparable union of the Son with the Father, and are born because the Father "laid on him the iniquity of us all"(48). They also foreshadow the words of Saint Paul: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin"(49). Together with this horrible weight, encompassing the "entire" evil of the turning away from God which is contained in sin, Christ, through the divine depth of his filial union with the Father, perceives in a humanly inexpressible way this suffering which is the separation, the rejection by the Father, the estrangement from God. But precisely through this suffering he accomplishes the Redemption, and can say as he breathes his last: "It is finished"(50).

One can also say that the Scripture has been fulfilled, that these words of the Song of the Suffering Servant have been definitively accomplished: "it was the will of the Lord to bruise him"(51). Human suffering has reached its culmination in the Passion of Christ. And at the same time it has entered into a completely new dimension and a new order: it has been linked to love, to that love of which Christ spoke to Nicodemus, to that love which creates good, drawing it out by means of suffering, just as the supreme good of the Redemption of the world was drawn from the Cross of Christ, and from that Cross constantly takes its beginning. The Cross of Christ has become a source from which flow rivers of living water(52). In it we must also pose anew the question about the meaning of suffering, and read in it, to its very depths, the answer to this question.

V - SHARERS IN THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

19. The same Song of the Suffering Servant in the Book of Isaiah leads us, through the following verses, precisely in the direction of this question and answer:

"When he makes himself an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring,
he shall prolong his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand;
he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul
and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant.

make many to be accounted righteous;
and he shall bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out his soul to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors".

One can say that with the Passion of Christ all human suffering has found itself in a new situation. And it is as though Job has foreseen this when he said: "I know that my Redeemer lives...", and as though he had directed towards it his own suffering, which without the Redemption could not have revealed to him the fullness of its meaning.

In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed,. Christ, - without any fault of his own - took on himself "the total evil of sin". The experience of this evil determined the incomparable extent of Christ's suffering, which became the price of the Redemption. The Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah speaks of this. In later times, the witnesses of the New Covenant, sealed in the Blood of Christ, will speak of this.

These are the words of the Apostle Peter in his First Letter: "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with the perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot".

And the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Galatians will say: "He gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age"(56), and in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body "(57).

With these and similar words the witnesses of the New Covenant speak of the greatness of the Redemption, accomplished through the suffering of Christ. The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man. Every man has his own share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.

20. The texts of the New Testament express this concept in many places. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians the Apostle writes: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.... knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus"(58).

Saint Paul speaks of various sufferings and, in particular, of those in which the first Christians became sharers "for the sake of Christ ". These sufferings enable the recipients of that Letter to share in the work of the Redemption, accomplished through the suffering and death of the Redeemer. The eloquence of the Cross and death is, however, completed by the eloquence of the Resurrection. Man finds in the Resurrection a completely new light, which helps him to go forward through the thick darkness of humiliations, doubts, hopelessness and persecution. Therefore the Apostle will also write in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too"(59). Elsewhere he addresses to his recipients words of encouragement: "May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ"(60). And in the Letter to the Romans he writes: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"(61).

The very participation in Christ's suffering finds, in these apostolic expressions, as it were a twofold dimension. If one becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ, this happens because Christ has opened his suffering to man, because he himself in his redemptive suffering has become, in a certain sense, a sharer in all human sufferings. Man, discovering through faith the redemptive suffering of Christ, also discovers in it his own sufferings; he rediscovers them, through faith, enriched with a new content and new meaning.

This discovery caused Saint Paul to write particularly strong words in the Letter to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"(62). Faith enables the author of these words to know that love which led Christ to the Cross. And if he loved us in this way, suffering and dying, then with this suffering and death of his he lives in the one whom he loved in this way; he lives in the man: in Paul. And living in him-to the degree that Paul, conscious of this through faith,

responds to his love with love-Christ also becomes in a particular way united to the man, to Paul, through the Cross. This union caused Paul to write, in the same Letter to the Galatians, other words as well, no less strong: "But far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"(63).

21. The Cross of Christ throws salvific light, in a most penetrating way, on man's life and in particular on his suffering. For through faith the Cross reaches man together with the Resurrection: the mystery of the Passion is contained in the Paschal Mystery. The witnesses of Christ's Passion are at the same time witnesses of his Resurrection. Paul writes: "That I may know him (Christ) and the power of his Resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead"(64). Truly, the Apostle first experienced the "power of the Resurrection" of Christ, on the road to Damascus, and only later, in this paschal light, reached that "sharing in his sufferings" of which he speaks, for example, in the Letter to the Galatians. The path of Paul is clearly paschal: sharing in the Cross of Christ comes about through the experience of the Risen One, therefore through a special sharing in the Resurrection. Thus, even in the Apostle's expressions on the subject of suffering there so often appears the motif of glory, which finds its beginning in Christ's Cross.

The witnesses of the Cross and Resurrection were convinced that "through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God"(65). And Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says this: "We ourselves boast of you... for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which you are suffering"(66). Thus to share in the sufferings of Christ is, at the same time, to suffer for the Kingdom of God. In the eyes of the just God, before his judgment, those who share in the suffering of Christ become worthy of this Kingdom. Through their sufferings, in a certain sense they repay the infinite price of the Passion and death of Christ, which became the price of our Redemption: at this price the Kingdom of God has been consolidated anew in human history, becoming the definitive prospect of man's earthly existence. Christ has led us into this Kingdom through his suffering. And also

through suffering those surrounded by the mystery of Christ's Redemption become mature enough to enter this Kingdom.

22.

To the prospect of the Kingdom of God is linked hope in that glory which has its beginning in the Cross of Christ. The Resurrection revealed this glory-eschatological glory-which, in the Cross of Christ, was completely obscured by the immensity of suffering. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ are also called, through their own sufferings, to share in glory. Paul expresses this in various places. To the Romans he writes: "We are... fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us"(67). In the Second Letter to the Corinthians we read: "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to things that are unseen"(68). The Apostle Peter will express this truth in the following words of his First Letter: "But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed "(69).

The motif of suffering and glory has a strictly evangelical characteristic, which becomes clear by reference to the Cross and the Resurrection. The Resurrection became, first of all, the manifestation of glory, which corresponds to Christ's being lifted up through the Cross. If, in fact, the Cross was to human eyes Christ's emptying of himself, at the same time it was in the eyes of God his being lifted up. On the Cross, Christ attained and fully accomplished his mission: by fulfilling the will of the Father, he at the same time fully realized himself. In weakness he manifested his power, and in humiliation he manifested all his messianic greatness. Are not all the words he uttered during his agony on Golgotha a proof of this greatness, and especially his words concerning the perpetrators of his crucifixion: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"(70)? To those who share in Christ's sufferings these words present themselves with the power of a supreme example. Suffering is also an invitation to manifest the moral greatness of man, his spiritual maturity. Proof of this has been given, down through the generations, by the martyrs and confessors of Christ, faithful to the words: "And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.

Christ's Resurrection has revealed "the glory of the future age" and, at the same time, has confirmed "the boast of the Cross": the glory that is hidden in the very suffering of Christ and which has been and is often mirrored in human suffering, as an expression of man's spiritual greatness. This glory must be acknowledged not only in the martyrs for the faith but in many others also who, at times, even without belief in Christ, suffer and give their lives for the truth and for a just cause. In the sufferings of all of these people the great dignity of man is strikingly confirmed.

23. Suffering, in fact, is always a trial-at times a very hard one-to which humanity is subjected. The gospel paradox of weakness and strength often speaks to us from the pages of the Letters of Saint Paul, a paradox particularly experienced by the Apostle himself and together with him experienced by all who share Christ's sufferings. Paul writes in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"(72). In the Second Letter to Timothy we read: "And therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed"(73). And in the Letter to the Philippians he will even say: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me"(74).

Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the Cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's Cross. In such a concept, to suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ. In him God has confirmed his desire to act especially through suffering, which is man's weakness and emptying of self, and he wishes to make his power known precisely in this weakness and emptying of self. This also explains the exhortation in the First Letter of Peter: "Yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God"(75).

In the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul deals still more fully with the theme of this "birth of power in weakness", this spiritual tempering of man in the midst of trials and tribulations, which is the particular vocation of those who share in Christ's sufferings. "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us"(76). Suffering as it were contains a special call to the virtue which man must exercise on his own part. And this is the virtue of perseverance in bearing whatever disturbs and causes harm. In doing this, the individual unleashes hope, which maintains in him the conviction that suffering will not get the better of him, that it will not deprive him of his dignity as a human being, a dignity linked to awareness of the meaning of life. And indeed this meaning makes itself known together with the working of God's love, which is the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit. The more he shares in this love, man rediscovers himself more and more fully in suffering: he rediscovers the "soul" which he thought he had "lost"(77) because of suffering.

24. Nevertheless, the Apostle's experiences as a sharer in the sufferings of Christ go even further. In the Letter to the Colossians we read the words which constitute as it were the final stage of the spiritual journey in relation to suffering: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the

sake of his body, that is, the Church"(78). And in another Letter he asks his readers: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?"(79).

In the Paschal Mystery Christ began the union with man in the community of the Church. The mystery of the Church is expressed in this: that already in the act of Baptism, which brings about a configuration with Christ, and then through his Sacrifice-sacramentally through the Eucharist-the Church is continually being built up spiritually as the Body of Christ. In this Body, Christ wishes to be united with every individual, and in a special way he is united with those who suffer. The words quoted above from the Letter to the Colossians bear witness to the exceptional nature of this union. For, whoever suffers in union with Christ- just as the Apostle Paul bears his "tribulations" in union with Christ- not only receives from Christ that strength already referred to but also "completes" by his suffering "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions". This evangelical outlook especially highlights the truth concerning the creative character of suffering. The sufferings of Christ created the good of the world's redemption. This good in itself is inexhaustible and infinite. No man can add anything to it. But at the same time, in the mystery of the Church as his Body, Christ has in a sense opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering. In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ's sufferings-in any part of the world and at any time in history-to that extent he in his own way completes the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world.

Does this mean that the Redemption achieved by Christ is not complete? No. It only means that the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, remains always open to all love expressed in human suffering. In this dimension-the dimension of love-the Redemption which has already been completely accomplished is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished. Christ achieved the Redemption completely and to the very limits but at the same time he did not bring it to a close. In this redemptive suffering, through which the Redemption of the world was accomplished, Christ opened himself from the beginning to every human suffering and constantly does so. Yes, it seems to be part of the very essence of Christ's redemptive suffering that this suffering requires to be unceasingly completed.

Thus, with this openness to every human suffering, Christ has accomplished the world's Redemption through his own suffering. For, at the same time, this Redemption, even though it was completely achieved by Christ's suffering, lives on and in its own special way develops in the history of man. It lives and develops as the body of Christ, the Church, and in this dimension every human suffering, by reason of the loving union with Christ, completes the suffering of Christ. It completes that suffering just as the Church completes the redemptive work of Christ. The mystery of the Church-that body which completes in itself also Christ's crucified and risen body-indicates at the same time the space or context in which human sufferings complete the sufferings of Christ. Only within this radius and dimension of the Church as the Body of Christ, which continually develops in space and time, can one think and speak of "what is lacking" in the sufferings of Christ. The Apostle, in fact, makes this clear when he writes of "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church".

It is precisely the Church, which ceaselessly draws on the infinite resources of the Redemption, introducing it into the life of humanity, which is the dimension in which the redemptive suffering of Christ can be constantly completed by the suffering of man. This also highlights the divine and human nature of the Church. Suffering seems in some way to share in the characteristics of this nature. And for this reason suffering also has a special value in the eyes of the Church. It is something good, before which the Church bows down in reverence with all the depth of her faith in the Redemption. She likewise bows down with all the depth of that faith with which she embraces within herself the inexpressible mystery of the Body of Christ.

VI - THE GOSPEL OF SUFFERING

25. The witnesses of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ have handed on to the Church and to mankind a specific Gospel of suffering. The Redeemer himself wrote this Gospel, above all by his own suffering accepted in love, so that man "should not perish but have eternal life"(80). This suffering, together with the living word of his teaching, became a rich source for all those who shared in Jesus' sufferings among the first generation of his disciples and confessors and among those who have come after them down the centuries.

It is especially consoling to note-and also accurate in accordance with the Gospel and history-that at the side of Christ, in the first and most exalted place, there is always his Mother through the exemplary testimony that she bears by her whole life to this particular Gospel of suffering. In her, the many and intense sufferings were amassed in such an interconnected way that they were not only a proof of her unshakeable faith but also a contribution to the redemption of all. In reality, from the time of her secret conversation with the angel, she began to see in her mission as a mother her "destiny" to share, in a singular and unrepeatable way, in the very mission of her Son. And she very soon received a confirmation of this in the events that accompanied the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and in the solemn words of the aged Simeon, when he spoke of a sharp sword that would pierce her heart. Yet a further confirmation was in the anxieties and privations of the hurried flight into Egypt, caused by the cruel decision of Herod.

And again, after the events of her Son's hidden and public life, events which she must have shared with acute sensitivity, it was on Calvary that Mary's suffering, beside the suffering of Jesus, reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view but which was mysterious and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of

the world. Her ascent of Calvary and her standing at the foot of the Cross together with the Beloved Disciple were a special sort of sharing in the redeeming death of her Son. And the words which she heard from his lips were a kind of solemn handing-over of this Gospel of suffering so that it could be proclaimed to the whole community of believers.

As a witness to her Son's Passion by her presence, and as a sharer in it by her compassion, Mary offered a unique contribution to the Gospel of suffering, by embodying in anticipation the expression of Saint Paul which was quoted at the beginning. She truly has a special title to be able to claim that she "completes in her flesh"-as already in her heart-"what is lacking in Christ's afflictions".

In the light of the unmatched example of Christ, reflected with singular clarity in the life of his Mother, the Gospel of suffering, through the experience and words of the Apostles, becomes an inexhaustible source for the ever new generations that succeed one another in the history of the Church. The Gospel of suffering signifies not only the presence of suffering in the Gospel, as one of the themes of the Good News, but also the revelation of the salvific power and salvific significance of suffering in Christ's messianic mission and, subsequently, in the mission and vocation of the Church.

Christ did not conceal from his listeners the need for suffering. He said very clearly: "If any man would come after me... let him take up his cross daily" (81), and before his disciples he placed demands of a moral nature that can only be fulfilled on condition that they should "deny themselves" (82). The way that leads to the Kingdom of heaven is "hard and narrow", and Christ contrasts it to the "wide and easy" way that "leads to destruction" (83). On various occasions Christ also said that his disciples and confessors would meet with much persecution, something which-as we know-happened not only in the first centuries of the Church's life under the Roman Empire, but also came true in various historical periods and in other parts of the world, and still does even in our own time.

Here are some of Christ's statements on this subject: "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives" (84).

The Gospel of suffering speaks first in various places of suffering "for Christ", "for the sake of Christ", and it does so with the words of Jesus himself or the words of his Apostles. The Master does not conceal the prospect of suffering from his disciples and followers. On the contrary, he reveals it with all frankness, indicating at the same time the supernatural assistance that will accompany them in the midst of persecutions and tribulations "for his name's sake". These persecutions and tribulations will also be, as it were, a particular proof of likeness to Christ and union with him. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you...; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you... A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me they will persecute you... But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me" (85). "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (86).

This first chapter of the Gospel of suffering, which speaks of persecutions, namely of tribulations experienced because of Christ, contains in itself a special call to courage and fortitude, sustained by the eloquence of the Resurrection. Christ has overcome the world definitively by his Resurrection. Yet, because of the relationship between the Resurrection and his Passion and death, he has at the same time overcome the world by his suffering. Yes, suffering has been singularly present in that victory over the world which was manifested in the Resurrection. Christ retains in his risen body the marks of the wounds of the Cross in his hands, feet and side. Through the Resurrection, he manifests the victorious power of suffering, and he wishes to imbue with the conviction of this power the hearts of those whom he chose as Apostles and those whom he continually chooses and sends forth. The Apostle Paul will say: "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (87).

26. While the first great chapter of the Gospel of suffering is written down, as the generations pass, by those who suffer persecutions for Christ's sake, simultaneously another great chapter of this Gospel unfolds through the course of history. This chapter is written by all those who suffer together with Christ, uniting their human sufferings to his salvific suffering. In these people there is fulfilled what the first witnesses of the Passion and Resurrection said and wrote about sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Therefore in those people there is fulfilled the Gospel of suffering, and, at the same time, each of them continues in a certain sense to write it: they write it and proclaim it to the world, they announce it to the world in which they live and to the people of their time.

Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ, a special grace. To this grace many saints, such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and others, owe their profound conversion. A result of such a conversion is not only that the individual discovers the salvific meaning of suffering but above all that he becomes a completely new person. He discovers a new dimension, as it were, of his entire life and vocation. This discovery is a particular confirmation of the spiritual greatness which in man surpasses the body in a way that is completely beyond compare. When this body is

gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior maturity and spiritual greatness become evident, constituting a touching lesson to those who are healthy and normal.

This interior maturity and spiritual greatness in suffering are certainly the result of a particular conversion and cooperation with the grace of the Crucified Redeemer. It is he himself who acts at the heart of human sufferings through his Spirit of truth, through the consoling Spirit. It is he who transforms, in a certain sense, the very substance of the spiritual life, indicating for the person who suffers a place close to himself. It is he-as the interior Master and Guide-who reveals to the suffering brother and sister this wonderful interchange, situated at the very heart of the mystery of the Redemption. Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil. But Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, namely the good of eternal salvation. By his suffering on the Cross, Christ reached the very roots of evil, of sin and death. He conquered the author of evil, Satan, and his permanent rebellion against the Creator. To the suffering brother or sister Christ discloses and gradually reveals the horizons of the Kingdom of God: the horizons of a world converted to the Creator, of a world free from sin, a world being built on the saving power of love. And slowly but effectively, Christ leads into this world, into this Kingdom of the Father, suffering man, in a certain sense through the very heart of his suffering. For suffering cannot be transformed and changed by a grace from outside, but from within. And Christ through his own salvific suffering is very much present in every human suffering, and can act from within that suffering by the powers of his Spirit of truth, his consoling Spirit.

This is not all: the Divine Redeemer wishes to penetrate the soul of every sufferer through the heart of his holy Mother, the first and the most exalted of all the redeemed. As though by a continuation of that motherhood which by the power of the Holy Spirit had given him life, the dying Christ conferred upon the ever Virgin Mary a new kind of motherhood-spiritual and universal-towards all human beings, so that every individual, during the pilgrimage of faith, might remain, together with her, closely united to him unto the Cross, and so that every form of suffering, given fresh life by the power of this Cross, should become no longer the weakness of man but the power of God.

However, this interior process does not always follow the same pattern. It often begins and is set in motion with great difficulty. Even the very point of departure differs: people react to suffering in different ways. But in general it can be said that almost always the individual enters suffering with a typically human protest and with the question "why". He asks the meaning of his suffering and seeks an answer to this question on the human level. Certainly he often puts this question to God, and to Christ. Furthermore, he cannot help noticing that the one to whom he puts the question is himself suffering and wishes to answer him from the Cross, from the heart of his own suffering. Nevertheless, it often takes time, even a long time, for this answer to begin to be interiorly perceived. For Christ does not answer directly and he does not answer in the abstract this human questioning about the meaning of suffering. Man hears Christ's saving answer as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ.

The answer which comes through this sharing, by way of the interior encounter with the Master, is in itself something more than the mere abstract answer to the question about the meaning of suffering. For it is above all a call. It is a vocation. Christ does not explain in the abstract the reasons for suffering, but before

all else he says: "Follow me!". Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering! Through my Cross. Gradually, as the individual takes up his cross, spiritually uniting himself to the Cross of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering is revealed before him. He does not discover this meaning at his own human level, but at the level of the suffering of Christ. At the same time, however, from this level of Christ the salvific meaning of suffering descends to man's level and becomes, in a sense, the individual's personal response. It is then that man finds in his suffering interior peace and even spiritual joy.

27. Saint Paul speaks of such joy in the Letter to the Colossians: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake"(88). A source of joy is found in the overcoming of the sense of the uselessness of suffering, a feeling that is sometimes very strongly rooted in human suffering. This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly, but seems to make him a burden to others. The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others, and at the same time seems useless to himself. The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ transforms this depressing feeling. Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"; the certainty that in the spiritual dimension of the work of Redemption he is serving, like Christ, the salvation of his brothers and sisters. Therefore he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. In the Body of Christ, which is ceaselessly born of the Cross of the Redeemer, it is precisely suffering permeated by the spirit of Christ's sacrifice that is the irreplaceable mediator and author of the good things which are indispensable for the world's salvation. It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption. In that "cosmic" struggle between the spiritual powers of good and evil, spoken of in the Letter to the Ephesians(89), human sufferings, united to the redemptive suffering of Christ, constitute a special support for the powers of good, and open the way to the victory of these salvific powers.

And so the Church sees in all Christ's suffering brothers and sisters as it were a multiple subject of his supernatural power. How often is it precisely to them that the pastors of the Church appeal, and precisely from them that they seek help and support! The Gospel of suffering is being written unceasingly, and it speaks unceasingly with the words of this strange paradox: the springs of divine power gush forth precisely in the midst of human weakness. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special particle of the infinite treasure of the world's

Redemption, and can share this treasure with others. The more a person is threatened by sin, the heavier the structures of sin which today's world brings with it, the greater is the eloquence which human suffering possesses in itself. And the more the Church feels the need to have recourse to the value of human sufferings for the salvation of the world.

VII - THE GOOD SAMARITAN

28. To the Gospel of suffering there also belongs-and in an organic way-the parable of the Good Samaritan. Through this parable Christ wished to give an answer to the question: "Who is my neighbour?"(90) For of the three travellers along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, on which there lay half-dead a man who had been stripped and beaten by robbers, it was precisely the Samaritan who showed himself to be the real "neighbour" of the victim: "neighbour" means also the person who carried out the commandment of love of neighbour. Two other men were passing along the same road; one was a priest and the other a Levite, but each of them "saw him and passed by on the other side". The Samaritan, on the other hand, "saw him and had compassion on him. He went to him, ... and bound up his wounds", then "brought him to an inn, and took care of him"(91). And when he left, he solicitously entrusted the suffering man to the care of the innkeeper, promising to meet any expenses.

The parable of the Good Samaritan belongs to the Gospel of suffering. For it indicates what the relationship of each of us must be towards our suffering neighbour. We are not allowed to "pass by on the other side" indifferently; we must "stop" beside him. Everyone who stops beside the suffering of another person, whatever form it may take, is a Good Samaritan. This stopping does not mean curiosity but availability. It is like the opening of a certain interior disposition of the heart, which also has an emotional expression of its own. The name "Good Samaritan" fits every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others, who "is moved" by the misfortune of another. If Christ, who knows the interior of man, emphasizes this compassion, this means that it is important for our whole attitude to others' suffering. Therefore one must cultivate this sensitivity of heart, which bears witness to compassion towards a suffering person. Some times this compassion remains the only or principal expression of our love for and solidarity with the sufferer.

Nevertheless, the Good Samaritan of Christ's parable does not stop at sympathy and compassion alone. They become for him an incentive to actions aimed at bringing help to the injured man. In a word, then, a Good Samaritan is one who brings help in suffering, whatever its nature may be. Help which is, as far as possible, effective. He puts his whole heart into it, nor does he spare material means. We can say that he gives himself, his very "I", opening this "I" to the other person. Here we touch upon one of the key-points of all Christian anthropology. Man cannot "fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself"(92). A Good Samaritan is the person capable of exactly such a gift of self.

29. Following the parable of the Gospel, we could say that suffering, which is present under so many different forms in our human world, is also present in order to unleash love in the human person, that unselfish gift of one's "I" on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer. The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a certain sense man owes to suffering that unselfish love which stirs in his heart and actions. The person who is a "neighbour" cannot indifferently pass by the suffering of another: this in the name of fundamental human solidarity, still more in the name of love of neighbour. He must "stop", "sympathize", just like the Samaritan of the Gospel parable. The parable in itself expresses a deeply Christian truth, but one that at the same time is very universally human. It is not without reason that, also in ordinary speech, any activity on behalf of the suffering and needy is called "Good Samaritan" work.

In the course of the centuries, this activity assumes organized institutional forms and constitutes a field of work in the respective professions. How much there is of "the Good Samaritan" in the profession of the doctor, or the nurse, or others similar! Considering its "evangelical" content, we are inclined to think here of a vocation rather than simply a profession. And the institutions which from generation to generation have performed "Good Samaritan" service have developed and specialized even further in our times. This undoubtedly proves that people today pay ever greater and closer attention to the sufferings of their neighbour, seek to understand those sufferings and deal with them with ever greater skill. They also have an ever greater capacity and specialization in this area. In view of all this, we can say that the parable of the Samaritan of the Gospel has become one of the essential elements of moral culture and universally human civilization. And thinking of all those who by their knowledge and ability provide many kinds of service to their suffering neighbour, we cannot but offer them words of thanks and gratitude.

These words are directed to all those who exercise their own service to their suffering neighbour in an unselfish way, freely undertaking to provide "Good Samaritan" help, and devoting to this cause all the time and energy at their disposal outside their professional work. This kind of voluntary "Good Samaritan" or charitable activity can be called social work; it can also be called an apostolate, when it is undertaken for clearly evangelical motives, especially if this is in connection with the Church or another Christian Communion. Voluntary "Good Samaritan" work is carried out in appropriate milieux or through organizations created for this purpose. Working in this way has a great importance, especially if it involves undertaking larger tasks which require cooperation and the use of technical means. No less valuable is individual activity, especially by people who are better prepared for it in regard to the various kinds of human suffering which can only be alleviated in an individual or personal way. Finally, family help means both acts of love of neighbour done to members of the same family, and mutual help between families.

It is difficult to list here all the types and different circumstances of "Good Samaritan" work which exist in the Church and society. It must be recognized that they are very numerous, and one must express satisfaction at the fact that, thanks to them, the fundamental moral values, such as the value of human solidarity, the value of Christian love of neighbour, form the framework of social life and interhuman relationships and combat on this front the various forms of hatred, violence, cruelty, contempt for others, or simple "insensitivity", in other words, indifference towards one's neighbour and his sufferings.

Here we come to the enormous importance of having the right attitudes in education. The family, the school and other education institutions must, if only for humanitarian reasons, work perseveringly for the reawakening and refining of that sensitivity towards one's neighbour and his suffering of which the figure of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel has become a symbol. Obviously the Church must do the same. She must even more profoundly make her own-as far as possible-the motivations which Christ placed in his parable and in the whole Gospel. The eloquence of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and of the whole Gospel, is especially this: every individual must feel as if called personally to bear witness to love in suffering. The institutions are very important and indispensable; nevertheless, no institution can by itself replace the human heart, human compassion, human love or human initiative, when it is a question of dealing with the sufferings of another. This refers to physical sufferings, but it is even more true when it is a question of the many kinds of moral suffering, and when it is primarily the soul that is suffering.

30. The parable of the Good Samaritan, which -as we have said-belongs to the Gospel of suffering, goes hand in hand with this Gospel through the history of the Church and Christianity, through the history of man and humanity. This parable witnesses to the fact that Christ's revelation of the salvific meaning of suffering is in no way identified with an attitude of passivity. Completely the reverse is true. The Gospel is the negation of passivity in the face of suffering. Christ himself is especially active in this field. In this way he accomplishes the messianic programme of his mission, according to the words of the prophet: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"(93). In a superabundant way Christ carries out this messianic programme of his mission: he goes about "doing good"(94). and the good of his works became especially evident in the face of human suffering. The parable of the Good Samaritan is in profound harmony with the conduct of Christ himself.

Finally, this parable, through its essential content, will enter into those disturbing words of the Final Judgment, noted by Matthew in his Gospel: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was in prison and you came to me"(95). To the just, who ask when they did all this to him, the Son of Man will respond: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"(96). The opposite sentence will be imposed on those who have behaved differently: "As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me".

One could certainly extend the list of the forms of suffering that have encountered human sensitivity, compassion and help, or that have failed to do so. The first and second parts of Christ's words about the Final Judgment unambiguously show how essential it is, for the eternal life of every individual, to "stop", as the Good Samaritan did, at the suffering of one's neighbour, to have "compassion" for that suffering, and to give some help. In the messianic programme of Christ, which is at the same time the programme of the Kingdom of God, suffering is present in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbour, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a "civilization of love". In this love the salvific meaning of suffering is completely accomplished and reaches its definitive dimension. Christ's words about the Final Judgment enable us to understand this in all the simplicity and clarity of the Gospel.

These words about love, about actions of love, acts linked with human suffering, enable us once more to discover, at the basis of all human sufferings, the same redemptive suffering of Christ. Christ said: "You did it to me". He himself is the one who in each individual experiences love; he himself is the one who receives help, when this is given to every suffering person without exception. He himself is present in this suffering person, since his salvific suffering has been opened once and for all to every human suffering. And all those who suffer have been called once and for all to become sharers "in Christ's sufferings"(98), just as all have been called to "complete" with their own suffering "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"(99). At one and the same time Christ has taught man to do good by his suffering and to do good to those who suffer. In this double aspect he has completely revealed the meaning of suffering.

VIII - CONCLUSION

31. This is the meaning of suffering, which is truly supernatural and at the same time human. It is supernatural because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission.

Suffering is certainly part of the mystery of man. Perhaps suffering is not wrapped up as much as man is by this mystery, which is an especially impenetrable one. The Second Vatican Council expressed this truth that "...only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. In fact..., Christ, the final Adam, by the

revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear"(100). If these words refer to everything that concerns the mystery of man, then they certainly refer in a very special way to human suffering. Precisely at this point the "revealing of man to himself and making his supreme vocation clear" is particularly indispensable. It also happens as experience proves-that this can be particularly dramatic. But when it is completely accomplished and becomes the light of human life, it is particularly blessed. "Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful"(101).

I now end the present considerations on suffering in the year in which the Church is living the extraordinary Jubilee linked to the anniversary of the Redemption.

The mystery of the Redemption of the world is in an amazing way rooted in suffering, and this suffering in turn finds in the mystery of the Redemption its supreme and surest point of reference.

We wish to live this Year of the Redemption in special union with all those who suffer. And so there should come together in spirit beneath the Cross on Calvary all suffering people who believe in Christ, and particularly those who suffer because of their faith in him who is the Crucified and Risen One, so that the offering of their sufferings may hasten the fulfilment of the prayer of the Saviour himself that all may be one(102). Let there also gather beneath the Cross all people of good will, for on this Cross is the "Redeemer of man", the Man of Sorrows, who has taken upon himself the physical and moral sufferings of the people of all times, so that in love they may find the salvific meaning of their sorrow and valid answers to all of their questions.

Together with Mary, Mother of Christ, who stood beneath the Cross(103), we pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man.

We invoke all the Saints, who down the centuries in a special way shared in the suffering of Christ. We ask them to support us.

And we ask all you who suffer to support us. We ask precisely you who are weak to become a source of strength for the Church and humanity. In the terrible battle between the forces of good and evil, revealed to our eyes by our modern world, may your suffering in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious!

To all of you, dearest brothers and sisters, I send my Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the liturgical Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, 11 February 1984, in the sixth year of my Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

(1) Col. 1, 24.

(2) Col. 1, 24.

(3) Rom. 8, 22.

(4) Cfr. IOANNIS PAULI PP. II Redemptor Hominis, 14. 18. 21. 22.

(5) Quod Ezechias subiit (cfr. Is. 38, 1-3).

(6) Sic ut Agar timuit (cfr. Gen. 15, 16), Iacob mente finxit (cfr. Gen. 37, 33-35), David expertus est (cfr. 2 Sam. 19, 1).

(7) Id Anna metuit, Tobiae mater (cfr. Tob. 10, 1-7; cfr. edam Ier. 6, 26; Am. 8, 10; Zac. 12, 10).

(8) Talis fuit Abrahae (cfr. Gen. 15, 2), Rachelis (cfr. Gen. 30, 1), Annae, Samuelis matris (cfr. 1 Sam. 1, 6-10), temptatio.

(9) Ut exsulum Babylonica lamentatio (cfr. Ps. 137 [136]).

(10) Quibus v. gr. affectus est Psaltes (cfr. Ps. 22 [21], 17-21), Ieremias (cfr. Ier. 18, 18).

(11) Sic ut accidit Iob (cfr. Iob 19, 18; 30, 1. 9), nonnullis Psaltribus (cfr. Ps. 22 [21], 7-9; Ps. 42 [41], 11; Ps. 44 [43], 16-17), Ieremiae (cfr. Ier. 20, 7), Servo patienti (cfr. Is. 53, 3).

(12) Quibus iterum oppressi sunt nonnulli Psaltes (cfr. Ps. 22 [21], 2-3; Ps. 31 [30], 13; Ps. 38 [37], 12; Ps. 88 [87], 9. 19); Ieremias (cfr. Ier. 15, 17) atque Servus patiens (cfr. Is. 53, 3).

(13) His Psaltes (Ps. 51 [50], 5), testes aerumnarum Servi (cfr. Is. 53, 3-6) et Zacharias Propheta (cfr. Zac. 12, 10) confusi sunt.

(14) Talia passi sunt tum Psaltes (cfr. Ps. 73 [72], 3-14), tum Qoelet (cfr. Qo. 4, 1-3).

(15) Haec perpassi sunt sive Iob (cfr. Iob 19, 19), sive Psaltes nonnulli (cfr. Ps. 41 [40], 10; Ps. 55 [54], 13-15), sive Ieremias (cfr. Ier. 20, 10); Siracides vero de hac miseria meditatur (cfr. Sir. 37, 1-6).

(16) Praeter plures Lamentationum locos, cfr. psalmistarum questus (cfr. Ps. 44 [43], 10-17; Ps. 77 [76], 3-11; Ps. 79 [78], 11; Ps. 89 [88], 51), prophetarum (cfr. Is. 22, 4; Ier. 4, 8; 13, 17; 14, 17-18; Ez. 9, 8; 21, 11-12). Cfr. etiam Azariae orationes (cfr. Dan. 3, 31-40), et Danielis (cfr. Dan. 9, 16-19).

(17) Cfr. e. gr. Is. 38, 13; Ier. 23, 9; Ps. 31 (30), 10-11; Ps. 42 (41), 10-11.

(18) Cfr. Ps. 73 (72), 21; Iob 16, 13; Lam. 3, 13.

(19) Cfr. Lam. 2, 11.

(20) Cfr. Is. 16, 11; Ier. 4, 19; Iob 30, 27; Lam. 1, 20.

(21) Cfr. 1 Sam. 1, 8; Ier. 4, 19; 8, 18; Lam. 1, 20-22; Ps. 38 (37), 9. 11.

(22) Meminisse iuvat radicem Hebraicam r" designare in universum quod malum est et bono oppositum (•ob), nullamque admittere distinctionem inter sensum physicum, psychicum, ethicum. Invenitur etiam in substantiva forma ra' et ra'a, significante sine discrimine sive quod malum est in se, sive malam actionem, sive etiam male agentem. In formis verbalibus praeter simplicem illam formam (qal), quae, varia quidem ratione, designat « aliquid malum esse », invenitur etiam forma reflexiva-passiva (niph'al), id est « malum subire », « malo corripere », atque forma causativa (hiph'il), « malum inferre » seu « irrogare » alicui. Cum autem careat lingua Hebraica verbo Graecae formae respondente, idcirco fortasse verbum id raro in versione a Septuaginta occurrit.

(23) Dan. 3, 27 s.; cfr. Ps. 17 (18), 10; Ps. 36 (35), 7; Ps. 48 (47), 12; Ps. 51 (50), 6; Ps. 99 (98), 4; Ps. 119 (118), 75; Mal. 3, 16-21; Matth. 20, 16; Marc. 10, 31; Luc. 17, 34; Io. 5, 30; Rom. 2, 2.

(24) Iob 4, 8.

(25) Iob 1, 9-11.

(26) Cfr. 2 Macc. 6, 12.

(27) Io. 3, 16.

(28) Iob 19, 25-26.

(29) 1, 29.

(30) Gen. 3, 19.

(31) Io. 3, 16.

(32) Act. 10, 38.

(33) Cfr. Matth. 5, 3-11.

(34) Cfr. Luc. 6, 21.

(35) Marc. 10, 33-34.

(36) Cfr. Matth. 16, 23.

(37) Ibid. 26, 52. 54.

(38) Io. 18, 11.

(39) Ibid. 3, 16.

(40) Gal. 2, 20.

(41) Is. 53, 2-6.

(42) Io. 1, 29.

(43) Is. 53, 7-9.

(44) Cfr. 1 Cor. 1, 18.

(45) Matth. 26, 39.

(46) Ibid. 26, 42.

(47) Ps. 22 (21), 2.

(48) Is. 53, 6.

(49) 2 Cor. 5, 21.

(50) Io. 19, 30.

(51) Is. 53, 10.

(52) Cfr. Io. 7, 37-38.

(53) Is. 53, 10-12.

(54) Iob. 19, 25.

(55) 1 Petr. 1, 18-19.

(56) Gal. 1, 4.

(57) 1 Cor. 6, 20.

(58) 2 Cor. 4, 8-11. 14.

(59) Ibid. 1, 5.

(60) 2 Thess. 3, 5.

(61) Rom. 12, 1.

(62) Gal. 2, 19-20.

(63) Ibid. 6, 14.

(64) Phil. 3, 10-11.

(65) Act. 14, 22.

(66) 2 Thess. 1, 4-5.

(67) Rom. 8, 17-18.

(68) 2 Cor. 4, 17-18.

(69) 1 Petr. 4, 13.

(70) Luc. 23, 34.

(71) Matth. 10, 28.

(72) 2 Cor. 12, 9.

(73) 2 Tim. 1, 12.

(74) Phil. 4, 13.

- (75) 1 Petr. 4, 16.
- (76) Rom. 5, 3-5.
- (77) Cfr. Marc. 8, 35; Luc. 9, 24; Io. 12, 25.
- (78) Col. 1, 24.
- (79) 1 Cor. 6, 15.
- (80) Io. 3, 16.
- (81) Luc. 9, 23.
- (82) Cfr. *ibid.*
- (83) Cfr. Matth. 7, 13-14.
- (84) Luc. 21, 12-19.
- (85) Io. 15, 18-21.
- (86) *Ibid.* 16, 33.
- (87) 2 Tim. 3, 12.
- (88) Col. 1, 24.
- (89) Cfr. Eph. 6, 12.
- (90) Luc. 10, 29.
- (91) *Ibid.* 10, 33-34.
- (92) *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
- (93) Luc. 4, 18-19; cfr. Is. 61, 1-2.
- (94) Act. 10, 38.
- (95) Matth. 25, 34-36.
- (96) *Ibid.* 25, 40.
- (97) *Ibid.* 25, 45.
- (98) 1 Petr. 4, 13.
- (99) Col. 1, 24.
- (100) *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- (101) *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.
- (102) Cfr. Io. 17, 11. 21-22.
- (103) Cfr. *ibid.* 19, 25.

**Apostolic Constitution
Sacrae Disciplinae Leges
Of The Supreme Pontiff
Pope John Paul II
For The Promulgation
Of The New Code Of Canon Law**

TO THE REVERED BROTHERS, CARDINALS, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, PRIESTS,
DEACONS, AND TO THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD,
JOHN PAUL,
BISHOP SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD AS A PERPETUAL RECORD

During the course of the centuries, the Catholic Church has been accustomed to reform and renew the laws of canonical discipline so that, in constant fidelity to her divine Founder, they may be better adapted to the saving mission entrusted to her. Prompted by this same purpose and fulfilling at last the expectations of the whole Catholic world, I order today, January 25, 1983, the promulgation of the revised Code of Canon Law. In so doing, my thoughts go back to the same day of the year 1959, when my Predecessor of happy memory, John XXIII, announced for the first time his decision to reform the existing corpus of canonical legislation which had been promulgated on the feast of Pentecost in the year 1917.

Such a decision to reform the Code was taken together with two other decisions of which the Pontiff spoke on that same day, and they concerned the intention to hold a Synod of the Diocese of Rome and to convoke the Ecumenical Council. Of these two events, the first was not closely connected with the reform of the Code, but the second, that is, the Council, is of supreme importance in regard to the present matter and is closely connected with it.

If we ask ourselves why John XXIII considered it necessary to reform the existing Code, the answer can perhaps be found in the Code itself which was promulgated in the year 1917. But there exists also another answer and that is the decisive one, namely, that the reform of the Code of Canon Law appeared to be definitely desired and requested by the same Council which devoted such great attention to the Church.

As is obvious, when the revision of the Code was first announced, the Council was an event of the future. Moreover, the acts of its magisterium and especially its doctrine on the Church would be decided in the years 1962-1965; however, it is clear to everyone that John XXIII's intuition was very true, and with good reason it must be said that his decision was for the good of the Church in the long term.

Therefore, the new Code, which is promulgated today, necessarily required the previous work of the Council; and although it was announced together with the Ecumenical Council, nevertheless it follows it chronologically, because the work undertaken in its preparation, since it had to be based upon the Council, could not begin until after completion of the latter.

Turning our mind today to the beginning of this long journey, that is, to that January 25, 1959, and to John XXIII himself who initiated the revision of the Code, I must recognize that this Code derives from one and the same intention, which is that of the renewal of the Christian life. From such an intention, in fact, the entire work of the Council drew its norms and its direction.

If we now pass on to consider the nature of the work which preceded the promulgation of the Code, and also the manner in which it was carried out, especially during the Pontificates of Paul VI and of John Paul I, and from then until the present day, it must be clearly pointed out that this work was brought to completion in an outstandingly collegial spirit; and this not only in regard to the material drafting of the work, but also as regards the very substance of the laws enacted.

This note of collegiality, which eminently characterizes and distinguishes the process of origin of the present Code, corresponds perfectly with the teaching and the character of the Second Vatican Council. Therefore the Code, not only because of its content but also because of its very origin, manifests the spirit of this Council, in the documents of which the Church, the universal "sacrament of salvation" (cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, nos. 1, 9, 48), is presented as the People of God and its hierarchical constitution appears based on the College of Bishops united with its Head.

For this reason, therefore, the bishops and the episcopates were invited to collaborate in the preparation of the new Code, so that by means of such a long process, by a method as far as possible collegial, there should gradually mature the juridical formulas which would later serve for the use of the entire Church. In all these phases of the work there also took part experts, namely, specialists in theology, history, and especially in canon law, who were chosen from all over the world.

To one and all of them I wish to express today my sentiments of deep gratitude.

In the first place there come before my eyes the figures of the deceased Cardinals who presided over the preparatory commission: Cardinal Pietro Ciriaci who began the work, and Cardinal Pericle Felici who, for many years, guided the course of the work almost to its end. I think then of the secretaries of the same commission: Very Rev. Mons. Giacomo Violardo, later Cardinal, and Father Raimondo Bidagor, S.J., both of whom in carrying out this task poured out the treasures of their doctrine and wisdom. Together with them I recall the Cardinals, the archbishops, the bishops and all those who were members of that commission, as well as the consultants of the individual study groups engaged during these years in such a difficult work, and whom God in the meantime has called to their eternal reward. I pray to God for all of them.

I am pleased to remember also the living, beginning with the present Pro - President of the commission, the revered brother, Most Rev. Rosalío Castillo Lara, who for a very long time has done excellent work in a task of such great responsibility, to pass then to our beloved son, Mons. Willy Onclin, whose devotion and diligence have greatly contributed to the happy outcome of the work, and finally to all the others in the commission itself, whether as Cardinal members or as officials, consultants and collaborators in the various study groups, or in other offices, who have given their appreciated contribution to the drafting and the completion of such a weighty and complex work.

