

Laity Today

*A Series of Studies edited
by the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS

The Congress of Catholic Laity

Rome 2000



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INTRODUCTION

The present publication contains the proceedings of the Congress of Catholic Laity held in Rome, under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, from 25 to 30 November 2000 on the theme: “Witnesses of Christ in the new millennium”.

Incorporated in the official calendar of the celebrations of the Great Jubilee, the holding of the Congress was warmly encouraged by John Paul II. “This Congress – he said while its preparations were still going ahead – will be above all a Jubilee event for all those who will participate in it. It will also be a recapitulation of the journey of the laity from Vatican Council II to the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation [...]. To be held towards the end of 2000, it will be enriched by everything experienced in that year of grace of the Lord, nor will it fail to indicate to the lay faithful the tasks that await them in the various fields of mission and service to man at the beginning of the third millennium”.¹

The Congress was attended by over 500 participants from 92 countries. They included the delegates of 89 episcopal conferences and 114 ecclesial movements and new communities, members of national councils of the laity and diocesan and pastoral councils, numerous laypeople who hold offices or fulfil duties or ministries not incorporated in the local Churches, and Christian personalities who bring their own witness to the various environments of social, political and cultural life. Their analyses, discussions, testimonies and reflections on the identity of Christians, and on the horizons opened to their apostolate by Vatican Council II, had a distinctly jubilee character and impetus.

In the autograph message sent to the Congress, and read out by Cardinal Secretary of State, Angelo Sodano, the Pope exhorted the lay

¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity on the occasion of its eighteenth Plenary Assembly”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1-2 March 1999, 5.

faithful never to forget their own baptism, but to base their own life on Christ and to live it as vocation. For, if it is true that the seeds of an encouraging spiritual springtime can be seen blossoming in the Church, at the same time, in a climate of widespread secularization, “many believers are tempted to stray from the Church [...], they allow themselves to be infected by indifference or yield to compromises with the dominant culture”. No baptized person can therefore remain idle. All must feel themselves called “to bear witness to Christ in every circumstance and situation, in every social, cultural and political context”, assuming their own share of responsibility also in the life of their own ecclesial community. The Holy Father recalled that during the harsh persecutions suffered by the Church in the twentieth century in vast areas of the world “it was above all thanks to the courageous witness of lay faithful, in many cases to the point of martyrdom, that the faith was not wiped out from the life of entire peoples”. It is in the footsteps of their luminous example that “the present generation [must assume the task] of bringing the Gospel to the humanity of tomorrow”.

The work of the Congress was introduced by a review of the historical events and epoch-making changes that marked the twentieth century. The analysis of Prof. Pedro Morandé, professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Catholic University of Santiago in Chile, was followed by a round table at which the following spoke: Tadeusz Mazowiecki (Poland), Thomas Han (Korea), Agnès Avognon (Benin), Amin Fahim (Egypt) and Mary Ann Glendon (USA). In the course of the century, Christians, by their social action, announced the freedom and primacy of the human person. Their witness found a new unity around the Magisterium and was renewed, producing new movements born from submissiveness and obedience to the faith which together with the prophetic guidance of the Successor of Peter placed the Church on the road of the evangelizing and missionary presence at the heart of our age. In every part of the world they must tackle enormous challenges today: in Europe the legacy of a past that has inflicted deep wounds and the reconstruction of a unity firmly linked to the Christian roots of the continent; in Asia the task of the inculturation of the

Gospel in a world where Catholics only form 2.8% of a population that comprises some three and a half billion non Christians; in Africa the enterprise of redeeming the dignity of millions of human beings and promoting the rebirth of a continent devastated by centuries of slavery, hunger, and AIDS; in the tormented Middle East the task of building peace and supporting the often heroic mission of our brothers in the faith who live in Moslem countries; in North America, the effort to vanquish the spreading “culture of death”, fuelled by growing materialism, secularism, nihilism, and to guide the path of freedom and the progress of science and technology towards the truth of the person and the service of peoples.

The lay faithful – who live in full their vocation in the daily communication of the newness they experience by their meeting with Christ – are thus asked to come to the forefront on the stage of the world. This was emphasized by Bishop Angelo Scola, Rector of the Pontifical Lateran University who, in treating the theme of the Church’s missionary nature, spoke of an “ecclesiology of mission” and mission as method of Christian life.