Therefore, in promulgating the Code today, I am fully aware that this act is an expression of pontifical authority and, therefore, it is invested with a "primatial" character. But I am also aware that this Code in its objective content reflects the collegial care of all my brothers in the episcopate for the Church. Indeed, by a certain analogy with the Council, it should be considered as the fruit of a collegial collaboration because of the united efforts on the part of specialized persons and institutions throughout the whole Church.

A second question arises concerning the very nature of the Code of Canon Law. To reply adequately to this question, one must mentally recall the distant patrimony of law contained in the books of the Old and New Testament from which is derived, as from its first source, the whole juridical - legislative tradition of the Church.

Christ the Lord, indeed, did not in the least wish to destroy the very rich heritage of the Law and of the Prophets which was gradually formed from the history and experience of the People of God in the Old Testament, but He brought it to completion (cf. Mt. 5:17), in such wise that in a new and higher way it became part of the heritage of the New Testament. Therefore, although St. Paul, in expounding the Paschal Mystery, teaches that justification is not obtained by the works of the Law, but by means of faith (cf. Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16), he does not thereby exclude the binding force of the Decalogue (cf. Rom. 13:28; Gal. 5:13-25; 6:2), nor does he deny the importance of discipline in the Church of God (cf. 1 Cor. chapters 5, 6). Thus the writings of the New Testament enable us to understand still more the importance itself of discipline and make us see better how it is more closely connected with the saving character of the evangelical message itself.

This being so, it appears sufficiently clear that the Code is in no way intended as a substitute for faith, grace and the charisms in the life of the Church and of the faithful. On the contrary, its purpose is rather to create such an order in the ecclesial society that, while assigning the primacy to faith, grace and the charisms, it at the same time renders easier their organic development in the life both of the ecclesial society and of the individual persons who belong to it.

The Code, as the principal legislative document of the Church, founded on the juridical - legislative heritage of Revelation and Tradition, is to be regarded as an indispensable instrument to ensure order both in individual and social life, and also in the Church's activity itself. Therefore, besides containing the fundamental elements of the hierarchical and organic structure of the Church as willed by her divine Founder, or as based upon apostolic, or in any case most ancient, tradition, and besides the fundamental principles which govern the exercise of the threefold office entrusted to the Church itself, the Code must also lay down certain rules and norms of behavior.

The instrument, which the Code is, fully corresponds to the nature of the Church, especially as it is proposed by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in general, and in a particular way by its ecclesiological teaching. Indeed, in a certain sense, this new Code could be understood as a great effort to translate this same doctrine, that is, the conciliar ecclesiology, into canonical language. If, however, it is impossible to translate perfectly into canonical language the conciliar image of the Church, nevertheless, in this image there should always be found as far as possible its essential point of reference.

From this there are derived certain fundamental criteria which should govern the entire new Code, both in the sphere of its specific matter and also in the language connected with it. It could indeed be said that from this there is derived that character of complementarity which the Code presents in relation to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, with particular reference to the two constitutions, the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* and the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*.

Hence it follows that what constitutes the substantial "novelty" of the Second Vatican Council, in line with the legislative tradition of the Church, especially in regard to ecclesiology, constitutes likewise the "novelty" of the new Code.

Among the elements which characterize the true and genuine image of the Church, we should emphasize especially the following: the doctrine in which the Church is presented as the People of God (cf. *Lumen gentium*, no. 2), and authority as a service (cf. *ibid.*, no. 3); the doctrine in which the Church is seen as a "communion," and which, therefore, determines the relations which should exist between the particular Churches and the universal Church, and between collegiality and the primacy; the doctrine, moreover, according to which all the members of the

People of God, in the way suited to each of them, participate in the threefold office of Christ: priestly, prophetic and kingly. With this teaching there is also linked that which concerns the duties and rights of the faithful, and particularly of the laity; and finally, the Church's commitment to ecumenism.

If, therefore, the Second Vatican Council has drawn from the treasury of Tradition elements both old and new, and the new consists precisely in the elements which we have enumerated, then it is clear that the Code also should reflect the same note of fidelity in newness and of newness in fidelity, and conform itself to that in its own field and in its particular way of expressing itself.

The new Code of Canon Law appears at a moment when the bishops of the whole Church not only ask for its promulgation, but are crying out for it insistently and almost with impatience.

In actual fact the Code of Canon Law is extremely necessary for the Church. Since, indeed, it is organized as a social and visible structure, it must also have norms: in order that its hierarchical and organic structure be visible; in order that the exercise of the functions divinely entrusted to her, especially that of sacred power and of the administration of the sacraments, may be adequately organized; in order that the mutual relations of the faithful may be regulated according to justice based upon charity, with the rights of individuals guaranteed and well defined; in order, finally, that common initiatives, undertaken for a Christian life ever more perfect may be sustained, strengthened and fostered by canonical norms.

Finally, the canonical laws by their very nature must be observed. The greatest care has therefore been taken to ensure that in the lengthy preparation of the Code the wording of the norms should be accurate, and that they should be based on a solid juridical, canonical and theological foundation.

After all these considerations it is to be hoped that the new canonical legislation will prove to be an efficacious means in order that the Church may progress in conformity with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, and may every day be ever more suited to carry out its office of salvation in this world.

I am pleased to entrust to all with a confident spirit these considerations of mine in the moment in which I promulgate this fundamental body of ecclesiastical laws for the Latin Church.

May God grant that joy and peace with justice and obedience obtain favor for this Code, and that what has been ordered by the Head be observed by the members.

Trusting therefore in the help of divine grace, sustained by the authority of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, with certain knowledge, and in response to the wishes of the bishops of the whole world who have collaborated with me in a collegial spirit; with the supreme authority with which I am vested, by means of this Constitution, to be valid forever in the future, I promulgate the present Code as it has been set in order and revised. I command that for the future it is to have the force of law for the whole Latin Church, and I entrust it to the watchful care of all those concerned, in order that it may be observed.

So that all may more easily be informed and have a thorough knowledge of these norms before they have juridical binding force, I declare and order that they will have the force of law beginning from the first day of Advent of this year, 1983.

And this notwithstanding any contrary ordinances, constitutions, privileges (even worthy of special or individual mention) or customs.

I therefore exhort all the faithful to observe the proposed legislation with a sincere spirit and good will in the hope that there may flower again in the Church a renewed discipline; and that consequently the salvation of souls may be rendered ever easier under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

Given at Rome, from the Apostolic Palace, January 25, 1983, the fifth year of our Pontificate.

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Apostolic Exhortation
Familiaris Consortio
Of Pope
John Paul II
To The Episcopate
To The Clergy And To The Faithful
Of The Whole Catholic Church
On The Role
Of The Christian Family
In The Modern World

INTRODUCTION

The Church at the Service of the Family

1. The family in the modern world, as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture. Many families are living this situation in fidelity to those values that constitute the foundation of the institution of the family. Others have become uncertain and bewildered over their role or even doubtful and almost unaware of the ultimate meaning and truth of conjugal and family life. Finally, there are others who are hindered by various situations of injustice in the realization of their fundamental rights.

Knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives. Supporting the first, illuminating the second and assisting the others, the Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family.(1)

In a particular way the Church addresses the young, who are beginning their journey towards marriage and family life, for the purpose of presenting them with new horizons, helping them to discover the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life.

The Synod of 1980 in Continuity with Preceding Synods

2. A sign of this profound interest of the Church in the family was the last Synod of Bishops, held in Rome from September 26 to October 25, 1980. This was a natural continuation of the two preceding Synods(2): the Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity.

Furthermore, the recent Synod is logically connected in some way as well with that on the ministerial priesthood and on justice in the modern world. In fact, as an educating community, the family must help man to discern his own vocation and to accept responsibility in the search for greater justice, educating him from the beginning in interpersonal relationships, rich in justice and in love.

At the close of their assembly, the Synod Fathers presented me with a long list of proposals in which they had gathered the fruits of their reflections, which had matured over intense days of work, and they asked me unanimously to be a spokesman before humanity of the Church's lively care for the family and to give suitable indications for renewed pastoral effort in this fundamental sector of the life of man and of the Church.

As I fulfill that mission with this Exhortation, thus actuating in a particular matter the apostolic ministry with which I am entrusted, I wish to thank all the members of the Synod for the very valuable contribution of teaching and experience that they made especially through the Propositiones, the text of which I am entrusting to the Pontifical Council for the Family with instructions to study it so as to bring out every aspect of its rich content.

The Precious Value of Marriage and of the Family

3. Illuminated by the faith that gives her an understanding of all the truth concerning the great value of marriage and the family and their deepest meaning, the Church once again feels the pressing need to proclaim the Gospel, that is the "good news," to all people without exception, in particular to all those who are called to marriage and are preparing for it, to all married couples and parents in the world.

The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.

Willed by God in the very act of creation, (3) marriage and the family are interiorly ordained to fulfillment in Christ(4) and have need of His graces in order to be healed from the wounds of sin(5) and restored to their "beginning,"(6) that is, to full understanding and the full realization of God's plan.

At a moment of history in which the family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it, and aware that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family, (7) the Church perceives in a more urgent and compelling way her mission of proclaiming to all people the plan of God for marriage and the family, ensuring their full vitality and human and Christian development, and thus contributing to the renewal of society and of the People of God.

PART ONE - BRIGHT SPOTS AND SHADOWS FOR THE FAMILY TODAY

The Need To Understand the Situation

4. Since God's plan for marriage and the family touches men and women in the concreteness of their daily existence in specific social and cultural situations, the Church ought to apply herself to understanding the situations within which marriage and the family are lived today, in order to fulfill her task of serving.(8)

This understanding is, therefore, an inescapable requirement of the work of evangelization. It is, in fact, to the families of our times that the Church must bring the unchangeable and ever new Gospel of Jesus Christ, just as it is the families involved in the present conditions of the world that are called to accept and to live the plan of God that pertains to them. Moreover, the call and demands of the Spirit resound in the very events of history, and so the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family by the circumstances, the questions and the anxieties and hopes of the young people, married couples and parents of today.(9)

To this ought to be added a further reflection of particular importance at the present time. Not infrequently ideas and solutions which are very appealing but which obscure in varying degrees the truth and the dignity of the human person, are offered to the men and women of today, in their sincere and deep search for a response to the important daily problems that affect their married and family life. These views are often supported by the powerful and pervasive organization of the means of social communication, which subtly endanger freedom and the capacity for objective judgment.

Many are already aware of this danger to the human person and are working for the truth. The Church, with her evangelical discernment, joins with them, offering her own service to the truth, to freedom and to the dignity of every man and every woman.

Evangelical Discernment

5. The discernment effected by the Church becomes the offering of an orientation in order that the entire truth and the full dignity of marriage and the family may be preserved and realized.

This discernment is accomplished through the sense of faith, (10) which is a gift that the Spirit gives to all the faithful, (11) and is therefore the work of the whole Church according to the diversity of the various gifts and charisms that, together with and according to the responsibility proper to each one, work together for a more profound understanding and activation of the word of God. The Church, therefore, does not accomplish this discernment only through the Pastors, who teach in the name and with the power of Christ but also through the laity: Christ "made them His witnesses and gave them understanding of the faith and the grace of speech (cf. Acts 2:17-18; Rv. 19:10), so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life."(12) The laity, moreover, by reason of their particular vocation have the specific role of interpreting the history of the world in the light of Christ, in as much as they are called to illuminate and organize temporal realities according to the plan of God, Creator and Redeemer.

The "supernatural sense of faith"(13) however does not consist solely or necessarily in the consensus of the faithful. Following Christ, the Church seeks the truth, which is not always the same as the majority opinion. She listens to conscience and not to power, and in this way she defends the poor and the downtrodden. The Church values sociological and statistical research, when it proves helpful in understanding the historical context in which pastoral action has to be developed and when it leads to a better understanding of the truth. Such research alone, however, is not to be considered in itself an expression of the sense of faith.

Because it is the task of the apostolic ministry to ensure that the Church remains in the truth of Christ and to lead her ever more deeply into that truth, the Pastors must promote the sense of the faith in all the faithful, examine and authoritatively judge the genuineness of its expressions, and educate the faithful in an ever more mature evangelical discernment.(14)

Christian spouses and parents can and should offer their unique and irreplaceable contribution to the elaboration of an authentic evangelical discernment in the various situations and cultures in which men and women live their marriage and their family life. They are qualified for this role by their charism or specific gift, the gift of the sacrament of matrimony.(15)

The Situation of the Family in the World Today

6. The situation in which the family finds itself presents positive and negative aspects: the first are a sign of the salvation of Christ operating in the world; the second, a sign of the refusal that man gives to the love of God.

On the one hand, in fact, there is a more lively awareness of personal freedom and greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage, to promoting the dignity of women, to responsible procreation, to the education of children. There is also an awareness of the need for the development of interfamily relationships, for reciprocal spiritual and material assistance, the rediscovery of the ecclesial mission proper to the family and its responsibility for the building of a more just society. On the other hand, however, signs are not lacking of a disturbing degradation of some fundamental values: a mistaken theoretical and practical concept of the independence of the spouses in relation to each other; serious misconceptions regarding the relationship of authority between parents and children; the concrete difficulties that the family itself experiences in the transmission of values; the growing number of divorces; the scourge of abortion; the ever more frequent recourse to sterilization; the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality.

At the root of these negative phenomena there frequently lies a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being.

Worthy of our attention also is the fact that, in the countries of the so-called Third World, families often lack both the means necessary for survival, such as food, work, housing and medicine, and the most elementary freedoms. In the richer countries, on the contrary, excessive prosperity and the consumer mentality, paradoxically joined to a certain anguish and uncertainty about the future, deprive married couples of the generosity and courage needed for raising up new human life: thus life is often perceived not as a blessing, but as a danger from which to defend oneself.

The historical situation in which the family lives therefore appears as an interplay of light and darkness.

This shows that history is not simply a fixed progression towards what is better, but rather an event of freedom, and even a struggle between freedoms that are in mutual conflict, that is, according to the well-known expression of St. Augustine, a conflict between two loves: the love of God to the point of disregarding self, and the love of self to the point of disregarding God.(16)

It follows that only an education for love rooted in faith can lead to the capacity of interpreting "the signs of the times," which are the historical expression of this twofold love.

The Influence of Circumstances on the Consciences of the Faithful

7. Living in such a world, under the pressures coming above all from the mass media, the faithful do not always remain immune from the obscuring of certain fundamental values, nor set themselves up as the critical conscience of family culture and as active agents in the building of an authentic family humanism.

Among the more troubling signs of this phenomenon, the Synod Fathers stressed the following, in particular: the spread of divorce and of recourse to a new union, even on the part of the faithful; the acceptance of purely civil marriage in contradiction to the vocation of the baptized to "be married in the Lord", the celebration of the marriage sacrament without living faith, but for other motives; the rejection of the moral norms that guide and promote the human and Christian exercise of sexuality in marriage.

Our Age Needs Wisdom

8. The whole Church is obliged to a deep reflection and commitment, so that the new culture now emerging may be evangelized in depth, true values acknowledged, the rights of men and women defended, and justice promoted in the very structures of society. In this way the "new humanism" will not distract people from their relationship with God, but will lead them to it more fully.

Science and its technical applications offer new and immense possibilities in the construction of such a humanism. Still, as a consequence of political choices that decide the direction of research and its applications, science is often used against its original purpose, which is the advancement of the human person.

It becomes necessary, therefore, on the part of all, to recover an awareness of the primacy of moral values, which are the values of the human person as such. The great task that has to be faced today for the renewal of society is that of recapturing the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values. Only an awareness of the primacy of these values enables man to use the immense possibilities given him by science in such a way as to bring about the true advancement of the human person in his or her whole truth, in his or her freedom and dignity. Science is called to ally itself with wisdom.

The following words of the Second Vatican Council can therefore be applied to the problems of the family: "Our era needs such wisdom more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized. For the future of the world stands in peril unless wiser people are forthcoming.(17)

The education of the moral conscience, which makes every human being capable of judging and of discerning the proper ways to achieve self-realization according to his or her original truth, thus becomes a pressing requirement that cannot be renounced.

Modern culture must be led to a more profoundly restored covenant with divine Wisdom. Every man is given a share of such Wisdom through the creating action of God. And it is only in faithfulness to this covenant that the families of today will be in a position to influence positively the building of a more just and fraternal world.

Gradualness and Conversion

9. To the injustice originating from sin-which has profoundly penetrated the structures of today's world-and often hindering the family's full realization of itself and of its fundamental rights, we must all set ourselves in opposition through a conversion of mind and heart, following Christ Crucified by denying our own selfishness: such a conversion cannot fail to have a beneficial and renewing influence even on the structures of society.

What is needed is a continuous, permanent conversion which, while requiring an interior detachment from every evil and an adherence to good in its fullness, is brought about concretely in steps which lead us ever forward. Thus a dynamic process develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands of His definitive and absolute love in the entire personal and social life of man. Therefore an educational growth process is necessary, in order that individual believers, families and peoples, even civilization itself, by beginning from what they have already received of the mystery of Christ, may patiently be led forward, arriving at a richer understanding and a fuller integration of this mystery in their lives.

Inculturation

10. In conformity with her constant tradition, the Church receives from the various cultures everything that is able to express better the unsearchable riches of Christ.(18) Only with the help of all the cultures will it be possible for these riches to be manifested ever more clearly, and for the Church to progress towards a daily more complete and profound awareness of the truth, which has already been given to her in its entirety by the Lord.

Holding fast to the two principles of the compatibility with the Gospel of the various cultures to be taken up, and of communion with the universal Church, there must be further study, particularly by the Episcopal Conferences and the appropriate departments of the Roman Curia, and greater pastoral diligence so that this "inculturation" of the Christian faith may come about ever more extensively, in the context of marriage and the family as well as in other fields.

It is by means of "inculturation" that one proceeds towards the full restoration of the covenant with the Wisdom of God, which is Christ Himself. The whole Church will be enriched also by the cultures which, though lacking technology, abound in human wisdom and are enlivened by profound moral values.

So that the goal of this journey might be clear and consequently the way plainly indicated, the Synod was right to begin by considering in depth the original design of God for marriage and the family: it "went back to the beginning, " in deference to the teaching of Christ.(19)

PART TWO - THE PLAN OF GOD FOR MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Man, the Image of the God Who Is Love

11. God created man in His own image and likeness(20): calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love.

God is love(21) and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion.(22) Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.

As an incarnate spirit, that is a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit, man is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love.

Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being "created in the image of God."

Consequently, sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally.

This totality which is required by conjugal love also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility. This fertility is directed to the generation of a human being, and so by its nature it surpasses the purely biological order and involves a whole series of personal values. For the harmonious growth of these values a persevering and unified contribution by both parents is necessary.

The only "place" in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God Himself(23) which only in this light manifests its true meaning. The institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love which is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive, in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the Creator. A person's freedom, far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative Wisdom.

Marriage and Communion Between God and People

12. The communion of love between God and people, a fundamental part of the Revelation and faith experience of Israel, finds a meaningful expression in the marriage covenant which is established between a man and a woman.

For this reason the central word of Revelation, "God loves His people, " is likewise proclaimed through the living and concrete word whereby a man and a woman express their conjugal love. Their bond of love becomes the image and the symbol of the covenant which unites God and His people.(24) And the same sin which can harm the conjugal covenant becomes an image of the infidelity of the people to their God: idolatry is prostitution, (25) infidelity is adultery, disobedience to the law is abandonment of the spousal love of the Lord. But the infidelity of Israel does not destroy the eternal fidelity of the Lord, and therefore the ever faithful love of God is put forward as the model of the of faithful love which should exist between spouses.

Jesus Christ, Bridegroom of the Church, and the Sacrament of Matrimony

13. The communion between God and His people finds its definitive fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom who loves and gives Himself as the Savior of humanity, uniting it to Himself as His body.

He reveals the original truth of marriage, the truth of the "beginning, "(27) and, freeing man from his hardness of heart, He makes man capable of realizing this truth in its entirety.

This revelation reaches its definitive fullness in the gift of love which the Word of God makes to humanity in assuming a human nature, and in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ makes of Himself on the Cross for His bride, the Church. In this sacrifice there is entirely revealed that plan which God has imprinted on the humanity of man and woman since their creation(23); the marriage of baptized persons thus becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ. The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart, and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross.

In a deservedly famous page, Tertullian has well expressed the greatness of this conjugal life in Christ and its beauty: "How can I ever express the happiness of the marriage that is joined together by the Church strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels and ratified by the Father?...How wonderful the bond between two believers with a single hope, a single desire, a single observance, a single service! They are both brethren and both fellow-servants; there is no separation between them in spirit or flesh; in fact they are truly two in one flesh and where the flesh is one, one is the spirit."(24)

Receiving and meditating faithfully on the word of God, the Church has solemnly taught and continues to teach that the marriage of the baptized is one of the seven sacraments of the New Covenant.(30)

Indeed, by means of baptism, man and woman are definitively placed within the new and eternal covenant, in the spousal covenant of Christ with the Church. And it is because of this indestructible insertion that the intimate community of conjugal life and love, founded by the Creator, (31) is elevated and assumed into the spousal charity of Christ, sustained and enriched by His redeeming power.

By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church.

Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers. Of this salvation event marriage, like every sacrament, is a memorial, actuation and prophecy: "As a memorial, the sacrament gives them the grace and duty of commemorating the great works of God and of bearing witness to them before their children. As actuation, it gives them the grace and duty of putting into practice in the present, towards each other and their children, the demands of a love which forgives and redeems. As prophecy, it gives them the grace and duty of living and bearing witness to the hope of the future encounter with Christ."(32)

Like each of the seven sacraments, so also marriage is a real symbol of the event of salvation, but in its own way. "The spouses participate in it as spouses, together, as a couple, so that the first and immediate effect of marriage (res et sacramentum) is not supernatural grace itself, but the Christian conjugal bond, a typically Christian communion of two persons because it represents the mystery of Christ's incarnation and the mystery of His covenant. The content of participation in Christ's life is also specific: conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter- appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, the unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility (cf *Humanae vitae*, 9). In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values."(33)

Children, the Precious Gift of Marriage

14. According to the plan of God, marriage is the foundation of the wider community of the family, since the very institution of marriage and conjugal love are ordained to the procreation and education of children, in whom they find their crowning.(34)

In its most profound reality, love is essentially a gift; and conjugal love, while leading the spouses to the reciprocal "knowledge" which makes them "one flesh,"(35) does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person. Thus the couple, while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother.

When they become parents, spouses receive from God the gift of a new responsibility. Their parental love is called to become for the children the visible sign of the very love of God, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."(36)

It must not be forgotten however that, even when procreation is not possible, conjugal life does not for this reason lose its value. Physical sterility in fact can be for spouses the occasion for other important services to the life of the human person, for example, adoption, various forms of educational work, and assistance to other families and to poor or handicapped children.

The Family, a Communion of Persons

15. In matrimony and in the family a complex of interpersonal relationships is set up-married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity-through which each human person is introduced into the "human family" and into the "family of God," which is the Church.

Christian marriage and the Christian family build up the Church: for in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God's family, which is the Church.

The human family, disunited by sin, is reconstituted in its unity by the redemptive power of the death and Resurrection of Christ.(37) Christian marriage, by participating in the salvific efficacy of this event, constitutes the natural setting in which the human person is introduced into the great family of the Church.

The commandment to grow and multiply, given to man and woman in the beginning, in this way reaches its whole truth and full realization.

The Church thus finds in the family, born from the sacrament, the cradle and the setting in which she can enter the human generations, and where these in their turn can enter the Church.

Marriage and Virginitly or Celibacy

16. Virginitly or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but presupposes it and confirms it. Marriage and virginitly or celibacy are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with His people. When marriage is not esteemed, neither can consecrated virginitly or celibacy exist; when human sexuality is not regarded as a great value given by the Creator, the renunciation of it for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven loses its meaning.

Rightly indeed does St. John Chrysostom say: "Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginitly. Whoever praises it makes virginitly more admirable and resplendent. What appears good only in comparison with evil would not be particularly good. It is something better than what is admitted to be good that is the most excellent good."(38)

In virginitly or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church, giving himself or herself completely to the Church in the hope that Christ may give Himself to the Church

in the full truth of eternal life. The celibate person thus anticipates in his or her flesh the new world of the future resurrection.(39)

By virtue of this witness, virginity or celibacy keeps alive in the Church a consciousness of the mystery of marriage and defends it from any reduction and impoverishment.

Virginity or celibacy, by liberating the human heart in a unique way, (40) "so as to make it burn with greater love for God and all humanity,"(41) bears witness that the Kingdom of God and His justice is that pearl of great price which is preferred to every other value no matter how great, and hence must be sought as the only definitive value. It is for this reason that the Church, throughout her history, has always defended the superiority of this charism to that of marriage, by reason of the wholly singular link which it has with the Kingdom of God.(42)

In spite of having renounced physical fecundity, the celibate person becomes spiritually fruitful, the father and mother of many, cooperating in the realization of the family according to God's plan.

Christian couples therefore have the right to expect from celibate persons a good example and a witness of fidelity to their vocation until death. Just as fidelity at times becomes difficult for married people and requires sacrifice, mortification and self-denial, the same can happen to celibate persons, and their fidelity, even in the trials that may occur, should strengthen the fidelity of married couples.(43)

These reflections on virginity or celibacy can enlighten and help those who, for reasons independent of their own will, have been unable to marry and have then accepted their situation in a spirit of service.

PART THREE - THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

Family, Become What You Are

17. The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, become what you are.

Accordingly, the family must go back to the "beginning" of God's creative act, if it is to attain self-knowledge and self-realization in accordance with the inner truth not only of what it is but also of what it does in history. And since in God's plan it has been established as an "intimate community of life and love,"(44) the family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love, in an effort that will find fulfillment, as will everything created and redeemed, in the Kingdom of God. Looking at it in such a way as to reach its very roots, we must say that the essence and role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love. Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride.

Every particular task of the family is an expressive and concrete actuation of that fundamental mission. We must therefore go deeper into the unique riches of the family's mission and probe its contents, which are both manifold and unified.

Thus, with love as its point of departure and making constant reference to it, the recent Synod emphasized four general tasks for the family:

- 1) forming a community of persons;
- 2) serving life;
- 3) participating in the development of society;
- 4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church.

I - FORMING A COMMUNITY OF PERSONS

Love as the Principle and Power of Communion

18. The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons.

The inner principle of that task, its permanent power and its final goal is love: without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons. What I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptor hominis* applies primarily and especially within the family as such: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."(45)

The love between husband and wife and, in a derivatory and broader way, the love between members of the same family-between parents and children, brothers and sisters and relatives and members of the household-is given life and

sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family.

The Indivisible Unity of Conjugal Communion

19. The first communion is the one which is established and which develops between husband and wife: by virtue of the covenant of married life, the man and woman "are no longer two but one flesh"(46) and they are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.

This conjugal communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life-project, what they have and what they are: for this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need. But in the Lord Christ God takes up this human need, confirms it, purifies it and elevates it, leading it to perfection through the sacrament of matrimony: the Holy Spirit who is poured out in the sacramental celebration offers Christian couples the gift of a new communion of love that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the Church the indivisible Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus.

The gift of the Spirit is a commandment of life for Christian spouses and at the same time a stimulating impulse so that every day they may progress towards an ever richer union with each other on all levels-of the body, of the character, of the heart, of the intelligence and will, of the soul(47)-revealing in this way to the Church and to the world the new communion of love, given by the grace of Christ.

Such a communion is radically contradicted by polygamy: this, in fact, directly negates the plan of God which was revealed from the beginning, because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive. As the Second Vatican Council writes: "Firmly established by the Lord, the unity of marriage will radiate from the equal personal dignity of husband and wife, a dignity acknowledged by mutual and total love."(48)

An Indissoluble Communion

20. Conjugal communion is characterized not only by its unity but also by its indissolubility: "As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union, as well as the good of children, imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them."(49)

It is a fundamental duty of the Church to reaffirm strongly, as the Synod Fathers did, the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage. To all those who, in our times, consider it too difficult, or indeed impossible, to be bound to one person for the whole of life, and to those caught up in a culture that rejects the indissolubility of marriage and openly mocks the commitment of spouses to fidelity, it is necessary to reconfirm the good news of the definitive nature of that conjugal love that has in Christ its foundation and strength.(50)

Being rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the couple, and being required by the good of the children, the indissolubility of marriage finds its ultimate truth in the plan that God has manifested in His revelation: He wills and He communicates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church.

Christ renews the first plan that the Creator inscribed in the hearts of man and woman, and in the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony offers a "new heart": thus the couples are not only able to overcome "hardness of heart,"(51) but also and above all they are able to share the full and definitive love of Christ, the new and eternal Covenant made flesh. Just as the Lord Jesus is the "faithful witness,"(52) the "yes" of the promises of God(53) and thus the supreme realization of the unconditional faithfulness with which God loves His people, so Christian couples are called to participate truly in the irrevocable indissolubility that binds Christ to the Church His bride, loved by Him to the end.(54)

The gift of the sacrament is at the same time a vocation and commandment for the Christian spouses, that they may remain faithful to each other forever, beyond every trial and difficulty, in generous obedience to the holy will of the Lord: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."(55)

To bear witness to the inestimable value of the indissolubility and fidelity of marriage is one of the most precious and most urgent tasks of Christian couples in our time. So, with all my Brothers who participated in the Synod of Bishops, I praise and encourage those numerous couples who, though encountering no small difficulty, preserve and develop the value of indissolubility: thus, in a humble and courageous manner, they perform the role committed to them of being in the world a "sign"-a small and precious sign, sometimes also subjected to temptation, but always renewed-of the unflinching fidelity with which God and Jesus Christ love each and every human being. But it is also proper to recognize the value of the witness of those spouses who, even when abandoned by their partner, with the strength of faith and of Christian hope have not entered a new union: these spouses too give an authentic witness to fidelity, of which the world today has a great need. For this reason they must be encouraged and helped by the pastors and the faithful of the Church.

The Broader Communion of the Family

21. Conjugal communion constitutes the foundation on which is built the broader communion of the family, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters with each other, of relatives and other members of the household.

This communion is rooted in the natural bonds of flesh and blood, and grows to its specifically human perfection with the establishment and maturing of the still deeper and richer bonds of the spirit: the love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members of the family constitutes the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion and community.

The Christian family is also called to experience a new and original communion which confirms and perfects natural and human communion. In fact the grace of Jesus Christ, "the first-born among many brethren" (56) is by its nature and interior dynamism "a grace of brotherhood," as St. Thomas Aquinas calls it. (57) The Holy Spirit, who is poured forth in the celebration of the sacraments, is the living source and inexhaustible sustenance of the supernatural communion that gathers believers and links them with Christ and with each other in the unity of the Church of God. The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called "the domestic Church." (58)

All members of the family, each according to his or her own gift, have the grace and responsibility of building, day by day, the communion of persons, making the family "a school of deeper humanity" (59): this happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick, the aged; where there is mutual service every day; when there is a sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows.

A fundamental opportunity for building such a communion is constituted by the educational exchange between parents and children, (60) in which each gives and receives. By means of love, respect and obedience towards their parents, children offer their specific and irreplaceable contribution to the construction of an authentically human and Christian family. (61) They will be aided in this if parents exercise their unrenounceable authority as a true and proper "ministry," that is, as a service to the human and Christian well-being of their children, and in particular as a service aimed at helping them acquire a truly responsible freedom, and if parents maintain a living awareness of the "gift" they continually receive from their children.

Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation. There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life. But, at the same time, every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of "reconciliation," that is, communion reestablished, unity restored. In particular, participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation and in the banquet of the one Body of Christ offers to the Christian family the grace and the responsibility of overcoming every division and of moving towards the fullness of communion willed by God, responding in this way to the ardent desire of the Lord: "that they may be one." (62)

The Rights and Role of Women

22. In that it is, and ought always to become, a communion and community of persons, the family finds in love the source and the constant impetus for welcoming, respecting and promoting each one of its members in his or her lofty dignity as a person, that is, as a living image of God. As the Synod Fathers rightly stated, the moral criterion for the authenticity of conjugal and family relationships consists in fostering the dignity and vocation of the individual persons, who achieve their fullness by sincere self-giving. (63)

In this perspective the Synod devoted special attention to women, to their rights and role within the family and society. In the same perspective are also to be considered men as husbands and fathers, and likewise children and the elderly.

Above all it is important to underline the equal dignity and responsibility of women with men. This equality is realized in a unique manner in that reciprocal self-giving by each one to the other and by both to the children which is proper to marriage and the family. What human reason intuitively perceives and acknowledges is fully revealed by the word of God: the history of salvation, in fact, is a continuous and luminous testimony of the dignity of women.

In creating the human race "male and female," (64) God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity, endowing them with the inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person. God then manifests the dignity of women in the highest form possible, by assuming human flesh from the Virgin Mary, whom the Church honors as the Mother of God, calling her the new Eve and presenting her as the model of redeemed woman. The sensitive respect of Jesus towards the women that He called to His following and His friendship, His appearing on Easter morning to a woman before the other disciples, the mission entrusted to women to carry the good news of the Resurrection to the apostles—these are all signs that confirm the special esteem of the Lord Jesus for women. The Apostle Paul will say: "In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (65)

Women and Society

23. Without intending to deal with all the various aspects of the vast and complex theme of the relationships between women and society, and limiting these remarks to a few essential points, one cannot but observe that in the specific area of family life a widespread social and cultural tradition has considered women's role to be exclusively that of wife and mother, without adequate access to public functions which have generally been reserved for men.

There is no doubt that the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justifies women's access to public functions. On the other hand the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions. Furthermore, these roles and professions should be harmoniously combined, if we wish the evolution of society and culture to be truly and fully human.

This will come about more easily if, in accordance with the wishes expressed by the Synod, a renewed "theology of work" can shed light upon and study in depth the meaning of work in the Christian life and determine the fundamental bond between work and the family, and therefore the original and irreplaceable meaning of work in the home and in rearing children.(66) Therefore the Church can and should help modern society by tirelessly insisting that the work of women in the home be recognized and respected by all in its irreplaceable value. This is of particular importance in education: for possible discrimination between the different types of work and professions is eliminated at its very root once it is clear that all people, in every area, are working with equal rights and equal responsibilities. The image of God in man and in woman will thus be seen with added luster.

While it must be recognized that women have the same right as men to perform various public functions, society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are not in practice compelled to work outside the home, and that their families can live and prosper in a dignified way even when they themselves devote their full time to their own family.

Furthermore, the mentality which honors women more for their work outside the home than for their work within the family must be overcome. This requires that men should truly esteem and love women with total respect for their personal dignity, and that society should create and develop conditions favoring work in the home.

With due respect to the different vocations of men and women, the Church must in her own life promote as far as possible their equality of rights and dignity: and this for the good of all, the family, the Church and society.

But clearly all of this does not mean for women a renunciation of their femininity or an imitation of the male role, but the fullness of true feminine humanity which should be expressed in their activity, whether in the family or outside of it, without disregarding the differences of customs and cultures in this sphere.

Offenses Against Women's Dignity

24. Unfortunately the Christian message about the dignity of women is contradicted by that persistent mentality which considers the human being not as a person but as a thing, as an object of trade, at the service of selfish interest and mere pleasure: the first victims of this mentality are women.

This mentality produces very bitter fruits, such as contempt for men and for women, slavery, oppression of the weak, pornography, prostitution-especially in an organized form-and all those various forms of discrimination that exist in the fields of education, employment, wages, etc.

Besides, many forms of degrading discrimination still persist today in a great part of our society that affect and seriously harm particular categories of women, as for example childless wives, widows, separated or divorced women, and unmarried mothers.

The Synod Fathers deplored these and other forms of discrimination as strongly as possible. I therefore ask that vigorous and incisive pastoral action be taken by all to overcome them definitively so that the image of God that shines in all human beings without exception may be fully respected.

Men as Husbands and Fathers

25. Within the conjugal and family communion-community, the man is called upon to live his gift and role as husband and father.

In his wife he sees the fulfillment of God's intention: "It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him,"(67) and he makes his own the cry of Adam, the first husband: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."(68)

Authentic conjugal love presupposes and requires that a man have a profound respect for the equal dignity of his wife: "You are not her master, " writes St. Ambrose, "but her husband; she was not given to you to be your slave, but your wife.... Reciprocate her attentiveness to you and be grateful to her for her love."(69) With his wife a man should live "a very special form of personal friendship."(70) As for the Christian, he is called upon to develop a new attitude of love, manifesting towards his wife a charity that is both gentle and strong like that which Christ has for the Church."

Love for his wife as mother of their children and love for the children themselves are for the man the natural way of understanding and fulfilling his own fatherhood. Above all where social and cultural conditions so easily encourage a

father to be less concerned with his family or at any rate less involved in the work of education, efforts must be made to restore socially the conviction that the place and task of the father in and for the family is of unique and irreplaceable importance.(72) As experience teaches, the absence of a father causes psychological and moral imbalance and notable difficulties in family relationships, as does, in contrary circumstances, the oppressive presence of a father, especially where there still prevails the phenomenon of "machismo, " or a wrong superiority of male prerogatives which humiliates women and inhibits the development of healthy family relationships.

In revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God, (73) a man is called upon to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family: he will perform this task by exercising generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother, by a more solicitous commitment to education, a task he shares with his wife, (74) by work which is never a cause of division in the family but promotes its unity and stability, and by means of the witness he gives of an adult Christian life which effectively introduces the children into the living experience of Christ and the Church.

The Rights of Children

26. In the family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights. This is true for every child, but it becomes all the more urgent the smaller the child is and the more it is in need of everything, when it is sick, suffering or handicapped.

By fostering and exercising a tender and strong concern for every child that comes into this world, the Church fulfills a fundamental mission: for she is called upon to reveal and put forward anew in history the example and the commandment of Christ the Lord, who placed the child at the heart of the Kingdom of God: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."(75)

I repeat once again what I said to the General Assembly of the United Nations on October 2, 1979: "I wish to express the joy that we all find in children, the springtime of life, the anticipation of the future history of each of our present earthly homelands. No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family. Concern for the child, even before birth, from the first moment of conception and then throughout the years of infancy and youth, is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another. And so, what better wish can I express for every nation and for the whole of mankind, and for all the children of the world than a better future in which respect for human rights will become a complete reality throughout the third millennium, which is drawing near?"(76)

Acceptance, love, esteem, many-sided and united material, emotional, educational and spiritual concern for every child that comes into this world should always constitute a distinctive, essential characteristic of all Christians, in particular of the Christian family: thus children, while they are able to grow "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man,"(77) offer their own precious contribution to building up the family community and even to the sanctification of their parents.(78)

The Elderly in the Family

27. There are cultures which manifest a unique veneration and great love for the elderly: far from being outcasts from the family or merely tolerated as a useless burden, they continue to be present and to take an active and responsible part in family life, though having to respect the autonomy of the new family; above all they carry out the important mission of being a witness to the past and a source of wisdom for the young and for the future.

Other cultures, however, especially in the wake of disordered industrial and urban development, have both in the past and in the present set the elderly aside in unacceptable ways. This causes acute suffering to them and spiritually impoverishes many families.

The pastoral activity of the Church must help everyone to discover and to make good use of the role of the elderly within the civil and ecclesial community, in particular within the family. In fact, "the life of the aging helps to clarify a scale of human values; it shows the continuity of generations and marvelously demonstrates the interdependence of God's people. The elderly often have the charism to bridge generation gaps before they are made: how many children have found understanding and love in the eyes and words and caresses of the aging! And how many old people have willingly subscribed to the inspired word that the 'crown of the aged is their children's children' (Prv. 17:6)!"(79)

II - SERVING LIFE

1. The Transmission of Life

Cooperators in the Love of God the Creator

28. With the creation of man and woman in His own image and likeness, God crowns and brings to perfection the work of His hands: He calls them to a special sharing in His love and in His power as Creator and Father, through their free and responsible cooperation in transmitting the gift of human life: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'"(80)

Thus the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator-that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person.(81)

Fecundity is the fruit and the sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal selfgiving of the spouses: "While not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior, who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day."(82) However, the fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children, even understood in its specifically human dimension: it is enlarged and enriched by all those fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life which the father and mother are called to hand on to their children, and through the children to the Church and to the world.

The Church's Teaching and Norm, Always Old Yet Always New

29. Precisely because the love of husband and wife is a unique participation in the mystery of life and of the love of God Himself, the Church knows that she has received the special mission of guarding and protecting the lofty dignity of marriage and the most serious responsibility of the transmission of human life.

Thus, in continuity with the living tradition of the ecclesial community throughout history, the recent Second Vatican Council and the magisterium of my predecessor Paul VI, expressed above all in the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, have handed on to our times a truly prophetic proclamation, which reaffirms and repropose with clarity the Church's teaching and norm, always old yet always new, regarding marriage and regarding the transmission of human life.

For this reason the Synod Fathers made the following declaration at their last assembly: "This Sacred Synod, gathered together with the Successor of Peter in the unity of faith, firmly holds what has been set forth in the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 50) and afterwards in the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, particularly that love between husband and wife must be fully human, exclusive and open to new life (*Humanae vitae*, 11; cf. 9, 12)."(83)

The Church Stands for Life

30. The teaching of the Church in our day is placed in a social and cultural context which renders it more difficult to understand and yet more urgent and irreplaceable for promoting the true good of men and women.

Scientific and technical progress, which contemporary man is continually expanding in his dominion over nature, not only offers the hope of creating a new and better humanity, but also causes ever greater anxiety regarding the future. Some ask themselves if it is a good thing to be alive or if it would be better never to have been born; they doubt therefore if it is right to bring others into life when perhaps they will curse their existence in a cruel world with unforeseeable terrors. Others consider themselves to be the only ones for whom the advantages of technology are intended and they exclude others by imposing on them contraceptives or even worse means. Still others, imprisoned in a consumer mentality and whose sole concern is to bring about a continual growth of material goods, finish by ceasing to understand, and thus by refusing, the spiritual riches of a new human life. The ultimate reason for these mentalities is the absence in people's hearts of God, whose love alone is stronger than all the world's fears and can conquer them.

Thus an anti-life mentality is born, as can be seen in many current issues: one thinks, for example, of a certain panic deriving from the studies of ecologists and futurologists on population growth, which sometimes exaggerate the danger of demographic increase to the quality of life.

But the Church firmly believes that human life, even if weak and suffering, is always a splendid gift of God's goodness. Against the pessimism and selfishness which cast a shadow over the world, the Church stands for life: in each human life she sees the splendor of that "Yes, " that "Amen, " who is Christ Himself.

(84) To the "No" which assails and afflicts the world, she replies with this living "Yes, " thus defending the human person and the world from all who plot against and harm life.

The Church is called upon to manifest anew to everyone, with clear and stronger conviction, her will to promote human life by every means and to defend it against all attacks, in whatever condition or state of development it is found.

Thus the Church condemns as a grave offense against human dignity and justice all those activities of governments or other public authorities which attempt to limit in any way the freedom of couples in deciding about children. Consequently, any violence applied by such authorities in favor of contraception or, still worse, of sterilization and procured abortion, must be altogether condemned and forcefully rejected. Likewise to be denounced as gravely unjust are cases where, in international relations, economic help given for the advancement of peoples is made conditional on programs of contraception, sterilization and procured abortion.(85)

That God's Design May Be Ever More Completely Fulfilled

31. The Church is certainly aware of the many complex problems which couples in many countries face today in their task of transmitting life in a responsible way. She also recognizes the serious problem of population growth in the form it has taken in many parts of the world and its moral implications.

However, she holds that consideration in depth of all the aspects of these problems offers a new and stronger confirmation of the importance of the authentic teaching on birth regulation repropounded in the Second Vatican Council and in the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*.

For this reason, together with the Synod Fathers I feel it is my duty to extend a pressing invitation to theologians, asking them to unite their efforts in order to collaborate with the hierarchical Magisterium and to commit themselves to the task of illustrating ever more clearly the biblical foundations, the ethical grounds and the personalistic reasons behind this doctrine. Thus it will be possible, in the context of an organic exposition, to render the teaching of the Church on this fundamental question truly accessible to all people of good will, fostering a daily more enlightened and profound understanding of it: in this way God's plan will be ever more completely fulfilled for the salvation of humanity and for the glory of the Creator.

A united effort by theologians in this regard, inspired by a convinced adherence to the Magisterium, which is the one authentic guide for the People of God, is particularly urgent for reasons that include the close link between Catholic teaching on this matter and the view of the human person that the Church proposes: doubt or error in the field of marriage or the family involves obscuring to a serious extent the integral truth about the human person, in a cultural situation that is already so often confused and contradictory. In fulfillment of their specific role, theologians are called upon to provide enlightenment and a deeper understanding, and their contribution is of incomparable value and represents a unique and highly meritorious service to the family and humanity.

In an Integral Vision of the Human Person and of His or Her Vocation

32. In the context of a culture which seriously distorts or entirely misinterprets the true meaning of human sexuality, because it separates it from its essential reference to the person, the Church more urgently feels how irreplaceable is her mission of presenting sexuality as a value and task of the whole person, created male and female in the image of God.

In this perspective the Second Vatican Council clearly affirmed that "when there is a question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives. It must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his or her acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love. Such a goal cannot be achieved unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practiced."(85)

It is precisely by moving from "an integral vision of man and of his vocation, not only his natural and earthly, but also his supernatural and eternal vocation,"(87) that Paul VI affirmed that the teaching of the Church "is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning."(88) And he concluded by re-emphasizing that there must be excluded as intrinsically immoral "every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible."(89)

When couples, by means of recourse to contraception, separate these two meanings that God the Creator has inscribed in the being of man and woman and in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as "arbiters" of the divine plan and they "manipulate" and degrade human sexuality-and with it themselves and their married partner-by altering its value of "total" self-giving. Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality.

When, instead, by means of recourse to periods of infertility, the couple respect the inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative meanings of human sexuality, they are acting as "ministers" of God's plan and they "benefit from" their sexuality according to the original dynamism of "total" selfgiving, without manipulation or alteration.(90)

In the light of the experience of many couples and of the data provided by the different human sciences, theological reflection is able to perceive and is called to study further the difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle: it is a difference which is much wider and deeper than is usually thought, one which involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality. The choice of the natural rhythms involves accepting the cycle of the person, that is the woman, and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self- control. To accept the cycle and to enter into dialogue means to recognize both the spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion and to live personal love with its requirement of fidelity. In this context the couple comes to experience how conjugal communion is enriched with those values of tenderness and affection which constitute the inner soul of human sexuality, in its physical dimension also. In this way sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension, and is never

"used" as an "object" that, by breaking the personal unity of soul and body, strikes at God's creation itself at the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person.

The Church as Teacher and Mother for Couples in Difficulty

33. In the field of conjugal morality the Church is Teacher and Mother and acts as such.

As Teacher, she never tires of proclaiming the moral norm that must guide the responsible transmission of life. The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection.

As Mother, the Church is close to the many married couples who find themselves in difficulty over this important point of the moral life: she knows well their situation, which is often very arduous and at times truly tormented by difficulties of every kind, not only individual difficulties but social ones as well; she knows that many couples encounter difficulties not only in the concrete fulfillment of the moral norm but even in understanding its inherent values.

But it is one and the same Church that is both Teacher and Mother. And so the Church never ceases to exhort and encourage all to resolve whatever conjugal difficulties may arise without ever falsifying or compromising the truth: she is convinced that there can be no true contradiction between the divine law on transmitting life and that on fostering authentic married love.⁽⁹¹⁾ Accordingly, the concrete pedagogy of the Church must always remain linked with her doctrine and never be separated from it. With the same conviction as my predecessor, I therefore repeat: "To diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls."⁽⁹²⁾

On the other hand, authentic ecclesial pedagogy displays its realism and wisdom only by making a tenacious and courageous effort to create and uphold all the human conditions-psychological, moral and spiritual-indispensable for understanding and living the moral value and norm.

There is no doubt that these conditions must include persistence and patience, humility and strength of mind, filial trust in God and in His grace, and frequent recourse to prayer and to the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation.⁽⁹³⁾ Thus strengthened, Christian husbands and wives will be able to keep alive their awareness of the unique influence that the grace of the sacrament of marriage has on every aspect of married life, including therefore their sexuality: the gift of the Spirit, accepted and responded to by husband and wife, helps them to live their human sexuality in accordance with God's plan and as a sign of the unitive and fruitful love of Christ for His Church.

But the necessary conditions alone in the knowledge of the bodily aspect and the body's rhythms of fertility. Accordingly, every effort must be made to render such knowledge accessible to all married people and also to young adults before marriage, through clear, timely and serious instruction and education given by married couples, doctors and experts. Knowledge must then lead to education in selfcontrol: hence the absolute necessity for the virtue of chastity and for permanent education in it. In the Christian view, chastity by no means signifies rejection of human sexuality or lack of esteem for it: rather it signifies spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness, and able to advance it towards its full realization.

With deeply wise and loving intuition, Paul VI was only voicing the experience of many married couples when he wrote in his Encyclical: "To dominate instinct by means of one's reason and free will undoubtedly requires ascetical practices, so that the affective manifestations of conjugal life may observe the correct order, in particular with regard to the observance of periodic continence. Yet this discipline which is proper to the purity of married couples, far from harming conjugal love, rather confers on it a higher human value. It demands continual effort, yet, thanks to its beneficent influence, husband and wife fully develop their personalities, being enriched with spiritual values. Such discipline bestows upon family life fruits of serenity and peace, and facilitates the solution of other problems; it favors attention for one's partner, helps both parties to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love, and deepens their sense of responsibility. By its means, parents acquire the capacity of having a deeper and more efficacious influence in the education of their offspring.

The Moral Progress of Married People

34. It is always very important to have a right notion of the moral order, its values and its norms; and the importance is all the greater when the difficulties in the way of respecting them become more numerous and serious.

Since the moral order reveals and sets forth the plan of God the Creator, for this very reason it cannot be something that harms man, something impersonal. On the contrary, by responding to the deepest demands of the human being created by God, it places itself at the service of that person's full humanity with the delicate and binding love whereby God Himself inspires, sustains and guides every creature towards its happiness.

But man, who has been called to live God's wise and loving design in a responsible manner, is an historical being who day by day builds himself up through his many free decisions; and so he knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by stages of growth.

Married people too are called upon to progress unceasingly in their moral life, with the support of a sincere and active desire to gain ever better knowledge of the values enshrined in and fostered by the law of God. They must also be

supported by an upright and generous willingness to embody these values in their concrete decisions. They cannot however look on the law as merely an ideal to be achieved in the future: they must consider it as a command of Christ the Lord to overcome difficulties with constancy. "And so what is known as 'the law of gradualness' or step-by-step advance cannot be identified with 'gradualness of the law,' as if there were different degrees or forms of precept in God's law for different individuals and situations. In God's plan, all husbands and wives are called in marriage to holiness, and this lofty vocation is fulfilled to the extent that the human person is able to respond to God's command with serene confidence in God's grace and in his or her own will."(95) On the same lines, it is part of the Church's pedagogy that husbands and wives should first of all recognize clearly the teaching of *Humanae vitae* as indicating the norm for the exercise of their sexuality, and that they should endeavor to establish the conditions necessary for observing that norm.

As the Synod noted, this pedagogy embraces the whole of married life. Accordingly, the function of transmitting life must be integrated into the overall mission of Christian life as a whole, which without the Cross cannot reach the Resurrection. In such a context it is understandable that sacrifice cannot be removed from family life, but must in fact be wholeheartedly accepted if the love between husband and wife is to be deepened and become a source of intimate joy.

This shared progress demands reflection, instruction and suitable education on the part of the priests, religious and lay people engaged in family pastoral work: they will all be able to assist married people in their human and spiritual progress, a progress that demands awareness of sin, a sincere commitment to observe the moral law, and the ministry of reconciliation. It must also be kept in mind that conjugal intimacy involves the wills of two persons, who are however called to harmonize their mentality and behavior: this requires much patience, understanding and time. Uniquely important in this field is unity of moral and pastoral judgment by priests, a unity that must be carefully sought and ensured, in order that the faithful may not have to suffer anxiety of conscience.(96)

It will be easier for married people to make progress if, with respect for the Church's teaching and with trust in the grace of Christ, and with the help and support of the pastors of souls and the entire ecclesial community, they are able to discover and experience the liberating and inspiring value of the authentic love that is offered by the Gospel and set before us by the Lord's commandment. *Instilling Conviction and Offering Practical Help*

35. With regard to the question of lawful birth regulation, the ecclesial community at the present time must take on the task of instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way.

In this matter, while the Church notes with satisfaction the results achieved by scientific research aimed at a more precise knowledge of the rhythms of women's fertility, and while it encourages a more decisive and wide-ranging extension of that research, it cannot fail to call with renewed vigor on the responsibility of all-doctors, experts, marriage counselors, teachers and married couples-who can actually help married people to live their love with respect for the structure and finalities of the conjugal act which expresses that love. This implies a broader, more decisive and more systematic effort to make the natural methods of regulating fertility known, respected and applied.(97)

A very valuable witness can and should be given by those husbands and wives who through the joint exercise of periodic continence have reached a more mature personal responsibility with regard to love and life. As Paul VI wrote: "To them the Lord entrusts the task of making visible to people the holiness and sweetness of the law which unites the mutual love of husband and wife with their cooperation with the love of God, the author of human life."(98)

2. Education

The Right and Duty of Parents Regarding Education

36. The task of giving education is rooted in the primary vocation of married couples to participate in God's creative activity: by begetting in love and for love a new person who has within himself or herself the vocation to growth and development, parents by that very fact take on the task of helping that person effectively to live a fully human life. As the Second Vatican Council recalled, "since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs."(99)

The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others.

In addition to these characteristics, it cannot be forgotten that the most basic element, so basic that it qualifies the educational role of parents, is parental love, which finds fulfillment in the task of education as it completes and perfects its service of life: as well as being a source, the parents' love is also the animating principle and therefore the norm

inspiring and guiding all concrete educational activity, enriching it with the values of kindness, constancy, goodness, service, disinterestedness and self-sacrifice that are the most precious fruit of love.

Educating in the Essential Values of Human Life

37. Even amid the difficulties of the work of education, difficulties which are often greater today, parents must trustingly and courageously train their children in the essential values of human life. Children must grow up with a correct attitude of freedom with regard to material goods, by adopting a simple and austere life style and being fully convinced that "man is more precious for what he is than for what he has."(100)

In a society shaken and split by tensions and conflicts caused by the violent clash of various kinds of individualism and selfishness, children must be enriched not only with a sense of true justice, which alone leads to respect for the personal dignity of each individual, but also and more powerfully by a sense of true love, understood as sincere solicitude and disinterested service with regard to others, especially the poorest and those in most need. The family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family. And the communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home at times of joy and at times of difficulty are the most concrete and effective pedagogy for the active, responsible and fruitful inclusion of the children in the wider horizon of society.

Education in love as self-giving is also the indispensable premise for parents called to give their children a clear and delicate sex education. Faced with a culture that largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something common place, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure, the educational service of parents must aim firmly at a training in the area of sex that is truly and fully personal: for sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person-body, emotions and soul-and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love.

Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents.

In this context education for chastity is absolutely essential, for it is a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the "nuptial meaning" of the body. Indeed Christian parents, discerning the signs of God's call, will devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality.

In view of the close links between the sexual dimension of the person and his or her ethical values, education must bring the children to a knowledge of and respect for the moral norms as the necessary and highly valuable guarantee for responsible personal growth in human sexuality.

For this reason the Church is firmly opposed to an often widespread form of imparting sex information dissociated from moral principles. That would merely be an introduction to the experience of pleasure and a stimulus leading to the loss of serenity-while still in the years of innocence-by opening the way to vice.

The Mission To Educate and the Sacrament of Marriage

38. For Christian parents the mission to educate, a mission rooted, as we have said, in their participation in God's creating activity, has a new specific source in the sacrament of marriage, which consecrates them for the strictly Christian education of their children: that is to say, it calls upon them to share in the very authority and love of God the Father and Christ the Shepherd, and in the motherly love of the Church, and it enriches them with wisdom, counsel, fortitude and all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to help the children in their growth as human beings and as Christians.

The sacrament of marriage gives to the educational role the dignity and vocation of being really and truly a "ministry" of the Church at the service of the building up of her members. So great and splendid is the educational ministry of Christian parents that Saint Thomas has no hesitation in comparing it with the ministry of priests: "Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God."(101)

A vivid and attentive awareness of the mission that they have received with the sacrament of marriage will help Christian parents to place themselves at the service of their children's education with great serenity and trustfulness, and also with a sense of responsibility before God, who calls them and gives them the mission of building up the Church in their children. Thus in the case of baptized people, the family, called together by word and sacrament as the Church of the home, is both teacher and mother, the same as the worldwide Church.

First Experience of the Church

39. The mission to educate demands that Christian parents should present to their children all the topics that are necessary for the gradual maturing of their personality from a Christian and ecclesial point of view. They will therefore follow the educational lines mentioned above, taking care to show their children the depths of significance to which the faith and love of Jesus Christ can lead. Furthermore, their awareness that the Lord is entrusting to them the growth of a child of God, a brother or sister of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a member of the Church, will support Christian parents in their task of strengthening the gift of divine grace in their children's souls.

The Second Vatican Council describes the content of Christian education as follows: "Such an education does not merely strive to foster maturity...in the human person. Rather, its principal aims are these: that as baptized persons are gradually introduced into a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, they may daily grow more conscious of the gift of faith which they have received; that they may learn to adore God the Father in spirit and in truth (cf. Jn. 4:23), especially through liturgical worship; that they may be trained to conduct their personal life in true righteousness and holiness, according to their new nature (Eph. 4:22-24), and thus grow to maturity, to the stature of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:13), and devote themselves to the upbuilding of the Mystical Body. Moreover, aware of their calling, they should grow accustomed to giving witness to the hope that is in them (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15), and to promoting the Christian transformation of the world."(102)

The Synod too, taking up and developing the indications of the Council, presented the educational mission of the Christian family as a true ministry through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated, so that family life itself becomes an itinerary of faith and in some way a Christian initiation and a school of following Christ. Within a family that is aware of this gift, as Paul VI wrote, "all the members evangelize and are evangelized."(103)

By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the Body of Christ-both the Eucharistic and the ecclesial Body-they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.

In order that Christian parents may worthily carry out their ministry of educating, the Synod Fathers expressed the hope that a suitable catechism for families would be prepared, one that would be clear, brief and easily assimilated by all. The Episcopal Conferences were warmly invited to contribute to producing this catechism.

Relations with Other Educating Agents

40. The family is the primary but not the only and exclusive educating community. Man's community aspect itself-both civil and ecclesial-demands and leads to a broader and more articulated activity resulting from well-ordered collaboration between the various agents of education. All these agents are necessary, even though each can and should play its part in accordance with the special competence and contribution proper to itself.(104)

The educational role of the Christian family therefore has a very important place in organic pastoral work. This involves a new form of cooperation between parents and Christian communities, and between the various educational groups and pastors. In this sense, the renewal of the Catholic school must give special attention both to the parents of the pupils and to the formation of a perfect educating community.

The right of parents to choose an education in conformity with their religious faith must be absolutely guaranteed.

The State and the Church have the obligation to give families all possible aid to enable them to perform their educational role properly. Therefore both the Church and the State must create and foster the institutions and activities that families justly demand, and the aid must be in proportion to the families' needs. However, those in society who are in charge of schools must never forget that the parents have been appointed by God Himself as the first and principal educators of their children and that their right is completely inalienable.

But corresponding to their right, parents have a serious duty to commit themselves totally to a cordial and active relationship with the teachers and the school authorities.

If ideologies opposed to the Christian faith are taught in the schools, the family must join with other families, if possible through family associations, and with all its strength and with wisdom help the young depart from the faith. In this case the family needs special assistance from pastors of souls, who must never forget that parents have the inviolable right to entrust their children to the ecclesial community.

Manifold Service to Life

41. Fruitful married love expresses itself in serving life in many ways. Of these ways, begetting and educating children are the most immediate, specific and irreplaceable. In fact, every act of true love towards a human being bears witness to and perfects the spiritual fecundity of the family, since it is an act of obedience to the deep inner dynamism of love as self-giving to others.

For everyone this perspective is full of value and commitment, and it can be an inspiration in particular for couples who experience physical sterility.

Christian families, recognizing with faith all human beings as children of the same heavenly Father, will respond generously to the children of other families, giving them support and love not as outsiders but as members of the one family of God's children. Christian parents will thus be able to spread their love beyond the bonds of flesh and blood, nourishing the links that are rooted in the spirit and that develop through concrete service to the children of other families, who are often without even the barest necessities.

Christian families will be able to show greater readiness to adopt and foster children who have lost their parents or have been abandoned by them. Rediscovering the warmth of affection of a family, these children will be able to experience God's loving and provident fatherhood witnessed to by Christian parents, and they will thus be able to grow up with serenity and confidence in life. At the same time the whole family will be enriched with the spiritual values of a wider fraternity. Family fecundity must have an unceasing "creativity," a marvelous fruit of the Spirit of God, who opens the eyes of the heart to discover the new needs and sufferings of our society and gives courage for accepting them and responding to them. A vast field of activity, lies open to families: today, even more preoccupying than child abandonment is the phenomenon of social and cultural exclusion, which seriously affects the elderly, the sick, the disabled, drug addicts, ex-prisoners, etc.

This broadens enormously the horizons of the parenthood of Christian families: these and many other urgent needs of our time are a challenge to their spiritually fruitful love. With families and through them, the Lord Jesus continues to "have compassion" on the multitudes.

III - PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

The Family as the First and Vital Cell of Society

42. "Since the Creator of all things has established the conjugal partnership as the beginning and basis of human society," the family is "the first and vital cell of society."(105)

The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself.

Thus, far from being closed in on itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role.

Family Life as an Experience of Communion and Sharing

43. The very experience of communion and sharing that should characterize the family's daily life represents its first and fundamental contribution to society.

The relationships between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of "free giving." By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity.

Thus the fostering of authentic and mature communion between persons within the family is the first and irreplaceable school of social life, and example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love.

The family is thus, as the Synod Fathers recalled, the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society: it makes an original contribution in depth to building up the world, by making possible a life that is properly speaking human, in particular by guarding and transmitting virtues and "values." As the Second Vatican Council states, in the family "the various generations come together and help one another to grow wiser and to harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social living."(106)

Consequently, faced with a society that is running the risk of becoming more and more depersonalized and standardized and therefore inhuman and dehumanizing, with the negative results of many forms of escapism-such as alcoholism, drugs and even terrorism-the family possesses and continues still to release formidable energies capable of taking man out of his anonymity, keeping him conscious of his personal dignity, enriching him with deep humanity and actively placing him, in his uniqueness and unrepeatability, within the fabric of society.

The Social and Political Role

44. The social role of the family certainly cannot stop short at procreation and education, even if this constitutes its primary and irreplaceable form of expression.

Families therefore, either singly or in association, can and should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially in favor of the poor, or at any rate for the benefit of all people and situations that cannot be reached by the public authorities' welfare organization.

The social contribution of the family has an original character of its own, one that should be given greater recognition and more decisive encouragement, especially as the children grow up, and actually involving all its members as much as possible.(107)

In particular, note must be taken of the ever greater importance in our society of hospitality in all its forms, from opening the door of one's home and still more of one's heart to the pleas of one's brothers and sisters, to concrete efforts to ensure that every family has its own home, as the natural environment that preserves it and makes it grow. In a special way the Christian family is called upon to listen to the Apostle's recommendation: "Practice hospitality,"(108) and therefore, imitating Christ's example and sharing in His love, to welcome the brother or sister in need: "Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."(109)

The social role of families is called upon to find expression also in the form of political intervention: families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family. Along these lines, families should grow in awareness of being "protagonists" of what is known as "family politics" and assume responsibility for transforming society; otherwise families will be the first victims of the evils that they have done no more than note with indifference. The Second Vatican Council's appeal to go beyond an individualistic ethic therefore also holds good for the family as such."(110)

Society at the Service of the Family

45. Just as the intimate connection between the family and society demands that the family be open to and participate in society and its development, so also it requires that society should never fail in its fundamental task of respecting and fostering the family.

The family and society have complementary functions in defending and fostering the good of each and every human being. But society—more specifically the State—must recognize that "the family is a society in its own original right"(111) and so society is under a grave obligation in its relations with the family to adhere to the principle of subsidiarity.

By virtue of this principle, the State cannot and must not take away from families the functions that they can just as well perform on their own or in free associations; instead it must positively favor and encourage as far as possible responsible initiative by families. In the conviction that the good of the family is an indispensable and essential value of the civil community, the public authorities must do everything possible to ensure that families have all those aids—economic, social, educational, political and cultural assistance—that they need in order to face all their responsibilities in a human way.

The Charter of Family Rights

46. The ideal of mutual support and development between the family and society is often very seriously in conflict with the reality of their separation and even opposition.

In fact, as was repeatedly denounced by the Synod, the situation experienced by many families in various countries is highly problematical, if not entirely negative: institutions and laws unjustly ignore the inviolable rights of the family and of the human person; and society, far from putting itself at the service of the family, attacks it violently in its values and fundamental requirements. Thus the family, which in God's plan is the basic cell of society and a subject of rights and duties before the State or any other community, finds itself the victim of society, of the delays and slowness with which it acts, and even of its blatant injustice.

For this reason, the Church openly and strongly defends the rights of the family against the intolerable usurpations of society and the State. In particular, the Synod Fathers mentioned the following rights of the family:

- the right to exist and progress as a family, that is to say, the right of every human being, even if he or she is poor, to found a family and to have adequate means to support it;
- the right to exercise its responsibility regarding the transmission of life and to educate children; family life;
- the right to the intimacy of conjugal and family life;
- the right to the stability of the bond and of the institution of marriage;
- the right to believe in and profess one's faith and to propagate it;
- the right to bring up children in accordance with the family's own traditions and religious and cultural values, with the necessary instruments, means and institutions;
- the right, especially of the poor and the sick, to obtain physical, social, political and economic security;
- the right to housing suitable for living family life in a proper way;
- the right to expression and to representation, either directly or through associations, before the economic, social and cultural public authorities and lower authorities;
- the right to form associations with other families and institutions, in order to fulfill the family's role suitably and expeditiously;

- the right to protect minors by adequate institutions and legislation from harmful drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.;
- the right to wholesome recreation of a kind that also fosters family values;
- the right of the elderly to a worthy life and a worthy death;
- the right to emigrate as a family in search of a better life.(112)

Acceding to the Synod's explicit request, the Holy See will give prompt attention to studying these suggestions in depth and to the preparation of a Charter of Rights of the Family, to be presented to the quarters and authorities concerned.

The Christian Family's Grace and Responsibility

47. The social role that belongs to every family pertains by a new and original right to the Christian family, which is based on the sacrament of marriage. By taking up the human reality of the love between husband and wife in all its implications, the sacrament gives to Christian couples and parents a power and a commitment to live their vocation as lay people and therefore to "seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God."(113)

The social and political role is included in the kingly mission of service in which Christian couples share by virtue of the sacrament of marriage, and they receive both a command which they cannot ignore and a grace which sustains and stimulates them.

The Christian family is thus called upon to offer everyone a witness of generous and disinterested dedication to social matters, through a "preferential option" for the poor and disadvantaged. Therefore, advancing in its following of the Lord by special love for all the poor, it must have special concern for the hungry, the poor, the old, the sick, drug victims and those who have no family.

For a New International Order

48. In view of the worldwide dimension of various social questions nowadays, the family has seen its role with regard to the development of society extended in a completely new way: it now also involves cooperating for a new international order, since it is only in worldwide solidarity that the enormous and dramatic issues of world justice, the freedom of peoples and the peace of humanity can be dealt with and solved.

The spiritual communion between Christian families, rooted in a common faith and hope and given life by love, constitutes an inner energy that generates, spreads and develops justice, reconciliation, fraternity and peace among human beings. Insofar as it is a "small- scale Church, " the Christian family is called upon, like the "large- scale Church, " to be a sign of unity for the world and in this way to exercise its prophetic role by bearing witness to the Kingdom and peace of Christ, towards which the whole world is journeying.

Christian families can do this through their educational activity-that is to say by presenting to their children a model of life based on the values of truth, freedom, justice and love-both through active and responsible involvement in the authentically human growth of society and its institutions, and by supporting in various ways the associations specifically devoted to international issues.

IV - SHARING IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Family, Within the Mystery of the Church

49. Among the fundamental tasks of the Christian family is its ecclesial task: the family is placed at the service of the building up of the Kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church.

In order to understand better the foundations, the contents and the characteristics of this participation, we must examine the many profound bonds linking the Church and the Christian family and establishing the family as a "Church in miniature" (Ecclesia domestica), (114) in such a way that in its own way the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church.

It is, above all, the Church as Mother that gives birth to, educates and builds up the Christian family, by putting into effect in its regard the saving mission which she has received from her Lord. By proclaiming the word of God, the Church reveals to the Christian family its true identity, what it is and should be according to the Lord's plan; by celebrating the sacraments, the Church enriches and strengthens the Christian family with the grace of Christ for its sanctification to the glory of the Father; by the continuous proclamation of the new commandment of love, the Church encourages and guides the Christian family to the service of love, so that it may imitate and relive the same self-giving and sacrificial love that the Lord Jesus has for the entire human race.

In turn, the Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the Church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the Church: by virtue of the sacrament, Christian married couples and parents "in their state and way of life have their own special gift among the People of God."(115) For this reason they not only

receive the love of Christ and become a saved community, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ's love to their brethren, thus becoming a saving community. In this way, while the Christian family is a fruit and sign of the supernatural fecundity of the Church, it stands also as a symbol, witness and participant of the Church's motherhood.(116)

A Specific and Original Ecclesial Role

50. The Christian family is called upon to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific, by placing itself, in what it is and what it does as an "intimate community of life and love, " at the service of the Church and of society.

Since the Christian family is a community in which the relationships are renewed by Christ through faith and the sacraments, the family's sharing in the Church's mission should follow a community pattern: the spouses together as a couple, the parents and children as a family, must live their service to the Church and to the world. They must be "of one heart and soul"(117) in faith, through the shared apostolic zeal that animates them, and through their shared commitment to works of service to the ecclesial and civil communities.

The Christian family also builds up the Kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life. It is thus in the love between husband and wife and between the members of the family-a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness(118) that the Christian family's participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of His Church finds expression and realization. Therefore, love and life constitute the nucleus of the saving mission of the Christian family in the Church and for the Church.

The Second Vatican Council recalls this fact when it writes: "Families will share their spiritual riches generously with other families too. Thus the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant will manifest to all people the Savior's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all the members of the family work together."(119)

Having laid the foundation of the participation of the Christian family in the Church's mission, it is now time to illustrate its substance in reference to Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King- three aspects of a single reality-by presenting the Christian family as 1) a believing and evangelizing community, 2) a community in dialogue with God, and 3) a community at the service of man.

1. The Christian Family as a Believing and Evangelizing Community

Faith as the Discovery and Admiring Awareness of God's Plan for the Family

51. As a sharer in the life and mission of the Church, which listens to the word of God with reverence and proclaims it confidently, (120) the Christian family fulfills its prophetic role by welcoming and announcing the word of God: it thus becomes more and more each day a believing and evangelizing community.

Christian spouses and parents are required to offer "the obedience of faith."(121) They are called upon to welcome the word of the Lord which reveals to them the marvelous news-the Good News-of their conjugal and family life sanctified and made a source of sanctity by Christ Himself. Only in faith can they discover and admire with joyful gratitude the dignity to which God has deigned to raise marriage and the family, making them a sign and meeting place of the loving covenant between God and man, between Jesus Christ and His bride, the Church.

The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a journey of faith. It is a special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in Baptism and nourished by their Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the Kingdom of God in the married state.

The celebration of the sacrament of marriage is the basic moment of the faith of the couple. This sacrament, in essence, is the proclamation in the Church of the Good News concerning married love. It is the word of God that "reveals" and "fulfills" the wise and loving plan of God for the married couple, giving them a mysterious and real share in the very love with which God Himself loves humanity. Since the sacramental celebration of marriage is itself a proclamation of the word of God, it must also be a "profession of faith" within and with the Church, as a community of believers, on the part of all those who in different ways participate in its celebration.

This profession of faith demands that it be prolonged in the life of the married couple and of the family. God, who called the couple to marriage, continues to call them in marriage.(122) In and through the events, problems, difficulties and circumstances of everyday life, God comes to them, revealing and presenting the concrete "demands" of their sharing in the love of Christ for His Church in the particular family, social and ecclesial situation in which they find themselves.

The discovery of and obedience to the plan of God on the part of the conjugal and family community must take place in "togetherness, " through the human experience of love between husband and wife, between parents and children, lived in the Spirit of Christ.

Thus the little domestic Church, like the greater Church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized: hence its duty regarding permanent education in the faith.

The Christian Family's Ministry of Evangelization

52. To the extent in which the Christian family accepts the Gospel and matures in faith, it becomes an evangelizing community. Let us listen again to Paul VI: "The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part."(123)

As the Synod repeated, taking up the appeal which I launched at Puebla, the future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home.(124) This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan.

Particularly today, the Christian family has a special vocation to witness to the paschal covenant of Christ by constantly radiating the joy of love and the certainty of the hope for which it must give an account: "The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come."(125)

The absolute need for family catechesis emerges with particular force in certain situations that the Church unfortunately experiences in some places: "In places where anti-religious legislation endeavors even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, 'the Church of the home' remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis."(126)

Ecclesial Service

53. The ministry of evangelization carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable. It assumes the characteristics typical of family life itself, which should be interwoven with love, simplicity, practicality and daily witness.(127)

The family must educate the children for life in such a way that each one may fully perform his or her role according to the vocation received from God. Indeed, the family that is open to transcendent values, that serves its brothers and sisters with joy, that fulfills its duties with generous fidelity, and is aware of its daily sharing in the mystery of the glorious Cross of Christ, becomes the primary and most excellent seed-bed of vocations to a life of consecration to the Kingdom of God.

The parents' ministry of evangelization and catechesis ought to play a part in their children's lives also during adolescence and youth, when the children, as often happens, challenge or even reject the Christian faith received in earlier years. Just as in the Church the work of evangelization can never be separated from the sufferings of the apostle, so in the Christian family parents must face with courage and great interior serenity the difficulties that their ministry of evangelization sometimes encounters in their own children.

It should not be forgotten that the service rendered by Christian spouses and parents to the Gospel is essentially an ecclesial service. It has its place within the context of the whole Church as an evangelized and evangelizing community. In so far as the ministry of evangelization and catechesis of the Church of the home is rooted in and derives from the one mission of the Church and is ordained to the upbuilding of the one Body of Christ, (128) it must remain in intimate communion and collaborate responsibly with all the other evangelizing and catechetical activities present and at work in the ecclesial community at the diocesan and parochial levels.

To Preach the Gospel to the Whole Creation

54. Evangelization, urged on within by irrepressible missionary zeal, is characterized by a universality without boundaries. It is the response to Christ's explicit and unequivocal command: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation."(129)

The Christian family's faith and evangelizing mission also possesses this catholic missionary inspiration.

The sacrament of marriage takes up and reposes the task of defending and spreading the faith, a task that has its roots in Baptism and Confirmation, (130) and makes Christian married couples and parents witnesses of Christ "to the end of the earth,"(131) missionaries, in the true and proper sense, of love and life.

A form of missionary activity can be exercised even within the family. This happens when some member of the family does not have the faith or does not practice it with consistency. In such a case the other members must give him or her a

living witness of their own faith in order to encourage and support him or her along the path towards full acceptance of Christ the Savior.(132)

Animated in its own inner life by missionary zeal, the Church of the home is also called to be a luminous sign of the presence of Christ and of His love for those who are "far away, " for families who do not yet believe, and for those Christian families who no longer live in accordance with the faith that they once received. The Christian family is called to enlighten "by its example and its witness...those who seek the truth."(133)

Just as at the dawn of Christianity Aquila and Priscilla were presented as a missionary couple, (134) so today the Church shows forth her perennial newness and fruitfulness by the presence of Christian couples and families who dedicate at least a part of their lives to working in missionary territories, proclaiming the Gospel and doing service to their fellowman in the love of Jesus Christ.

Christian families offer a special contribution to the missionary cause of the Church by fostering missionary vocations among their sons and daughters(135) and, more generally, "by training their children from childhood to recognize God's love for all people."(136)

2. The Christian Family as a Community in Dialogue with God

The Church's Sanctuary in the Home

55. The proclamation of the Gospel and its acceptance in faith reach their fullness in the celebration of the sacraments. The Church which is a believing and evangelizing community is also a priestly people invested with the dignity and sharing in the power of Christ the High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant.(137)

The Christian family too is part of this priestly people which is the Church. By means of the sacrament of marriage, in which it is rooted and from which it draws its nourishment, the Christian family is continuously vivified by the Lord Jesus and called and engaged by Him in a dialogue with God through the sacraments, through the offering of one's life, and through prayer.

This is the priestly role which the Christian family can and ought to exercise in intimate communion with the whole Church, through the daily realities of married and family life. In this way the Christian family is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world.

Marriage as a Sacrament of Mutual Sanctification and an Act of Worship

56. The sacrament of marriage is the specific source and original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism. By virtue of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is purified and made holy: "This love the Lord has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity."(138)

The gift of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in the actual celebration of the sacrament of marriage, but rather accompanies the married couple throughout their lives. This fact is explicitly recalled by the Second Vatican Council when it says that Jesus Christ "abides with them so that, just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal.... For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance towards their own perfection, as well as towards their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God."(139)

Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life.(140) This gives rise to the grace and requirement of an authentic and profound conjugal and family spirituality that draws its inspiration from the themes of creation, covenant, cross, resurrection, and sign, which were stressed more than once by the Synod.

Christian marriage, like the other sacraments, "whose purpose is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God, "(141) is in itself a liturgical action glorifying God in Jesus Christ and in the Church. By celebrating it, Christian spouses profess their gratitude to God for the sublime gift bestowed on them of being able to live in their married and family lives the very love of God for people and that of the Lord Jesus for the Church, His bride.

Just as husbands and wives receive from the sacrament the gift and responsibility of translating into daily living the sanctification bestowed on them, so the same sacrament confers on them the grace and moral obligation of transforming their whole lives into a "spiritual sacrifice."(142) What the Council says of the laity applies also to Christian spouses and parents, especially with regard to the earthly and temporal realities that characterize their lives: "As worshippers leading holy lives in every place, the laity consecrate the world itself to God."(143)

Marriage and the Eucharist

57. The Christian family's sanctifying role is grounded in Baptism and has its highest expression in the Eucharist, to which Christian marriage is intimately connected. The Second Vatican Council drew attention to the unique relationship between the Eucharist and marriage by requesting that "marriage normally be celebrated within the Mass."(144) To understand better and live more intensely the graces and responsibilities of Christian marriage and family life, it is altogether necessary to rediscover and strengthen this relationship.

The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with His blood on the Cross.(145) In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation of Christ's sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its "communion" and its "mission": by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is "given up" and in His Blood that is "shed" becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family.

The Sacrament of Conversion and Reconciliation

58. An essential and permanent part of the Christian family's sanctifying role consists in accepting the call to conversion that the Gospel addresses to all Christians, who do not always remain faithful to the "newness" of the Baptism that constitutes them "saints." The Christian family too is sometimes unfaithful to the law of baptismal grace and holiness proclaimed anew in the sacrament of marriage.

Repentance and mutual pardon within the bosom of the Christian family, so much a part of daily life, receive their specific sacramental expression in Christian Penance. In the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, Paul VI wrote of married couples: "And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is abundantly poured forth in the sacrament of Penance."(146)

The celebration of this sacrament acquires special significance for family life. While they discover in faith that sin contradicts not only the covenant with God, but also the covenant between husband and wife and the communion of the family, the married couple and the other members of the family are led to an encounter with God, who is "rich in mercy," (147) who bestows on them His love which is more powerful than sin, (148) and who reconstructs and brings to perfection the marriage covenant and the family communion.

Family Prayer

59. The Church prays for the Christian family and educates the family to live in generous accord with the priestly gift and role received from Christ the High Priest. In effect, the baptismal priesthood of the faithful, exercised in the sacrament of marriage, constitutes the basis of a priestly vocation and mission for the spouses and family by which their daily lives are transformed into "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."(149) This transformation is achieved not only by celebrating the Eucharist and the other sacraments and through offering themselves to the glory of God, but also through a life of prayer, through prayerful dialogue with the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

Family prayer has its own characteristic qualities. It is prayer offered in common, husband and wife together, parents and children together. Communion in prayer is both a consequence of and a requirement for the communion bestowed by the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony. The words with which the Lord Jesus promises His presence can be applied to the members of the Christian family in a special way: "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."(150)

Family prayer has for its very own object family life itself, which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to His call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc.-all of these mark God's loving intervention in the family's history. They should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven. The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God's unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer.

Educators in Prayer

60. By reason of their dignity and mission, Christian parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer, introducing them to gradual discovery of the mystery of God and to personal dialogue with Him: "It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and the office of the sacrament of Matrimony, that from the earliest years children should be taught, according to the faith received in Baptism, to have a knowledge of God, to worship Him and to love their neighbor."(151)

The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother-exercising their royal priesthood-penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface. Let us again listen to the appeal made by Paul VI to parents: "Mothers, do you teach your children the Christian prayers? Do you prepare them, in conjunction with the priests, for the sacraments that they receive when they are young: Confession, Communion and Confirmation? Do you encourage them when they are sick to think of Christ suffering to invoke the aid of the Blessed Virgin and the saints Do you say the family rosary together? And you, fathers, do you pray with your children, with the whole domestic community, at least sometimes? Your example of honesty in thought and action, joined to some common prayer, is a lesson for life, an act of worship of singular value. In this way you bring peace to your homes: Pax huic domui. Remember, it is thus that you build up the Church."(152)

Liturgical Prayer and Private Prayer

61. There exists a deep and vital bond between the prayer of the Church and the prayer of the individual faithful, as has been clearly reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council.(153) An important purpose of the prayer of the domestic Church is to serve as the natural introduction for the children to the liturgical prayer of the whole Church, both in the sense of preparing for it and of extending it into personal, family and social life. Hence the need for gradual participation by all the members of the Christian family in the celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sundays and feast days, and of the other sacraments, particularly the sacraments of Christian initiation of the children. The directives of the Council opened up a new possibility for the Christian family when it listed the family among those groups to whom it recommends the recitation of the Divine Office in common.(154) Likewise, the Christian family will strive to celebrate at home, and in a way suited to the members, the times and feasts of the liturgical year.

As preparation for the worship celebrated in church, and as its prolongation in the home, the Christian family makes use of private prayer, which presents a great variety of forms. While this variety testifies to the extraordinary richness with which the Spirit vivifies Christian prayer, it serves also to meet the various needs and life situations of those who turn to the Lord in prayer. Apart from morning and evening prayers, certain forms of prayer are to be expressly encouraged, following the indications of the Synod Fathers, such as reading and meditating on the word of God, preparation for the reception of the sacraments, devotion and consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the various forms of veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, grace before and after meals, and observance of popular devotions.

While respecting the freedom of the children of God, the Church has always proposed certain practices of piety to the faithful with particular solicitude and insistence. Among these should be mentioned the recitation of the rosary: "We now desire, as a continuation of the thought of our predecessors, to recommend strongly the recitation of the family rosary.... There is no doubt that... the rosary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers in common that the Christian family is invited to recite. We like to think, and sincerely hope, that when the family gathering becomes a time of prayer the rosary is a frequent and favored manner of praying."(155) In this way authentic devotion to Mary, which finds expression in sincere love and generous imitation of the Blessed Virgin's interior spiritual attitude, constitutes a special instrument for nourishing loving communion in the family and for developing conjugal and family spirituality. For she who is the Mother of Christ and of the Church is in a special way the Mother of Christian families, of domestic Churches.

Prayer and Life

62. It should never be forgotten that prayer constitutes an essential part of Christian life, understood in its fullness and centrality. Indeed, prayer is an important part of our very humanity: it is "the first expression of man's inner truth, the first condition for authentic freedom of spirit."(156)

Far from being a form of escapism from everyday commitments, prayer constitutes the strongest incentive for the Christian family to assume and comply fully with all its responsibilities as the primary and fundamental cell of human society. Thus the Christian family's actual participation in the Church's life and mission is in direct proportion to the fidelity and intensity of the prayer with which it is united with the fruitful vine that is Christ the Lord.(157)

The fruitfulness of the Christian family in its specific service to human advancement, which of itself cannot but lead to the transformation of the world, derives from its living union with Christ, nourished by Liturgy, by self-oblation and by prayer.(158)

3. The Christian Family

The New Commandment of Love

63. The Church, a prophetic, priestly and kingly people, is endowed with the mission of bringing all human beings to accept the word of God in faith, to celebrate and profess it in the sacraments and in prayer, and to give expression to it in the concrete realities of life in accordance with the gift and new commandment of love.

The law of Christian life is to be found not in a written code, but in the personal action of the Holy Spirit who inspires and guides the Christian. It is the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"(159) "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."(160)

This is true also for the Christian couple and family. Their guide and rule of life is the Spirit of Jesus poured into their hearts in the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony. In continuity with Baptism in water and the Spirit, marriage sets forth anew the evangelical law of love, and with the gift of the Spirit engraves it more profoundly on the hearts of Christian husbands and wives. Their love, purified and saved, is a fruit of the Spirit acting in the hearts of believers and constituting, at the same time, the fundamental commandment of their moral life to be lived in responsible freedom.

Thus, the Christian family is inspired and guided by the new law of the Spirit and, in intimate communion with the Church, the kingly people, it is called to exercise its "service" of love towards God and towards its fellow human beings. Just as Christ exercises His royal power by serving us, (161) so also the Christian finds the authentic meaning of his participation in the kingship of his Lord in sharing His spirit and practice of service to man. "Christ has communicated this power to his disciples that they might be established in royal freedom and that by self-denial and a holy life they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves (cf. Rom. 6:12). Further, He has shared this power so that by serving Him in their fellow human beings they might through humility and patience lead their brothers and sisters to that King whom to serve is to reign. For the Lord wishes to spread His kingdom by means of the laity also, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace. In this kingdom, creation itself will be delivered out of its slavery to corruption and into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (cf. Rom. 8:21). "(162)

To Discover the Image of God in Each Brother and Sister

64. Inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, the Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God.