Mission as expression of the Christian identity was discussed in turn by Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, who reconstructed the journey made by the Catholic laity from the Council to our own day. Among the most significant fruits of Vatican II he pointed to the flourishing of ecclesial associations and movements, and emphasized their great importance in the context of contemporary society, a mass society that generates a sense of profound loneliness and loss.

The Christian who wants to be a genuine witness of Christ cannot water down his own identity. The foundation of the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission, whereby the Christian participates in the mission of Christ, is Baptism, the sacrament in which the vocation of the lay faithful to holiness is rooted. This was explained by the bishop of Namur (Belgium), Msgr. André-Mutien Léonard, warning the laity of the risk they run today of focusing their own efforts almost exclusively inside the Church, whereas their primary task is an active presence in the world.

In the world, they are called to keep awake that “inward sentinel” that conscience represents for every human being. They are called to acquire an ever deeper consciousness of their own being and put to one side the improvization of the self-taught in the life of faith that renders the individual Christian unconsciously vulnerable and immediately confused at the very first objection. From the laity’s identity as baptized also derives their vocation to be witnesses in unity in every situation in which the trauma of division is experienced, bearing witness by their own life that love is stronger than hatred, violence and death. And it is from Baptism, moreover, that springs their responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, and of making their own indispensable contribution to more humane forms of life and conditions more worthy of man. These are some of the observations that emerged from the round table on vocation, animated by the interventions of the editor-in-chief of the daily *Avvenire*, Dino Boffo, the founder of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich, the Australian Brian Smith, the Russian Alexey Youdine, the Senegalese Théodore Ndiaye and the Spaniard Alejandro Llano.

“The Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body”: starting out from this affirmation from the *Letter to Diognetus*, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, spoke of the laity as witnesses of new life. He pointed out that Vatican Council II radically changed the perspective of the theological reflection on the laity. Assuming as its point of departure the vocation and the mission of the Church in the world and the way in which her various members participate in it, the Council in fact affirmed that the mission of sanctification and evangelization is the mission of the whole Church and that by virtue of their baptism the laity participate in it by full right.

A great sign of the new life in the contemporary world is the love of Christians for the poor. It is a love that proves that the Church, in a world that has become a marketplace in everything, even in its most hidden interstices, lives according to the law of gratuitousness. The poor are a social problem, an open question, a challenge to the search for justice. But the Christian lay person cannot forget that the poor person is above all a man, a woman, because the ‘ideologization’ of the

problem of poverty inevitably leads to a distancing of the suffering human person. So many lay people who, also in the twentieth century, have never hesitated to place at risk their own life in the service of their fellowmen, have testified movingly to this.

In political action and in the international community the witness of the newness of life must be transformed into a strong commitment to the construction of a genuine democracy, respectful of the natural law, the fundamental rights of the human person and the ethical principles that derive from them. The real danger is the judicial encroachment of politics on fundamental questions of life like abortion and euthanasia, as well as attempts to redefine the concept of marriage.

More than ever central is the question of the family, a field that specifically belongs to the mission of Christian married couples. Like the disciples in the Gospel who were sent out two by two, they are invited on the day of their marriage to set out on a mission as a couple: on a mission the one towards the other and on a mission towards their own children; a mission to turn the family into the "laboratory of the civilization of love".

The promotion of a spirituality of work that is born from the experience of the meeting with Christ, and that may foster a way of experiencing work as the grace of collaborating with God, is the newness that the laity must bring to the world of work. No energy must be spared to ensure that, in the context of the globalization of the economy characterized by the introduction of ever more advanced technologies, work may always preserve a fully human dimension.

In the universities, dedicated *par excellence* to education and culture, and where the most advanced frontiers of the development of knowledge are explored, Christian professors and researchers must come to terms with the widespread relativism of our time. In their witnessing, according to the teachings of *Fides et Ratio*, their challenge is to have the ability to help others see the Truth, the ability to guide them in discernment, the ability to look on their own scientific activity with the eyes of Christ, and the ability to inculturate the Gospel in all spheres of life and knowledge.

All this emerged from the round table on mission, in the course of which the following intervened: Andrea Riccardi, founder of the St. Egidio Community; George Weigel, of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington DC; Anouk Meyer (France); Rafael Serrano Castro (Spain); Nikolaus Lobkowicz, founder of the University of Eichstätt (Germany); and Patricia Jones, of Caritas of England and Wales.