It should be so especially between husband and wife and within the family, through a daily effort to promote a truly personal community, initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love. This way of life should then be extended to the wider circle of the ecclesial community of which the Christian family is a part. Thanks to love within the family, the Church can and ought to take on a more homelike or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships.

Love, too, goes beyond our brothers and sisters of the same faith since "everybody is my brother or sister." In each individual, especially in the poor, the weak, and those who suffer or are unjustly treated, love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served.

In order that the family may serve man in a truly evangelical way, the instructions of the Second Vatican Council must be carefully put into practice: "That the exercise of such charity may rise above any deficiencies in fact and even in appearance, certain fundamentals must be observed. Thus, attention is to be paid to the image of God in which our neighbor has been created, and also to Christ the Lord to whom is really offered whatever is given to a needy person."(163)

While building up the Church in love, the Christian family places itself at the service of the human person and the world, really bringing about the "human advancement" whose substance was given in summary form in the Synod's Message to families: "Another task for the family is to form persons in love and also to practice love in all its relationships, so that it does not live closed in on itself, but remains open to the community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of its responsibility towards the whole of society."(164)

PART FOUR - PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY: STAGES, STRUCTURES, AGENTS AND SITUATIONS

I - STAGES OF PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

The Church Accompanies the Christian Family on Its Journey Through Life

65. Like every other living reality, the family too is called upon to develop and grow. After the preparation of engagement and the sacramental celebration of marriage, the couple begin their daily journey towards the progressive actuation of the values and duties of marriage itself.

In the light of faith and by virtue of hope, the Christian family too shares, in communion with the Church, in the experience of the earthly pilgrimage towards the full revelation and manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, it must be emphasized once more that the pastoral intervention of the Church in support of the family is a matter of urgency. Every effort should be made to strengthen and develop pastoral care for the family, which should be treated as a real matter of priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church."(165)

The Church's pastoral concern will not be limited only to the Christian families closest at hand; it will extend its horizons in harmony with the Heart of Christ, and will show itself to be even more lively for families in general and for those families in particular which are in difficult or irregular situations. For all of them the Church will have a word of truth, goodness, understanding, hope and deep sympathy with their sometimes tragic difficulties. To all of them she will offer her disinterested help so that they can come closer to that model of a family which the Creator intended from "the beginning" and which Christ has renewed with His redeeming grace.

The Church's pastoral action must be progressive, also in the sense that it must follow the family, accompanying it step by step in the different stages of its formation and development.

Preparation for Marriage

66. More than ever necessary in our times is preparation of young people for marriage and family life. In some countries it is still the families themselves that, according to ancient customs, ensure the passing on to young people of the values concerning married and family life, and they do this through a gradual process of education or initiation. But the changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also society and the Church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities. Many negative phenomena which are today noted with regret in family life derive from the fact that, in the new situations, young people not only lose sight of the correct hierarchy of values but, since they no longer have certain criteria of behavior, they do not know how to face and deal with the new difficulties. But experience teaches that young people who have been well prepared for family life generally succeed better than others.

This is even more applicable to Christian marriage, which influences the holiness of large numbers of men and women. The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages.

Marriage preparation has to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. It includes three main stages: remote, proximate and immediate preparation.

Remote preparation begins in early childhood, in that wise family training which leads children to discover themselves as being endowed with a rich and complex psychology and with a particular personality with its own strengths and weaknesses. It is the period when esteem for all authentic human values is instilled, both in interpersonal and in social relationships, with all that this signifies for the formation of character, for the control and right use of one's inclinations, for the manner of regarding and meeting people of the opposite sex, and so on. Also necessary, especially for Christians, is solid spiritual and catechetical formation that will show that marriage is a true vocation and mission, without excluding the possibility of the total gift of self to God in the vocation to the priestly or religious life.

Upon this basis there will subsequently and gradually be built up the proximate preparation, which-from the suitable age and with adequate catechesis, as in a catechumenal process-involves a more specific preparation for the sacraments, as it were, a rediscovery of them. This renewed catechesis of young people and others preparing for Christian marriage is absolutely necessary in order that the sacrament may be celebrated and lived with the right moral and spiritual dispositions. The religious formation of young people should be integrated, at the right moment and in accordance with the various concrete requirements, with a preparation for life as a couple. This preparation will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, with the essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it. It will also acquaint those concerned with correct methods for the education of children, and will assist them in gaining the basic requisites for well-ordered family life, such as stable work, sufficient financial resources, sensible administration, notions of housekeeping.

Finally, one must not overlook preparation for the family apostolate, for fraternal solidarity and collaboration with other families, for active membership in groups, associations, movements and undertakings set up for the human and Christian benefit of the family.

The immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony should take place in the months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding, so as to give a new meaning, content and form to the so-called premarital enquiry required by Canon Law. This preparation is not only necessary in every case, but is also more urgently needed for engaged couples that still manifest shortcomings or difficulties in Christian doctrine and practice.

Among the elements to be instilled in this journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate, there must also be a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, of the meaning of grace and of the responsibility of Christian marriage, as well as preparation for taking an active and conscious part in the rites of the marriage liturgy.

The Christian family and the whole of the ecclesial community should feel involved in the different phases of the preparation for marriage, which have been described only in their broad outlines. It is to be hoped that the Episcopal

Conferences, just as they are concerned with appropriate initiatives to help engaged couples to be more aware of the seriousness of their choice and also to help pastors of souls to make sure of the couples' proper dispositions, so they will also take steps to see that there is issued a Directory for the Pastoral Care of the Family. In this they should lay down, in the first place, the minimum content, duration and method of the "Preparation Courses, " balancing the different aspects-doctrinal, pedagogical, legal and medical-concerning marriage, and structuring them in such a way that those preparing for marriage will not only receive an intellectual training but will also feel a desire to enter actively into the ecclesial community.

Although one must not underestimate the necessity and obligation of the immediate preparation for marriage-which would happen if dispensations from it were easily given-nevertheless such preparation must always be set forth and put into practice in such a way that omitting it is not an impediment to the celebration of marriage.

The Celebration

67. Christian marriage normally requires a liturgical celebration expressing in social and community form the essentially ecclesial and sacramental nature of the conjugal covenant between baptized persons.

Inasmuch as it is a sacramental action of sanctification, the celebration of marriage-inserted into the liturgy, which is the summit of the Church's action and the source of her sanctifying power(166) must be per se valid, worthy and fruitful. This opens a wide field for pastoral solicitude, in order that the needs deriving from the nature of the conjugal covenant, elevated into a sacrament, may be fully met, and also in order that the Church's discipline regarding free consent, impediments, the canonical form and the actual rite of the celebration may be faithfully observed. The celebration should be simple and dignified, according to the norms of the competent authorities of the Church. It is also for them-in accordance with concrete circumstances of time and place and in conformity with the norms issued by the Apostolic See(167)-to include in the liturgical celebration such elements proper to each culture which serve to express more clearly the profound human and religious significance of the marriage contract, provided that such elements contain nothing that is not in harmony with Christian faith and morality.

Inasmuch as it is a sign, the liturgical celebration should be conducted in such a way as to constitute, also in its external reality, a proclamation of the word of God and a profession of faith on the part of the community of believers. Pastoral commitment will be expressed here through the intelligent and careful preparation of the Liturgy of the Word and through the education to faith of those participating in the celebration and in the first place the couple being married.

Inasmuch as it is a sacramental action of the Church, the liturgical celebration of marriage should involve the Christian community, with the full, active and responsible participation of all those present, according to the place and task of each individual: the bride and bridegroom, the priest, the witnesses, the relatives, the friends, the other members of the faithful, all of them members of an assembly that manifests and lives the mystery of Christ and His Church. For the celebration of Christian marriage in the sphere of ancestral cultures or traditions, the principles laid down above should be followed.

Celebration of Marriage and Evangelization of Non-believing Baptized Persons

68. Precisely because in the celebration of the sacrament very special attention must be devoted to the moral and spiritual dispositions of those being married, in particular to their faith, we must here deal with a not infrequent difficulty in which the pastors of the Church can find themselves in the context of our secularized society.

In fact, the faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed.

The sacrament of Matrimony has this specific element that distinguishes it from all the other sacraments: it is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation; it is the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator "in the beginning." Therefore the decision of a man and a woman to marry in accordance with this divine plan, that is to say, the decision to commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity, really involves, even if not in a fully conscious way, an attitude of profound obedience to the will of God, an attitude which cannot exist without God's grace. They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards salvation, a journey which the celebration of the sacrament and the immediate preparation for it can complement and bring to completion, given the uprightness of their intention.

On the other hand it is true that in some places engaged couples ask to be married in church for motives which are social rather than genuinely religious. This is not surprising. Marriage, in fact, is not an event that concerns only the persons actually getting married. By its very nature it is also a social matter, committing the couple being married in the eyes of society. And its celebration has always been an occasion of rejoicing that brings together families and friends. It therefore goes without saying that social as well as personal motives enter into the request to be married in church.

Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that these engaged couples, by virtue of their Baptism, are already really sharers in Christ's marriage Covenant with the Church, and that, by their right intention, they have accepted God's plan

regarding marriage and therefore at least implicitly consent to what the Church intends to do when she celebrates marriage. Thus, the fact that motives of a social nature also enter into the request is not enough to justify refusal on the part of pastors. Moreover, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, the sacraments by words and ritual elements nourish and strengthen faith"(171): that faith towards which the married couple are already journeying by reason of the uprightness of their intention, which Christ's grace certainly does not fail to favor and support.

As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve grave risks. In the first place, the risk of making unfounded and discriminatory judgments; secondly, the risk of causing doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated, with grave harm to Christian communities, and new and unjustified anxieties to the consciences of married couples; one would also fall into the danger of calling into question the sacramental nature of many marriages of brethren separated from full communion with the Catholic Church, thus contradicting ecclesial tradition.

However, when in spite of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage. In spite of his reluctance to do so, he has the duty to take note of the situation and to make it clear to those concerned that, in these circumstances, it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration that they are asking for, but themselves.

Once more there appears in all its urgency the need for evangelization and catechesis before and after marriage, effected by the whole Christian-community, so that every man and woman that gets married celebrates the sacrament of Matrimony not only validly but also fruitfully.

Pastoral Care After Marriage

69. The pastoral care of the regularly established family signifies, in practice, the commitment of all the members of the local ecclesial community to helping the couple to discover and live their new vocation and mission. In order that the family may be ever more a true community of love, it is necessary that all its members should be helped and trained in their responsibilities as they face the new problems that arise, in mutual service, and in active sharing in family life.

This holds true especially for young families, which, finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children. Young married couples should learn to accept willingly, and make good use of, the discreet, tactful and generous help offered by other couples that already have more experience of married and family life. Thus, within the ecclesial community-the great family made up of Christian families-there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values which are both the starting point and goal of all pastoral care. Thus young families will not limit themselves merely to receiving, but in their turn, having been helped in this way, will become a source of enrichment for other longer established families, through their witness of life and practical contribution.

In her pastoral care of young families, the Church must also pay special attention to helping them to live married love responsibly in relationship with its demands of communion and service to life. She must likewise help them to harmonize the intimacy of home life with the generous shared work of building up the Church and society. When children are born and the married couple becomes a family in the full and specific sense, the Church will still remain close to the parents in order that they may accept their children and love them as a gift received from the Lord of life, and joyfully accept the task of serving them in their human and Christian growth.

II - STRUCTURES OF FAMILY PASTORAL CARE

Pastoral activity is always the dynamic expression of the reality of the Church, committed to her mission of salvation. Family pastoral care too-which is a particular and specific form of pastoral activity- has as its operative principle and responsible agent the Church herself, through her structures and workers.

The Ecclesial Community and in Particular the Parish

70. The Church, which is at the same time a saved and a saving community, has to be considered here under two aspects: as universal and particular. The second aspect is expressed and actuated in the diocesan community, which is pastorally divided up into lesser communities, of which the parish is of special importance.

Communion with the universal Church does not hinder but rather guarantees and promotes the substance and originality of the various particular Churches. These latter remain the more immediate and more effective subjects of operation for putting the pastoral care of the family into practice. In this sense every local Church and, in more particular terms, every parochial community, must become more vividly aware of the grace and responsibility that it

receives from the Lord in order that it may promote the pastoral care of the family. No plan for organized pastoral work, at any level, must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral care of the family.

Also to be seen in the light of this responsibility is the importance of the proper preparation of all those who will be more specifically engaged in this kind of apostolate. Priests and men and women religious, from the time of their formation, should be oriented and trained progressively and thoroughly for the various tasks. Among the various initiatives I am pleased to emphasize the recent establishment in Rome, at the Pontifical Lateran University, of a Higher Institute for the study of the problems of the family. Institutes of this kind have also been set up in some dioceses. Bishops should see to it that as many priests as possible attend specialized courses there before taking on parish responsibilities. Elsewhere, formation courses are periodically held at Higher Institutes of theological and pastoral studies. Such initiatives should be encouraged, sustained, increased in number, and of course are also open to lay people who intend to use their professional skills (medical, legal, psychological, social or educational) to help the family.

The Family

71. But it is especially necessary to recognize the unique place that, in this field, belongs to the mission of married couples and Christian families, by virtue of the grace received in the sacrament. This mission must be placed at the service of the building up of the Church, the establishing of the Kingdom of God in history. This is demanded as an act of docile obedience to Christ the Lord. For it is He who, by virtue of the fact that marriage of baptized persons has been raised to a sacrament, confers upon Christian married couples a special mission as apostles, sending them as workers into His vineyard, and, in a very special way, into this field of the family.

In this activity, married couples act in communion and collaboration with the other members of the Church, who also work for the family, contributing their own gifts and ministries. This apostolate will be exercised in the first place within the families of those concerned, through the witness of a life lived in conformity with the divine law in all its aspects, through the Christian formation of the children, through helping them to mature in faith, through education to chastity, through preparation for life, through vigilance in protecting them from the ideological and moral dangers with which they are often threatened, through their gradual and responsible inclusion in the ecclesial community and the civil community, through help and advice in choosing a vocation, through mutual help among family members for human and Christian growth together, and so on. The apostolate of the family will also become wider through works of spiritual and material charity towards other families, especially those most in need of help and support, towards the poor, the sick, the old, the handicapped, orphans, widows, spouses that have been abandoned, unmarried mothers and mothers-to-be in difficult situations who are tempted to have recourse to abortion, and so on.

Associations of Families for Families

72. Still within the Church, which is the subject responsible for the pastoral care of the family, mention should be made of the various groupings of members of the faithful in which the mystery of Christ's Church is in some measure manifested and lived. One should therefore recognize and make good use of each one in relationship to its own characteristics, purposes effectiveness and methods-the different ecclesial communities, the various groups and the numerous movements engaged in various ways, for different reasons and at different levels, in the pastoral care of the family.

For this reason the Synod expressly recognized the useful contribution made by such associations of spirituality, formation and apostolate. It will be their task to foster among the faithful a lively sense of solidarity, to favor a manner of living inspired by the Gospel and by the faith of the Church, to form consciences according to Christian values and not according to the standards of public opinion; to stimulate people to perform works of charity for one another and for others with a spirit of openness which will make Christian families into a true source of light and a wholesome leaven for other families.

It is similarly desirable that, with a lively sense of the common good, Christian families should become actively engaged, at every level, in other non-ecclesial associations as well. Some of these associations work for the preservation, transmission and protection of the wholesome ethical and cultural values of each people, the development of the human person, the medical, juridical and social protection of mothers and young children, the just advancement of women and the struggle against all that is detrimental to their dignity, the increase of mutual solidarity, knowledge of the problems connected with the responsible regulation of fertility in accordance with natural methods that are in conformity with human dignity and the teaching of the Church. Other associations work for the building of a more just and human world; for the

promotion of just laws favoring the right social order with full respect for the dignity and every legitimate freedom of the individual and the family, on both the national and international level; for collaboration with the school and with the other institutions that complete the education of children, and so forth.

III - AGENTS OF THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

As well as the family, which is the object but above all the subject of pastoral care of the family, one must also mention the other main agents in this particular sector.

Bishops and Priests

73. The person principally responsible in the diocese for the pastoral care of the family is the Bishop. As father and pastor, he must exercise particular solicitude in this clearly priority sector of pastoral care. He must devote to it personal interest, care, time, personnel and resources, but above all personal support for the families and for all those who, in the various diocesan structures, assist him in the pastoral care of the family. It will be his particular care to make the diocese ever more truly a "diocesan family," a model and source of hope for the many families that belong to it. The setting up of the Pontifical Council for the Family is to be seen in this light: to be a sign of the importance that I attribute to pastoral care for the family in the world, and at the same time to be an effective instrument for aiding and promoting it at every level.

The Bishops avail themselves especially of the priests, whose task-as the Synod expressly emphasized-constitutes an essential part of the Church's ministry regarding marriage and the family. The same is true of deacons to whose care this sector of pastoral work may be entrusted.

Their responsibility extends not only to moral and liturgical matters but to personal and social matters as well. They must support the family in its difficulties and sufferings, caring for its members and helping them to see their lives in the light of the Gospel. It is not superfluous to note that from this mission, if it is exercised with due discernment and with a truly apostolic spirit, the minister of the Church draws fresh encouragement and spiritual energy for his own vocation too and for the exercise of his ministry.

Priests and deacons, when they have received timely and serious preparation for this apostolate, must unceasingly act towards families as fathers, brothers, pastors and teachers, assisting them with the means of grace and enlightening them with the light of truth. Their teaching and advice must therefore always be in full harmony with the authentic Magisterium of the Church, in such a way as to help the People of God to gain a correct sense of the faith, to be subsequently applied to practical life. Such fidelity to the Magisterium will also enable priests to make every effort to be united in their judgments, in order to avoid troubling the consciences of the faithful.

In the Church, the pastors and the laity share in the prophetic mission of Christ: the laity do so by witnessing to the faith by their words and by their Christian lives; the pastors do so by distinguishing in that witness what is the expression of genuine faith from what is less in harmony with the light of faith; the family, as a Christian community, does so through its special sharing and witness of faith. Thus there begins a dialogue also between pastors and families. Theologians and experts in family matters can be of great help in this dialogue, by explaining exactly the content of the Church's Magisterium and the content of the experience of family life. In this way the teaching of the Magisterium becomes better understood and the way is opened to its progressive development. But it is useful to recall that the proximate and obligatory norm in the teaching of the faith-also concerning family matters-belongs to the hierarchical Magisterium. Clearly defined relationships between theologians, experts in family matters and the Magisterium are of no little assistance for the correct understanding of the faith and for promoting-within the boundaries of the faith-legitimate pluralism.

Men and Women Religious

74. The contribution that can be made to the apostolate of the family by men and women religious and consecrated persons in general finds its primary, fundamental and original expression precisely in their consecration to God. By reason of this consecration, "for all Christ's faithful religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse," (175) and they are witnesses to that universal charity which, through chastity embraced for the Kingdom of heaven, makes them ever more available to dedicate themselves generously to the service of God and to the works of the apostolate.

Hence the possibility for men and women religious, and members of Secular Institutes and other institutes of perfection, either individually or in groups, to develop their service to families, with particular solicitude for children, especially if they are abandoned, unwanted, orphaned, poor or handicapped. They can also visit families and look after the sick; they can foster relationships of respect and charity towards one-parent families or families that are in difficulties or are separated; they can offer their own work of teaching and counseling in the preparation of young people for marriage, and in helping couples towards truly responsible parenthood; they can open their own houses for simple and cordial hospitality, so that families can find there the sense of God's presence and gain a taste for prayer and recollection, and see the practical examples of lives lived in charity and fraternal joy as members of the larger family of God.

I would like to add a most pressing exhortation to the heads of institutes of consecrated life to consider-always with substantial respect for the proper and original charism of each one-the apostolate of the family as one of the priority tasks, rendered even more urgent by the present state of the world.

Lay Specialists

75. Considerable help can be given to families by lay specialists (doctors, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, consultants, etc.) who either as individuals or as members of various associations and undertakings offer their contribution of enlightenment, advice, orientation and support. To these people one can well apply the exhortations that I had the occasion to address to the Confederation of Family Advisory Bureaus of Christian Inspiration: "Yours is a commitment that well deserves the title of mission, so noble are the aims that it pursues, and so determining, for the good of society and the Christian community itself, are the results that derive from it.... All that you succeed in doing to support the family is destined to have an effectiveness that goes beyond its own sphere and reaches other people too and has an effect on society. The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family."(170)

Recipients and Agents of Social Communications

76. This very important category in modern life deserves a word of its own. It is well known that the means of social communication "affect, and often profoundly, the minds of those who use them, under the affective and intellectual aspect and also under the moral and religious aspect, " especially in the case of young people.(171) They can thus exercise a beneficial influence on the life and habits of the family and on the education of children, but at the same time they also conceal "snares and dangers that cannot be ignored."(172) They could also become a vehicle-sometimes cleverly and systematically manipulated, as unfortunately happens in various countries of the world-for divisive ideologies and distorted ways of looking at life, the family, religion and morality, attitudes that lack respect for man's true dignity and destiny.

This danger is all the more real inasmuch as "the modern life style- especially in the more industrialized nations-all too often causes families to abandon their responsibility to educate their children. Evasion of this duty is made easy for them by the presence of television and certain publications in the home, and in this way they keep their children's time and energies occupied."(173) Hence "the duty...to protect the young from the forms of aggression they are subjected to by the mass media, " and to ensure that the use of the media in the family is carefully regulated. Families should also take care to seek for their children other forms of entertainment that are more wholesome, useful and physically, morally and spiritually formative, "to develop and use to advantage the free time of the young and direct their energies."(174)

Furthermore, because the means of social communication, like the school and the environment, often have a notable influence on the formation of children, parents as recipients must actively ensure the moderate, critical, watchful and prudent use of the media, by discovering what effect they have on their children and by controlling the use of the media in such a way as to "train the conscience of their children to express calm and objective judgments, which will then guide them in the choice or rejection of programs available.

With equal commitment parents will endeavor to influence the selection and the preparation of the programs themselves, by keeping in contact-through suitable initiatives-with those in charge of the various phases of production and transmission. In this way they will ensure that the fundamental human values that form part of the true good of society are not ignored or deliberately attacked. Rather they will ensure the broadcasting of programs that present in the right light family problems and their proper solution. In this regard my venerated predecessor Paul VI wrote: "Producers must know and respect the needs of the family, and this sometimes presupposes in them true courage, and always a high sense of responsibility. In fact they are expected to avoid anything that could harm the family in its existence, its stability, its balance and its happiness. Every attack on the fundamental value of the family-meaning eroticism or violence, the defense of divorce or of antisocial attitudes among young people-is an attack on the true good of man."(176)

I myself, on a similar occasion, pointed out that families "to a considerable extent need to be able to count on the good will, integrity and sense of responsibility of the media professionals- publishers writers, producers, directors, playwrights, newsmen, commentators and actors."(177) It is therefore also the duty of the Church to continue to devote every care to these categories, at the same time encouraging and supporting Catholics who feel the call and have the necessary talents, to take up this sensitive type of work.

IV - PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY IN DIFFICULT CASES

Particular Circumstances

77. An even more generous, intelligent and prudent pastoral commitment, modelled on the Good Shepherd, is called for in the case of families which, often independently of their own wishes and through pressures of various other kinds, find themselves faced by situations which are objectively difficult.

In this regard it is necessary to call special attention to certain particular groups which are more in need not only of assistance but also of more incisive action upon public opinion and especially upon cultural, economic and juridical structures, in order that the profound causes of their needs may be eliminated as far as possible.

Such for example are the families of migrant workers; the families of those obliged to be away for long periods, such as members of the armed forces, sailors and all kinds of itinerant people; the families of those in prison, of refugees and exiles; the families in big cities living practically speaking as outcasts; families with no home; incomplete or single-parent families; families with children that are handicapped or addicted to drugs; the families of alcoholics; families that have been uprooted from their cultural and social environment or are in danger of losing it; families discriminated against for political or other reasons; families that are ideologically divided; families that are unable to make ready contact with the parish; families experiencing violence or unjust treatment because of their faith; teenage married couples; the elderly, who are often obliged to live alone with inadequate means of subsistence.

The families of migrants, especially in the case of manual workers and farm workers, should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church. This is a task stemming from the nature of the Church, as being the sign of unity in diversity. As far as possible these people should be looked after by priests of their own rite, culture and language. It is also the Church's task to appeal to the public conscience and to all those in authority in social, economic and political life, in order that workers may find employment in their own regions and homelands, that they may receive just wages, that their families may be reunited as soon as possible, be respected in their cultural identity and treated on an equal footing with others, and that their children may be given the chance to learn a trade and exercise it, as also the chance to own the land needed for working and living.

A difficult problem is that of the family which is ideologically divided. In these cases particular pastoral care is needed. In the first place it is necessary to maintain tactful personal contact with such families. The believing members must be strengthened in their faith and supported in their Christian lives. Although the party faithful to Catholicism cannot give way, dialogue with the other party must always be kept alive. Love and respect must be freely shown, in the firm hope that unity will be maintained. Much also depends on the relationship between parents and children. Moreover, ideologies which are alien to the faith can stimulate the believing members of the family to grow in faith and in the witness of love.

Other difficult circumstances in which the family needs the help of the ecclesial community and its pastors are: the children's adolescence, which can be disturbed, rebellious and sometimes stormy; the children's marriage, which takes them away from their family; lack of understanding or lack of love on the part of those held most dear; abandonment by one of the spouses, or his or her death, which brings the painful experience of widowhood, or the death of a family member, which breaks up and deeply transforms the original family nucleus.

Similarly, the Church cannot ignore the time of old age, with all its positive and negative aspects. In old age married love, which has been increasingly purified and ennobled by long and unbroken fidelity, can be deepened. There is the opportunity of offering to others, in a new form, the kindness and the wisdom gathered over the years, and what energies remain. But there is also the burden of loneliness, more often psychological and emotional rather than physical, which results from abandonment or neglect on the part of children and relations. There is also suffering caused by ill-health, by the gradual loss of strength, by the humiliation of having to depend on others, by the sorrow of feeling that one is perhaps a burden to one's loved ones, and by the approach of the end of life. These are the circumstances in which, as the Synod Fathers suggested, it is easier to help people understand and live the lofty aspects of the spirituality of marriage and the family, aspects which take their inspiration from the value of Christ's Cross and Resurrection, the source of sanctification and profound happiness in daily life, in the light of the great eschatological realities of eternal life.

In all these different situations let prayer, the source of light and strength and the nourishment of Christian hope, never be neglected.

Mixed Marriages

78. The growing number of mixed marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons also calls for special pastoral attention in the light of the directives and norms contained in the most recent documents of the Holy See and in those drawn up by the Episcopal Conferences, in order to permit their practical application to the various situations.

Couples living in a mixed marriage have special needs, which can be put under three main headings.

In the first place, attention must be paid to the obligations that faith imposes on the Catholic party with regard to the free exercise of the faith and the consequent obligation to ensure, as far as is possible, the Baptism and upbringing of the children in the Catholic faith.(179)

There must be borne in mind the particular difficulties inherent in the relationships between husband and wife with regard to respect for religious freedom: this freedom could be violated either by undue pressure to make the partner change his or her beliefs, or by placing obstacles in the way of the free manifestation of these beliefs by religious practice.

With regard to the liturgical and canonical form of marriage, Ordinaries can make wide use of their faculties to meet various necessities.

In dealing with these special needs, the following points should be kept in mind:

1. In the appropriate preparation for this type of marriage, every reasonable effort must be made to ensure a proper understanding of Catholic teaching on the qualities and obligations of marriage, and also to ensure that the pressures and obstacles mentioned above will not occur.
2. It is of the greatest importance that, through the support of the community, the Catholic party should be strengthened in faith and positively helped to mature in understanding and practicing that faith, so as to become a credible witness within the family through his or her own life and through the quality of love shown to the other spouse and the children.

Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement. This is particularly true when both parties are faithful to their religious duties. Their common Baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the spouses in these marriages with the basis and motivation for expressing their unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values.

For this purpose, and also in order to highlight the ecumenical importance of mixed marriages which are fully lived in the faith of the two Christian spouses, an effort should be made to establish cordial cooperation between the Catholic and the non-Catholic ministers from the time that preparations begin for the marriage and the wedding ceremony, even though this does not always prove easy.

With regard to the sharing of the non-Catholic party in Eucharistic Communion, the norms issued by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity should be followed.(179)

Today in many parts of the world marriages between Catholics and non-baptized persons are growing in numbers. In many such marriages the non-baptized partner professes another religion, and his beliefs are to be treated with respect, in accordance with the principles set out in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra aetate* on relations with non-Christian religions. But in many other such marriages, particularly in secularized societies, the non-baptized person professes no religion at all. In these marriages there is a need for Episcopal Conferences and for individual Bishops to ensure that there are proper pastoral safeguards for the faith of the Catholic partner and for the free exercise of his faith, above all in regard to his duty to do all in his power to ensure the Catholic baptism and education of the children of the marriage. Likewise the Catholic must be assisted in every possible way to offer within his family a genuine witness to the Catholic faith and to Catholic life.

Pastoral Action in Certain Irregular Situations

79. In its solicitude to protect the family in all its dimensions, not only the religious one, the Synod of Bishops did not fail to take into careful consideration certain situations which are irregular in a religious sense and often in the civil sense too. Such situations, as a result of today's rapid cultural changes, are unfortunately becoming widespread also among Catholics with no little damage to the very institution of the family and to society, of which the family constitutes the basic cell.

a) Trial Marriages

80. A first example of an irregular situation is provided by what are called "trial marriages," which many people today would like to justify by attributing a certain value to them. But human reason leads one to see that they are unacceptable, by showing the unconvincing nature of carrying out an "experiment" with human beings, whose dignity demands that they should be always and solely the term of a self-giving love without limitations of time or of any other circumstance.

The Church, for her part, cannot admit such a kind of union, for further and original reasons which derive from faith. For, in the first place, the gift of the body in the sexual relationship is a real symbol of the giving of the whole person: such a giving, moreover, in the present state of things cannot take place with full truth without the concourse of the love of charity, given by Christ. In the second place, marriage between two baptized persons is a real symbol of the union of Christ and the Church, which is not a temporary or "trial" union but one which is eternally faithful. Therefore between two baptized persons there can exist only an indissoluble marriage.

Such a situation cannot usually be overcome unless the human person, from childhood, with the help of Christ's grace and without fear, has been trained to dominate concupiscence from the beginning and to establish relationships of genuine love with other people. This cannot be secured without a true education in genuine love and in the right use of sexuality, such as to introduce the human person in every aspect, and therefore the bodily aspect too, into the fullness of the mystery of Christ.

It will be very useful to investigate the causes of this phenomenon, including its psychological and sociological aspect, in order to find the proper remedy.

b) De Facto Free Unions

81. This means unions without any publicly recognized institutional bond, either civil or religious. This phenomenon, which is becoming ever more frequent, cannot fail to concern pastors of souls, also because it may be based on widely varying factors, the consequences of which may perhaps be containable by suitable action.

Some people consider themselves almost forced into a free union by difficult economic, cultural or religious situations, on the grounds that, if they contracted a regular marriage, they would be exposed to some form of harm, would lose economic advantages, would be discriminated against, etc. In other cases, however, one encounters people who scorn, rebel against or reject society, the institution of the family and the social and political order, or who are solely seeking pleasure. Then there are those who are driven to such situations by extreme ignorance or poverty, sometimes by a conditioning due to situations of real injustice, or by a certain psychological immaturity that makes them uncertain or afraid to enter into a stable and definitive union. In some countries, traditional customs presume that the true and proper marriage will take place only after a period of cohabitation and the birth of the first child.

Each of these elements presents the Church with arduous pastoral problems, by reason of the serious consequences deriving from them, both religious and moral (the loss of the religious sense of marriage seen in the light of the Covenant of God with His people; deprivation of the grace of the sacrament; grave scandal), and also social consequences (the destruction of the concept of the family; the weakening of the sense of fidelity, also towards society; possible psychological damage to the children; the strengthening of selfishness).

The pastors and the ecclesial community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes, case by case. They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned, and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of Christian family life, in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation. But above all there must be a campaign of prevention, by fostering the sense of fidelity in the whole moral and religious training of the young, instructing them concerning the conditions and structures that favor such fidelity, without which there is no true freedom; they must be helped to reach spiritual maturity and enabled to understand the rich human and supernatural reality of marriage as a sacrament.

The People of God should also make approaches to the public authorities, in order that the latter may resist these tendencies which divide society and are harmful to the dignity, security and welfare of the citizens as individuals, and they must try to ensure that public opinion is not led to undervalue the institutional importance of marriage and the family. And since in many regions young people are unable to get married properly because of extreme poverty deriving from unjust or inadequate social and economic structures, society and the public authorities should favor legitimate marriage by means of a series of social and political actions which will guarantee a family wage, by issuing directives ensuring housing fitting for family life and by creating opportunities for work and life.

c) Catholics in Civil Marriages

82. There are increasing cases of Catholics who for ideological or practical reasons, prefer to contract a merely civil marriage, and who reject or at least defer religious marriage. Their situation cannot of course be likened to that of people simply living together without any bond at all, because in the present case there is at least a certain commitment to a properly-defined and probably stable state of life, even though the possibility of a future divorce is often present in the minds of those entering a civil marriage. By seeking public recognition of their bond on the part of the State, such couples show that they are ready to accept not only its advantages but also its obligations. Nevertheless, not even this situation is acceptable to the Church.

The aim of pastoral action will be to make these people understand the need for consistency between their choice of life and the faith that they profess, and to try to do everything possible to induce them to regularize their situation in the light of Christian principle. While treating them with great charity and bringing them into the life of the respective communities, the pastors of the Church will regrettably not be able to admit them to the sacraments.

d) Separated or Divorced Persons Who Have Not Remarried

83. Various reasons can unfortunately lead to the often irreparable breakdown of valid marriages. These include mutual lack of understanding and the inability to enter into interpersonal relationships. Obviously, separation must be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have proved vain.

Loneliness and other difficulties are often the lot of separated spouses, especially when they are the innocent parties. The ecclesial community must support such people more than ever. It must give them much respect, solidarity, understanding and practical help, so that they can preserve their fidelity even in their difficult situation; and it must help them to cultivate the need to forgive which is inherent in Christian love, and to be ready perhaps to return to their former married life.

The situation is similar for people who have undergone divorce, but, being well aware that the valid marriage bond is indissoluble, refrain from becoming involved in a new union and devote themselves solely to carrying out their family duties and the responsibilities of Christian life. In such cases their example of fidelity and Christian consistency takes on particular value as a witness before the world and the Church. Here it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance, without there being any obstacle to admission to the sacraments.

e) Divorced Persons Who Have Remarried

84. Daily experience unfortunately shows that people who have obtained a divorce usually intend to enter into a new union, obviously not with a Catholic religious ceremony. Since this is an evil that, like the others, is affecting more and more Catholics as well, the problem must be faced with resolution and without delay. The Synod Fathers studied it expressly. The Church, which was set up to lead to salvation all people and especially the baptized, cannot abandon to their own devices those who have been previously bound by sacramental marriage and who have attempted a second marriage. The Church will therefore make untiring efforts to put at their disposal her means of salvation.

Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations. There is in fact a difference between those who have sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been unjustly abandoned, and those who through their own grave fault have destroyed a canonically valid marriage. Finally, there are those who have entered into a second union for the sake of the children's upbringing, and who are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably destroyed marriage had never been valid.

Together with the Synod, I earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced, and with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life. They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace. Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, and thus sustain them in faith and hope.

However, the Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: if these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage.

Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they "take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples."(180)

Similarly, the respect due to the sacrament of Matrimony, to the couples themselves and their families, and also to the community of the faithful, forbids any pastor, for whatever reason or pretext even of a pastoral nature, to perform ceremonies of any kind for divorced people who remarry. Such ceremonies would give the impression of the celebration of a new sacramentally valid marriage, and would thus lead people into error concerning the indissolubility of a validly contracted marriage.

By acting in this way, the Church professes her own fidelity to Christ and to His truth. At the same time she shows motherly concern for these children of hers, especially those who, through no fault of their own, have been abandoned by their legitimate partner.

With firm confidence she believes that those who have rejected the Lord's command and are still living in this state will be able to obtain from God the grace of conversion and salvation, provided that they have persevered in prayer, penance and charity.

Those Without a Family

85. I wish to add a further word for a category of people whom, as a result of the actual circumstances in which they are living, and this often not through their own deliberate wish, I consider particularly close to the Heart of Christ and deserving of the affection and active solicitude of the Church and of pastors.

There exist in the world countless people who unfortunately cannot in any sense claim membership of what could be called in the proper sense a family. Large sections of humanity live in conditions of extreme poverty, in which promiscuity, lack of housing, the irregular nature and instability of relationships and the extreme lack of education make it impossible in practice to speak of a true family. There are others who, for various reasons, have been left alone in the world. And yet for all of these people there exists a "good news of the family."

On behalf of those living in extreme poverty, I have already spoken of the urgent need to work courageously in order to find solutions, also at the political level, which will make it possible to help them and to overcome this inhuman condition of degradation.

It is a task that faces the whole of society but in a special way the authorities, by reason of their position and the responsibilities flowing therefrom, and also families, which must show great understanding and willingness to help.

For those who have no natural family the doors of the great family which is the Church—the Church which finds concrete expression in the diocesan and the parish family, in ecclesial basic communities and in movements of the

apostolate-must be opened even wider. No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who "labor and are heavy laden."(181)

CONCLUSION

86. At the end of this Apostolic Exhortation my thoughts turn with earnest solicitude:

1. to you, married couples, to you, fathers and mothers of families;
2. to you, young men and women, the future and the hope of the Church and the world, destined to be the dynamic central nucleus of the family in the approaching third millennium;
3. to you, venerable and dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the priesthood, beloved sons and daughters in the religious life, souls consecrated to the Lord, who bear witness before married couples to the ultimate reality of the love of God;
4. to you, upright men and women, who for any reason whatever give thought to the fate of the family.

The future of humanity passes by way of the family.

It is therefore indispensable and urgent that every person of good will should endeavor to save and foster the values and requirements of the family.

I feel that I must ask for a particular effort in this field from the sons and daughters of the Church. Faith gives them full knowledge of God's wonderful plan: they therefore have an extra reason for caring for the reality that is the family in this time of trial and of grace.

They must show the family special love. This is an injunction that calls for concrete action.

Loving the family means being able to appreciate its values and capabilities, fostering them always. Loving the family means identifying the dangers and the evils that menace it, in order to overcome them. Loving the family means endeavoring to create for it an environment favorable for its development. The modern Christian family is often tempted to be discouraged and is distressed at the growth of its difficulties; it is an eminent form of love to give it back its reasons for confidence in itself, in the riches that it possesses by nature and grace, and in the mission that God has entrusted to it. "Yes indeed, the families of today must be called back to their original position. They must follow Christ."(182)

Christians also have the mission of proclaiming with joy and conviction the Good News about the family, for the family absolutely needs to hear ever anew and to understand ever more deeply the authentic words that reveal its identity, its inner resources and the importance of its mission in the City of God and in that of man.

The Church knows the path by which the family can reach the heart of the deepest truth about itself. The Church has learned this path at the school of Christ and the school of history interpreted in the light of the Spirit. She does not impose it but she feels an urgent need to propose it to everyone without fear and indeed with great confidence and hope, although she knows that the Good News includes the subject of the Cross. But it is through the Cross that the family can attain the fullness of its being and the perfection of its love.

Finally, I wish to call on all Christians to collaborate cordially and courageously with all people of good will who are serving the family in accordance with their responsibilities. The individuals and groups, movements and associations in the Church which devote themselves to the family's welfare, acting in the Church's name and under her inspiration, often find themselves side by side with other individuals and institutions working for the same ideal. With faithfulness to the values of the Gospel and of the human person and with respect for lawful pluralism in initiatives this collaboration can favor a more rapid and integral advancement of the family.

And now, at the end of my pastoral message, which is intended to draw everyone's attention to the demanding yet fascinating roles of the Christian family, I wish to invoke the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Through God's mysterious design, it was in that family that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It is therefore the prototype and example for all Christian families. It was unique in the world. Its life was passed in anonymity and silence in a little town in Palestine. It underwent trials of poverty, persecution and exile. It glorified God in an incomparably exalted and pure way. And it will not fail to help Christian families-indeed, all the families in the world-to be faithful to their day-to-day duties, to bear the cares and tribulations of life, to be open and generous to the needs of others, and to fulfill with joy the plan of God in their regard.

St. Joseph was "a just man, " a tireless worker, the upright guardian of those entrusted to his care. May he always guard, protect and enlighten families.

May the Virgin Mary, who is the Mother of the Church, also be the Mother of "the Church of the home." Thanks to her motherly aid, may each Christian family really become a "little Church" in which the mystery of the Church of Christ is mirrored and given new life. May she, the Handmaid of the Lord, be an example of humble and generous acceptance of the will of God. May she, the Sorrowful Mother at the foot of the Cross, comfort the sufferings and dry the tears of those in distress because of the difficulties of their families.

May Christ the Lord, the Universal King, the King of Families, be present in every Christian home as He was at Cana, bestowing light, joy, serenity and strength. On the solemn day dedicated to His Kingship I beg of Him that every family

may generously make its own contribution to the coming of His Kingdom in the world-"a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace, " 183 towards which history is journeying.

I entrust each family to Him, to Mary, and to Joseph. To their hands and their hearts I offer this Exhortation: may it be they who present it to you, venerable Brothers and beloved sons and daughters, and may it be they who open your hearts to the light that the Gospel sheds on every family.

I assure you all of my constant prayers and I cordially impart the apostolic blessing to each and every one of you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on the twenty-second day of November, the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, in the year 1981, the fourth of the Pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

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Apostolic Letter
A Concilio Constantinopolitano I
Of His Holiness
John Paul II
To The Bishops Of The Catholic Church
For The 1600th Anniversary Of The First Council Of
Constantinople And The 1550th Anniversary Of The
Council Of Ephesus

My dear brothers in the Episcopate,

I.

1. I am impelled to write you this letter-which is both a theological reflection and a pastoral invitation coming from the depths of my heart-first of all, by the Sixteenth Centenary of the First Council of Constantinople, which was held in the year 381. As I pointed out at the beginning of the new year in St. Peter's Basilica, "after the Council of Nicaea this was the second Ecumenical Council of the Church.... To it we owe the Credo that is constantly recited in the Liturgy. A particular heritage of that Council is the doctrine on the Holy Spirit, thus proclaimed in the Latin Liturgy: Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem..: qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur, qui locutus est per prophetas."(1)

These words repeated in the Creed by so many generations of Christians will have a particular significance both of doctrine and religious sentiment for us this year and will remind us of the profound bonds that link the Church of today-as we look towards the coming of the third millennium of her life, a life so wonderfully rich and tested, continually sharing in the cross and resurrection of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit-with the Church of the fourth century, in the one continuity of her first beginnings, and in fidelity to the teaching of the Gospel and the preaching of the Apostles.