The objective to be pursued to become intrepid witnesses of the Gospel is formation. We need to place ourselves in the school of Jesus, and assimilate his Word. The point was made by Most Rev. Robert Sarah, Archbishop of Conakry (Guinea), in speaking of human and Christian maturity. The Gospel risks becoming a dead letter due to the refusal to open ourselves to the Mystery and to the obsession with profit and success that bar our way to the love of God. Man today is incapable of grasping the radical nature of that love; he minimizes it, and rejects the Cross which is scandalous to his way of thinking and to his quest for easy answers. But the Christian's journey to maturity passes through Scripture and through a conversion that urges him to seek God at the centre of his own soul and gives him the strength to follow Christ and daily to conform his own existence to the needs of the Gospel.

The theme of formation was completed by interventions from Onorato Grassi, Eusebio Astiaso Garcia (Spain), Ludmila Grygiel (Poland), Ernesto Preziosi, vice-president of Italian Catholic Action, Martine Catta (France), Nazario Vivero (Venezuela). Education, it has been said, is the fundamental dimension of human life. There is not life worthy of that name that does not urge us to penetrate into the great mystery of things, and especially today Christian education must show the reasonableness of the faith: it must show that it corresponds to man's fundamental structure and responds to his historical problems and needs.

In a Christian's journey of formation great importance is attached to the liturgy, the sacraments and prayer, the privileged means for the integral formation of the person, who is called to enter into communion with other persons and with God. It is precisely in the loss of the harmonious balance between *ora et labora* that the main cause of the dechristianization we are witnessing today has been identified.

Last but not least, discussion focused on the places for the formation of the Christian laity. They are par excellence the parish, as exemplary experience of the Church, and the ecclesial movements and new communities, places of spiritual growth because they are places in which mission is practised.

“What laity for the third millennium?” This question was posed at the end of the Congress and replies to it were given by Cardinal Bernard Francis Law, archbishop of Boston, and Prof. Guzmán Carriquiry, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

Emphasizing the hope represented for the future both by the emphasis placed on the laity by the Council and by the life and teaching of John Paul II, Cardinal Law warns the laity of the temptation to seek refuge inside the Church, and the even more dangerous temptation to separate faith from life. In a culture ever more hostile to faith, and characterized by scepticism and moral relativism, it is ever more urgently necessary that they have the courage to bring the light of the Gospel into temporal realities. He also made a strong appeal to the duty that Catholic universities have to stimulate students to place culture in the perspective of faith. The fundamental choices that Christian lay people are called to make in the third millennium are three: life, family and the poor. And this means ever more closely conforming culture, politics and the economy to the principles of the social doctrine of the Church.

The future of the Catholic laity cannot therefore be that of an “assimilated” and hence insignificant minority. Christianity, said Prof. Guzmán Carriquiry, runs the risk of being reduced to a mere symbol of compassion, to edifying social volunteer service, to just one of the many irrational and interchangeable forms of “spiritual offerings” with which entertainment and the shop-windows of consumer society are full. Living their own baptism with passion, in other words transforming their own lives by the meeting with Jesus Christ as superabundant response to the yearnings of the human heart for freedom and truth, beauty and justice, is the need posed to the laity in the third millennium.

The Congress of Catholic Laity was pervaded by a climate of prayer and worship, significantly expressed in the daily eucharistic celebra-

tions, in the memory of the sacraments of Christian initiation, in the renewal of the baptismal promises, and in a Marian Vigil. This jubilee dynamic reached its culmination in the celebration presided by the Holy Father in St. Peter's Square on Sunday, 26 November 2000, solemnity of Christ the King. The deeply-felt participation of the lay faithful was the tangible sign of their communion with the Successor of Peter and their gratitude for his tireless apostolic ministry aimed at bearing witness to Christ the Lord and confirming the faith of his disciples gathered in unity, in truth and in charity.

In his homily given for the Jubilee of the apostolate of the laity, John Paul II spoke of the congress as one of the fruits of the deeper consciousness that the Church has been gradually acquiring in the course of the last fifty years "of her own nature as mystery of communion and her own intrinsic missionary responsibility in the world", a process in which Vatican Council II marked a decisive turning point, because "with the Council, the hour of the laity really struck in the Church". Not by chance, therefore, did the Pope invite the faithful, and in particular the laity, to take up the Council documents, for to them [the laity] "the Council opened up extraordinary prospects of involvement and commitment in the mission of the Church".

The Holy Father then stressed that holiness, the "high standard of ordinary Christian living",² and the basic meaning of the jubilee indulgence, continues to be the greatest challenge for believers. There are no other programmes that need to be invented in the life of Christians, "the programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever [and] has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live [...] and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem".³ And so the Christian is asked always to choose to follow in the footsteps of the Lord, in the *fiat* requested of each disciple, trusting to grace and letting himself be reconciled with

² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, no. 29.

God. God changes our life, making it more human both in marriage and in the family, and in the commitment we make in the world of work, culture and politics.

Major challenges are addressed to the laity in the third millennium. It is their irreplaceable task to "bring the light of the Gospel into the living heart of society". "One need only think", said Pope John Paul II, "of social advances and of the revolution in genetics; of economic progress and of underdevelopment in vast areas of the globe; of the tragedy of hunger in the world and of the difficulties in safeguarding peace; of the extensive network of communications and of the dramas of loneliness and violence reported in the daily press".

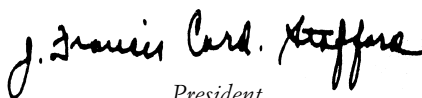
The commitment of lay Christians "to seek with courage adequate responses to the demand for bread and work and to the needs for freedom, peace and justice, sharing and solidarity", as the Holy Father wrote in his message to the Congress, and their consciousness of the duty to proclaim the gospel and bear witness to Christ, assumed a significant form in the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles and in a celebration in the Catacombs of Domitilla. This included a commemoration of the martyrs who in every age have confessed their faith in the Church, from Clement to St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein).

The Congress of Catholic Laity ended with the missionary mandate. After the penitential procession of the participants and the passing through the Holy Door in the basilica of St. Paul's outside the Walls, the gift made to them of an icon depicting Christ who sends out his disciples into the world sealed the commitment of the lay faithful to ensure that the Gospel be ever more light, salt and leaven of a new humanity.

The hope I entertain for the Church of the new millennium is based on the hope that God is working among the lay *christifideles* and was reinforced by the experience of the Congress of the Catholic laity. The testimonies, the reports, the exchanges that enlivened it, and whose contents are summed up in the final Message, speak in fact of a laity determined to walk in the footsteps of Christ with their eyes fixed on

the first community of disciples of the Lord formed of Mary, John, Peter and Paul. A constellation that remains in every period, the insuperable model for the whole Church and for each believer.

Of all this, the documentation collected in the present volume offers a survey rich in content, perspective and guidance. I am confident that the lay faithful throughout the world will derive inspiration from it and that, especially in the light of the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, they will be encouraged to follow as closely as possible in the footsteps of the Lord and to transmit the Gospel to the new generations of disciples of Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. Francis Card. Stafford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

President
of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

The words of the Pope

Message of His Holiness John Paul II

To my Venerable Brother Cardinal James Francis Stafford
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

1. In the coming days the Congress of the Catholic Laity organized by this Pontifical Council for the Laity will be held in Rome with the theme: "Witnesses to Christ in the New Millennium". This is a happy initiative which will offer the participants a further opportunity during the Great Jubilee to grow in faith and ecclesial communion. For the assembly will see many lay people gather with Cardinals, Bishops, priests and religious, signifying all the people baptized in the Lord, the christifideles, who are walking to the Father's house amid the afflictions of the world and the consolations of God (cf. *2 Cor* 1:4). The congress will thus be a moment of reflection and dialogue, of sharing faith and prayer, within the framework of the celebrations for the Jubilee of the Laity, culminating with Holy Mass in St Peter's Square on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

Through you I thank the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which wanted to organize this stimulating programme that has us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church (cf. *Rv* 2:7) through the faith experience of so many lay Christians, men and women of our time.

2. The congress is thematically related with the other great meetings of the lay faithful which in the last 50 years have marked important stages on the journey of the promotion and development of the Catholic laity. I am thinking in particular of the world congresses of the apostolate of the laity held in Rome respectively in 1951, 1957 and then in 1967, immediately after the Council. I am also thinking of the two world consultations of the Catholic laity organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity for the Holy Year of 1975 and in preparation for the Seventh General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in

1987, whose results I synthesized in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*.