What has just been said suffices to enable us to understand how the teaching of the First Council of Constantinople is still the expression of the one common faith of the Church, of the whole or Christianity. As we confess this faith-as we do every time that we recite the Creed-and as we revive it in the forthcoming centenary commemoration, we wish to emphasize the things which unite us with all our brothers, notwithstanding the divisions that have occurred in the course of the centuries. As we do this, 1600 years after the First Council of Constantinople, we give thanks to God for the truth of the Lord, which thanks to the teaching of that Council, enlightens the paths of our faith, and the paths of life by virtue of that faith. In this anniversary we not only call to mind a formula of faith that has been in force for sixteen centuries in the Church; It the same time we make ever more present to our spirit, in reflection, in prayer, in the contribution of spirituality and theology, that personal divine power which gives life that hypostatic Gift-Dominum et vivificantem- that third Person of the most Holy Trinity who in this faith is shared in by each individual soul and by the whole Church. The Holy Spirit continues to vivify the Church and to guide her along the paths to holiness and love. As St. Ambrose pointed out so well in his work *De Spiritu Sancto*, "although He is inaccessible by nature, yet He can be received by us, thanks to His goodness; He fills everything with His power, but only the just share in Him; He is simple in His substance, rich in power, present in all, shares that which is His in order to give it to each one, and is wholly present in every place."(2)

2. The memory of the Council of Constantinople, which was the second Ecumenical Council of the Church, makes us, the Christians of the period towards the end of the second millennium, aware of how lively was the need, in the first centuries of the first millennium, among the growing community of believers, to understand and to proclaim correctly, in the confession of the Church, the inscrutable mystery of God in His absolute transcendence: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This and other key principles of truth and of Christian life first attracted the attention of the faithful; and with regard to these principles there arose numerous interpretations, some of them divergent ones, which made necessary the voice of the Church her solemn witness given in virtue of the promise made by Christ in the Upper Room: "the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name...will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you"(3); He, the Spirit of truth, "will guide you into all the truth."(4)

Therefore, in the present year, 1981, we ought to give thanks to the Holy Spirit in a special way because, in the midst of the many fluctuations of human thought, He has enabled the Church to express her faith, in the manners of expression peculiar to the age, in complete harmony with "all the truth."

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets": these are the words of the Creed of the First Council of Constantinople in 381, (5) that elucidated the mystery of the Holy Spirit and His origin from the Father, thus affirming the unity and equality in divinity of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son.

II.

3. As I recall the sixteenth centenary of the First Council of Constantinople, I cannot pass over in silence yet another significant occasion that concerns 1981: this year, in fact, there also occurs the 1550th Anniversary of the Council of Ephesus, which was held in 431. This anniversary is, as it were, overshadowed by the preceding Council, but it too has a particular importance for our faith, and is supremely worthy of being remembered.

In that same Creed, in fact, we recite, in the midst of the liturgical community as it prepares to relive the divine Mysteries, the words: *et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est*: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. The Council of Ephesus thus had a value that was above all Christological, for it defined the two natures in Jesus Christ, the divine and the human, in order to state exactly the authentic doctrine of the Church already expressed by the Council of Nicaea in 325, but which had been imperiled by the spread of certain formulas used in the Nestorian teaching. In close connection with these affirmations, the Council of Ephesus also had a soteriological significance, for it illustrated the fact that—as the well-known axiom has it—"what is not assumed is not saved." But just as closely linked with the value of these dogmatic truths was also the truth concerning the Blessed Virgin, called to the unique and unrepeatable dignity of being the Mother of God, the Theotokos, as was so clearly shown principally by the Letter of St. Cyril to Nestorius⁽⁶⁾ and by the splendid Formula Unionis of 433.⁽⁷⁾ It was a whole hymn raised by those ancient Fathers to the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God, in the full truth of the two natures in the one person; it was a hymn to the work of salvation, accomplished in the world through the working of the Holy Spirit; and all of this could not fail to redound to the honor of the Mother of God, the first cooperator with the power of the Almighty, which overshadowed her at the moment of the Annunciation in the luminous coming of the Holy Spirit.⁽⁸⁾ And this is how our brothers and sisters of Ephesus understood it, when, on the evening of June 22, the first day of the Council, celebrated in the Cathedral of the "Mother of God," they acclaimed the Virgin Mary with this title and carried the Fathers in triumph at the end of that first session.

It therefore seems to me very opportune that this ancient Council too, the third in the history of the Church, should be remembered by us in its rich theological and ecclesial context. The most Blessed Virgin is she who, by the overshadowing of the power of the Trinity, was the creature most closely associated with the work of salvation. The incarnation of the Word took place beneath her heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit. In her there dawned the new humanity which with Christ was presented in the world in order to bring to completion the original plan of the covenant with God, broken by the disobedience of the first man. *Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine.*

4. These two anniversaries, though for different reasons and with differing historical relevance, redound to the honor of the Holy Spirit. All was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. One can see how profoundly these two great commemorations, to which it is proper to make reference in this year of the Lord 1981, are linked to one another in the teaching and in the profession of faith of the Church, of the faith of all Christians. Faith in the Most Holy Trinity: faith in the Father, from whom all gifts come.⁽⁹⁾ Faith in Christ, the Redeemer of man. Faith in the Holy Spirit. And, in this light, veneration of the Blessed Virgin, who "by thus consenting to the divine utterance...became the Mother of Jesus. Embracing God's saving will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son" and "the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as cooperating in the work of human salvation through free faith and obedience."⁽¹⁰⁾ And it is wonderful that, just as Mary awaited with faith the coming of the Lord, so also in this last part of the second millennium she should be present to illuminate our faith as we await this "advent."

All this is for us a source of immense joy, a source of gratitude for the light of this faith, whereby we share in the inscrutable mysteries of God, making them the living content of our souls, expanding thereby the horizons of the understanding of our spiritual dignity and of our individual destinies. And so, these great anniversaries, too, cannot remain for us merely a memory of the distant past. They must take on fresh life in the faith of the Church, they must re-echo anew in her spirituality, indeed they must find an external manifestation of their ever living relevance for the entire community of believers.

5. I write these things in the first place to you, my dear and venerable brothers in the episcopal service. I address myself at the same time to my brother priests, your closest collaborators in your pastoral care in *virtute Spiritus Sancti*. I address the brothers and sisters of all the religious families of men and women, in the midst of which there should be a particularly lively witness of the Spirit of Christ and likewise a particular love for the mission of her who consented to be the handmaid of the Lord.⁽¹¹⁾ I finally address myself to all my brothers and sisters of the laity of the Church, who, in professing her faith together with all the other members of the ecclesial community, have so often and for so many generations rendered ever living the memory of the great Councils. I am convinced that they will accept with gratitude the evocation of these dates and anniversaries, especially when together we realize how relevant are, at the same time, the mysteries to which the two Councils gave authoritative expression as long ago as the first half of the first millennium of the history of the Church.

I also venture to hope that the commemoration of the Councils of Constantinople and Ephesus, which were expressions of the faith taught and professed by the undivided Church, will make us grow in mutual understanding with our beloved brothers in the East and in the West, with whom we are still not united by full ecclesial communion but together with whom we seek in prayer, with humility and with trust, the paths to unity in truth. What indeed can more effectively hasten the journey toward that unity than the memory and, at the same time the re-living of that which for so many

centuries has been the content of the faith professed in a nun, indeed which has not ceased to be so, even after the sad divisions which have occurred in the course of the centuries?

III.

6. It is therefore my aim that these events should be lived within the whole of their ecclesiological context. We should not merely commemorate these great anniversaries as things that happened in the past: we must give them life in our own times and establish a deep link between them and the life and role of the Church of our period, as that life and role have been given expression throughout the message of the Council of our period, the Second Vatican Council. How deeply rooted in that teaching are the truths defined in the two Councils that we are commemorating! To how great an extent those truths have permeated the Second Vatican Council's central doctrine on the Church! How substantial and constitutive they are for that doctrine! And likewise how intensely these fundamental and central truths of our faith live, so to speak, a new life and shine with a new light throughout the teaching of the Second Vatican Council!

While the chief task of our generation, and perhaps also of future generations in the Church, will be to carry out and make part of life the teaching and guidance of this great Council, the anniversaries this year of the First Council of Constantinople and the Council of Ephesus give us an opportunity for performing this task in the living context of the truth that lasts throughout the ages to eternity.

7. "When the son had accomplished the work that the Father gave him to do on earth (cf. Jn. 17:4), the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost, in order that He might continually sanctify the Church and that through Christ those who believe might thus have access in one Spirit to the Father (cf. Eph. 2:18). He is the Spirit of life, a spring of water welling up to eternal life (cf. Jn. 4:14; 7:38-39); through Him the Father gives life to people who are dead because of sin, until the day when, in Christ, He raises to life their mortal bodies (cf. Rom. 8:10-11). The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). In them He prays and bears witness to their adoption as children (cf. Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8: 15-18, 26). He guides the Church into all the truth (cf. Jn. 16:13), unifies her in communion and ministry, provides her with varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, through which He directs her, and adorns her with His fruits (cf. Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:4; Gal. 5:22). He rejuvenates the Church by the power of the Gospel, continually renews her and leads her to perfect union with her Bridegroom. For the Spirit and the Bride say to the Lord Jesus: 'Come' (cf. Rev. 22:17). Thus the universal Church is seen to be 'a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.'⁽¹²⁾ This is certainly the richest and most synthetic text, although not a unique one, indicating how the truth about the Holy Spirit, to which expression was given so authoritatively 1600 years ago by the First Council of Constantinople, lives with new life and shines with new splendor throughout the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

The whole work of renewal of the Church, so providentially set forth and initiated by the Second Vatican Council—a renewal that must be both an updating and a consolidation of what is eternal and constitutive of the Church's mission—can be carried out only in the Holy Spirit, that is to say, with the aid of His light and His power. This is important, so important, for the whole of the universal Church and also for each particular Church in its communion with all the other particular Churches. This is important also for the ecumenical process within Christianity and for the Church's path in the modern world, which must extend in the direction of justice and peace. This is important also for activity in favor of priestly or religious vocations, as well as for the apostolate of the laity, as the fruit of a new maturity in their faith.

8. The two phrases in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, "Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto" and "Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem," remind us that the greatest work of the Holy Spirit, one to which all the others unceasingly refer as a source from which they draw, is that of the incarnation of the Eternal Word by the power of the Spirit from the Virgin Mary.

Christ, the Redeemer of man and the world, is the center of history: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever."⁽¹³⁾ Our thoughts and our hearts are turned to Him in view of the approaching end of the second millennium separating us from His first coming into the world: but for that very reason they turn to the Holy Spirit, through whose power His human conception took place, and to the Virgin Mary, by whom He was conceived and from whom He was born. The anniversaries of the two great Councils this year direct our thoughts and hearts in a special way to the Holy Spirit and to Mary, the Mother of God. While we recall the joy and exultation that the profession of faith in the divine motherhood of the Virgin Mary (Theotokos) aroused 1550 years ago at Ephesus, we understand that that profession of faith also glorified the particular work of the Holy Spirit, the work composed of both the human conception and birth of the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit and, again by the power of the Holy Spirit, the holy motherhood of the Virgin Mary. This motherhood is not only the source and foundation of all her exceptional holiness and her very special participation in the whole plan of salvation; it also establishes a permanent maternal link with the Church, as a result of the fact that she was chosen by the holy Trinity as the Mother of Christ, who is "the Head of the body, the Church."⁽¹⁴⁾ This link was revealed especially beneath the cross, where she, "enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of His suffering, associated herself with His sacrifice in her mother's heart.... She was given by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross as a Mother to His disciple, with these words: 'Woman, behold your son!'"⁽¹⁵⁾

The Second Vatican Council summarizes in felicitous words Mary's unbreakable relationship with Christ and with the Church: "Since it had pleased God not to manifest solemnly the Mystery of the salvation of the human race before He

would pour forth the Spirit promised by Christ, we see the Apostles before the day of Pentecost 'with one accord devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren' (cf. Acts 1:14), and we also see Mary by her prayers imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation."(16) With these words the Council text links the two moments in which Mary's motherhood is most closely united with the work of the Holy Spirit: firstly, the moment of the Incarnation, and secondly, that of the birth of the Church in the Upper Room in Jerusalem.

IV.

9. Accordingly, all these great and important motives and the coincidence of such meaningful circumstances are reasons for giving particular emphasis throughout the Church this year, which is the jubilee of two events, to the solemnity of Pentecost.

I therefore invite all the Episcopal Conferences of the Catholic Church and the Patriarchates and metropolitan provinces of the Eastern Catholic Churches to send the representatives they wish to Rome for that day, in order that we may together renew the inheritance that we have received from the Pentecost Upper Room in the power of the Holy Spirit. He it is who showed the Church, at the moment of her birth, the way that leads to all nations, all peoples and tongues, and to the heart of every individual.

Finding ourselves gathered in collegial unity, as inheritors of the apostolic solicitude for all the Churches, (17) we shall draw from the abundant source of the same Spirit, who guides the Church's mission on the paths of present-day humanity, at the close of the second millennium after the Word became incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

10. First, on the morning of the solemnity we shall come together in the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican to sing with all our hearts our belief in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem...qui locutus est per prophetas.... Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam. We are prompted to do this by the 1600th anniversary of the First Council of Constantinople. Like the Apostles in the Upper Room and the Fathers of that Council, we shall be brought together by the one who "rejuvenates the Church by the power of the Gospel" and "constantly renews her."(18)

Thus this year's solemnity of Pentecost will be a sublime and grateful profession of the faith in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, that we owe in a particular way to that Council. It will also be a humble and ardent prayer that the Holy Spirit will help us "renew the face of the earth"-among other ways by means of the Church's work of renewal in accordance with the thought of the Second Vatican Council. It will be a prayer that this work may be carried out maturely and in a regular way in all the Churches and Christian communities, and that the work may, first and foremost, be carried out within people's souls, since no true renewal is possible without continual conversion to God. We shall ask the Spirit of Truth that we may, on the path of this renewal, remain perfectly faithful to what the Spirit says to us at the present time in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, not abandoning this way at the prompting of a certain regard for the spirit of the world. We shall also ask Him who is fons vivus, ignis, caritas (living water, fire and love) to permeate us and the whole Church, and also the human family, with the love that "hopes all things, endures all things" and "never ends."(19)

There is no doubt that at the present stage of the history of the Church and of humanity a special need is felt to go deeper into and give new life to the truth about the Holy Spirit. The commemoration at Pentecost of the sixteenth centenary of the First Council of Constantinople will give us an occasion for doing this, May the Holy Spirit accept our manifestation of faith. In the liturgical function of the solemnity of Pentecost may He accept us as we humbly open our hearts to Him, the Consoler, in whom the gift of unity is revealed and brought to realization.

11. In the second part of the celebration, we shall gather in the late afternoon of the same day in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major. There the morning part will be completed by the thoughts presented by the 1550th anniversary of the Council of Ephesus. We shall also be prompted to do this because by a singular coincidence Pentecost will this year fall on June 7, as it did in 431, when on that solemn day, on which the Council sessions, later postponed to June 22, were to begin, the first groups of bishops began to arrive in Ephesus.

These thoughts will also be reflected on in the light of the Second Vatican Council, with special attention to the marvelous seventh chapter of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. Just as the Council of Ephesus' Christological and soteriological teaching made it possible to confirm the truth about the divine motherhood of Mary, the Theotokos, so too the Second Vatican Council enables us to recall that, when the Church was born by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, she began to look to Mary as the example for her own spiritual motherhood and, therefore, as her archetype. On that day the one whom Paul VI called Mother of the Church irradiated the power of her intercession over the Church as Mother and protected the apostolic zeal by which the Church still lives, generating for God the believers of all times and all geographical areas.

Accordingly, the afternoon liturgy of the solemnity of Pentecost will gather us in the chief Marian Basilica of Rome, in order thus to recall in a special way that in the Upper Room at Jerusalem the Apostles "with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with...Mary the mother of Jesus...", "(20) in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. We, too, likewise wish on that important day to devote ourselves with one accord to prayer, together with her who, as Mother of God, is, in the words of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, "a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ."(21) Thus, devoting ourselves to prayer, together

with her, and full of trust in her, we shall entrust to the power of the Holy Spirit the Church and her mission among all the nations of the world of today and tomorrow. For we have within us the heritage of those who were commanded by the risen Christ to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.(22)

On the day of Pentecost, gathered in prayer, together with Mary the Mother of Jesus, they became convinced that they could carry out this command with the power of the Holy Spirit that had come upon them, as the Lord had foretold.(23)

On the same day we, their heirs, shall join together in the same act of faith and prayer.

V.

12. Dear brothers,

I know that on Holy Thursday you renew within the community of the presbyterium of your dioceses the memorial of the Last Supper, during which, by the words of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become the body and blood of our Savior, that is to say, the Eucharist of our redemption.

On that day, or also on other suitable occasions, speak to all the People of God about these important anniversaries and events, in order that in every local Church and every community of the Church they may similarly be recalled and lived as they deserve, in the manner that will be decided by the individual bishops in accordance with the indications of the respective Episcopal Conferences or of the Patriarchates or Metropolitan Provinces of the Eastern Churches.

Looking forward eagerly to the celebrations that I have announced, I gladly impart my special apostolic blessing to all of you, venerable and dear brothers in the episcopate, and together with you to your ecclesial communities.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's on March 25, 1981, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, the third year of the Pontificate.

NOTES

1. L'Osservatore Romano, January 2-3, 1981.

2. St. Ambrose, De Spiritu Sancto, I, V, 72; ed. O. Faller; CSEL 79, Vindobonae 1964, p. 45.

3. Jn. 14:26.

4. Jn. 16:13.

5. Thus quoted for the first time in the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, act. II: ed. E. Schwartz, Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, II Concilium universale Chalcedonense, Berolini et Lipsiae 1917-32 I, 2, p. 80; cf. also Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, Bologna 1973, p. 24.

6. Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, I Concilium universale Ephesinum: ed. E. Schwartz, I, 1, pp. 25-28 and 223-242; cf. also Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, Bologna 1973, pp. 40-44; 50-61.

7. Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, I, I, 4, pp. 8ff. (A); cf. also Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, pp. 69ff.

8. Cf. Lk. 1:35.

9. Cf. Jas. 1:17.

10. Lumen gentium, no. 56.

11. Cf. Lk. 1:38.

12. Lumen gentium, no. 4.

13. Heb. 13:8.

14. Col. 1:18.

15. Lumen gentium, no. 58.

16. Lumen gentium, no. 59.

17. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:28.

18. Cf. Lumen gentium, no. 4.

19. 1 Cor. 13:7-8.

20. Acts 1:14.

21. Lumen gentium, no. 63.

22. Cf. Mk. 16:15.

23. Cf. Acts 1:8.

**Apostolic Exhortation
Catechesi Tradendae
Of Pope
John Paul II
On Catechesis In Our Time**

INTRODUCTION

Christ's Final Command

1. The Church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks, for, before Christ ascended to His Father after His resurrection, He gave the apostles a final command - to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to observe all that He had commanded.(1) He thus entrusted them with the mission and power to proclaim to humanity what they had heard, what they had seen with their eyes, what they had looked upon and touched with their hands, concerning the Word of Life.(2) He also entrusted them with the mission and power to explain with authority what He had taught them, His words and actions, His signs and commandments. And He gave them the Spirit to fulfill this mission.

Very soon the name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in His name, (3) and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ. The Church has not ceased to devote her energy to this task.

Paul VI's Solitude

2. The most recent Popes gave catechesis a place of eminence in their pastoral solicitude. Through his gestures, his preaching, his authoritative interpretation of the Second Vatican Council (considered by him the great catechism of modern times), and through the whole of his life, my venerated predecessor Paul VI served the Church's catechesis in a particularly exemplary fashion. On March 18, 1971, he approved the General Catechetical Directory prepared by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, a directory that is still the basic document for encouraging and guiding catechetical renewal throughout the Church. He set up the International Council for Catechesis in 1975. He defined in masterly fashion the role and significance of catechesis in the life and mission of the Church when he addressed the participants in the first International Catechetical Congress on September 25, 1971, (4) and he returned explicitly to the subject in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*.(5) He decided that catechesis, especially that meant for children and young people, should be the theme of the fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops, (6) which was held in October 1977 and which I myself had the joy of taking part in.

A Fruitful Synod

3. At the end of that synod the fathers presented the Pope with a very rich documentation, consisting of the various interventions during the assembly, the conclusions of the working groups, the message that they had with his consent sent to the People of God, (7) and especially the imposing list of "propositions" in which they expressed their views on a very large number of aspects of present-day catechesis.

The Synod worked in an exceptional atmosphere of thanksgiving and hope. It saw in catechetical renewal a precious gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church of today, a gift to which the Christian communities at all levels throughout the world are responding with a generosity and inventive dedication that win admiration. The requisite discernment could then be brought to bear on a reality that is very much alive and it could benefit from great openness among the People of God to the grace of the Lord and the directives of the magisterium.

Purpose of This Exhortation

4. It is in the same climate of faith and hope that I am today addressing this apostolic exhortation to you, venerable brothers and dear sons and daughters. The theme is extremely vast and the exhortation will keep to only a few of the most topical and decisive aspects of it, as an affirmation of the happy results of the synod. In essence, the exhortation takes up again the reflections that were prepared by Pope Paul VI, making abundant use of the documents left by the synod. Pope John Paul I, whose zeal and gifts as a catechist amazed us all, had taken them in hand and was preparing to publish them when he was suddenly called to God. To all of us he gave an example of catechesis at once popular and concentrated on the essential, one made up of simple words and actions that were able to touch the heart. I am therefore taking up the inheritance of these two Popes in response to the request which was expressly formulated by the Bishops

at the end of the fourth general assembly of the synod and which was welcomed by Pope Paul VI in his closing speech.(8) I am also doing so in order to fulfill one of the chief duties of my apostolic charge. Catechesis has always been a central care in my ministry as a priest and as a Bishop.

I ardently desire that this apostolic exhortation to the whole Church should strengthen the solidity of the faith and of Christian living, should give fresh vigor to the initiatives in hand, should stimulate creativity -with the required vigilance - and should help to spread among the communities the joy of bringing the mystery of Christ to the world.

I. - WE HAVE BUT ONE TEACHER, JESUS CHRIST

Putting Into Communion With the Person of Christ

5. The fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops often stressed the Christocentricity of all authentic catechesis. We can here use the word "Christocentricity" in both its meanings, which are not opposed to each other or mutually exclusive, but each of which rather demands and completes the other.

In the first place, it is intended to stress that at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, "the only Son from the Father...full of grace and truth, "(9) who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever. It is Jesus who is "the way, and the truth, and the life, "(10) and Christian living consists in following Christ, the sequela Christi.

The primary and essential object of catechesis is, to use an expression dear to St. Paul and also to contemporary theology, "the mystery of Christ." Catechizing is in a way to lead a person to study this mystery in all its dimensions: "to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery...comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth...know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...(and be filled) with all the fullness of God."(11) It is therefore to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by Him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery. Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

Transmitting Christ's Teaching

6. Christocentricity in catechesis also means the intention to transmit not one's own teaching or that of some other master, but the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Truth that He communicates or, to put it more precisely, the Truth that He is.(12) We must therefore say that in catechesis it is Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, who is taught - everything else is taught with reference to Him - and it is Christ alone who teaches -anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ's spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with his lips. Whatever be the level of his responsibility in the Church, every catechist must constantly endeavor to transmit by his teaching and behavior the teaching and life of Jesus. He will not seek to keep directed towards himself and his personal opinions and attitudes the attention and the consent of the mind and heart of the person he is catechizing. Above all, he will not try to inculcate his personal opinions and options as if they expressed Christ's teaching and the lessons of His life. Every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."(13) St. Paul did this when he was dealing with a question of prime importance: "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you."(14) What assiduous study of the word of God transmitted by the Church's magisterium, what profound familiarity with Christ and with the Father, what a spirit of prayer, what detachment from self must a catechist have in order that he can say: "My teaching is not mine!"

Christ the Teacher

7. This teaching is not a body of abstract truths. It is the communication of the living mystery of God. The Person teaching it in the Gospel is altogether superior in excellence to the "masters" in Israel, and the nature of His doctrine surpasses theirs in every way because of the unique link between what He says, what He does and what He is. Nevertheless, the Gospels clearly relate occasions when Jesus "taught." "Jesus began to do and teach"(15) - with these two verbs, placed at the beginning of the book of the Acts, St. Luke links and at the same time distinguishes two poles in Christ's mission.

Jesus taught. It is the witness that He gives of Himself: "Day after day I sat in the temple teaching."(16) It is the admiring observation of the evangelists, surprised to see Him teaching everywhere and at all times, teaching in a manner and with an authority previously unknown: "Crowds gathered to him again; and again, as his custom was, he taught them "(17); "and they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority."(18) It is also what His enemies note for the purpose of drawing from it grounds for accusation and condemnation: "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judaea, from Galilee even to this place."(19)

The One "Teacher"

8. One who teaches in this way has a unique title to the name of "Teacher." Throughout the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, how many times is He given this title of Teacher!(20) Of course the Twelve, the other disciples, and the crowds of listeners call Him "Teacher" in tones of admiration, trust and tenderness.(21) Even the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the doctors of the law, and the Jews in general do not refuse Him the title: "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you"(22); "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"(23) But above all, Jesus Himself at particularly solemn and highly significant moments calls Himself Teacher: "You call me teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am"(24); and He proclaims the singularity, the uniqueness of His character as teacher: "You have one teacher,"(25) the Christ. One can understand why people of every kind, race and nation have for 2,000 years in all the languages of the earth given Him this title with veneration, repeating in their own ways the exclamation of Nicodemus: "We know that you are a teacher come from God."(26)

This image of Christ the Teacher is at once majestic and familiar, impressive and reassuring. It comes from the pen of the evangelists and it has often been evoked subsequently in iconography since earliest Christian times, (27) so captivating is it. And I am pleased to evoke it in my turn at the beginning of these considerations on catechesis in the modern world.

Teaching Through His Life as a Whole

9. In doing so, I am not forgetful that the majesty of Christ the Teacher and the unique consistency and persuasiveness of His teaching can only be explained by the fact that His words, His parables and His arguments are never separable from His life and His very being. Accordingly, the whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: His silences, His miracles, His gestures, His prayer, His love for people, His special affection for the little and the poor, His acceptance of the total sacrifice on the cross for the redemption of the world, and His resurrection are the actualization of His word and the fulfillment of revelation. Hence for Christians the crucifix is one of the most sublime and popular images of Christ the Teacher.

These considerations follow in the wake of the great traditions of the Church and they all strengthen our fervor with regard to Christ, the Teacher who reveals God to man and man to himself, the Teacher who saves, sanctifies and guides, who lives, who speaks, rouses, moves, redresses, judges, forgives, and goes with us day by day on the path of history, the Teacher who comes and will come in glory.

Only in deep communion with Him will catechists find light and strength for an authentic, desirable renewal of catechesis.

II. - AN EXPERIENCE AS OLD AS THE CHURCH

The Mission of the Apostles

10. The image of Christ the Teacher was stamped on the spirit of the Twelve and of the first disciples, and the command "Go...and make disciples of all nations"(28) set the course for the whole of their lives. St. John bears witness to this in his Gospel when he reports the words of Jesus: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."(29) It was not they who chose to follow Jesus; it was Jesus who chose them, kept them with Him, and appointed them even before His Passover, that they should go and bear fruit and that their fruit should remain.(30) For this reason He formally conferred on them after the resurrection the mission of making disciples of all nations.

The whole of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is a witness that they were faithful to their vocation and to the mission they had received. The members of the first Christian community are seen in it as "devoted to the apostles" teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."(31) Without any doubt we find in that a lasting image of the Church being born of and continually nourished by the word of the Lord, thanks to the teaching of the apostles, celebrating that word in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and bearing witness to it before the world in the sign of charity.

When those who opposed the apostles took offense at their activity, it was because they were "annoyed because (the apostles) were teaching the people"(32) and the order they gave them was not to teach at all in the name of Jesus.(33) But we know that the apostles considered it right to listen to God rather than to men on this very matter.(34)

Catechesis in the Apostolic Age

11. The apostles were not slow to share with others the ministry of apostleship.(35) They transmitted to their successors the task of teaching. They entrusted it also to the deacons from the moment of their institution: Stephen, "full of grace and power," taught unceasingly, moved by the wisdom of the Spirit.(36) The apostles associated "many others" with themselves in the task of teaching, (37) and even simple Christians scattered by persecution "went about preaching the

word."(38) St. Paul was in a pre-eminent way the herald of this preaching, from Antioch to Rome, where the last picture of him that we have in Acts is that of a person "teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly."(39) His numerous letters continue and give greater depth to his teaching. The letters of Peter, John, James and Jude are also, in every case, evidence of catechesis in the apostolic age.

Before being written down, the Gospels were the expression of an oral teaching passed on to the Christian communities, and they display with varying degrees of clarity a catechetical structure. St. Matthew's account has indeed been called the catechist's Gospel, and St. Mark's the catechumen's Gospel.

The Fathers of the Church

12. This mission of teaching that belonged to the apostles and their first fellow workers was continued by the Church. Making herself day after day a disciple of the Lord, she earned the title of "Mother and Teacher."(40) From Clement of Rome to Origen, (41) the post-apostolic age saw the birth of remarkable works. Next we see a striking fact: Some of the most impressive Bishops and pastors, especially in the third and fourth centuries considered it an important part of their episcopal ministry to deliver catechetical instructions and write treatises. It was the age of Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom, of Ambrose and Augustine, the age that saw the flowering, from the pen of numerous Fathers of the Church, of works that are still models for us.

It would be impossible here to recall, even very briefly the catechesis that gave support to the spread and advance of the Church in the various periods of history, in every continent, and in the widest variety of social and cultural contexts. There was indeed no lack of difficulties. But the word of the Lord completed its course down the centuries; it sped on and triumphed, to use the words of the Apostle Paul.(42)

Councils and Missionary Activity

13. The ministry of catechesis draws ever fresh energy from the councils. The Council of Trent is a noteworthy example of this. It gave catechesis priority in its constitutions and decrees. It lies at the origin of the Roman Catechism, which is also known by the name of that council and which is a work of the first rank as a summary of Christian teaching and traditional theology for use by priests. It gave rise to a remarkable organization of catechesis in the Church. It aroused the clergy to their duty of giving catechetical instruction. Thanks to the work of holy theologians such as St. Charles Borromeo, St. Robert Bellarmine and St. Peter Canisius, it involved the publication of catechisms that were real models for that period. May the Second Vatican Council stir up in our time a like enthusiasm and similar activity.

The missions are also a special area for the application of catechesis. The People of God have thus continued for almost 2,000 years to educate themselves in the faith in ways adapted to the various situations of believers and the many different circumstances in which the Church finds herself.

Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church's life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more, her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis. It is worthwhile pointing out some of the many lessons to be drawn from the experiences in Church history that we have just recalled.

Catechesis as the Church's Right and Duty

14. To begin with, it is clear that the Church has always looked on catechesis as a sacred duty and an inalienable right. On the one hand, it is certainly a duty springing from a command given by the Lord and resting above all on those who in the new covenant receive the call to the ministry of being pastors. On the other hand, one can likewise speak of a right: from the theological point of view every baptized person, precisely the reason of being baptized, has the right to receive from the Church instruction and education enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life; and from the viewpoint of human rights, every human being has the right to seek religious truth and adhere to it freely, that is to say, "without coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and any human power, " in such a way that in this matter of religion, "no one is to be forced to act against his or her conscience or prevented from acting in conformity to it."(43)

That is why catechetical activity should be able to be carried out in favorable circumstances of time and place, and should have access to the mass media and suitable equipment, without discrimination against parents, those receiving catechesis or those imparting it. At present this right is admittedly being given growing recognition, at least on the level of its main principles, as is shown by international declarations and conventions in which, whatever their limitations, one can recognize the desires of the consciences of many people today.(44) But the right is being violated by many States, even to the point that imparting catechesis, having it imparted, and receiving it become punishable offenses. I vigorously raise my voice in union with the synod fathers against all discrimination in the field of catechesis, and at the same time I again make a pressing appeal to those in authority to put a complete end to these constraints on human freedom in general and on religious freedom in particular.

Priority of This Task

15. The second lesson concerns the place of catechesis in the Church's pastoral programs. The more the Church, whether on the local or the universal level, gives catechesis priority over other works and undertakings the results of which would be more spectacular, the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church. As the 20th century draws to a close, the Church is bidden by God and by events - each of them a call from Him - to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. She is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy, without sparing effort, toil or material means, in order to organize it better and to train qualified personnel. This is no mere human calculation; it is an attitude of faith. And an attitude of faith always has reference to the faithfulness of God, who never fails to respond.

Shared But Differentiated Responsibility

16. The third lesson is that catechesis always has been and always will be a work for which the whole Church must feel responsible and must wish to be responsible. But the Church's members have different responsibilities, derived from each one's mission. Because of their charge, pastors have, at differing levels, the chief responsibility for fostering, guiding and coordinating catechesis. For his part, the Pope has a lively awareness of the primary responsibility that rests on him in this field: In this he finds reasons for pastoral concern but principally a source of joy and hope. Priests and religious have in catechesis a pre-eminent field for their apostolate. On another level, parents have a unique responsibility. Teachers, the various ministers of the Church, catechists, and also organizers of social communications, all have in various degrees very precise responsibilities in this education of the believing conscience, an education that is important for the life of the Church and affects the life of society as such. It would be one of the best results of the general assembly of the synod that was entirely devoted to catechesis if it stirred up in the Church as a whole and in each sector of the Church a lively and active awareness of this differentiated but shared responsibility.

Continual Balanced Renewal

17. Finally, catechesis needs to be continually renewed by a certain broadening of its concept, by the revision of its methods, by the search for suitable language, and by the utilization of new means of transmitting the message. Renewal is sometimes unequal in value; the synod fathers realistically recognized, not only an undeniable advance in the vitality of catechetical activity and promising initiatives, but also the limitations or even "deficiencies" in what has been achieved to date.(45) These limitations are particularly serious when they endanger integrity of content. The message to the People of God rightly stressed that "routine, with its refusal to accept any change, and improvisation, with its readiness for any venture, are equally dangerous" for catechesis.(46) Routine leads to stagnation, lethargy and eventual paralysis. Improvisation begets confusion on the part of those being given catechesis and, when these are children, on the part of their parents; it also begets all kinds of deviations, and the fracturing and eventually the complete destruction of unity. It is important for the Church to give proof today, as she has done at other periods of her history, of evangelical wisdom, courage and fidelity in seeking out and putting into operation new methods and new prospects for catechetical instruction.

III. - CATECHESIS IN THE CHURCH'S PASTORAL AND MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

Catechesis as a Stage in Evangelization

18. Catechesis cannot be dissociated from the Church's pastoral and missionary activity as a whole. Nevertheless it has a specific character which was repeatedly the object of inquiry during the preparatory work and throughout the course of the fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops. The question also interests the public both within and outside the Church.

This is not the place for giving a rigorous formal definition of catechesis, which has been sufficiently explained in the General Catechetical Directory.(47) It is for specialists to clarify more and more its concept and divisions.

In view of uncertainties in practice, let us simply recall the essential landmarks - they are already solidly established in Church documents - that are essential for an exact understanding of catechesis and without which there is a risk of failing to grasp its full meaning and import.

All in all, it can be taken here that catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life. Accordingly, while not being formally identified with them, catechesis is built on a certain number of elements of the Church's pastoral mission that have a catechetical aspect, that prepare for catechesis, or that spring from it. These elements are: the initial proclamation of the Gospel or

missionary preaching through the kerygma to arouse faith, apologetics or examination of the reasons for belief, experience of Christian living, celebration of the sacraments, integration into the ecclesial community, and apostolic and missionary witness.

Let us first of all recall that there is no separation or opposition between catechesis and evangelization. Nor can the two be simply identified with each other. Instead, they have close links whereby they integrate and complement each other. The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of December 8, 1975, on evangelization in the modern world, rightly stressed that evangelization - which has the aim of bringing the Good News to the whole of humanity, so that all may live by it - is a rich, complex and dynamic reality, made up of elements, or one could say moments, that are essential and different from each other, and that must all be kept in view simultaneously.(48) Catechesis is one of these moments - a very remarkable one - in the whole process of evangelization.

Catechesis and the Initial Proclamation of the Gospel

19. The specific character of catechesis, as distinct from the initial conversion - bringing proclamation of the Gospel, has the twofold objective of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ.(49)

But in catechetical practice, this model order must allow for the fact that the initial evangelization has often not taken place. A certain number of children baptized in infancy come for catechesis in the parish without receiving any other initiation into the faith and still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ; they only have the capacity to believe placed within them by Baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit; and opposition is quickly created by the prejudices of their non-Christian family background or of the positivist spirit of their education. In addition, there are other children who have not been baptized and whose parents agree only at a later date to religious education: for practical reasons, the catechumenal stage of these children will often be carried out largely in the course of the ordinary catechesis. Again, many pre-adolescents and adolescents who have been baptized and been given a systematic catechesis and the sacraments still remain hesitant for a long time about committing their whole lives to Jesus Christ - if, moreover, they do not attempt to avoid religious education in the name of their freedom. Finally, even adults are not safe from temptations to doubt or to abandon their faith, especially as a result of their unbelieving surroundings. This means that "catechesis" must often concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it unceasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith. This concern will in part decide the tone, the language and the method of catechesis.

Specific Aim of Catechesis

20. Nevertheless, the specific aim of catechesis is to develop, with God's help, an as yet initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old. It is in fact a matter of giving growth, at the level of knowledge and in life, to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit with the initial proclamation and effectively transmitted by Baptism.

Catechesis aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word. Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus sets himself to follow Christ and learns more and more within the Church to think like Him, to judge like Him, to act in conformity with His commandments, and to hope as He invites us to.

To put it more precisely: within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given Him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know His "mystery," the kingdom of God proclaimed by Him, the requirements and promises contained in His Gospel message, and the paths that He has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow Him.

It is true that being a Christian means saying "yes" to Jesus Christ, but let us remember that this "yes" has two levels: It consists in surrendering to the word of God and relying on it, but it also means, at a later stage, endeavoring to know better - and better the profound meaning of this word.

Need for Systematic Catechesis

21. In his closing speech at the fourth general assembly of the synod, Pope Paul VI rejoiced "to see how everyone drew attention to the absolute need for systematic catechesis, precisely because it is this reflective study of the Christian mystery that fundamentally distinguishes catechesis from all other ways of presenting the word of God."(50)

In view of practical difficulties, attention must be drawn to some of the characteristics of this instruction:

- It must be systematic, not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal;

- It must deal with essentials, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis;
- It must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the kerygma;
- It must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life.

I am not forgetting the interest of the many different occasions for catechesis connected with personal, family, social and ecclesial life - these occasions must be utilized and I shall return to them in Chapter VI -but I am stressing the need for organic and systematic Christian instruction, because of the tendency in various quarters to minimize its importance.

Catechesis and Life Experience

22. It is useless to play off orthopraxis against orthodoxy: Christianity is inseparably both. Firm and well-thought - out convictions lead to courageous and upright action, the endeavor to educate the faithful to live as disciples of Christ today calls for and facilitates a discovery in depth of the mystery of Christ in the history of salvation.

It is also quite useless to campaign for the abandonment of serious and orderly study of the message of Christ in the name of a method concentrating on life experience. "No one can arrive at the whole truth on the basis solely of some simple private experience, that is to say, without an adequate explanation of the message of Christ, who is 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn. 14:6)."(51)

Nor is any opposition to be set up between a catechesis taking life as its point of departure and a traditional doctrinal and systematic catechesis.(52) Authentic catechesis is always an orderly and systematic initiation into the revelation that God has given of Himself to humanity in Christ Jesus, a revelation stored in the depths of the Church's memory and in Sacred Scripture, and constantly communicated from one generation to the next by a living, active traditio. This revelation is not however isolated from life or artificially juxtaposed to it. It is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and it illumines the whole of life with the light of the Gospel, to inspire it or to question it.

That is why we can apply to catechists an expression used by the Second Vatican Council with special reference to priests: "Instructors (of the human being and his life) in the faith."(53)

Catechesis and Sacraments

23. Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings.

In the early Church, the catechumenate and preparation for the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist were the same thing. Although in the countries that have long been Christian the Church has changed her practice in this field, the catechumenate has never been abolished; on the contrary, it is experiencing a renewal in those countries(54) and is abundantly practiced in the young missionary Churches. In any case, catechesis always has reference to the sacraments. On the one hand, the catechesis that prepares for the sacraments is an eminent kind, and every form of catechesis necessarily leads to the sacraments of faith. On the other hand, authentic practice of the sacraments is bound to have a catechetical aspect. In other words, sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in the sacramental practice.

Catechesis and Ecclesial Community

24. Finally, catechesis is closely linked with the responsible activity of the Church and of Christians in the world. A person who has given adherence to Jesus Christ by faith and is endeavoring to consolidate that faith by catechesis needs to live in communion with those who have taken the same step. Catechesis runs the risk of becoming barren if no community of faith and Christian life takes the catechumen in at a certain stage of his catechesis. That is why the ecclesial community at all levels has a twofold responsibility with regard to catechesis: it has the responsibility of providing for the training of its members, but it also has the responsibility of welcoming them into an environment where they can live as fully as possible what they have learned.

Catechesis is likewise open to missionary dynamism. If catechesis is done well, Christians will be eager to bear witness to their faith, to hand it on to their children, to make it known to others, and to serve the human community in every way.

Catechesis in the Wide Sense Necessary for Maturity and Strength of Faith

25. Thus through catechesis the Gospel kerygma (the initial ardent proclamation by which a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith) is gradually deepened, developed

in its implicit consequences, explained in language that includes an appeal to reason, and channelled towards Christian practice in the Church and the world. All this is no less evangelical than the kerygma, in spite of what is said by certain people who consider that catechesis necessarily rationalizes, dries up and eventually kills all that is living, spontaneous and vibrant in the kerygma. The truths studied in catechesis are the same truths that touched the person's heart when he heard them for the first time. Far from blunting or exhausting them, the fact of knowing them better should make them even more challenging and decisive for one's life.

In the understanding expounded here, catechesis keeps the entirely pastoral perspective with which the synod viewed it. This broad meaning of catechesis in no way contradicts but rather includes and goes beyond a narrow meaning which was once commonly given to catechesis in didactic expositions, namely, the simple teaching of the formulas that express faith.

In the final analysis, catechesis is necessary both for the maturation of the faith of Christians and for their witness in the world: It is aimed at bringing Christians to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"(55); it is also aimed at making them prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls them to account for the hope that is in them.(56)

IV. THE WHOLE OF THE GOOD NEWS DRAWN FROM ITS SOURCE

Content of the Message

26. Since catechesis is a moment or aspect of evangelization, its content cannot be anything else but the content of evangelization as a whole. The one message - the Good News of salvation - that has been heard once or hundreds of times and has been accepted with the heart, is in catechesis probed unceasingly by reflection and systematic study, by awareness of its repercussions on one's personal life - an awareness calling for ever greater commitment - and by inserting it into an organic and harmonious whole, namely, Christian living in society and the world.

The Source

27. Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the Word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures, for "sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church, " as was recalled by the Second Vatican Council, which desired that "the ministry of the word - pastoral preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction... - (should be) healthily nourished and (should) thrive in holiness through the word of Scripture."(57)

To speak of Tradition and Scripture as the source of catechesis is to draw attention to the fact that catechesis must be impregnated and penetrated by the thought, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and the Gospels through assiduous contact with the texts themselves; but it is also a reminder that catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts with the intelligence and the heart of the Church and for drawing inspiration from the 2, 000 years of the Church's reflection and life.

The Church's teaching, liturgy and life spring from this source and lead back to it, under the guidance of the pastors and, in particular, of the doctrinal magisterium entrusted to them by the Lord.

The Creed, an Exceptionally Important Expression of Doctrine

28. An exceptionally important expression of the living heritage placed in the custody of the pastors is found in the Creed or, to put it more concretely, in the Creeds that at crucial moments have summed up the Church's faith in felicitous syntheses. In the course of the centuries an important element of catechesis was constituted by the *transmissio Symboli* (transmission of the summary of the faith), followed by the transmission of the Lord's Prayer. This expressive rite has in our time been reintroduced into the initiation of catechumens.(58) Should not greater use be made of an adapted form of it to mark that most important stage at which a new disciple of Jesus Christ accepts with full awareness and courage the content of what will from then on be the object of his earnest study?

In the Creed of the People of God, proclaimed at the close of the 19th centenary of the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul, my predecessor Paul VI decided to bring together the essential elements of the Catholic Faith, especially those that presented greater difficulty or risked being ignored.(59) This is a sure point of reference for the content of catechesis.

Factors That Must Not Be Neglected

29. In the third chapter of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, the same Pope recalled "the essential content, the living substance" of evangelization.(60) Catechesis, too, must keep in mind each of these factors and also the living synthesis of which they are part.(61)

I shall therefore limit myself here simply to recalling one or two points.(62) Anyone can see, for instance, how important it is to make the child, the adolescent, the person advancing in faith understand "what can be known about God"(63); to be able in a way to tell them: "What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you"(64); to set forth briefly for them(65) the mystery of the Word of God become man and accomplishing man's salvation by His Passover, that is to say, through His death and resurrection, but also by His preaching, by the signs worked by Him, and by the sacraments of His permanent presence in our midst. The synod fathers were indeed inspired when they asked that care should be taken not to reduce Christ to His humanity alone or His message to a no more than earthly dimension, but that He should be recognized as the Son of God, the Mediator giving us in the Spirit free access to the Father.(66)

It is important to display before the eyes of the intelligence and of the heart, in the light of faith, the sacrament of Christ's presence constituted by the mystery of the Church, which is an assembly of human beings who are sinners and yet have at the same time been sanctified and who make up the family of God gathered together by the Lord under the guidance of those whom "the Holy Spirit has made...guardians, to feed the Church of God."(67)

It is important to explain that the history of the human race, marked as it is by grace and sin, greatness and misery, is taken up by God in His Son Jesus, "foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come."(68)

Finally, it is important to reveal frankly the demands - demands that involve self-denial but also joy - made by what the Apostle Paul liked to call "newness of life,"(69) "a new creation,"(70) being in Christ, (71) and "eternal life in Christ Jesus,"(72) which is the same thing as life in the world but lived in accordance with the beatitudes and called to an extension and transfiguration hereafter.

Hence the importance in catechesis of personal moral commitments in keeping with the Gospel and of Christian attitudes, whether heroic or very simple, to life and the world - what we call the Christian or evangelical virtues. Hence also, in its endeavor to educate faith, the concern of catechesis not to omit but to clarify properly realities such as man's activity for his integral liberation, (73) the search for a society with greater solidarity and fraternity, the fight for justice and the building of peace.

Besides, it is not to be thought that this dimension of catechesis is altogether new. As early as the patristic age, St. Ambrose and St. John Chrysostom - to quote only them - gave prominence to the social consequences of the demands made by the Gospel. Close to our own time, the catechism of St. Pius X explicitly listed oppressing the poor and depriving workers of their just wages among the sins that cry to God for vengeance.(74) Since *Rerum novarum* especially, social concern has been actively present in the catechetical teaching of the Popes and the Bishops. Many synod fathers rightly insisted that the rich heritage of the Church's social teaching should, in appropriate forms, find a place in the general catechetical education of the faithful.

Integrity of Content

30. With regard to the content of catechesis, three important points deserve special attention today.

The first point concerns the integrity of the content. In order that the sacrificial offering of his or her faith (75) should be perfect, the person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive "the word of faith"(76) not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor. Unfaithfulness on some point to the integrity of the message means a dangerous weakening of catechesis and putting at risk the results that Christ and the ecclesial community have a right to expect from it. It is certainly not by chance that the final command of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel bears the mark of a certain entirety: "All authority...has been given to me...make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all...I am with you always." This is why, when a person first becomes aware of "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus,"(77) whom he has encountered by faith, and has the perhaps unconscious desire to know Him more extensively and better, "hearing about Him and being taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, (78) there is no valid pretext for refusing Him any part whatever of that knowledge. What kind of catechesis would it be that failed to give their full place to man's creation and sin; to God's plan of redemption and its long, loving preparation and realization; to the incarnation of the Son of God; to Mary, the Immaculate One, the Mother of God, ever Virgin, raised body and soul to the glory of heaven, and to her role in the mystery of salvation; to the mystery of lawlessness at work in our lives(79) and the power of God freeing us from it; to the need for penance and asceticism; to the sacramental and liturgical actions; to the reality of the Eucharistic Presence; to participation in divine life here and hereafter, and so on? Thus, no true catechist can lawfully, on his own initiative, make a selection of what he considers important in the deposit of faith as opposed to what he considers unimportant, so as to teach the one and reject the other.

By Means of Suitable Pedagogical Methods

31. This gives rise to a second remark. It can happen that in the present situation of catechesis reasons of method or pedagogy suggest that the communication of the riches of the content of catechesis should be organized in one way rather than another. Besides, integrity does not dispense from balance and from the organic hierarchical character through which the truths to be taught, the norms to be transmitted, and the ways of Christian life to be indicated will be given the proper importance due to each. It can also happen that a particular sort of language proves preferable for

transmitting this content to a particular individual or group. The choice made will be a valid one to the extent that, far from being dictated by more or less subjective theories or prejudices stamped with a certain ideology, it is inspired by the humble concern to stay closer to a content that must remain intact. The method and language used must truly be means for communicating the whole and not just a part of "the words of eternal life"(80) and the "ways of life."(81)

Ecumenical Dimension of Catechesis

32. The great movement, one certainly inspired by the Spirit of Jesus, that has for some years been causing the Catholic Church to seek with other Christian Churches or confessions the restoration of the perfect unity willed by the Lord, brings me to the question of the ecumenical character of catechesis. This movement reached its full prominence in the Second Vatican Council(82) and since then has taken on a new extension within the Church, as is shown concretely by the impressive series of events and initiatives with which everyone is now familiar.

Catechesis cannot remain aloof from this ecumenical dimension, since all the faithful are called to share, according to their capacity and place in the Church, in the movement towards unity.(83)

Catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if, while not ceasing to teach that the fullness of the revealed truths and of the means of salvation instituted by Christ is found in the Catholic Church, (84) it does so with sincere respect, in words and in deeds, for the ecclesial communities that are not in perfect communion with this Church.

In this context, it is extremely important to give a correct and fair presentation of the other Churches and ecclesial communities that the Spirit of Christ does not refrain from using as means of salvation; "moreover, some, even very many, of the outstanding elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church herself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church."(85) Among other things this presentation will help Catholics to have both a deeper understanding of their own faith and a better acquaintance with and esteem for their other Christian brethren, thus facilitating the shared search for the way towards full unity in the whole truth. It should also help non-Catholics to have a better knowledge and appreciation of the Catholic Church and her conviction of being the "universal help toward salvation."

Catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if, in addition, it creates and fosters a true desire for unity. This will be true all the more if it inspires serious efforts - including the effort of self-purification in the humility and the fervor of the Spirit in order to clear the ways - with a view not to facile irenics made up of omissions and concessions on the level of doctrine, but to perfect unity, when and by what means the Lord will wish.

Finally, catechesis will have an ecumenical dimension if it tries to prepare Catholic children and young people, as well as adults, for living in contact with non-Catholics, affirming their Catholic identity while respecting the faith of others.

Ecumenical Collaboration in the Field of Catechesis

33. In situations of religious plurality, the Bishops can consider it opportune or even necessary to have certain experiences of collaboration in the field of catechesis between Catholics and other Christians, complementing the normal catechesis that must in any case be given to Catholics. Such experiences have a theological foundation in the elements shared by all Christians.(86) But the communion of faith between Catholics and other Christians is not complete and perfect; in certain cases there are even profound divergences. Consequently, this ecumenical collaboration is by its very nature limited: it must never mean a "reduction" to a common minimum. Furthermore, catechesis does not consist merely in the teaching of doctrine: it also means initiating into the whole of Christian life, bringing full participation in the sacraments of the Church. Therefore, where there is an experience of ecumenical collaboration in the field of catechesis, care must be taken that the education of Catholics in the Catholic Church should be well ensured in matters of doctrine and of Christian living.

During the synod, a certain number of Bishops drew attention to what they referred to as the increasingly frequent cases in which the civil authority or other circumstances impose on the schools in some countries a common instruction in the Christian religion, with common textbooks, class periods, etc., for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Needless to say, this is not true catechesis. But this teaching also has ecumenical importance when it presents Christian doctrine fairly and honestly. In cases where circumstances impose it, it is important that in addition a specifically Catholic catechesis should be ensured with all the greater care.

The Question of Textbooks Dealing with the Various Religions

34. At this point another observation must be made on the same lines but from a different point of view. State schools sometimes provide their pupils with books that for cultural reasons (history, morals or literature) present the various religions, including the Catholic religion. An objective presentation of historical events, of the different religions and of the various Christian confessions can make a contribution here to better mutual understanding. Care will then be taken that every effort is made to ensure that the presentation is truly objective and free from the distorting influence of ideological and political systems or of prejudices with claims to be scientific. In any case, such schoolbooks can obviously not be considered catechetical works: they lack both the witness of believers stating their faith to other believers and an understanding of the Christian mysteries and of what is specific about Catholicism, as these are understood within the faith.

V. - EVERYBODY NEEDS TO BE CATECHIZED

The Importance of Children and the Young

35. The theme designated by my predecessor Paul VI for the fourth general assembly of the synod of Bishops was: "Catechesis in our time, with special reference to the catechesis of children and young people." The increase in the number of young people is without doubt a fact charged with hope and at the same time with anxiety for a large part of the contemporary world. In certain countries, especially those of the Third World, more than half of the population is under 25 or 30 years of age. This means millions and millions of children and young people preparing for their adult future. And there is more than just the factor of numbers: recent events, as well as the daily news, tell us that, although this countless multitude of young people is here and there dominated by uncertainty and fear, seduced by the escapism of indifference or drugs, or tempted by nihilism and violence, nevertheless it constitutes in its major part the great force that amid many hazards is set on building the civilization of the future.

In our pastoral care we ask ourselves: How are we to reveal Jesus Christ, God made man, to this multitude of children and young people, reveal Him not just in the fascination of a first fleeting encounter but through an acquaintance, growing deeper and clearer daily, with Him, His message, the plan of God that He has revealed, the call He addresses to each person, and the kingdom that He wishes to establish in this world with the "little flock"(87) of those who believe in Him, a kingdom that will be complete only in eternity? How are we to enable them to know the meaning, the import, the fundamental requirements, the law of love, the promises and the hopes of this kingdom?

There are many observations that could be made about the special characteristics that catechesis assumes at the different stages of life.

Infants

36. One moment that is often decisive is the one at which the very young child receives the first elements of catechesis from its parents and the family surroundings. These elements will perhaps be no more than a simple revelation of a good and provident Father in heaven to whom the child learns to turn its heart. The very short prayers that the child learns to lip will be the start of a loving dialogue with this hidden God whose word it will then begin to hear. I cannot insist too strongly on this early initiation by Christian parents in which the child's faculties are integrated into a living relationship with God. It is a work of prime importance. It demands great love and profound respect for the child who has a right to a simple and true presentation of the Christian faith.

Children

37. For the child there comes soon, at school and in Church, in institutions connected with the parish or with the spiritual care of the Catholic or state school not only an introduction into a wider social circle, but also the moment for a catechesis aimed at inserting him or her organically into the life of the Church, a moment that includes an immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacraments. This catechesis is didactic in character, but is directed towards the giving of witness in the faith. It is an initial catechesis but not a fragmentary one, since it will have to reveal, although in an elementary way, all the principal mysteries of faith and their effects on the child's moral and religious life. It is a catechesis that gives meaning to the sacraments, but at the same time it receives from the experience of the sacraments a living dimension that keeps it from remaining merely doctrinal, and it communicates to the child the joy of being a witness to Christ in ordinary life.

Adolescents

38. Next comes puberty and adolescence, with all the greatness and dangers which that age brings. It is the time of discovering oneself and one's own inner world, the time of generous plans, the time when the feeling of love awakens, with the biological impulses of sexuality, the time of the desire to be together, the time of a particularly intense joy connected with the exhilarating discovery of life. But often it is also the age of deeper questioning, of anguished or even frustrating searching, of a certain mistrust of others and dangerous introspection, and the age sometimes of the first experiences of setbacks and of disappointments. Catechesis cannot ignore these changeable aspects of this delicate period of life. A catechesis capable of leading the adolescent to reexamine his or her life and to engage in dialogue, a catechesis that does not ignore the adolescent's great questions - self-giving, belief, love and the means of expressing it constituted by sexuality - such a catechesis can be decisive. The revelation of Jesus Christ as a Friend, Guide and Model, capable of being admired but also imitated; the revelation of this message which provides an answer to the fundamental questions, the revelation of the loving plan of Christ the Savior as the incarnation of the only authentic love and as the possibility of uniting the human race - all this can provide the basis for genuine education in faith. Above all, the mysteries of the passion and death of Jesus, through which, according to St. Paul, he merited His

glorious resurrection, can speak eloquently to the adolescent's conscience and heart and cast light on his first sufferings and on the suffering of the world that he is discovering.

The Young

39. With youth comes the moment of the first great decisions. Although the young may enjoy the support of the members of their family and their friends, they have to rely on themselves and their own conscience and must ever more frequently and decisively assume responsibility for their destiny. Good and evil, grace and sin, life and death will more and more confront one another within them, not just as moral categories but chiefly as fundamental options which they must accept or reject lucidly, conscious of their own responsibility. It is obvious that a catechesis which denounces selfishness in the name of generosity, and which without any illusory over-simplification presents the Christian meaning of work, of the common good, of justice and charity, a catechesis on international peace and on the advancement of human dignity, on development, and on liberation, as these are presented in recent documents of the Church, (88) fittingly completes in the minds of the young the good catechesis on strictly religious realities which is never to be neglected. Catechesis then takes on considerable importance, since it is the time when the Gospel can be presented, understood and accepted as capable of giving meaning to life and thus of inspiring attitudes that would have no other explanation, such as self-sacrifice, detachment, forbearance, justice, commitment, reconciliation, a sense of the Absolute and the unseen. All these are traits that distinguish a young person from his or her companions as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Catechesis thus prepares for the important Christian commitments of adult life. For example, it is certain that many vocations to the priesthood and religious life have their origin during a well-imparted catechesis in infancy and adolescence.

From infancy until the threshold of maturity, catechesis is thus a permanent school of the faith and follows the major stages of life, like a beacon lighting the path of the child, the adolescent and the young person.

The Adaptation of Catechesis for Young People

40. It is reassuring to note that, during the fourth general assembly of the synod and the following years, the Church has widely shared in concern about how to impart catechesis to children and young people. God grant that the attention thus aroused will long endure in the Church's consciousness. In this way the synod has been valuable for the whole Church by seeking to trace with the greatest possible precision the complex characteristics of present-day youth; by showing that these young persons speak a language into which the message of Jesus must be translated with patience and wisdom and without betrayal; by demonstrating that, in spite of appearances, these young people have within them, even though often in a confused way, not just a readiness or openness, but rather a real desire to know "Jesus...who is called Christ" (89); and by indicating that if the work of catechesis is to be carried out rigorously and seriously, it is today more difficult and tiring than ever before, because of the obstacles and difficulties of all kinds that it meets; but it is also more consoling, because of the depth of the response it receives from children and young people. This is a treasure which the Church can and should count on in the years ahead.

The Handicapped

41. Children and young people who are physically or mentally handicapped come first to mind. They have a right, like others of their age, to know "the mystery of faith." The greater difficulties that they encounter give greater merit to their efforts and to those of their teachers. It is pleasant to see that Catholic organizations especially dedicated to young handicapped people contributed to the synod a renewed desire to deal better with this important problem. They deserve to be given warm encouragement in this endeavor.

Young People Without Religious Support

42. My thoughts turn next to the ever increasing number of children and young people born and brought up in a non-Christian or at least non-practicing home but who wish to know the Christian faith. They must be ensured a catechesis attuned to them, so that they will be able to grow in faith and live by it more and more, in spite of the lack of support or even the opposition they meet in their surroundings.

Adults

43. To continue the series of receivers of catechesis, I cannot fail to emphasize now one of the most constant concerns of the synod fathers, a concern imposed with vigor and urgency by present experiences throughout the world: I am referring to the central problem of the catechesis of adults. This is the principal form of catechesis, because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully

developed form.⁽⁹⁰⁾ The Christian community cannot carry out a permanent catechesis without the direct and skilled participation of adults, whether as receivers or as promoters of catechetical activity. The world, in which the young are called to live and to give witness to the faith which catechesis seeks to deepen and strengthen, is governed by adults. The faith of these adults too should continually be enlightened, stimulated and renewed, so that it may pervade the temporal realities in their charge. Thus, for catechesis to be effective, it must be permanent, and it would be quite useless if it stopped short at the threshold of maturity, since catechesis, admittedly under another form, proves no less necessary for adults.

Quasi-Catechumens

44. Among the adults who need catechesis, our pastoral missionary concern is directed to those who were born and reared in areas not yet Christianized, and who have never been able to study deeply the Christian teaching that the circumstances of life have at a certain moment caused them to come across. It is also directed to those who in childhood received a catechesis suited to their age but who later drifted away from all religious practice and as adults find themselves with religious knowledge of a rather childish kind. It is likewise directed to those who feel the effects of a catechesis received early in life but badly imparted or badly assimilated. It is directed to those who, although they were born in a Christian country or in sociologically Christian surroundings, have never been educated in their faith and, as adults are really catechumens.

Diversified and Complementary Forms of Catechesis

45. Catechesis is therefore for adults of every age, including the elderly-persons who deserve particular attention in view of their experience and their problems - no less than for children, adolescents and the young. We should also mention migrants, those who are by-passed by modern developments, those who live in areas of large cities which are often without churches, buildings and suitable organization, and other such groups. It is desirable that initiatives meant to give all these groups a Christian formation, with appropriate means (audio-visual aids, booklets, discussions, lectures), should increase in number, enabling many adults to fill the gap left by an insufficient or deficient catechesis, to complete harmoniously at a higher level their childhood catechesis, or even to prepare themselves enough in this field to be able to help others in a more serious way.

It is important also that the catechesis of children and young people, permanent catechesis, and the catechesis of adults should not be separate watertight compartments. It is even more important that there should be no break between them. On the contrary, their perfect complementarity must be fostered: adults have much to give to young people and children in the field of catechesis, but they can also receive much from them for the growth of their own Christian lives.

It must be restated that nobody in the Church of Jesus Christ should feel excused from receiving catechesis. This is true even of young seminarians and young religious, and of all those called to the task of being pastors and catechists. They will fulfill this task all the better if they are humble pupils of the Church, the great giver as well as the great receiver of catechesis.

VI. - SOME WAYS AND MEANS OF CATECHESIS

Communications Media

46. From the oral teaching by the apostles and the letters circulating among the churches down to the most modern means, catechesis has not ceased to look for the most suitable ways and means for its mission, with the active participation of the communities and at the urging of the pastors. This effort must continue.

I think immediately of the great possibilities offered by the means of social communication and the means of group communication: television, radio, the press, records, tape recordings-the whole series of audio-visual means. The achievements in these spheres are such as to encourage the greatest hope. Experience shows, for example, the effect had by instruction given on radio or television, when it combines a high aesthetic level and rigorous fidelity to the magisterium. The Church now has many opportunities for considering these questions - as, for instance, on Social Communications Days - and it is not necessary to speak of them at length here, in spite of their prime importance.

Utilization of Various Places, Occasions and Gatherings

47. I am also thinking of various occasions of special value which are exactly suitable for catechesis: for example, diocesan, regional or national pilgrimages, which gain from being centered on some judiciously chosen theme based on the life of Christ, of the Blessed Virgin or of the saints. Then there are the traditional missions, often too hastily dropped but irreplaceable for the periodic and vigorous renewal of Christian life - they should be revived and brought up to date. Again there are Bible-study groups, which ought to go beyond exegesis and lead their members to live by the Word of God. Yet other instances are the meetings of ecclesial basic communities, in so far as they correspond to the criteria laid down in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*.⁽⁹¹⁾ I may also mention the youth groups that, under varying names and forms but always with the purpose of making Jesus Christ known and of living by the Gospel,

are in some areas multiplying and flourishing in a sort of springtime that is very comforting for the Church. These include Catholic action groups, charitable groups, prayer groups and Christian meditation groups. These groups are a source of great hope for the Church of tomorrow. But, in the name of Jesus, I exhort the young people who belong to them, their leaders, and the priests who devote the best part of their ministry to them: no matter what it costs, do not allow these groups-which are exceptional occasions for meeting others, and which are blessed with such riches of friendship and solidarity among the young, of joy and enthusiasm, of reflection on events and facts - do not allow them to lack serious study of Christian doctrine. If they do, they will be in danger - a danger that has unfortunately proved only too real - of disappointing their members and also the Church.

The catechetical endeavor that is possible in these various surroundings, and in many others besides, will have all the greater chance of being accepted and bearing fruit if it respects their individual nature. By becoming part of them in the right way, it will achieve the diversity and complementarity of approach that will enable it to develop all the riches of its concept, with its three dimensions of word, memorial and witness-doctrine, celebration and commitment in living - which the synod Message to the People of God emphasized.(92)

The Homily

48. This remark is even more valid for the catechesis given in the setting of the liturgy, especially at the Eucharistic assembly. Respecting the specific nature and proper cadence of this setting, the homily takes up again the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfillment. At the same time it encourages the Lord's disciples to begin anew each day their spiritual journey in truth, adoration and thanksgiving. Accordingly, one can say that catechetical teaching too finds its source and its fulfillment in the Eucharist, within the whole circle of the liturgical year. Preaching, centered upon the Bible texts, must then in its own way make it possible to familiarize the faithful with the whole of the mysteries of the faith and with the norms of Christian living. Much attention must be given to the homily: it should be neither too long nor too short; it should always be carefully prepared, rich in substance and adapted to the hearers, and reserved to ordained ministers. The homily should have its place not only in every Sunday and feast-day Eucharist, but also in the celebration of baptisms, penitential liturgies, marriages and funerals. This is one of the benefits of the liturgical renewal.

Catechetical Literature

49. Among these various ways and means - all the Church's activities have a catechetical dimension-catechetical works, far from losing their essential importance, acquire fresh significance. One of the major features of the renewal of catechetics today is the rewriting and multiplication of catechetical books taking place in many parts of the Church. Numerous very successful works have been produced and are a real treasure in the service of catechetical instruction. But it must be humbly and honestly recognized that this rich flowering has brought with it articles and publications which are ambiguous and harmful to young people and to the life of the Church. In certain places, the desire to find the best forms of expression or to keep up with fashions in pedagogical methods has often enough resulted in certain catechetical works which bewilder the young and even adults, either by deliberately or unconsciously omitting elements essential to the Church's faith, or by attributing excessive importance to certain themes at the expense of others, or, chiefly, by a rather horizontalist overall view out of keeping with the teaching of the Church's magisterium. Therefore, it is not enough to multiply catechetical works. In order that these works may correspond with their aim, several conditions are essential:

- a) they must be linked with the real life of the generation to which they are addressed, showing close acquaintance with its anxieties and questionings, struggles and hopes;
- b) they must try to speak a language comprehensible to the generation in question;
- c) they must make a point of giving the whole message of Christ and His Church, without neglecting or distorting anything, and in expounding it they will follow a line and structure that highlights what is essential;
- d) they must really aim to give to those who use them a better knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, aimed at true conversion and a life more in conformity with God's will.

Catechisms

50. All those who take on the heavy task of preparing these catechetical tools, especially catechism texts, can do so only with the approval of the pastors who have the authority to give it, and taking their inspiration as closely as possible from the General Catechetical Directory, which remains the standard of reference.(93)

In this regard, I must warmly encourage episcopal conferences of the whole world to undertake, patiently but resolutely, the considerable work to be accomplished in agreement with the Apostolic See in order to prepare genuine catechisms which will be faithful to the essential content of revelation and up to date in method, and which will be capable of educating the Christian generations of the future to a sturdy faith.

This brief mention of ways and means of modern catechetics does not exhaust the wealth of suggestions worked out by the synod fathers. It is comforting to think that at the present time every country is seeing valuable collaboration for a more organic and more secure renewal of these aspects of catechetics. There can be no doubt that the Church will find the experts and the right means for responding, with God's grace, to the complex requirements of communicating with the people of today.

VII. - HOW TO IMPART CATECHESIS

Diversity of Methods

51. The age and the intellectual development of Christians, their degree of ecclesial and spiritual maturity and many other personal circumstances demand that catechesis should adopt widely differing methods for the attainment of its specific aim: education in the faith. On a more general level, this variety is also demanded by the social and cultural surrounding in which the Church carries out her catechetical work.

The variety in the methods used is a sign of life and a resource. That is how it was considered by the fathers of the fourth general assembly of the synod, although they also drew attention to the conditions necessary for that variety to be useful and not harmful to the unity of the teaching of the one Faith.

At the Service of Revelation and Conversion

52. The first question of a general kind that presents itself here concerns the danger and the temptation to mix catechetical teaching unduly with overt or masked ideological views, especially political and social ones, or with personal political options. When such views get the better of the - central message to be transmitted, to the point of obscuring it and putting it in second place or even using it to further their own ends, catechesis then becomes radically distorted. The synod rightly insisted on the need for catechesis to remain above one-sided divergent trends - to avoid "dichotomies" - even in the field of theological interpretation of such questions. It is on the basis of revelation that catechesis will try to set its course, revelation as transmitted by the universal magisterium of the Church, in its solemn or ordinary form. This revelation tells of a creating and redeeming God, Whose Son has come among us in our flesh and enters not only into each individual's personal history but into human history itself, becoming its center. Accordingly, this revelation tells of the radical chance of man and the universe, of all that makes up the web of human life under the influence of the Good News of Jesus Christ. If conceived in this way, catechesis goes beyond every form of formalistic moralism, although it will include true Christian moral teaching. Chiefly, it goes beyond any kind of temporal, social or political "messianism." It seeks to arrive at man's innermost being.

The Message Embodied in Cultures

53. Now a second question. As I said recently to the members of the Biblical Commission: "The term 'acculturation' or 'inculturation' may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of the Incarnation."⁽⁹⁴⁾ We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery⁽⁹⁵⁾ and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought. Two things must however be kept in mind.

On the one hand the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.

On the other hand, the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates. When that power enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements. There would be no catechesis if it were the Gospel that had to change when it came into contact with the cultures.

To forget this would simply amount to what St. Paul very forcefully calls "emptying the cross of Christ of its power."⁽⁹⁶⁾

It is a different matter to take, with wise discernment, certain elements, religious or otherwise, that form part of the cultural heritage of a human group and use them to help its members to understand better the whole of the Christian mystery. Genuine catechists know that catechesis "takes flesh" in the various cultures and milieux: one has only to think of the peoples with their great differences, of modern youth, of the great variety of circumstances in which people find themselves today. But they refuse to accept an impoverishment of catechesis through a renunciation or obscuring of its message, by adaptations, even in language, that would endanger the "precious deposit" of the faith, ⁽⁹⁷⁾ or by

concessions in matters of faith or morals. They are convinced that true catechesis eventually enriches these cultures by helping them to go beyond the defective or even inhuman features in them, and by communicating to their legitimate values the fullness of Christ.(98)

The Contribution of Popular Devotion

54. Another question of method concerns the utilization in catechetical instruction of valid elements in popular piety. I have in mind devotions practiced by the faithful in certain regions with moving fervor and purity of intention, even if the faith underlying them needs to be purified or rectified in many aspects. I have in mind certain easily understood prayers that many simple people are fond of repeating. I have in mind certain acts of piety practiced with a sincere desire to do penance or to please the Lord. Underlying most of these prayers and practices, besides elements that should be discarded, there are other elements which, if they were properly used, could serve very well to help people advance towards knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of His message: the love and mercy of God, the Incarnation of Christ, His redeeming cross and resurrection, the activity of the Spirit in each Christian and in the Church, the mystery of the hereafter, the evangelical virtues to be practiced, the presence of the Christian in the world, etc. And why should we appeal to non-Christian or even anti-Christian elements refusing to build on elements which, even if they need to be revised or improved, have something Christian at their root?

Memorization

55. The final methodological question the importance of which should at least be referred to-one that was debated several times in the synod-is that of memorization. In the beginnings of Christian catechesis, which coincided with a civilization that was mainly oral, recourse was had very freely to memorization. Catechesis has since then known a long tradition of learning the principal truths by memorizing. We are all aware that this method can present certain disadvantages, not the least of which is that it lends itself to insufficient or at times almost non-existent assimilation, reducing all knowledge to formulas that are repeated without being properly understood. These disadvantages and the different characteristics of our own civilization have in some places led to the almost complete suppression - according to some, alas, the definitive suppression - of memorization in catechesis. And yet certain very authoritative voices made themselves heard on the occasion of the fourth general assembly of the synod, calling for the restoration of a judicious balance between reflection and spontaneity, between dialogue and silence, between written work and memory work. Moreover certain cultures still set great value on memorization.

At a time when, in non-religious teaching in certain countries, more and more complaints are being made about the unfortunate consequences of disregarding the human faculty of memory, should we not attempt to put this faculty back into use in an intelligent and even an original way in catechesis, all the more since the celebration or "memorial" of the great events of the history of salvation require a precise knowledge of them? A certain memorization of the words of Jesus, of important Bible passages, of the Ten Commandments, of the formulas of profession of the faith, of the liturgical texts, of the essential prayers, of key doctrinal ideas, etc., far from being opposed to the dignity of young Christians, or constituting an obstacle to personal dialogue with the Lord, is a real need, as the synod fathers forcefully recalled. We must be realists. The blossoms, if we may call them that, of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memory - less catechesis. What is essential is that the texts that are memorized must at the same time be taken in and gradually understood in depth, in order to become a source of Christian life on the personal level and the community level.

The plurality of methods in contemporary catechesis can be a sign of vitality and ingenuity. In any case, the method chosen must ultimately be referred to a law that is fundamental for the whole of the Church's life: the law of fidelity to God and of fidelity to man in a single loving attitude.

VIII. - THE JOY OF FAITH IN A TROUBLED WORLD

Affirming Christian Identity

56. We live in a difficult world in which the anguish of seeing the best creations of man slip away from him and turn against him creates a climate of uncertainty.(99) In this world catechesis should help Christians to be, for their own joy and the service of all, "light" and "salt."(100) Undoubtedly this demands that catechesis should strengthen them in their identity and that it should continually separate itself from the surrounding atmosphere of hesitation, uncertainty and insipidity. Among the many difficulties, each of them a challenge for faith, I shall indicate a few in order to assist catechesis in overcoming them.

In an Indifferent World

57. A few years ago, there was much talk of the secularized world, the post-Christian era. Fashion changes, but a profound reality remains. Christians today must be formed to live in a world which largely ignores God or which, in religious matters, in place of an exacting and fraternal dialogue, stimulating for all, too often flounders in a debasing indifferentism, if it does not remain in a scornful attitude of "suspicion" in the name of the progress it has made in the field of scientific "explanations." To "hold on" in this world, to offer to all a "dialogue of salvation"(101) in which each person feels respected in his or her most basic dignity, the dignity of one who is seeking God, we need a catechesis which trains the young people and adults of our communities to remain clear and consistent in their faith, to affirm serenely their Christian and Catholic identity, to "see him who is invisible"(102) and to adhere so firmly to the absoluteness of God that they can be witnesses to Him in a materialistic civilization that denies Him.

With the Original Pedagogy of the Faith

58. The irreducible originality of Christian identity has for corollary and condition no less original a pedagogy of the faith. Among the many prestigious sciences of man that are nowadays making immense advances, pedagogy is certainly one of the most important. The attainments of the other sciences - biology, psychology, sociology - are providing it with valuable elements. The science of education and the art of teaching are continually being subjected to review, with a view to making them better adapted or more effective, with varying degrees of success. There is also a pedagogy of faith, and the good that it can do for catechesis cannot be overstated. In fact, it is natural that techniques perfected and tested for education in general should be adapted for the service of education in the faith. However, account must always be taken of the absolute originality of faith. Pedagogy of faith is not a question of transmitting human knowledge, even of the highest kind; it is a question of communicating God's revelation in its entirety. Throughout sacred history, especially in the Gospel, God Himself used a pedagogy that must continue to be a model for the pedagogy of faith. A technique is of value in catechesis only to the extent that it serves the faith that is to be transmitted and learned; otherwise it is of no value.

Language Suited to the Service of the Credo

59. A problem very close to the preceding one is that of language. This is obviously a burning question today. It is paradoxical to see that, while modern studies, for instance in the field of communication, semantics and symbology, attribute extraordinary importance to language, nevertheless language is being misused today for ideological mystification, for mass conformity in thought and for reducing man to the level of an object. All this has extensive influence in the field of catechesis. For catechesis has a pressing obligation to speak a language suited to today's children and young people in general and to many other categories of people-the language of students, intellectuals and scientists; the language of the illiterate or of people of simple culture; the language of the handicapped, and so on. St. Augustine encountered this same problem and contributed to its solution for his own time with his wellknown work *De Catechizandis Rudibus*. In catechesis as in theology, there is no doubt that the question of language is of the first order. But there is good reason for recalling here that catechesis cannot admit any language that would result in altering the substance of the content of the Creed, under any pretext whatever, even a pretended scientific one. Deceitful or beguiling language is no better. On the contrary, the supreme rule is that the great advances in the science of language must be capable of being placed at the service of catechesis so as to enable it really to "tell" or "communicate" to the child, the adolescent, the young people and adults of today the whole content of doctrine without distortion.

Research and Certainty of Faith

60. A more subtle challenge occasionally comes from the very way of conceiving faith. Certain contemporary philosophical schools, which seem to be exercising a strong influence on some theological currents and, through them, on pastoral practice, like to emphasize that the fundamental human attitude is that of seeking the infinite, a seeking that never attains its object. In theology, this view of things will state very categorically that faith is not certainty but questioning, not clarity but a leap in the dark.

These currents of thought certainly have the advantage of reminding us that faith concerns things not yet in our possession, since they are hoped for; that as yet we see only "in a mirror dimly"(103); and that God dwells always in inaccessible light.(104) They help us to make the Christian faith not the attitude of one who has already arrived, but a journey forward as with Abraham. For all the more reason one must avoid presenting as certain things which are not. However, we must not fall into the opposite extreme, as too often happens. The Letter to the Hebrews says that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."(105) Although we are not in full possession, we do have an assurance and a conviction. When educating children, adolescents and young people, let us not give them too negative an idea of faith - as if it were absolute non-knowing, a kind of blindness, a world of darkness - but let us show them that the humble yet courageous seeking of the believer, far from having its starting point in nothingness, in plain self-deception, in fallible opinions or in uncertainty, is based on the Word of God who cannot deceive or be

deceived, and is unceasingly built on the immovable rock of this Word. It is the search of the Magi under the guidance of a star, (106) the search of which Pascal, taking up a phrase of St. Augustine, wrote so profoundly: "You would not be searching for me, if you had not found me."(107)

It is also one of the aims of catechesis to give young catechumens the simple but solid certainties that will help them to seek to know the Lord more and better.

Catechesis and Theology

61. In this context, it seems important to me that the connection between catechesis and theology should be well understood.

Obviously this connection is profound and vital for those who understand the irreplaceable mission of theology in the service of Faith. Thus it is no surprise that every stirring in the field of theology also has repercussions in that of catechesis. In this period immediately after the Council, the Church is living through an important but hazardous time of theological research. The same must be said of hermeneutics with respect to exegesis.

Synod fathers from all continents dealt with this question in very frank terms: they spoke of the danger of an "unstable balance" passing from theology to catechesis and they stressed the need to do something about this difficulty. Pope Paul VI himself had dealt with the problem in no less frank terms in the introduction to his Solemn Profession of Faith(108) and in the apostolic exhortation marking the fifth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council.(109)

This point must again be insisted on. Aware of the influence that their research and their statements have on catechetical instruction, theologians and exegetes have a duty to take great care that people do not take for a certainty what on the contrary belongs to the area of questions of opinion or of discussion among experts. Catechists for their part must have the wisdom to pick from the field of theological research those points that can provide light for their own reflection and their teaching, drawing, like the theologians, from the true sources, in the light of the magisterium. They must refuse to trouble the minds of the children and young people, at this stage of their catechesis, with outlandish theories, useless questions and unproductive discussions, things that St. Paul often condemned in his pastoral letters.(110)

The most valuable gift that the Church can offer to the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith. Catechesis will teach this to them, and it will itself be the first to benefit from it: "The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly - and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being - must come to Christ with his unrest and uncertainty, and even his weakness and sinfulness, his life and death. He must, so to speak, enter into Christ with all his own self, he must `appropriate' Christ and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and redemption in order to find himself."(111)

IX. - THE TASK CONCERNS US ALL

Encouragement to All Responsible for Catechesis

62. Now, beloved brothers and sons and daughters, I would like my words, which are intended as a serious and heartfelt exhortation from me in my ministry as pastor of the universal Church, to set your hearts aflame, like the letters of St. Paul to his companions in the Gospel, Titus and Timothy, or like St. Augustine writing for the deacon Deogratias, when the latter lost heart before his task as a catechist, a real little treatise on the joy of catechizing.(112) Yes, I wish to sow courage, hope and enthusiasm abundantly in the hearts of all those many diverse people who are in charge of religious instruction and training for life in keeping with the Gospel.

Bishops

63. To begin with, I turn to my brother Bishops: The Second Vatican Council has already explicitly reminded you of your task in the catechetical area, (113) and the fathers of the fourth general assembly of the synod have also strongly underlined it.

Dearly beloved brothers, you have here a special mission within your Churches: You are beyond all others the ones primarily responsible for catechesis, the catechists par excellence. Together with the Pope, in the spirit of episcopal collegiality, you too have charge of catechesis throughout the Church. Accept therefore what I say to you from my heart.

I know that your ministry as Bishops is growing daily more complex and overwhelming. A thousand duties call you: from the training of new priests to being actively present within the lay communities, from the living, worthy celebration of the sacraments and acts of worship to concern for human advancement and the defense of human rights. But let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care whatever in any way. This concern will lead you to transmit personally to your faithful the doctrine of life. But it should also lead you to take on in your

diocese, in accordance with the plans of the episcopal conference to which you belong, the chief management of catechesis, while at the same time surrounding yourselves with competent and trustworthy assistants. Your principal role will be to bring about and maintain in your Churches a real passion for catechesis, a passion embodied in a pertinent and effective organization, putting into operation the necessary personnel, means and equipment, and also financial resources. You can be sure that if catechesis is done well in your local Churches, everything else will be easier to do. And needless to say, although your zeal must sometimes impose upon you the thankless task of denouncing deviations and correcting errors, it will much more often win for you the joy and consolation of seeing your Churches flourishing because catechesis is given in them as the Lord wishes.

Priests

64. For your part, priests, here you have a field in which you are the immediate assistants of your Bishops. The Council has called you "instructors in the faith"(114); there is no better way for you to be such instructors than by devoting your best efforts to the growth of your communities in the faith. Whether you are in charge of a parish, or are chaplains to primary or secondary schools or universities, or have responsibility for pastoral activity at any level, or are leaders of large or small communities, especially youth groups, the Church expects you to neglect nothing with a view to a well-organized and well-oriented catechetical effort. The deacons and other ministers that you may have the good fortune to have with you are your natural assistants in this. All believers have a right to catechesis; all pastors have the duty to provide it. I shall always ask civil leaders to respect the freedom of catechetical teaching; but with all my strength I beg you, ministers of Jesus Christ: Do not, for lack of zeal or because of some unfortunate preconceived idea, leave the faithful without catechesis. Let it not be said that "the children beg for food, but no one gives to them."(115)

Men and Women Religious

65. Many religious institutes for men and women came into being for the purpose of giving Christian education to children and young people, especially the most abandoned. Throughout history, men and women religious have been deeply committed to the Church's catechetical activity, doing particularly apposite and effective work. At a time when it is desired that the links between religious and pastors should be accentuated and consequently the active presence of religious communities and their members in the pastoral projects of the local Churches, I wholeheartedly exhort you, whose religious consecration should make you even more readily available for the Church's service, to prepare as well as possible for the task of catechesis according to the differing vocations of your institutes and the missions entrusted to you, and to carry this concern everywhere. Let the communities dedicate as much as possible of what ability and means they have to the specific work of catechesis.

Lay Catechists

66. I am anxious to give thanks in the Church's name to all of you, lay teachers of catechesis in the parishes, the men and the still more numerous women throughout the world who are devoting yourselves to the religious education of many generations. Your work is often lowly and hidden but it is carried out with ardent and generous zeal, and it is an eminent form of the lay apostolate, a form that is particularly important where for various reasons children and young people do not receive suitable religious training in the home. How many of us have received from people like you our first notions of catechism and our preparation for the sacrament of Penance, for our first Communion and Confirmation! The fourth general assembly of the synod did not forget you. I join with it in encouraging you to continue your collaboration for the life of the Church.

But the term "catechists" belongs above all to the catechists in mission lands. Born of families that are already Christian or converted at some time to Christianity and instructed by missionaries or by another catechist, they then consecrate their lives, year after year, to catechizing children and adults in their own country. Churches that are flourishing today would not have been built up without them. I rejoice at the efforts made by the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to improve more and more the training of these catechists. I gratefully recall the memory of those whom the Lord has already called to Himself. I beg the intercession of those whom my predecessors have raised to the glory of the altars. I wholeheartedly encourage those engaged in the work. I express the wish that many others may succeed them and that they may increase in numbers for a task so necessary for the missions.

In the Parish

67. I now wish to speak of the actual setting in which all these catechists normally work. I am returning this time, taking a more overall view, to the "places" for catechesis, some of which have already been mentioned in chapter VI: the parish, the family, the school, organizations.

It is true that catechesis can be given anywhere, but I wish to stress, in accordance with the desire of very many Bishops, that the parish community must continue to be the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis. Admittedly, in many countries the parish has been as it were shaken by the phenomenon of urbanization. Perhaps some have too easily accepted that the parish should be considered old-fashioned, if not doomed to disappear, in favor of more pertinent and effective small communities. Whatever one may think, the parish is still a major point of reference for the Christian people, even for the non-practicing. Accordingly, realism and wisdom demand that we continue along

the path aiming to restore to the parish, as needed, more adequate structures and, above all a new impetus through the increasing integration into it of qualified, responsible and generous members. This being said and taking into account the necessary diversity of places for catechesis (the parish as such, families taking in children and adolescents, chaplaincies for State schools, Catholic educational establishments, apostolic movements that give periods of catechesis, clubs open to youth in general, spiritual formation weekends, etc.), it is supremely important that all these catechetical channels should really converge on the same confession of faith, on the same membership of the Church, and on commitments in society lived in the same Gospel spirit: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father."(116) That is why every big parish or every group of parishes with small numbers has the serious duty to train people completely dedicated to providing catechetical leadership (priests, men and women religious, and lay people), to provide the equipment needed for catechesis under all aspects, to increase and adapt the places for catechesis to the extent that it is possible and useful to do so, and to be watchful about the quality of the religious formation of the various groups and their integration into the ecclesial community.