In this regard, as I have already had occasion to stress, the present meeting “will sum up the laity’s progress from the Second Vatican Council to the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation”.¹ Starting with an assessment of the implementation of the Council’s teachings in the life and apostolate of the laity, your meeting will certainly help to instil new zeal in their missionary efforts. An essential dimension of the Christian’s vocation and mission is to bear witness to God’s saving presence in human history, as is well stated by the congress’ theme: “Witnesses to Christ in the New Millennium”.

3. The last decades of the 20th century saw the seeds of an encouraging spiritual springtime blossoming in the Church. How, for example, could we not be grateful to God for the clearer awareness that the lay faithful – men and women – have acquired of their own dignity as baptized persons who have become a “new creation”; of their own Christian vocation; of the need to grow in the knowledge and experience of faith as christifideles, that is, as true disciples of the Lord; and of their own membership in the Church?

At the same time, however, in a climate of widespread secularism, many believers are tempted to leave the Church, and unfortunately they let themselves be infected with indifference or make compromises with the dominant culture. Many of the faithful, too, have selective and critical attitudes to the Church’s Magisterium. To reawaken in the consciences of Christians a livelier sense of their identity, there is a need then, in the framework of the Great Jubilee, for that serious examination of conscience which I spoke of in *Tertio millennio adveniente*.² There are essential questions which no one can avoid: What have I done with my Baptism and Confirmation? Is Christ truly the centre of

¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity on the occasion of its eighteenth Plenary Assembly”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 10 March 1999, 5.

² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 34.

my life? Do I make room for daily prayer? Do I live my life as a vocation and a mission? Christ continues to remind us: “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:13, 14, 16).

4. The vocation and mission of the lay faithful can be understood only in the light of a renewed awareness of the Church, which “is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men”,³ and of one’s personal duty to adhere more firmly to her. The Church is a mystery of communion which originates in the life of the Blessed Trinity. She is the Mystical Body of Christ. She is the People of God who, made one by the same faith, hope and charity, journey through history to their definitive homeland in heaven. And we, as the baptized, are living members of this marvellous and fascinating organism, nourished by the sacramental, hierarchical and charismatic gifts which are coessential to it. That is why, today more than ever, it is necessary for Christians, enlightened and guided by faith, to know the Church as she is in all her beauty and holiness, so that they can listen to her and love her as their mother. To this end it is important to reawaken in the entire People of God a true *sensus Ecclesiae*, along with a deep awareness of being Church, that is, a mystery of communion.

5. At the threshold of the third millennium, God calls believers, especially lay people, to a renewed missionary zeal. Mission is not an appendix to the Christian vocation. Rather, as the Second Vatican Council recalls, the Christian vocation by its nature is a vocation to the apostolate.⁴ Christ should be proclaimed by word and the witness of life, and, before being a strategic and organized effort, the apostolate involves the grateful and joyful communication to all of the gift of meeting

³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.

Christ. An evangelically mature person, or community, is motivated by intense missionary enthusiasm, which spurs him to bear witness to Christ in every circumstance and situation, in every social, cultural and political context. In this regard, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, “by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will.

They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven”.⁵

Dear brothers and sisters, the Church needs you and is counting on you! The promotion and defence of the human person’s dignity and rights, today more urgent than ever, demands the courage of individuals who are enlivened by faith, capable of selfless love and deeply compassionate, respectful of the truth about man made in the image of God and destined to grow to the full stature of Christ Jesus (cf. *Eph* 4:13). Do not be discouraged by the complexity of situations! Seek the source of all apostolic strength in prayer; draw from the Gospel the light to guide your steps.

The complexity of situations must not discourage you, but rather should spur you to look with wisdom and courage for adequate answers to the demand for bread and work, and to the requirements of freedom, peace and justice, sharing and solidarity.