In short, without monopolizing or enforcing uniformity, the parish remains, as I have said, the pre-eminent place for catechesis. It must rediscover its vocation, which is to be a fraternal and welcoming family home, where those who have been baptized and confirmed become aware of forming the People of God. In that home, the bread of good doctrine and the Eucharistic Bread are broken for them in abundance, in the setting of the one act of worship(117); from that home they are sent out day by day to their apostolic mission in all the centers of activity of the life of the world.

In the Family

68. The family's catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. This special character has been rightly stressed by the Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council.(118) Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children's tenderest age, (119) is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, a bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events. But that is not enough: Christian parents must strive to follow and repeat, within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching received elsewhere. The fact that these truths about the main questions of faith and Christian living are thus repeated within a family setting impregnated with love and respect will often make it possible to influence the children in a decisive way for life. The parents themselves profit from the effort that this demands of them, for in a catechetical dialogue of this sort each individual both receives and gives.

Family catechesis therefore precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis. Furthermore, in places where anti-religious legislation endeavors even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, "the church of the home"(120) remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis. Thus there cannot be too great an effort on the part of Christian parents to prepare for this ministry of being their own children's catechists and to carry it out with tireless zeal. Encouragement must also be given to the individuals or institutions that, through person-to-person contacts, through meetings, and through all kinds of pedagogical means, help parents to perform their task: The service they are doing to catechesis is beyond price.

At School

69. Together with and in connection with the family, the school provides catechesis with possibilities that are not to be neglected. In the unfortunately decreasing number of countries in which it is possible to give education in the faith within the school framework, the Church has the duty to do so as well as possible. This of course concerns first and foremost the Catholic school: it would no longer deserve this title if, no matter how much it shone for its high level of teaching in non-religious matters, there were justification for reproaching it for negligence or deviation in strictly religious education. Let it not be said that such education will always be given implicitly and indirectly. The special character of the Catholic school, the underlying reason for it, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the education of the pupils. While Catholic establishments should respect freedom of conscience, that is to say, avoid burdening consciences from without by exerting physical or moral pressure, especially in the case of the religious activity of adolescents, they still have a grave duty to offer a religious training suited to the often widely varying religious situations of the pupils. They also have a duty to make them understand that, although God's call to serve Him in spirit and truth, in accordance with the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, does not apply constraint, it is nevertheless binding in conscience.

But I am also thinking of non-confessional and public schools. I express the fervent wish that, in response to a very clear right of the human person and of the family, and out of respect for everyone's religious freedom, all Catholic

pupils may be enabled to advance in their spiritual formation with the aid of a religious instruction dependent on the Church, but which, according to the circumstances of different countries, can be offered either by the school or in the setting of the school, or again within the framework of an agreement with the public authorities regarding school timetables, if catechesis takes place only in the parish or in another pastoral center. In fact, even in places where objective difficulties exist, it should be possible to arrange school timetables in such a way as to enable the Catholics to deepen their faith and religious experience, with qualified teachers, whether priests or lay people.

Admittedly, apart from the school, many other elements of life help in influencing the mentality of the young, for instance, recreation, social background and work surroundings. But those who study are bound to bear the stamp of their studies, to be introduced to cultural or moral values within the atmosphere of the establishment in which they are taught, and to be faced with many ideas met with in school. It is important for catechesis to take full account of this effect of the school on the pupils, if it is to keep in touch with the other elements of the pupil's knowledge and education; thus the Gospel will impregnate the mentality of the pupils in the field of their learning, and the harmonization of their culture will be achieved in the light of faith. Accordingly, I give encouragement to the priests, religious and lay people who are devoting themselves to sustaining these pupils' faith. This is moreover an occasion for me to reaffirm my firm conviction that to show respect for the Catholic faith of the young to the extent of facilitating its education, its implantation, its consolidation, its free profession and practice would certainly be to the honor of any government, whatever be the system on which it is based or the ideology from which it draws its inspiration.

Within Organizations

70. Lastly, encouragement must be given to the lay associations, movements and groups, whether their aim is the practice of piety, the direct apostolate, charity and relief work, or a Christian presence in temporal matters. They will all accomplish their objectives better, and serve the Church better, if they give an important place in their internal organization and their method of action to the serious religious training of their members. In this way every association of the faithful in the Church has by definition the duty to educate in the faith.

This makes more evident the role given to the laity in catechesis today, always under the pastoral direction of their Bishops, as the propositions left by the synod stressed several times.

Training Institutes

71. We must be grateful to the Lord for this contribution by the laity, but it is also a challenge to our responsibility as pastors, since these lay catechists must be carefully prepared for what is, if not a formally instituted ministry, at the very least a function of great importance in the Church. Their preparation calls on us to organize special centers and institutes, which are to be given assiduous attention by the Bishops. This is a field in which diocesan, interdiocesan or national cooperation proves fertile and fruitful. Here also the material aid provided by the richer Churches to their poor sisters can show the greatest effectiveness, for what better assistance can one Church give to another than to help it to grow as a Church with its own strength?

I would like to recall to all those who are working generously in the service of the Gospel, and to whom I have expressed here my lively encouragement, the instruction given by my venerated predecessor Paul VI: "As evangelizers, we must offer... the image of people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting-point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and disinterested search for truth. Yes, the destiny of evangelization is certainly bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church. This is a source of responsibility and also of comfort."(121)

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit, the Teacher Within

72. At the end of this apostolic exhortation, the gaze of my heart turns to Him who is the principle inspiring all catechetical work and all who do this work-the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, the Holy Spirit.

In describing the mission that this Spirit would have in the Church, Christ used the significant words: "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."(122) And He added: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...he will declare to you the things that are to come."(123)

The Spirit is thus promised to the Church and to each Christian as a teacher within, who, in the secret of the conscience and the heart, makes one understand what one has heard but was not capable of grasping: "Even now the Holy Spirit teaches the faithful," said St. Augustine in this regard, "in accordance with each one's spiritual capacity. And he sets their hearts aflame with greater desire according as each one progresses in the charity that makes him love what he already knows and desire what he has yet to know."(124)

Furthermore, the Spirit's mission is also to transform the disciples into witnesses to Christ: "He will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses."(125)

But this is not all. For St. Paul, who on this matter synthesizes a theology that is latent throughout the New Testament, it is the whole of one's "being a Christian, " the whole of the Christian life, the new life of the children of God, that constitutes a life in accordance with the Spirit.(126) Only the Spirit enables us to say to God: "Abba, Father."(127) Without the Spirit we cannot say: "Jesus is Lord."(128) From the Spirit come all the charisms that build up the Church, the community of Christians.(129)

In keeping with this, St. Paul gives each disciple of Christ the instruction: "Be filled with the Spirit."(130) St. Augustine is very explicit: "Both (our believing and our doing good) are ours because of the choice of our will, and yet both are gifts from the Spirit of faith and charity."(131)

Catechesis, which is growth in faith and the maturing of Christian life towards its fullness, is consequently a work of the Holy Spirit, a work that He alone can initiate and sustain in the Church.

This realization, based on the text quoted above and on many other passages of the New Testament, convinces us of two things.

To begin with, it is clear that, when carrying out her mission of giving catechesis, the Church-and also every individual Christian devoting himself to that mission within the Church and in her name- must be very much aware of acting as a living, pliant instrument of the Holy Spirit. To invoke this Spirit constantly, to be in communion with Him, to endeavor to know His authentic inspirations must be the attitude of the teaching Church and of every catechist.

Secondly, the deep desire to understand better the Spirit's action and to entrust oneself to Him more fully -at a time when "in the Church we are living an exceptionally favorable season of the Spirit, " as my predecessor Paul VI remarked in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*(132) - must bring about a catechetical awakening. For "renewal in the Spirit" will be authentic and will have real fruitfulness in the Church, not so much according as it gives rise to extraordinary charisms, but according as it leads the greatest possible number of the faithful, as they travel their daily paths, to make a humble, patient and persevering effort to know the mystery of Christ better and better, and to bear witness to it.

I invoke on the catechizing Church this Spirit of the Father and the Son, and I beg Him to renew catechetical dynamism in the Church.

Mary, Mother and Model of the Disciple

73. May the Virgin of Pentecost obtain this for us through her intercession. By a unique vocation, she saw her Son Jesus "increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favor."(133) As He sat on her lap and later as He listened to her throughout the hidden life at Nazareth, this Son, who was "the only Son from the Father, " "full of grace and truth, " was formed by her in human knowledge of the Scriptures and of the history of God's plan for His people, and in adoration of the Father.(134) She in turn was the first of His disciples. She was the first in time, because even when she found her adolescent Son in the temple she received from Him lessons that she kept in her heart.(135) She was the first disciple above all else because no one has been "taught by God"(136) to such depth. She was "both mother and disciple, " as St. Augustine said of her, venturing to add that her discipleship was more important for her than her motherhood.(137) There are good grounds for the statement made in the synod hall that Mary is "a living catechism" and "the mother and model of catechists."

May the presence of the Holy Spirit, through the prayers of Mary, grant the Church unprecedented enthusiasm in the catechetical work that is essential for her. Thus will she effectively carry out, at this moment of grace, her inalienable and universal mission, the mission given her by her Teacher: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."(138)

With my apostolic blessing.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on October 16, 1979, the second year of my pontificate.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

1. Cf. Mt. 28:19-20.
2. Cf. 1 Jn. 1
3. Cf. Jn. 20:31.
4. Cf. AAS 63 (1971), pp. 758-764.
5. Cf.44; cf. also 45-48 and 54: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 34-35; 35-38; 43.
6. According to the *Motu Proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo* of Sept. 15, 1965, the Synod of Bishops can come together in General Assembly, in extraordinary Assembly or in special assembly. In the present apostolic exhortation the words "synod, " "synod fathers" and "synod hall" always refer, unless otherwise indicated, to the fourth general assembly of the Synod of Bishops on catechesis, held in Rome in October 1977.

7. Cf. Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuuenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius, e Civitate Vaticana, 28-X-1977; cf. "L'Osservatore Romano, " October 30, 1977, pp. 3-4.
8. Cf. AAS 69 (1977), p. 633.
9. Jn. 1:14.
10. Jn. 14:6.
11. Eph. 3:9, 18-19.
12. Cf. Jn. 14:6.
13. Jn. 7:16. This is a theme dear to the fourth Gospel: cf. Jn. 3:34; 8:28, 12:49-50; 14:24; 17:8, 14.
14. 1 Cor. 11:23: the word "deliver" employed here by St. Paul was frequently repeated in the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi to describe the evangelizing activity of the Church, for example 4, 15, 78, 79.
15. Acts 1:1.
16. Mt. 26:55; cf. Jn. 18:20.
17. Mk. 10:1.
18. Mk. 1:22; cf. Mt. 5:2; 11:1; 13:54; 22:16; Mk. 2:13; 4:1; 6:2, 6; Lk. 5:3, 17; Jn. 7:14; 8:2, etc.
19. Lk. 23:5.
20. In nearly 50 places in the four Gospels, this title, inherited from the whole Jewish tradition but here given a new meaning that Christ Himself often seeks to emphasize, is attributed to Jesus.
21. Cf., among others, Mt. 8:19; Mk. 4:38; 9:38; 10:35; 13:1; Jn. 11:28.
22. Mt. 12:38.
23. Lk. 10:25; cf. Mt. 22:16.
24. Jn. 13:13-14; cf. also Mt. 10:25; 26:18 and parallel passages.
25. Mt. 23:8. St. Ignatius of Antioch takes up this affirmation and comments as follows: "We have received the faith; this is why we hold fast, in order to be recognized as disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Teacher" (Epistola ad Magnesios, IX, 2 Funk 1, 198).
26. Jn. 3:2.
27. The portrayal of Christ as Teacher goes back as far as the Roman Catacombs. It is frequently used in the mosaics of Romano-Byzantine art of the third and fourth centuries. It was to form a predominant artistic motif in the sculptures of the great Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages.
28. Mt. 28:19.
29. Jn. 15:15.
30. Cf. Jn. 15:16.
31. Acts 2:42.
32. Acts 4:2.
33. Cf. Acts 4:18; 5:28.
34. Cf. Acts 4:19.
35. Cf. Acts 1:25.
36. Cf. Acts 6:8ff.; cf. also Philip catechizing the minister of the Queen of the Ethiopians: Acts 8:26ff.
37. Cf. Acts 15:35.
38. Acts 8:4.
39. Acts 28:31.
40. Cf. Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Mater et Magistra (AAS 53 [1961], p. 401): the Church is "mother" because by baptism she unceasingly begets new children and increases God's family; she is "teacher" because she makes her children grow in the grace of their baptism by nourishing their *sensus fidei* through instruction in the truths of faith.
41. Cf., for example the letter of Clement of Rome to the Church of Corinth, the Didache, the Epistola Apostolorum, the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons (*Demonstratio Apostolicae Praedicationis* and *Adversus Haereses*), of Tertullian (*De Baptismo*), of Clement of Alexandria (*Paedagogus*), of Cyprian (*Testimonia ad Quirinum*), of Origen (*Contra Celsum*), etc.
42. Cf. 2 Thes. 3:1.
43. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2: AAS 58 (1966), p. 930.
44. Cf. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNO), December 10, 1948, Art. 18, The International Pact on Civil and Political Rights (UNO), December 16, 1966, Art. 4; Final Act of the Conference on European Security and Cooperation, Para. VII.
45. Cf. Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuuenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius, 1: loc. cit., pp. 3-4; cf. L'Osservatore Romano, October 30, 1977, p. 3.
46. Ibid., 6: loc. cit., pp. 7-8.
47. Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 17-35; AAS 64 (1972), pp. 110-118.
48. Cf. 17-24: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 17-22.
49. Cf. Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuuenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius, 1: loc. cit., pp. 3-4, cf. L'Osservatore Romano, October 30, 1977, p. 3.

50. Concluding Address to the Synod, October 29, 1977: AAS 69 (1977), p. 634.
51. Ibid.
52. Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 40 and 46: AAS 64 (1972), pp. 121 and 124-125.
53. Cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6: AAS 58 (1966), p. 999.
54. Cf. *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*.
55. Eph. 4:13.
56. Cf. 1 Pt. 3:15.
57. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 10 and 24: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 822 and 828-829; cf. also Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Directorium Catechisticum Generale 45 (AAS 64 [1972], p. 124), where the principal and complementary sources of catechesis are well set out.
58. Cf. *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*, 25-26; 183-187.
59. Cf. AAS 60 (1968), pp. 436-445. Besides these great professions of faith of the magisterium, note also the popular professions of faith, rooted in the traditional Christian culture of certain countries; cf. what I said to the young people at Gniezno, June 3, 1979, regarding the Bogurodzica song-message: "This is not only a song: it is also a profession of faith, a symbol of the Polish Credo, it is a catechesis and also a document of Christian education. The principal truths of Faith and the principles of morality are contained here. This is not only a historical object. It is a document of life. (It has even been called "the Polish catechism" [AAS 71, 1979], p. 754.)
60. 25: AAS 68 (1976), p. 23.
61. Ibid., especially 26-39: loc. cit., pp. 23-25; the "principal elements of the Christian message" are presented in a more systematic fashion in the Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 47-69 (AAS 64 [1972] pp. 125-141), where one also finds the norm for the essential doctrinal content of catechesis.
62. Consult also on this point the Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 37-46 (loc. cit., pp. 120-125).
63. Rom. 1:19.
64. Acts 17:23.
65. Cf. Eph. 3:3.
66. Cf. Eph. 2:18.
67. Acts 20:28.
68. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1056-1057.
69. Rom. 6:4.
70. 2 Cor. 5:17.
71. Cf. *ibid.*
72. Rom. 6:23.
73. Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 30-38: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 25-30.
74. Cf. *Catechismo Maggiore*, Fifth Part, chap. 6. 965-966.
75. Cf. Phil. 2:17.
76. Rom. 10:8.
77. Phil. 3:8.
78. Cf. Eph. 4:20-21.
79. Cf. 2 Thes. 2:7.
80. Jn. 6:69; cf. Acts 5:20; 7:38.
81. Acts 2:28, quoting Ps. 16:11.
82. Cf. the entire Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*: AAS 57 [1965], pp. 90-112.
83. Cf. *ibid.*, 5: loc. cit., p. 96; cf. also Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 15: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 963-965; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Directorium Catechisticum Generale 27: AAS 64 (1972), p. 115.
84. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3-4: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 92-96.
85. *Ibid.*, 3: loc. cit., p. 93.
86. Cf. *ibid.*; cf. also Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 15: AAS 57 (1965), p. 19.
87. Lk. 12:32.
88. Cf., for example, Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1025-1120; Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 257-299; Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 401-441; Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 5-76.
89. Mt. 1:16.
90. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 14: AAS 58 (1966), p. 679; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 14: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 962-963; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Directorium Catechisticum Generale 20: AAS 64 (1972), p. 112; cf. also *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*.
91. Cf. 58: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 46-49.

92. Cf. Synodus Episcoporum, De catechesi hoc nostro tempore tradenda praesertim pueris atque iuuenibus, Ad Populum Dei Nuntius, 7-10: loc. cit., pp. 9-12; cf. "L'Osservatore Romano," October 30, 1977, p. 3.
93. Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Directorium Catechisticum Generale, 119-121; 134: AAS 64 (1972), pp. 166-167; 172.
94. Cf. AAS 71 (1979), p. 607.
95. Cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:5.
96. 1 Cor. 1:17.
97. Cf. 2 Tm. 1:14.
98. Cf. Jn. 1:16; Eph. 1:10.
99. Cf. Encyclical Redemptor Hominis, 15-16: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 286-295.
100. Cf. Mt. 5:13-16.
101. Cf. Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Ecclesiam Suam, Part Three, AAS 56 (1964), pp. 637-659.
102. Cf. Heb. 11:27.
103. 1 Cor. 13:12.
104. Cf. 1 Tm. 6:16.
105. Heb. 11: 1.
106. Cf. Mt. 2: 1ff.
107. Blaise Pascal, Le mystere de Jesus: Pensees 553.
108. Pope Paul VI, Sollemnis Professio Fidei, 4: AAS 60 (1968), p. 434.
109. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Quinque Iam Anni: AAS 63 (1971), p. 99.
110. Cf. 1 Tm. 1:3ff.; 4:1ff.; 2 Tm. 2:14ff.; 4:1-5; Tit. 1:10-12; cf. also Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi, 78: AAS 68 (1976), p. 70.
111. Encyclical Redemptor Hominis, 10: AAS 71 (1979), p. 274.
112. De Catechizandis Rudibus, PL 40, 310-347.
113. Cf. Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church Christus Dominus, 14: AAS 58 (1966), p. 679.
114. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Presbyterorum Ordinis, 6: AAS 58 (1966), p. 999.
115. Lam. 4:4.
116. Eph. 4:5-6.
117. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, 35, 52: AAS 56 (1964), pp. 109, 114; cf. also Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, promulgated by a Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites on April 6, 1969, 33, and what has been said above in Chapter VI concerning the homily.
118. Since the High Middle Ages, provincial councils have insisted on the responsibility of parents in regard to education in the faith: cf. Sixth Council of Arles (813), Canon 19, Council of Mainz (813), Canons 45, 47; Sixth Council of Paris (829), Book 1, Chapter 7: Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio, XIV, 62, 74, 542. Among the more recent documents of the Magisterium, note the Encyclical Divini illius Magistri of Pius XI December 31, 1929: AAS 22 (1930), pp. 49-86; the many discourses and messages of Pius XII; and above all the texts of the Second Vatican Council: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 11, 35: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 15, 40; the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity Apostolicam Actuositatem, 11, 30: AAS 58(1966), pp. 847, 860; the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, n. 52: AAS 58 (1966) p. 1073; and especially the Declaration on Christian Education Gravissimum Educationis, 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.
119. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education Gravissimum Educationis, 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.
120. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, 11: AAS 57 (1965), p. 16; cf. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity Apostolicam Actuositatem, 11: AAS 58 (1966), p. 848.
121. Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, 77: AAS 68 (1976), p. 69.
122. Jn. 14:26.
123. Jn. 16:13.
124. In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus, 97, 1: PL 35, 1877.
125. Jn. 15:26-27.
126. Cf. Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6.
127. Rom. 8:15
128. 1 Cor 12:3.
129. Cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11.
130. Eph. 5:18.
131. Retractationum Liber I, 23, 2: PL 32, 621.
132. 75: AAS 68 (1976), p. 66.
133. Cf. Lk. 2:52.
134. Cf. Jn. 1:14; Heb. 10:5; S. Th., III, Q. 12, a. 2; a. 3, ad 3.
135. Cf. Lk. 2:51.
136. Cf. Jn. 6:45.

137. Cf. Sermo 25, 7: PL 46, 937-938.
138. Mt. 28:19.

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Apostolic Constitution
Sapientia Christiana
Of The Supreme Pontiff
Pope John Paul II
On Ecclesiastical Universities And Faculties
John Paul, Bishop
Servant Of The Servants Of God For Perpetual Remembrance

FOREWORD

I

Christian wisdom, which the Church teaches by divine authority, continuously inspires the faithful of Christ zealously to endeavor to relate human affairs and activities with religious values in a single living synthesis. Under the direction of these values all things are mutually connected for the glory of God and the integral development of the human person, a development that includes both corporal and spiritual well-being.(1)

Indeed, the Church's mission of spreading the Gospel not only demands that the Good News be preached ever more widely and to ever greater numbers of men and women, but that the very power of the Gospel should permeate thought patterns, standards of judgment, and norms of behavior; in a word, it is necessary that the whole of human culture be steeped in the Gospel.(2)

The cultural atmosphere in which a human being lives has a great influence upon his or her way of thinking and, thus, of acting. Therefore, a division between faith and culture is more than a small impediment to evangelization, while a culture penetrated with the Christian spirit is an instrument that favors the spreading of the Good News.

Furthermore, the Gospel is intended for all peoples of every age and land and is not bound exclusively to any particular culture. It is valid for pervading all cultures so as to illumine them with the light of divine revelation and to purify human conduct, renewing them in Christ.

For this reason, the Church of Christ strives to bring the Good News to every sector of humanity so as to be able to convert the consciences of human beings, both individually and collectively, and to fill with the light of the Gospel their works and undertakings, their entire lives, and, indeed, the whole of the social environment in which they are engaged. In this way the Church carries out her mission of evangelizing also by advancing human culture.(3)

II

In this activity of the Church with regard to culture, Catholic universities have had and still have special importance. By their nature they aim to secure that "the Christian outlook should acquire a public, stable and universal influence in the whole process of the promotion of higher culture."(4)

In fact, as my Predecessor Pope Pius XI recalled in the preface to the Apostolic Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, (5) there arose within the Church, from her earliest period, didascaleia for imparting instruction in Christian wisdom so that people's lives and conduct might be formed. From these houses of Christian wisdom the most illustrious Fathers and Doctors of the Church, teachers and ecclesiastical writers, drew their knowledge.

With the passing of centuries schools were established in the neighborhood of cathedrals and monasteries, thanks especially to the zealous initiatives of bishops and monks. These schools imparted both ecclesiastical doctrine and secular culture, forming them into one whole. From these schools arose the universities, those glorious institutions of the Middle Ages which, from their beginning, had the Church as their most bountiful mother and patroness.

Subsequently, when civil authorities, to promote the common good, began and developed their own universities, the Church, loyal to her very nature, did not desist from founding and favoring such kinds of centers of learning and institutions of instruction. This is shown by the considerable number of Catholic universities established in recent times in nearly all parts of the world. Conscious of her worldwide salvific mission, the Church wishes to be especially joined to these centers of higher learning and she desires that they flourish everywhere and work effectively to make Christ's true message present in the field of human culture and to make it advance in that field.

In order that Catholic universities might better achieve this goal, my Predecessor Pope Pius XII sought to stimulate their united activity when, by his Apostolic Brief of July 27, 1949, he formally established the International Federation of Catholic Universities. It was "to include all Athenaea which the Holy See either has canonically erected or will in the future erect in the world, or will have explicitly recognized as following the norms of Catholic teaching and as completely in conformity with that teaching."(6)

The Second Vatican Council, for this reason, did not hesitate to affirm that "the Church devotes considerable care to schools of higher learning, " and it strongly recommended that Catholic universities should "be established in suitable locations throughout the world" and that "the students of these institutions should be truly outstanding in learning, ready to shoulder duties of major responsibility in society and to witness to the faith before the world."(7) As the

Church well knows, "the future of society and of the Church herself is closely bound up with the development of young people engaged in higher studies."(8)

III

It is not surprising, however, that among Catholic universities the Church has always promoted with special care Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities, which is to say those concerned particularly with Christian revelation and questions connected therewith and which are therefore more closely connected with her mission of evangelization.

In the first place, the Church has entrusted to these Faculties the task of preparing with special care students for the priestly ministry, for teaching the sacred sciences, and for the more arduous tasks of the apostolate. It is also the task of these Faculties "to explore more profoundly the various areas of the sacred disciplines so that day by day a deeper understanding of sacred revelation will be developed, the heritage of Christian wisdom handed down by our ancestors will be more plainly brought into view, dialogue will be fostered with our separated brothers and sisters and with non-Christians, and solutions will be found for problems raised by doctrinal progress."(9)

In fact, new sciences and new discoveries pose new problems that involve the sacred disciplines and demand an answer. While carrying out their primary duty of attaining through theological research a deeper grasp of revealed truth, those engaged in the sacred sciences should therefore maintain contact with scholars of other disciplines, whether these are believers or not, and should try to evaluate and interpret the latter's affirmations and judge them in the light of revealed truth.(10)

From this assiduous contact with reality, theologians are also encouraged to seek a more suitable way of communicating doctrine to their contemporaries working in other various fields of knowledge, for "the deposit of faith, or the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, is one thing; quite another is the way in which these truths are formulated, while preserving the same sense and meaning."(11) This will be very useful so that among the People of God religious practice and uprightness of soul may proceed at an equal pace with the progress of science and technology, and so that, in pastoral work, the faithful may be gradually led to a purer and more mature life of faith.

The possibility of a connection with the mission of evangelization also exists in Faculties of other sciences which, although lacking a special link with Christian revelation, can still help considerably in the work of evangelizing. These are looked at by the Church precisely under this aspect when they are erected as Ecclesiastical Faculties. They therefore have a particular relationship with the Church's Hierarchy.

Thus, the Apostolic See, in carrying out its mission, is clearly aware of its right and duty to erect and promote Ecclesiastical Faculties dependent on itself, either with a separate existence or as parts of universities, Faculties destined for the education of both ecclesiastical and lay students. This See is very desirous that the whole People of God, under the guidance of their Shepherds, should cooperate to ensure that these centers of learning contribute effectively to the growth of the faith and of Christian life.

IV

Ecclesiastical Faculties -- which are ordered to the common good of the Church and have a valuable relationship with the whole ecclesial community -- ought to be conscious of their importance in the Church and of their participation in the ministry of the Church. Indeed, those Faculties which treat of matters that are close to Christian revelation should also be mindful of the orders which Christ, the Supreme Teacher, gave to His Church regarding this ministry: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19 - 20). From this it follows that there must be in these Faculties that adherence by which they are joined to the full doctrine of Christ, whose authentic guardian and interpreter has always been through the ages the Magisterium of the Church.

Bishops' Conferences in the individual nations and regions where these Faculties exist must diligently see to their care and progress, at the same time that they ceaselessly promote their fidelity to the Church's doctrine, so that these Faculties may bear witness before the whole community of the faithful to their wholehearted following of the above-mentioned command of Christ. This witness must always be borne both by the Faculty as such and by each and every member of the Faculty. Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties have been constituted in the Church for the building up and perfecting of Christ's faithful, and they must always bear this in mind as a criterion in the carrying out of their work.

Teachers are invested with very weighty responsibility in fulfilling a special ministry of the word of God and in being instructors of the faith for the young. Let them, above all, therefore be for their students, and for the rest of the faithful, witnesses of the living truth of the Gospel and examples of fidelity to the Church. It is fitting to recall the serious words of Pope Paul VI: "The task of the theologian is carried out with a view to building up ecclesial communion so that the People of God may grow in the experience of faith."(12)

V

To attain these purposes, Ecclesiastical Faculties should be organized in such a way as to respond to the new demands of the present day. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council stated that their laws should be subjected to revision.(13)

In fact, the Apostolic Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, promulgated by my Predecessor Pope Pius XI on May 24, 1931, did much in its time renew higher ecclesiastical studies. However, as a result of changed circumstances, it now needs to be suitably adapted and altered.

In the course of nearly fifty years great changes have taken place not only in civil society but also in the Church herself. Important events, especially the Second Vatican Council, have occurred, events which have affected both the internal life of the Church and her external relationships with Christians of other churches, with non - Christians, and with non - believers, as well as with all those in favor of a more human civilization.

In addition, there is a steadily growing interest being shown in the theological sciences, not only among the clergy but also by lay people, who are attending theological schools in increasing numbers. These schools have, as a consequence, greatly multiplied in recent times.

Finally, a new attitude has arisen about the structure of universities and Faculties, both civil and ecclesiastical. This is a result of the justified desire for a university life open to greater participation, a desire felt by all those in any way involved in university life.

Nor can one ignore the great evolution that has taken place in pedagogical and didactic methods, which call for new ways of organizing studies. Then too there is the closer connection that is being felt more and more between various sciences and disciplines, as well as the desire for greater cooperation in the whole university environment.

To meet these new demands, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, responding to the mandate received from the Council, already in 1967 began to study the question of renewal along the lines indicated by the Council. On May 20, 1968, it promulgated the *Normae quaedam ad Constitutionem Apostolicam "Deus Scientiarum Dominus" de studiis academicis ecclesiasticis recognoscendam*, which has exercised a beneficial influence during recent years.

VI

Now, however, this work needs to be completed and perfected with a new law. This law, abrogating the Apostolic Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* and the Norms of Application attached to it, as well as the *Normae quaedam* published on May 20, 1968, by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, includes some still valid elements from these documents, while laying down new norms whereby the renewal that has already successfully begun can be developed and completed.

Nobody is unaware of the difficulties that appear to impede the promulgation of a new Apostolic Constitution. In the first place, there is the "passage of time" which brings changes so rapidly that it seems impossible to lay down anything stable and permanent. Then there is the "diversity of places" which seems to call for a pluralism which would make it appear almost impossible to issue common norms, valid for all parts of the world.

Since however there exist Ecclesiastical Faculties throughout the world, which are erected and approved by the Holy See and which grant academic degrees in its name, it is necessary that a certain substantial unity be respected and that the requisites for gaining academic degrees be clearly laid down and have universal value. Things which are necessary and which are foreseen as being relatively stable must be set down by law, while at the same time a proper freedom must be left for introducing into the Statutes of the individual Faculties further specifications, taking into account varying local conditions and the university customs obtaining in each region. In this way, legitimate progress in academic studies is neither hindered nor restricted, but rather is directed through right channels towards obtaining better results. Moreover, together with the legitimate differentiation of the Faculties, the unity of the Catholic Church in these centers of education will also be clear to everyone.

Therefore, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, by command of my Predecessor Pope Paul VI, has consulted first of all, the Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties themselves, then, the departments of the Roman Curia and the other bodies interested. After this, it established a commission of experts who, under the direction of the same Congregation, have carefully reviewed the legislation covering ecclesiastical academic studies.

This work has now been successfully completed, and Pope Paul VI was about to promulgate this Constitution, as he so ardently desired to do, when he died; likewise Pope John Paul I was prevented by sudden death from doing so. After long and careful consideration of the matter, I decree and lay down, by my apostolic authority, the following laws and norms.

PART ONE

GENERAL NORMS Section I Nature and Purpose of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties

Article 1. To carry out the ministry of evangelization given to the Church by Christ, the Church has the right and duty to erect and promote Universities and Faculties which depend upon herself.

Article 2. In this Constitution the terms Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties mean those which have been canonically erected or approved by the Apostolic See, which foster and teach sacred doctrine and the sciences connected therewith, and which have the right to confer academic degrees by the authority of the Holy See.

Article 3. The purpose of Ecclesiastical Faculties are:

1. n. 1. through scientific research to cultivate and promote their own disciplines, and especially to deepen knowledge of Christian revelation and of matters connected with it, to enunciate systematically the truths contained therein, to consider in the light of revelation the most recent progress of the sciences, and to present them to the people of the present day in a manner adapted to various cultures;
2. n. 2. to train the students to a level of high qualification in their own disciplines, according to Catholic doctrine, to prepare them properly to face their tasks, and to promote the continuing permanent education of the ministers of the Church;
3. n. 3. to collaborate intensely, in accordance with their own nature and in close communion with the Hierarchy, with the local and the universal Church the whole work of evangelization.

Article 4. It is the duty of Bishops' Conferences to follow carefully the life and progress of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, because of their special ecclesial importance.

Article 5. The canonical erection or approval of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties is reserved to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, which governs them according to law.(14)

Article 6. Only Universities and Faculties canonically erected or approved by the Holy See and ordered according to the norms of this present Constitution have the right to confer academic degrees which have canonical value, with the exception of the special right of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.(15)

Article 7. The Statutes of each University or Faculty, which must be drawn up in accordance with the present Constitution, require approval by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.

Article 8. Ecclesiastical Faculties erected or approved by the Holy See in non - ecclesiastical universities, which confer both canonical and civil academic degrees, must observe the prescriptions of the present Constitution, account being taken of the conventions signed by the Holy See with various nations or with the universities themselves.

Article 9.

- n. 1. Faculties which have not been canonically erected or approved by the Holy See may not confer academic degrees having canonical value.
- n. 2. Academic degrees conferred by such Faculties, if they are to have value for some canonical effects only, require the recognition of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.
- n. 3. For this recognition to be given for individual degrees for a special reason, the conditions laid down by the Sacred Congregation must be fulfilled.

Article 10. For the correct carrying out of the present Constitution, the Norms of application issued by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education must be observed.

Section II

The Academic Community and Its Government

Article 11.

- n. 1. Since the University or Faculty forms a sort of community, all the people in it, either as individuals or as members of councils, must feel, each according to his or her own status, co - responsible for the common good and must strive to work for the institution's goals.
- n. 2. Therefore, their rights and duties within the academic community must be accurately set down in the Statutes, to ensure that they are properly exercised within correctly established limits.

Article 12. The Chancellor represents the Holy See to the University or Faculty and equally the University or Faculty to the Holy See. He promotes the continuation and progress of the University or Faculty and he fosters its communion with the local and universal Church.

Article 13.

- n. 1. The Chancellor is the Prelate Ordinary on whom the University or Faculty legally depends, unless the Holy See established otherwise.
- n. 2. Where conditions favor such a post, it is also possible to have a Vice - Chancellor, whose authority is determined in the Statutes.

Article 14. If the Chancellor is someone other than the local Ordinary, the statutory norms are to establish how the Ordinary and the Chancellor carry out their respective offices in mutual accord.

Article 15. The academic authorities are personal and collegial. Personal authorities are, in the first place, the Rector or President and the Dean. The collegial authorities are the various directive organisms or councils of the University or Faculty.

Article 16. The Statute of the University Faculty must very carefully set out the names and offices of the academic authorities, determining the way they are designated and their term of office, taking into account both the canonical nature of the individual University or Faculty and the university practice in the local area.

Article 17. Those designed as academic authorities are to be people who are truly knowledgeable about university life and, usually, who come from among the teachers of some Faculty.

Article 18. The Rector and the President are named, or at least confirmed, by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.

Article 19.

- n. 1. The Statutes determine how the personal and the collegial authorities are to collaborate with each other, so that, carefully observing the principle of collegiality, especially in more serious matters and above all in those of an academic nature, the persons in authority will enjoy that exercise of power which really corresponds to their office.
- n. 2. This applies, in the first place, to the Rector, who has the duty to govern the entire University and to promote, in a suitable way, its unity, cooperation, and progress.

Article 20.

- n. 1. When Faculties are parts of an Ecclesiastical University, their governance must be coordinated through the Statutes with the governance of the entire University in such a way that the good of the single Faculties is assured, at the same time that the good of the whole University is promoted and the cooperation of all the Faculties with each other is favored.
- n. 2. The canonical exigencies of Ecclesiastical Faculties must be safeguarded even when such Faculties are inserted into non - Ecclesiastical universities.

Article 21. When a Faculty is joined to a seminary or college, the Statutes, while always having due concern for cooperation in everything pertaining to the students' good, must clearly and effectively provide that the academic direction and administration of the Faculty is correctly distinct from the governance and administration of the seminary or college.

Section III Teachers

Article 22. In each Faculty there must be a number of teachers, especially permanent ones, which corresponds to the importance and development of the individual disciplines as well as to the proper care and profit of the students.

Article 23. There must be various ranks of teachers, determined in the Statutes, according to their measure of preparation, their insertion into the Faculty, their permanence, and their responsibility to the Faculty, taking into account the university practice of the local area.

Article 24. The Statutes are to define which authorities are responsible for hiring, naming, and promoting teachers, especially when it is a question of giving them a permanent position.

Article 25.

- n. 1. To be legitimately hired as a permanent teacher in a Faculty, a person must:
 - be distinguished by wealth of knowledge, witness of life, and a sense of responsibility;
 - have a suitable doctorate or equivalent title or exceptional and singular scientific accomplishment;
 - show documentary proof of suitability for doing scientific research, especially by a published dissertation;
 - demonstrate teaching ability.
- n. 2. These requirements for taking on permanent teachers must be applied also, in proportionate measure, for hiring non - permanent ones.

- n. 3. In hiring teachers, the scientific requirements in current force in the university practice of the local area should be taken into account.

Article 26.

- n. 1. All teachers of every rank must be marked by an upright life, integrity of doctrine, and devotion to duty, so that they can effectively contribute to the proper goals of an Ecclesiastical Faculty.
- n. 2. Those who teach matters touching on faith and morals are to be conscious of their duty to carry out their work in full communion with the authentic Magisterium of the Church, above all, with that of the Roman Pontiff.(16)

Article 27

- n. 1 Those who teach disciplines concerning faith or morals must receive, after making their profession of faith, a canonical mission from the Chancellor or his delegate, for they do not teach on their own authority but by virtue of the mission they have received from the Church. The other teachers must receive permission to teach from the Chancellor or his delegate.
- n. 2. All teachers, before they are given a permanent post or before they are promoted to the highest category of teacher, or else in both cases, as the Statutes are to state, must receive a declaration of nihil obstat from the Holy See.
- Article 28. Promotion to the higher ranks of teachers is to take place only after a suitable interval of time and with due reference to teaching skill, to research accomplished, to the publication of scientific works, to the spirit of cooperation in teaching and in research, and to commitment to the Faculty.

Article 29. The teachers, in order to carry out their tasks satisfactorily, must be free from other employment which cannot be reconciled with their duty to do research and to instruct, according to what the Statutes require for each rank of teacher.

Article 30. The Statutes must state:

- a) when and under which conditions a teaching post ends;
- b) for what reasons and in which ways a teacher can be suspended, or even deprived of his post, so as to safeguard suitably the rights of the teachers, of the Faculty or University, and, above all, of the students and also of the ecclesial community.

Section IV

Students

Article 31. Ecclesiastical Faculties are open to all, whether ecclesiastics or laity, who can legally give testimony to leading a moral life and to having completed the previous studies appropriate to enrolling in the Faculty.

Article 32.

- n. 1. To enroll in a Faculty in order to obtain an academic degree, one must present that kind of study title which would be necessary to permit enrollment in a civil university of one's own country or of the country where the Faculty is located.
- n. 2. The Faculty, in its own Statutes, should determine what, besides what is contained in n. 1 above, is needed for entrance into its course of study, including ancient and modern language requirements.

Article 33. Students must faithfully observe the laws of the Faculty about the general program and about discipline -- in the first place about the study program, class attendance, and examinations -- as well as all that pertains to the life of the Faculty.

Article 34. The Statutes should define how the students, either individually or collectively, take part in the university community life in those aspects which can contribute to the common good of the Faculty or University.

Article 35. The Statutes should equally determine how the students can for serious reasons be suspended from certain rights or be deprived of them or even be expelled from the Faculty, in such a way that the rights of the student, of the Faculty or University, and also of the ecclesial community are appropriately protected.

Section V Officials and Staff Assistants

Article 36.

- n. 1. In governing and administering a University or Faculty, the authorities are to be assisted by officials trained for various tasks.
- n. 2. The officials are, first of all, the Secretary, the Librarian, and the Financial Procurator.

Article 37. There should also be other staff assistants who have the task of vigilance, order, and other duties, according to the needs of the University or Faculty.

Section VI Study Program

Article 38.

- n. 1. In arranging the studies, the principles and norms which for different matters are contained in ecclesiastical documents, especially those of the Second Vatican Council, must be carefully observed. At the same time account must be taken of sound advances coming from scientific progress which can contribute to answering the questions being currently asked.
- n. 2. In the single Faculties let that scientific method be used which corresponds to the needs of the individual sciences. Up-to-date didactic and teaching methods should be applied in an appropriate way, in order to bring about the personal involvement of the students and their suitable, active participation in their studies.

Article 39.

- n. 1. Following the norm of the Second Vatican Council, according to the nature of each Faculty:
 - just freedom(17) should be acknowledged in research and teaching so that true progress can be obtained in learning and understanding divine truth;
 - at the same time it is clear that:
 - true freedom in teaching is necessarily contained within the limits of God's Word, as this is constantly taught by the Church's Magisterium,
 - likewise, true freedom in research is necessarily based upon firm adherence to God's Word and deference to the Church's Magisterium, whose duty it is to interpret authentically the Word of God.
- n. 2. Therefore, in such a weighty matter one must proceed with prudence, with trust, and without suspicion, at the same time with judgment and without rashness, especially in teaching, while working to harmonize studiously the necessities of science with the pastoral needs of the People of God.

Article 40. In each Faculty a curriculum of studies is to be suitably organized in steps or cycles, adapted to the material. The are usually as follows:

- first, a general instruction is imparted, covering a coordinated presentation of all the disciplines, along with an introduction into scientific methodology;
- next, one section of the disciplines is studied more profoundly, at the same time that the students practice scientific research more fully;
- finally, there is progress toward scientific maturity, especially through a written work which truly makes a contribution to the advance of the science.

Article 41.

- n. 1. The disciplines which are absolutely necessary for the Faculty to achieve its purposes should be determined. Those also should be set out which in a different way are helpful to these purposes and, therefore, how these are suitably distinguished one from another.
- n. 2. In each Faculty the disciplines should be arranged in such a way that they form an organic body, so as to serve the solid and coherent formation of the students and to facilitate collaboration by the teachers.

Article 42. Lectures, especially in the basic cycle, must be given, and the students must attend them, according to the norms to be determined in the Statutes.

Article 43. Practical exercises and seminars, mainly in the specialization cycle, must be assiduously carried on under the direction of the teachers. These ought to be constantly complemented by private study and frequent discussions with the teachers.