6. Dear lay faithful, men and women, you are also called to accept willingly and generously your share of responsibility for the life of the ecclesial communities to which you belong. The image of your parishes, called to be welcoming and missionary, depends on you. No baptized person can be idle. As participants in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and enriched by a variety of charisms, lay Christians can

⁵ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

make their own contribution to the liturgy, catechesis, and different kinds of missionary and charitable programmes. Some can also be called to assume non-ordained offices, roles or ministries at the parish or diocesan level.⁶ This is a valuable service and, in various parts of the world, more and more indispensable. However, the risk of distorting the role of the lay person by excessive withdrawal into intra-ecclesial needs should be avoided. Therefore, the identity both of the lay faithful and of the ordained minister must be respected, while collaboration between lay faithful and priests and, in cases determined by ecclesiastical discipline, the substitution of priests by lay persons must take place in a spirit of ecclesial communion in which tasks and states of life are seen as complementary and are mutually enriching.⁷

7. Participation of the lay faithful in the life and mission of the Church is expressed and supported by various associations, many of which are represented at this congress. Especially in our times, they represent an important means for deeper Christian formation and more effective apostolic activity. The Second Vatican Council says: "Associations are not ends in themselves; they are meant to be of service to the Church's mission to the world. Their apostolic value depends on their conformity with the Church's aims, as well as on the Christian witness and evangelical spirit of each of their members and of the association as a whole".⁸ Thus, if they are to remain faithful to their own identity, lay groups must constantly evaluate themselves according to the criteria of ecclesiality which I wrote about in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*.⁹

Today we can speak of a "new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful".¹⁰ It is one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council. Along

⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, no. 14.

⁷ Cf. *Instruction on Some Questions concerning the Collaboration of the Lay Faithful in the Ministry of Priests*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997.

⁸ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 19.

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, no. 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 29.

with the associations with a long and praiseworthy tradition, we observe a vigorous and diversified flourishing of ecclesial movements and new communities. This gift of the Holy Spirit is another sign of how God always finds appropriate and timely responses to the challenges posed to faith and to the Church in every historical era. Here too we must thank the associations, movements and ecclesial groups for their work in Christian formation and for the missionary enthusiasm they continue to bring to the Church.

8. Dear brothers and sisters! In these days you are sharing reflections and experiences, evaluating the ground covered and turning your gaze to the future. In looking at the past, you can clearly see how essential the role of the laity is to the life of the Church. How could we forget here the harsh persecutions which the Church suffered in the 20th century in vast areas of the world? It is above all due to the courageous witness of the lay faithful, often to the point of martyrdom, that faith was not erased from the lives of entire peoples. Experience shows that the blood of martyrs becomes the seed of confessors, and we Christians are deeply indebted to these “‘unknown soldiers’ of God’s great cause”.¹¹

As for the future, there are many reasons for entering the new millennium with well-founded hope. The Christian springtime, many signs of which we can already glimpse,¹² is perceivable in the radical choice of faith, in the genuine holiness of life, in the extraordinary apostolic zeal of many lay faithful, men and women, the young, adults and the elderly. It is therefore the task of the present generation to bring the Gospel to future humanity. Be “witnesses to Christ in the new millennium”, as the theme of your congress says. Be well aware of it, and respond with prompt fidelity to this urgent missionary call. The Church is counting on you!

I wish every success to the work of your assembly and, as I

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 37.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris missio*, no. 86.

invoke upon everyone the protection of Mary, Queen of Apostles and Star of the new evangelization, I cordially impart my special Blessing to you, Your Eminence, and to all the participants, and willingly extend it to your loved ones and to everyone you meet in your apostolate.

From the Vatican, 21 November 2000.

Joannes Paulus II

Homily of His Holiness John Paul II on the Occasion of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity

1. “*It is you who say I am a king*” (Jn 18:37). This is how Jesus answered Pilate in a dramatic dialogue which the Gospel recounts to us again on today's Solemnity of Christ the King. On this day, celebrated at the end of the liturgical year, Jesus, the Eternal Word of the Father, is presented as the *beginning and end of all creation*, as the Redeemer of man and the Lord of history. In the first reading, the prophet Daniel says: “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (7:14). *Yes, O Christ, you are King!* Your kingship is paradoxically manifested in the Cross, in obedience to the plan of the Father, “who”, as the Apostle Paul wrote, “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). As the first born from the dead, you, Jesus, are *the King of the new humanity*, restored to its original dignity. You are King! But your kingdom *is not of this world* (cf. Jn 18:36); it is not the fruit of the conquests of war, political domination, economic empires or cultural hegemony. Yours is a “kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace”,¹ which will be revealed in its fullness at the end of time, when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). The Church, which can already taste on earth the first fruits of this future fulfilment, never ceases to repeat: “*Adveniat regnum tuum*”, “Thy kingdom come” (Mt 6:10).