Article 44. The Statutes of the Faculty are to define which examinations or which equivalent tests the students are to take, whether written or oral, at the end of the semester, of the year, and especially of the cycle, so that their ability can be verified in regard to continuing in the Faculty and in regard to receiving academic degrees.

Article 45. Likewise the Statutes are to determine what value is to be given for studies taken elsewhere, especially in regard to being dispensed from some disciplines or examinations or even in regard to reducing the curriculum, always, however, respecting the prescriptions of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.

Section VII

Academic Degrees

Article 46.

- n. 1. After each cycle of the curriculum of studies, the suitable academic degree can be conferred, which must be established for each Faculty, with attention given to the duration of the cycle and to the disciplines taught in it.
- n. 2. Therefore, according to the general and special norms of this Constitution, all degrees conferred and the conditions under which they are conferred are to be determined in the Statutes of the individual Faculties.

Article 47.

- n. 1. The academic degrees conferred by an Ecclesiastical Faculty are: Baccalaureate, Licentiate, and Doctorate.
- n.2. Special qualifications can be added to the names of these degrees according to the diversity of Faculties and the order of studies in the individual Faculties.

Article 48. Academic degrees can be given different names in the Statutes of the individual Faculties, taking account of the university practice in the local area, indicating, however, with clarity the equivalence these have with the names of the academic degrees above and maintaining uniformity among the Ecclesiastical Faculties of the same area.

Article 49.

- n. 1. Nobody can obtain an academic degree unless properly enrolled in a Faculty, completing the course of studies prescribed by the Statutes, and successfully passing the examinations or tests.
- n. 2. Nobody can be admitted to the doctorate unless first having obtained the licentiate.
- n. 3. A requisite for obtaining a doctorate, furthermore, is a doctoral dissertation that makes a real contribution to the progress of science, written under the direction of a teacher, publicly defended and collegially approved; the principal part, at least, must be published.

Article 50.

- n. 1. The doctorate is the academic degree which enables one to teach in a Faculty and which is therefore required for this purpose, the licentiate is the academic degree which enables one to teach in a major seminary or equivalent school and which is therefore required for this purpose.
- n. 2. The academic degrees which are required for filling various ecclesiastical posts are to be stated by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Article 51. An honorary doctorate can be conferred for special scientific merit or cultural accomplishment in promoting the ecclesiastical sciences.

Section VIII

Matters Relating to Teaching

Article 52. In order to achieve its proper purposes, especially in regard to scientific research, each University or Faculty must have an adequate library, in keeping with the needs of the staff and students. It must be correctly organized and equipped with an appropriate catalogue.

Article 53. Through an annual allotment of money, the library must continually acquire books, old and new, as well as the principal reviews, so as to be able effectively to serve research, teaching of the disciplines, instructional needs, and the practical exercises and seminars.

Article 54. The library must be headed by a trained librarian, assisted by a suitable council. The librarian participates opportunely in the Council of the University or Faculty.

Article 55.

- n. 1. The Faculty must also have technical equipment, audio - visual materials, etc., to assist its didactic work.
- n. 2. In relationship to the special nature and purpose of a University or Faculty, research institutions and scientific laboratories should also be available, as well as other apparatus needed for the accomplishment of its ends.

Section IX

Economic Matters

Article 56. A University or Faculty must have enough money to achieve its purposes properly. Its financial endowments and its property rights are to be carefully described.

Article 57. The Statutes are to determine the duty of the Financial Procurator as well as the part the Rector or President and the University or Faculty Council play in money matters, according to the norms of good economics and so as to preserve healthy administration.

Article 58. Teachers, officials, and staff assistants are to be paid a suitable remuneration, taking account of the customs of the local area, and also taking into consideration social security and insurance protection.

Article 59. Likewise, the Statutes are to determinate the general norms that will indicate the ways the students are to contribute to the expenses of the University or Faculty, by paying admission fees, yearly tuition, examination fees, and diploma fees.

Section X

Planning and Cooperation of Faculties

Article 60.

- n. 1. Great care must be given to the distribution, or as it is called, the planning of Universities and Faculties, so as to provide for their conservation, their progress, and their suitable distribution in different parts of the world.
- n. 2. To accomplish this end, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education is to be helped by advice from the Bishops' Conferences and from a commission of experts.

Article 61. The erection or approval of a new University or Faculty is decided upon by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education when all the requirements are fulfilled. In this the Congregation listens to the local Ordinaries, the Bishops' Conference, and experts, especially from neighboring Faculties.

Article 62.

- n. 1. Affiliation of some institution with a Faculty for the purpose of being able to grant the bachelor's degree is approved by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, after the conditions established by that same Sacred Congregation are fulfilled.
- n. 2. It is highly desirable that theological study centers, whether diocesan or religious, be affiliated to a Faculty of Sacred Theology.

Article 63. Aggregation to a Faculty and incorporation into a Faculty by an institution for the purposes of also granting higher academic degrees is decided upon by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, after the conditions established by that same Sacred Congregation are fulfilled.

Article 64. Cooperation between Faculties, whether of the same University or of the same region or of a wider territorial area, is to be diligently striven for. For this cooperation is of great help to the scientific research of the teachers and to the better formation of the students. It also fosters the advance of interdisciplinary collaboration, which appears ever more necessary in current times, as well as contributing to the development of complementarity among Faculties. It also helps to bring about the penetration by Christian wisdom of all culture.

PART TWO - SPECIAL NORMS

Article 65. Besides the norms common to all Ecclesiastical Faculties, which are established in the first part of this Constitution, special norms are given here - under for certain of those Faculties, because of their particular nature and importance for the Church.

Section I

Faculty of Sacred Theology

Article 66. A Faculty of Sacred Theology has the aim of profoundly studying and systematically explaining, according to the scientific method proper to it, Catholic doctrine, derived with the greatest care from divine revelation. It has the further aim of carefully seeking the solution to human problems in the light of that same revelation.

Article 67.

- n. 1. The study of Sacred Scripture is, as it were, the soul of Sacred Theology, which rests upon the written Word of God together with living Tradition, as its perpetual foundation.(18)
- n. 2. The individual theological disciplines are to be taught in such a way that, from their internal structure and from the proper object of each as well as from their connection with other disciplines, including philosophical ones and the sciences of man, the basic unity of theological instruction is quite clear, and in such a way that all the disciplines converge in a profound understanding of the mystery of Christ, so that this can be announced with greater effectiveness to the People of God and to all nations.

Article 68.

- n. 1. Revealed truth must be considered also in connection with contemporary, evolving, scientific accomplishments, so that it can be seen "how faith and reason give harmonious witness to the unity of all truth."(19) Also, its exposition is to be such that, without any change of the truth, there is adaptation to the nature and character of every culture, taking special account of the philosophy and the wisdom of various peoples. However, all syncretism and every kind of false particularism are to be excluded.(20)
- n. 2. The positive values in the various cultures and philosophies are to be sought out, carefully examined, and taken up. However, systems and methods incompatible with Christian faith must not be accepted.

Article 69. Ecumenical questions are to be carefully treated, according to the norms of competent Church authorities.(21) Also to be carefully considered are relationships with non - Christian religions; and problems arising from contemporary atheism are to be scrupulously studied.

Article 70. In studying and teaching the Catholic doctrine, fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church is always to be emphasized. In the carrying out of teaching duties, especially in the basic cycle, those things are, above all, to be imparted which belong to the received patrimony of the Church. Hypothetical or personal opinions which come from new research are to be modestly presented as such.

Article 71. In presenting doctrine, those norms are to be followed which are in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, (22) as well as those found in more recent documents of the Holy See(23) insofar as these pertain to academic studies.

Article 72. The curriculum of studies of a Faculty of Sacred Theology comprises:

a) the first cycle, fundamentals, which lasts for five years or ten semesters, or else, when a previous two -year philosophy course is an entrance requirement, for three years. Besides a solid philosophical formation, which is a necessary propaedeutic for theological studies, the theological disciplines must be taught in such a way that what is presented is an organic exposition of the whole of Catholic doctrine, together with an introduction to theological scientific methodology.

The cycle ends with the academic degree of Baccalaureate or some other suitable degree as the Statutes of the Faculty determine.

b) the second cycle, specialization, which lasts for two years or four semesters. In this cycle the special disciplines are taught corresponding to the nature of the diverse specializations being undertaken. Also seminars and practical exercises are conducted for the acquisition of the ability to do scientific research.

The cycle concludes with the academic degree of specialized Licentiate.

c) the third cycle, in which for a suitable period of time scientific formation is brought to completion, especially through the writing of a doctrinal dissertation.

The cycle concludes with the academic degree of Doctorate.

Article 73.

- n. 1. To enroll in a Faculty of Sacred Theology, the student must have done the previous studies called for in accordance with article 32 of this Constitution.

- n. 2. Where the first cycle of the Faculty lasts for only three years, the student must submit proof of having properly completed a two - year course in philosophy at a Faculty of Philosophy or at an approved institution.
- n. 3. For this purpose, special courses suitable for seminarians should be offered. It is also appropriate for the Faculty itself to offer the "pastoral year" required for the priesthood, in addition to the five - year basic cycle. At the end of this year, a special Diploma may be conferred.

Article 74.

n. 1. A Faculty of Sacred Theology has the special duty of taking care of the scientific theological formation of those preparing for the priesthood or preparing to hold some ecclesiastical office.

Section II Faculty of Canon Law

Article 75. A Faculty of Canon Law, whether Latin or Oriental, has the aim of cultivating and promoting the juridical disciplines in the light of the law of the Gospel and of deeply instructing the students in these, so as to form researchers, teachers, and others who will be trained to hold special ecclesiastical posts.

Article 76. The curriculum of studies of a Faculty of Canon Law comprises:

- a) the first cycle, lasting at least one year or two semesters, in which are studied the general fundamentals of Canon Law and those disciplines which are required for higher juridical formation;
- b) the second cycle, lasting two years or four semesters, during which the entire Code of Canon Law is studied in depth, along with other disciplines having an affinity with it;
- c) the third cycle, lasting at least a year or two semesters, in which juridical formation is completed and a doctoral dissertation is written.

Article 77.

- n. 1. With regard to the studies prescribed for the first cycle, the Faculty may make use of the studies done in another Faculty and which it can acknowledge as responding to its needs.
- n. 2. The second cycle concludes with the Licentiate and the third with the Doctorate.
- n.3. The Statutes of the Faculty are to define the special requirements for the conferring of the academic degrees, observing the Norms of Application of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.

Article 78. To enroll in a Faculty of Canon Law, the student must have done the previous studies called for in accordance with Article 32 of this Constitution.

Section III Faculty of Philosophy

Article 79.

- n. 1. An Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy has the aim of investigating philosophical problems according to scientific methodology, basing itself on a heritage of perennially valid philosophy. (24)
- It has to search for solutions in the light of natural reason and, furthermore, it has to demonstrate their consistency with the Christian view of the world, of man, and of God, placing in a proper light the relationship between philosophy and theology.
- n. 2. Then, the students are to be instructed so as to make them ready to teach and to fill other suitable intellectual posts as well as to prepare them to promote Christian culture and to undertake a fruitful dialogue with the people of our time.

Article 80. In the teaching of philosophy, the relevant norms should be observed which are contained in the documents of the Second Vatican Council(25) and in other recent documents of the Holy See concerning academic studies.(26)

Article 81. The curriculum of studies of a Faculty of Philosophy comprises:

- a) the first cycle, basics, in which for two years or four semesters an organic exposition of the various parts of philosophy is imparted, which includes treating the world, man, and God. It also includes the history of philosophy, together with an introduction into the method of scientific research;
- b) the second cycle, the beginning of specialization, in which for two years or four semesters through special disciplines and seminars a more profound consideration is imparted in some sector of philosophy;
- c) the third cycle, in which for a suitable period of time philosophical maturity is promoted, especially by means of writing a doctoral dissertation.

Article 82. The first cycle ends with the degree of Baccalaureate, the second with the specialized Licentiate, and the third with the Doctorate.

Article 83. To enroll in a Faculty of Philosophy, the student must have done the previous studies called for in accordance with Article 32 of the Constitution.

Section IV

Other Faculties

Article 84. Besides the Faculties of Sacred Theology, Canon Law, and Philosophy, other Faculties have been or can be canonically erected, according to the needs of the Church and with a view to attaining certain goals, as for instance:

- a) a more profound study of certain sciences which are of greater importance to the theological, juridical, and philosophical disciplines;
- b) the promotion of other sciences, first of all the humanities, which have a close connection with the theological disciplines or with the work of evangelization;
- c) the cultivation of letters which provide a special help either to a better understanding of Christian revelation or else in carrying on the work of evangelizing;
- d) finally, the more exacting preparation both of the clergy and laity for properly carrying out specialized apostolic tasks.

Article 85. In order to achieve the goals set down in the preceding article, the following Faculties or institutions "ad instar Facultatis" have already been erected and authorized to grant degrees by the Holy See itself:

- . - Christian archaeology,
- . - Biblical studies and ancient Eastern studies,
- . - Church history,
- . - Christian and classical literature,
- . - Liturgy,
- . - Missiology,
- . - Sacred Music,
- . - Psychology,
- . - Educational science or Pedagogy,
- . - Religious science,
- . - Social sciences,
- . - Arabic studies and Islamology,
- . - Mediaeval studies,
- . - Oriental Ecclesiastical studies,
- . - "Utriusque Iuris" (both canon and civil law).

Article 86. It belongs to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education to set out, in accordance with circumstances, special norms for these Faculties, just as has been done in the above sections for the Faculties of Sacred Theology, Canon Law, and Philosophy.

Article 87. The Faculties and Institutes for which special norms have not yet been set out must also draw up their own Statutes. These must conform to the General Norms established in the first part of this Constitution, and they must take into account the special nature and purpose proper to each of these Faculties or Institutes.

Transitional Norms

Article 88. This present Constitution comes into effect on the first day of the 1980 - 1981 academic year or of the 1981 academic year, according to the scholastic calendar in use in various places.

Article 89. Each University or Faculty must, before January 1, 1981, present its proper Statutes, revised according to this Constitution, to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. If this is not done, its power to give academic degrees is, by this very fact, suspended.

Article 90. In each Faculty the studies must be arranged so that the students can acquire academic degrees according to the norms of this Constitution, immediately upon this Constitution coming into effect, preserving the students' previously acquired rights.

Article 91. The Statutes are to be approved experimentally for three years so that, when this period is completed, they may be perfected and approved definitively.

Article 92. Those Faculties which have a juridical connection with civil authorities may be given a longer period of time to revise their Statutes, providing that this is approved by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.

Article 93. It is the task of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, when, with the passage of time, circumstances shall require it, to propose changes to be introduced into this Constitution, so that this same Constitution may be continuously adapted to the needs of Ecclesiastical Faculties.

Article 94. All laws and customs presently obtaining which are in contradiction to this Constitution are abrogated, whether these are universal or local, even if they are worthy of special or individual mention. Likewise completely abrogated are all privileges hitherto granted by the Holy See to any person, whether physical or moral, if these are contrary to the prescriptions of this Constitution.

It is my will, finally, that this my Constitution be established, be valid, and be efficacious always and everywhere, fully and integrally in all its effects, that it be religiously observed by all to whom it pertains, anything to the contrary notwithstanding. If anyone, knowingly or unknowingly, acts otherwise than I have decreed, I order that this action is to be considered null and void.

Given at St. Peter's in Rome, the fifteenth day of April, the Solemnity of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the year 1979, the first of my Pontificate.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 43ff.: AAS 58 (1966) pp. 1061ff.
2. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19 - 20: AAS 68 (1976) pp. 18f.
3. Cf. *ibid.*, 18: AAS 68 (1976) pp. 17f. and also Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 58: AAS 58 (1966) p. 1079.
4. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10: AAS 58 (1966) p. 737.
5. AAS 23 (1931) p. 241.
6. AAS 42 (1950) p. 387.
7. Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10: AAS 58 (1966) p. 737.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.* 11: AAS 58 (1966) p. 738.
10. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 62: AAS 58 (1966) p. 1083.
11. Cf. Pope John XXIII, Allocution at the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: AAS 54 (1962) p. 792 and also the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 62: AAS 58 (1966) p. 1083.
12. Pope Paul VI, Letter *Le transfert a Louvain - la - Neuve* to the Rector of the Catholic University of Louvain, September 13, 1975 (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 22 - 23, 1975). Also cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 19: AAS 71 (1979) pp. 305ff.
13. Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 11: AAS 58 (1966) p. 738.
14. Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, 78: AAS 59 (1967) p. 914.
15. Cf. *Motu Proprio Sedula Cura*: AAS 63 (1971) pp. 665ff. and also the Decree of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *Ratio periclitandae doctrinae*: AAS 67 (1975) pp. 153ff.
16. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 25: AAS 57 (1965) pp. 29 - 31.
17. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 59: AAS 58 (1966) p. 1080.
18. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* 24: AAS 58 (1966) p. 827.
19. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10: AAS 58 (1966) p. 737.
20. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 22: AAS 58 (1966) pp. 973ff.
21. See the Ecumenical Directory, Second Part: AAS 62 (1970) pp. 705 - 724.
22. See especially Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*: AAS 58 (1966) pp. 713ff.
23. See especially the Letter of Pope Paul VI *Lumen Ecclesiae*, about St. Thomas Aquinas, of November 20, 1974: AAS 66 (1974) pp. 673ff. Also see the circular letters of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education: on the Theological Formation of Future Priests, February 22, 1976, on Canon Law Studies in Seminaries, March 1, 1975; and on Philosophical Studies, January 20, 1972.

24. See Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius*, 15: AAS 58 (1966) p. 722. 25.

Especially see the Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius*: AAS 58 (1966) pp. 713ff. and the Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*: AAS 58 (1966) pp. 728ff

26. See especially the letter of Pope Paul VI on St. Thomas Aquinas *Lumen Ecclesiae* of November 20, 1974: AAS 66 (1974) pp. 673ff. and the Circular letter of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *On the Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*, of January 20, 1972.

NORMS OF APPLICATION
OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION FOR THE CORRECT IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION
SAPIENTIA CHRISTIANA

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, according to article 10 of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, presents to the Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties the following Norms of Application and orders that they be faithfully observed.

PART ONE
GENERAL NORMS

Section I Nature and Purpose of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties
(Apostolic Constitution, articles 1 - 10)

Article 1. By the term University or Faculty is understood also those *Athenaea*, Institutes, or Academic Centers which have been canonically erected or approved by the Holy See with the right to confer academic degrees by the authority of the same See.

Article 2. With a view to promoting scientific research, a strong recommendation is given for specialized research centers, scientific periodicals and collections, and meetings of learned societies.

Article 3. The tasks for which students can be prepared can be either strictly scientific, such as research or teaching, or else pastoral. Account must be taken of this diversity in the ordering of the studies and in the determining of the academic degrees, while always preserving the scientific nature of the studies for both.

Article 4. Active participation in the ministry of evangelization concerns the action of the Church in pastoral work, in ecumenism, and in missionary undertakings. It also extends to the understanding, defense, and diffusion of the faith. At the same time it extends to the whole context of culture and human society.

Article 5. Bishops' Conferences, joined to the Apostolic See in these matters also, are thus to follow carefully the Universities and Faculties:

1. together with the Chancellor they are to foster their progress and, while of course respecting the autonomy of science according to the mind of the Second Vatican Council, they are to be solicitous for their scientific and ecclesial condition;
2. with regard to common problems which occur within the boundaries of their own region, they are to help, inspire, and harmonize the activity of the Faculties;
3. bearing in mind the needs of the Church and the cultural progress of their own area, they are to take care that there exist an adequate number of such Faculties;
4. to do all this, they are to constitute among themselves a commission for this purpose, which should be helped by a committee of experts.

Article 6. In preparing the Statutes and Study Program, the norms in Appendix I of these directives must be kept in mind.

Article 7.

- n. 1. The canonical value of an academic degree means that such a degree enables one to assume an office in the Church for which a degree is required. This is, first of all, for teaching sacred sciences in Faculties, major seminaries, or equivalent schools.
- n. 2. The condition to be fulfilled for the recognition of individual degrees mentioned in article 9 of the Apostolic Constitution, concern, first of all, besides the consent of the local or regional ecclesiastical authorities, the college of teachers, the study program, and the scientific helps used.
- n. 3. Degrees thus recognized, for certain canonical effects only may never be considered simply as equal to canonical degrees.

Section II

The Academic Community and Its Government

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 11 - 21)

Article 8. The duty of the Chancellor is:

1. to promote continually the progress of the University or Faculty, to advance scientific progress, to ensure that Catholic doctrine is integrally followed, and to enforce the faithful implementation of the Statutes and the prescriptions of the Holy See;
2. to help ensure close relationships between all the different ranks and members of the community;
3. to propose to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education the names of those who are to be nominated or confirmed as Rector and President, as well as the names of the teachers for whom a nihil obstat is to be requested;
4. to receive the profession of faith of the Rector and President;
5. to give to or take away from the teachers the canonical mission or permission to teach, according to the norms of the Constitution;
6. to inform the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education about more important matters and to send to that Congregation every three years a detailed report on the academic, moral, and economic condition of the University or Faculty.

Article 9. If the University or Faculty depends upon a collegial entity (for instance, on an Episcopal Conference), one designated member of the group is to exercise the office of Chancellor.

Article 10. The local Ordinary, if he is not the Chancellor, since he has the pastoral responsibility for his Diocese, is, whenever something in the University or Faculty is known to be contrary to doctrine, morals, or ecclesiastical discipline, to take the matter to the Chancellor so that the latter may take action. In case the Chancellor does nothing, the Ordinary may have recourse to the Holy See, without prejudice to his own obligation to provide personally for action in those cases which are more serious or urgent and which carry danger for his Diocese.

Article 11. What is contained in article 19 of the Constitution must be explained further in the proper Statutes of the individual Faculties, giving more weight, as the case may require, either to collegial or else to personal government, while always preserving both forms. Account should be taken of the university practice of the region where the Faculty is located or of the Religious Institute on which the Faculty may depend.

Article 12. Besides the University Council (Academic Senate) and the Faculty Council, both of which must everywhere exist even if under different names, the Statutes can suitably establish other special councils or commissions for scientific learning, teaching, discipline, finances, etc.

Article 13.

- n. 1. According to the Constitution, a Rector is one who presides over a University; a President is one who presides over an Institute or a Faculty which exists separately; a Dean is one who presides over a Faculty which is a part of a University.
- n. 2. The Statutes are to fix a term of office for these persons (for instance, three years) and are to determine how and how many times their term can be renewed.

Article 14. The office of the Rector or President is:

1. to direct, promote, and coordinate all the activity of the academic community;
2. to be the representative of the University or of the Institute or Faculty existing separately;
3. to convoke the Council of the University or of the Institute or Faculty existing separately and preside over the same according to the norms of the Statutes;
4. to watch over the administration of temporalities;
5. to refer more important matters to the Chancellor;
6. to send, every year, a statistical summary to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, according to the outline provided by that same Congregation.

Article 15. The Dean of the Faculty is:

- to promote and coordinate all the activity of the Faculty, especially matters regarding studies, and to see to providing with due speed for their needs;
- to convoke the Faculty Council and preside over it;
- to admit or exclude students in the name of the Rector according to the norms of the Statutes;
- to refer to the Rector what is done or proposed by the Faculty;
- to see that the instructions of higher authorities are carried out.

Section III

Teachers

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 22 - 30)

Article 16.

- n. 1. Teachers who are permanently attached to a Faculty are, in the first place, those who are assumed in full and firm right and who are called Ordinary Professors; next come Extraordinary Professors. It can also be useful to have others according to university practice.
- n. 2. Besides permanent teachers, there are other teachers who are designated by various titles, in the first place, those invited from other Faculties.
- n. 3. Finally, it is also opportune to have Teaching Assistants to carry out certain academic functions.

Article 17. By a suitable doctorate is meant one that corresponds to the discipline that is being taught. If the discipline is sacred or connected with the sacred, the doctorate must be canonical. In the event that the doctorate is not canonical, the teacher will usually be required to have at least a canonical licentiate.

Article 18. Non - Catholic teachers, co - opted according to the norms of competent ecclesiastical authority, (1) require permission to teach from the Chancellor.

Article 19.

- n. 1. The Statutes must establish when a permanent status is conferred in relationship with the obtaining of the nihil obstat that must be procured in accordance with article 27 of the Constitution.
- n. 2. The nihil obstat of the Holy See is the declaration that, in accordance with the Constitution and the special Statutes, there is nothing to impede a nomination which is proposed. If some impediment should exist, this will be communicated to the Chancellor who will listen to the teacher in regard to the matter.
- n. 3. If particular circumstances of time or place impede the requesting of the nihil obstat from the Holy See, the Chancellor is to take counsel with the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education to find a suitable solution.
- n. 4. In Faculties which are under special concordat law the established norms are to be followed.

Article 20. The time interval between promotions, which must be at least three years, is to be set down in the Statutes.

Article 21.

- n. 1. Teachers, first of all the permanent ones, are to seek to collaborate with each other. It is also recommended that there be collaboration with the teachers of other Faculties, especially those with subjects that have an affinity or some connection with those of the Faculty.
- n. 2. One cannot be at one and the same time a permanent teacher in more than one Faculty.

Article 22.

- n. 1. The Statutes are to set out with care the procedure in regard to the suspension or dismissal of a teacher, especially in matters concerning doctrine.
- n. 2. Care must be taken that, first of all, these matters be settled between the Rector or President or Dean and the teacher himself. If they are not settled there, the matters should be dealt with by an appropriate Council or committee, so that the first examination of the facts be carried out within the University or Faculty itself. If this is not sufficient, the matters are to be referred to the Chancellor, who, with the help of experts, either of the University or the Faculty or from other places, must consider the matter and provide for a solution. The possibility remains open for recourse to the Holy See for a definitive solution, always allowing the teacher to explain and defend himself.
- n. 3. However, in more grave or urgent cases for the good of the students and the faithful, the Chancellor can suspend the teacher for the duration of the regular procedure.

Article 23. Diocesan priests and Religious or those equivalent to Religious from whatever Institute, in order to be teachers in a Faculty or to remain as such, must have the consent of their proper Ordinary or Religious Superior, following the norms established in these matters by competent Church authority.

Section IV

Students

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 31 - 35)

Article 24.

- n1. Legal testimony, according to the norm of article 31 of the Constitution:
 - 1) about a moral life is to be given, for clergy and seminarians, their own Ordinary or his delegate; for all other persons by some ecclesiastic;
 - 2) about previous studies in the study title required in accordance with article 32 of the Constitution.
- n. 2. Since the studies required before entry into a University differ from one country to another, the Faculty has the right and duty to investigate whether all the disciplines have been studied which the Faculty itself considers necessary.

- n. 3. A suitable knowledge of the Latin language is required for the Faculties of the sacred sciences, so that the students can understand and use the sources and the documents of the Church.(2)
- n. 4. If one of the disciplines has been found not to have been studied or to have been studied in an insufficient way, the Faculty is to require that this be made up at a suitable time and verified by an examination.

Article 25.

- n. 1. Besides ordinary students, that is, those studying for academic degrees, extraordinary students can be admitted according to the norms determined in the Statutes.
- n. 2. A person can be enrolled as an ordinary student in only one Faculty at a time.

Article 26. The transfer of a student from one Faculty to another can take place only at the beginning of the academic year or semester, after a careful examination of his academic and disciplinary situation. But in any event nobody can be given an academic degree unless all the requirements for the degree are fulfilled as the Statutes of the Faculty demand.

Article 27. In the norms which determine the suspension or the expulsion of a student from a Faculty, the student's right to defend himself must be safeguarded.

Section V

Officials and Staff Assistants

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 36 - 37)

Article 28. In the Statutes or in some other suitable document of the University or Faculty, the rights and duties of the Officials and Staff Assistants should be determined, as well as their participation in the community life of the University.

Section VI

Study Program

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 38 - 45)

Article 29. The Statutes of each Faculty must define which disciplines (principal and auxiliary) are obligatory and must be followed by all, and which are free or optional.

Article 30. Equally, the Statutes are to determine the practical exercises and seminars in which the students must not only be present but also actively work together with their colleagues and produce their own expositions.

Article 31. The lectures and practical exercises are to be suitably distributed so as to foster private study and personal work under the guidance of the teachers.

Article 32.

- n. 1. The Statutes are also to determine in what way the examiners are to make their judgments about candidates.
- n. 2. In the final judgment about the candidates for the individual academic degrees, account is to be taken of all the marks received in the various tests in the same cycle, whether written or oral.
- n. 3. In the examinations for the giving of degrees, especially the doctorate, it is also useful to invite examiners from outside the Faculty.

Article 33. The Statutes are to indicate the permanent curricula of studies which are to be instituted in a Faculty for special purposes and indicate the diplomas which are conferred at their conclusion.

Section VII Academic Degrees

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 46 - 51)

Article 34. In Ecclesiastical Universities or Faculties which are canonically erected or approved, the academic degrees are given in the name of the Supreme Pontiff.

Article 35. The Statutes are to establish the necessary requisites for the preparation of the doctrinal dissertation and the norms for their public defense and publication.

Article 36. A copy of the published dissertation must be sent to the Sacred congregation for Catholic Education. It is recommended that copies also be sent to other Ecclesiastical Faculties, at least those of the same region, which deal with the same science.

Article 37. Authentic documents regarding the conferring of degrees are to be signed by the Academic Authorities, according to the Statutes, and then are to be countersigned by the Secretary of the University or Faculty and have the appropriate seal affixed.

Article 38. Honorary doctorates are not to be conferred except with the consent of the Chancellor, who, having listened to the opinion of the University or Faculty Council, has obtained the nihil obstat of the Holy See.

Section VIII Matters Relating to Teaching (Apostolic Constitution, articles 52 - 55)

Article 39. The University or Faculty must have lecture halls which are truly functional and worthy and suited to the teaching of the disciplines and to the number of students.

Article 40. There must be a library open for consultation, in which the principle works for the scientific work of the teachers and students are available.

Article 41. Library norms are to be established in such a way that access and use is made easy for the students and teachers.

Article 42. Cooperation and coordination between libraries of the same city and region should be fostered.

Section IX Economic Matters (Apostolic Constitution, articles 56 - 59)

Article 43. To provide for continuous good administration, the authorities must inform themselves at set times about the financial situation and they must provide for careful, periodic audits.

Article 44. n. 1. Suitable ways should be found so that tuition fees do not keep from academic degrees gifted students who give good hope of one day being useful to the Church.

n. 2. Therefore care must be taken to set up forms of assistance for scholars, whatever their various names (scholarships, study burses, student subsidies, etc.), to be given to needy students.

Section X Planning and Cooperation of Faculties (Apostolic Constitution, articles 60 - 64)

Article 45.

n. 1. In order to undertake the erection of a new University or Faculty, it is necessary that:

a) a true need or usefulness can be demonstrated, which cannot be satisfied either by affiliation, aggregation, or incorporation,

b) the necessary prerequisites are present, which are mainly:

1) permanently engaged teachers who in number and quality respond to the nature and demands of a Faculty;

2) a suitable number of students;

3) a library with scientific apparatus and suitable buildings;

4) economic means really sufficient for a University or Faculty;

c) the Statutes, together with the Study Program, be exhibited, which are in conformity to the Constitution and to these Norms of Application.

n. 2. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education - after listening to the advice first of the Bishops' Conference, mainly from the pastoral viewpoint, and next of experts, principally from nearby Faculties, mainly from the scientific viewpoint - will decide about the suitability of a new erection. This is commonly conceded at first experimentally for a period of time before being definitely confirmed.

Article 46. When, on the other hand, the approval of a University or Faculty is undertaken, this is to be done:

a) after the consent of both the Episcopal Conference and the local diocesan authority is obtained;

b) after the conditions stated in article 45, n. 1, under b) and c) are fulfilled.

Article 47. The conditions for affiliation regard, above all, the number and qualification of teachers, the study program, the library, and the duty of the affiliating Faculty to help the institution being affiliated. Therefore, this is usually granted only when the affiliating Faculty and the affiliated institution are in the same country or cultural region.

Article 48.

- n. 1. Aggregation is the linking with a Faculty of some Institute which embraces only the first and second cycle, for the purpose of granting the degrees corresponding to those cycles through the Faculty.
- n. 2. Incorporation is the insertion into a Faculty of some Institute which embraces either the second or third cycle or both, for the purpose of granting the corresponding degrees through the Faculty.
- n. 3. Aggregation and incorporation cannot be granted unless the Institute is specially equipped to grant degrees in such a way that there is a well - founded hope that, through the connection with the Faculty, the desired ends will be achieved.

Article 49.

- n. 1. Cooperation is to be fostered among the Ecclesiastical Faculties themselves by means of teacher exchanges, mutual communication of scientific work, and the promoting of common research for the benefit of the People of God.
- n.2. Cooperation with other Faculties, even those of non - Catholics, should be promoted, care always however being taken to preserve one's own identity.

PART TWO SPECIAL NORMS

Section I

Faculty of Sacred Theology

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 66 - 74)

Article 50. The theological disciplines are to be taught in such a way that their organic connection is made clear and that light be shed upon the various aspects or dimensions that pertain intrinsically to the nature of sacred doctrine. The chief ones are the biblical, patristic, historical, liturgical, and pastoral dimensions. The students are to be led to a deep grasp of the material, at the same time as they are led to form a personal synthesis, to acquire a mastery of the method of scientific research, and thus to become able to explain sacred doctrine appropriately.

Article 51. The obligatory disciplines are:

1. in the first cycle:

- a) the philosophical disciplines needed for theology, which are above all systematic philosophy together with its main parts and its historical evolution;
- b) the theological disciplines, namely:
 - . - Sacred Scripture, introduction and exegesis;
 - . - fundamental theology, which also includes reference to ecumenism, non - Christian religions, and atheism;
 - . - dogmatic theology;
 - . - moral and spiritual theology;
 - . - pastoral theology;
 - . - liturgy;
 - . - Church history, patrology, archaeology;
 - . - Canon law.
- c) the auxiliary disciplines, namely, some of the sciences of man and, besides Latin, the biblical languages insofar as they are required for the following cycles.

2. in the second cycle: the special disciplines established in various sections, according to the diverse specializations offered, along with the practical exercises and seminars, including written work.

3. in the third cycle: the Statutes are to determine if special disciplines are to be taught and which ones, together with practical exercises and seminars.

Article 52. In the fifth - year basic cycle, diligent care must be exercised that all the disciplines are taught with order, fullness, and with correct method, so that the student receives harmoniously and effectively a solid, organic, and complete basic instruction in theology, which will enable him either to go on to the next cycle's higher studies or to exercise some office in the Church.

Article 53. Besides examinations or equivalent tests for each discipline, at the end of the first and of the second cycle there is to be a comprehensive examination or equivalent test, so that the student proves that he has received the full and scientific formation demanded by the respective cycle.

Article 54. It belongs to the Faculty to determine under which conditions students who have completed a normal six - year philosophy - theology course in an ordinary seminary or in some other approved institution of higher learning may be admitted into the second cycle, taking account of their previous studies and, where necessary, prescribing special courses and examinations.

Section II

Faculty of Canon Law

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 76 - 79)

Article 55. In a Faculty of Canon Law, whether Latin or Oriental, there must be a careful setting forth both of the history and texts of ecclesiastical laws and of their disposition and connection.

Article 56. The obligatory disciplines are:

1. in the first cycle:

a) the general fundamentals of canon law;
b) the elements of Sacred Theology (especially of ecclesiology and sacramental theology) and of philosophy (especially ethics and natural law) which by their very nature are prerequisites for the study of canon law. It is useful to add elements from the sciences of man which are connected with the juridical sciences.

2. in the second cycle:

a) the Code of Canon Law with all its various parts and the other canonical laws;
b) the connected disciplines, which are: the philosophy of law, the public law of the Church, fundamentals of Roman law, elements of civil law, the history of canon law. The student must also write a special dissertation.

3. in the third cycle: the Statutes are to determine which special disciplines and which practical exercises are to be prescribed, according to the nature of the Faculty and the needs of the students.

Article 57. n. 1. Whoever successfully completes the philosophy - theology curriculum in an ordinary seminary or in some other approved institution of higher learning, or who has already successfully completed the studies of the first cycle, may be admitted directly into the second cycle.

n. 2. A person who has already earned a doctorate in civil law, may be allowed, according to the judgment of the Faculty, to abbreviate the course, always maintaining however the obligation to pass all the examinations and tests required for receiving academic degrees.

Article 58. Besides examinations or equivalent tests for each discipline, at the end of the second cycle there is to be a comprehensive examination or equivalent test, whereby the student proves that he has received the full and scientific formation demanded by the cycle.

Section III

Faculty of Philosophy

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 79 - 83)

Article 59.

- n. 1. Philosophy is to be taught in such a way that the students in the basic cycle will come to a solid and coherent synthesis of doctrine, will learn to examine and judge the different systems of philosophy, and will also gradually become accustomed to personal philosophical reflection.
- n. 2. All of the above is to be perfected in the second cycle, which begins specialization. In this cycle there is to be a deeper grasp of the determined object of philosophy and of the proper philosophical method.

Article 60. The obligatory disciplines are:

1. in the first cycle:

a) systematic philosophy (preceded by a general introduction) with its principal parts: philosophy of
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_co...ents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15041979_sapientia-christiana_en.html
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knowledge, natural philosophy, philosophy of man, philosophy of being (including natural theology) and moral philosophy;

b) history of philosophy, especially of modern philosophy, with a careful study of the systems which are exercising a major influence;

c) the auxiliary disciplines, namely selected natural and human sciences.

2. in the second cycle: the special disciplines established in various sections, according to the diverse specializations offered, along with practical exercises and seminars, including written work.

3. in the third cycle: the Statutes are to determine if special disciplines are to be taught and which ones, together with the practical exercises and seminars.

Article 61. Besides examinations or equivalent tests for each discipline, at the end of the first and second cycle there is to be a comprehensive examination or equivalent test whereby the student proves that he has received the full and scientific formation demanded by the respective cycle.

Article 62. It belongs to the Faculty to determine under what conditions students who have done a biennium of philosophy in an approved institution, or who have done a six - year philosophy - theology course in an ordinary seminary or equivalent school, may be admitted to the second cycle, taking account of their previous studies and, where necessary, prescribing special courses and examinations.

Section IV

Other Faculties

(Apostolic Constitution, articles 84 - 87)

Article 63. In accordance with article 86 of the Constitution, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education will gradually give special norms for the other Faculties, taking account of the experience already gained in these Faculties and Institutes.

Article 64. In the meantime, in Appendix II there is a list of the areas or divisions of ecclesiastical studies -besides the theological, canonical, and philosophical ones treated of in the three previous sections of these Norms of Application - which at the present time in the Church are ordered academically and are in existence as Faculties, Institutes ad instar, or Specialization Sections. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education will add to the list of these Sections when appropriate, indicating for these Sections their special purposes and the more important disciplines to be taught and researched.

His Holiness John Paul II, by divine Providence Pope, has ratified, confirmed, and ordered to be published each and every one of these Norms of Application, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given from the offices of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome, April 29, the Memorial of St. Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church, in the year of our Lord 1979.

Gabriel - Marie Cardinal GARRONE,

Prefect

Antonio Maria JAVIERRE ORTAS,

Titular Archbishop of Meta,

Secretary

APPENDIX I

According to Article 6 of Norms of Application

Norms for Drawing Up Statutes

Taking into account what is contained in the Apostolic Constitution and in the Norms of Application -- and leaving to their own internal regulations what is of a particular or changeable nature -- the Universities or Faculties must mainly deal with the following points in drawing up their Statutes:

1. The name, nature and purpose of the University or Faculty (with a brief history in the foreword).

2. The government -- the Chancellor, the personal and collegial academic authorities: what their exact functions are; how the personal authorities are chosen and how long their term of office is; how the collegial authorities or the members of the Councils are chosen and how long their term is.

3. The teachers -- what the minimum number of teachers is in each Faculty; into which ranks the permanent and non - permanent are divided; what requisites they must have; how they are hired, named, promoted, and how they cease functioning; their duties and rights.

4. The students -- requisites for enrollment and their duties and rights.
5. The officials and staff assistants -- their duties and rights.
6. The study program -- what the order of studies is in each Faculty; how many cycles it has; what disciplines are taught; which are obligatory, attendance at them; which seminars and practical exercises; which examinations and tests are to be given.
7. The academic degrees -- which degrees are given in each Faculty and under what conditions.
8. Matters relating to teaching -- the library; how its conservation and growth are provided for; other didactic helps and scientific laboratories, if required.
9. Economic matters -- the financial endowment of the University or Faculty and its economic administration; norms for paying the staff assistants, teachers and officials; student fees and payments, burses and scholarships.
10. Relationships with other Faculties and Institutes, etc.

APPENDIX II

According to Article 64 of the Norms of Application
Divisions of Ecclesiastical Studies as Now (1979) Existing in the Church

LIST

Note: These individual study Sectors are listed alphabetically (according to their Latin names) and in parenthesis is noted the academic organizational form (whether a Faculty or an Institute ad instar or a Sector of specialization) in which it now exists in some ecclesiastical academic center. Not listed are the studies of a theological, philosophical, or canonical kind which are treated in articles 51, 56, and 60 of the Norms of Application.

1. Arabic - Islamic studies (an Institute ad instar, a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
2. Christian Archaeology studies (an Institute ad instar).
3. Studies in Atheism (a specialized Sector in a Theology and/or Philosophy Faculty).
4. Biblical studies (a Faculty of Biblical Science, a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
5. Catechetical studies (a specialized Sector in a Theology or Education Faculty).
6. Ecclesiastical Oriental studies (a Faculty of Ecclesiastical Oriental Studies).
7. Education studies (a Faculty of Education).
8. Church History studies (a Faculty of Church History, a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
9. Comparative Canonical - Civil Juridical studies (a Faculty of comparative civil law).
10. Classical and Christian Literary studies (a Faculty of Christian and Classical Letters).
11. Liturgical studies (a Faculty, a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
12. Mariological studies (a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
13. Medieval studies (an Institute ad instar, a specialized Sector in a Faculty of Theology or Canon Law or Philosophy).
14. Missiological studies (a Faculty of Missiology, a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
15. Moral studies (a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).

16. Studies in Sacred Music (an Institute ad instar, a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
17. Ecumenical studies (a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
18. Ancient Oriental studies (a Faculty of Eastern Antiquity, a specialized Sector in a Theology or Philosophy Faculty).
19. Pedagogical studies (a Faculty of Pedagogy, a specialized Sector in a Philosophy or Education Faculty).
20. Pastoral studies (a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
21. Patristic studies (a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
22. Studies in Psychology (an Institute ad instar, a specialized Sector in a Faculty of Philosophy, or Pedagogy, or Education).
23. Studies in Religion and Religious Phenomenology (a specialized Sector in a Theology or Philosophy Faculty).
24. Catholic Religious studies (a Higher Institute of Religious Science).
25. Sociological studies (a Faculty of Social Science, a specialized Sector in a Faculty of Education).
26. Spirituality studies (a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).
27. Studies in the Theology of Religious Life (a specialized Sector in a Theology Faculty).

FOOTNOTES

1. See the Ecumenical Directory, Second Part: AAS 62 (1970), pp. 705ff.
2. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatum Totius*, 13: AAS 58 (1966), p. 721 and the Chirograph of Pope Paul VI *Romani Sermonis*: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 481ff.

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