¹ *Preface of Christ the King.*

2. Thy kingdom come! This is how the faithful, in every part of the world, pray as they gather round their Pastors today for the *Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity*. And I joyfully add my voice to this universal chorus of praise and prayer, as I celebrate Holy Mass together with you at the tomb of the Apostle Peter. I thank Cardinal James Francis Stafford, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and your two representatives, who expressed your common sentiments at the beginning of this Holy Mass. I greet my venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, as well as the priests and religious present. I extend my greetings in particular to you, my lay brothers and sisters, *Christifideles laici*, who are actively dedicated to the Gospel cause: in looking at you, I am also thinking of all the members of the communities, associations and movements of apostolic action; I am thinking of the fathers and mothers who, with generosity and a spirit of sacrifice, see that their children are raised in the practice of human and Christian virtues; I am thinking of those who offer their sufferings, accepted and lived in union with Christ, as a contribution to evangelization.

3. I especially greet you, dear participants in the *Congress of the Catholic Laity*, which fits well into the context of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity. The theme of your meeting is “*Witnesses to Christ in the new millennium*”. It continues the tradition of the world conventions of the lay apostolate which began 50 years ago under the fruitful impulse of the keener awareness which the Church had acquired both of her own nature as a mystery of communion and of her intrinsic missionary responsibility in the world.

In the growth of this awareness, *the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council marked a decisive turning-point*. With the Council *the hour of the laity* truly struck, and many lay faithful, men and women, more clearly understood their Christian vocation, which *by its very nature is a vocation to the apostolate*.² Thirty-five years after its conclusion, I say:

² Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.

we must return to the Council. We must once again take the documents of the Second Vatican Council in hand to rediscover the great wealth of its doctrinal and pastoral motives.

In particular, *you lay people* must again take those documents in hand. To you the Council opened extraordinary perspectives of commitment and involvement in the Church's mission. Did the Council not remind you of your participation in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ? In a special way, the Council Fathers entrusted you with the mission "of seeking the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will".³ Since then *a lively season of associations* has blossomed, in which, along with traditional groups, new movements, sodalities and communities have arisen.⁴ Today more than ever, dear brothers and sisters, *your apostolate is indispensable*, if the Gospel is to be the light, salt and leaven of a new humanity.

4. However, what does this mission entail? *What does being a Christian mean today, here and now?*

Being a Christian has never been easy, nor is it easy today. Following Christ demands the courage of radical choices, which often means going against the stream. "We are Christ!", St Augustine exclaimed. The *martyrs and witnesses of faith yesterday and today, including many lay faithful*, show that, if necessary, we must not hesitate to give even our lives for Jesus Christ.

In this regard, the Jubilee invites everyone to a serious examination of conscience and lasting spiritual renewal for ever more effective missionary activity. Here I would like to return to what my venerable predecessor, Pope Paul VI, wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* 25 years ago towards the end of the Holy Year of 1975: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than

³ *Vatican Council II*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 29.

to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”.⁵

These words are still valid today in the presence of a humanity full of potential and expectations, but threatened by a multitude of snares and dangers. One need only think, among other things, of social advances and of the revolution in genetics; of economic progress and of underdevelopment in vast areas of the globe; of the tragedy of hunger in the world and of the difficulties in safeguarding peace; of the extensive network of communications and of the dramas of loneliness and violence reported in the daily press. Dear lay faithful, as witnesses to Christ you are especially called *to bring the light of the Gospel to the vital nerve centres of society*. You are called to be prophets of Christian hope and apostles of the One “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty!” (Rv 1:4).

5. “*Holiness befits your house!*” (Ps 92:5). With these words we addressed God in the responsorial psalm. *Holiness* continues to be *the greatest challenge* for believers. We must be grateful to the Second Vatican Council, which recalled how *all Christians are called to the fullness of Christian life* and the perfection of charity. Dear friends, *do not be afraid to take up this challenge: be holy men and women!* Do not forget that the fruits of the apostolate depend on the depth of spiritual life, on the intensity of prayer, on continual formation and on sincere adherence to the Church's directives. Today I repeat to you, as I did to the young people during the recent World Youth Day, that if you are what you should be – that is, if you live Christianity without compromise – you will set the world ablaze. You face tasks and goals which may seem to exceed human forces. Do not lose heart! “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion” (Phil 1:6) Always keep your gaze fixed on Jesus. Make him the heart of the world.

⁵ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 41.

And you, Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, his first and most perfect disciple, help us to be his witnesses in the new millennium. Let your Son, King of the world and King of history, reign over our lives, our communities and the whole world!

“Praise and honour to you, O Christ!”. By your Cross you have redeemed the world. At the beginning of the millennium, we entrust to you our efforts to serve this world which you love and which we love too. Support us with the power of your grace! Amen.

I

A Time of epoch-making Changes

Retrospect of a Century and Prospects for a New Historical Phase: Challenges to Christian Witness

PEDRO MORANDÉ

A subject so vast in scale as that enunciated in the title of my intervention cannot be tackled other than with great humility. The difficulty of reviewing the events of a century, bearing in mind the complexity that social life came to acquire, can indeed escape no one. We know that history is characterized by the contingency of human freedom. The great social processes certainly condition, though without determining, the rationality of the free conscience, open simultaneously to grace and to sin, to serenity and passion, to the search for the common good and the defence of vested interests. Now that the great deterministic and monocausal conceptions have been abandoned, the conviction is increasingly spreading in the social sciences that in complex societies, such as society today, there does not, nor can there, exist an observer capable of objectively evaluating all the events of significance for the historical evolution of society.

Nonetheless, we Christians have at our disposal a great aid for interpreting the sum of social events, if we follow the major guidelines laid down by the Magisterium of the Church. For, on the one hand, its very catholicity gives to the Church a universal perspective difficult to compare with that of any other social institution: “Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in [man’s] heart”, declares *Gaudium et spes*.¹ On the other hand, the eminently historical character that derives from her foundation on the “communion” of witnesses as an historical event – the incarnation of the Word of God –, permanently actualized by the action of the Spirit and by the apostolic succession,

¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1.

makes it alert to the voices of the present time, to seek in them the signs of the presence of the one who precedes it as “the way, the truth and the life” in the realization of the meaning of existence, which is, at the same time, the realization of the meaning of history. Following the Magisterium means observing as the Church observes, in the perspective of a wisdom tradition that embraces the whole world. So, the Church observes not according to the abstract and idealized view of the world that is typical of neoplatonism or gnosticism, and that was expressed formerly in the modernist ideology and currently in the so-called “new age”, but with a vision of love and predilection for the destiny of each and every human being, “the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake”.²

On this premise, I believe we can interpret the events of the last century by adopting the dual hermeneutic criterion developed by the encyclicals comprised between *Aeterni Patris* (1879) and *Fides et ratio* (1999) as regards thought and culture, and between *Rerum novarum* (1891) and *Centesimus annus* (1991) as regards the organization of social life and its main institutions. These documents testify to the trust placed by the Church in the rational capacity of the human being to seek the truth, understand the world and himself, know God and discover the traces of his presence in the events of personal and collective history, as also to understand that man finds the source of his own hope and his own dignity in the victory of Christ over evil and death. Contrariwise, the same documents point out that, when he fails to place his trust in this rational capacity, the fruit of the unity between reason and faith in the contemplation of the truth, man loses the necessary objectivity to consider the events of history and may reach the point of extreme arbitrariness and the worst forms of denigration of his own dignity.

² *Ibid.*, no. 24.

1. *The ideological conflicts of the twentieth century*

I would like to begin with a review of modern post-Enlightenment thought, whose challenges to Christianity have been explicitly addressed by the Magisterium. Positivism, historicism, secularism, liberalism, Marxism, modernism and nihilism: these are the main ideological tendencies that were developed in the nineteenth century and that, in their essential traits, persisted throughout the twentieth century, even when, after the Second World War, they assumed the character of pragmatism, eclecticism and scientific empiricism, reflecting the decline of the great ideologies of human progress and the birth of a technological civilization increasingly dominated by experimental science. In the first half of the twentieth century the *anthropocentrism* common to these tendencies seemed victoriously to have usurped the place of the old *theocentrism*, taking the human being as the “measure of all things” according to the ancient affirmation of Pythagoras. But in the second half of the century even anthropocentrism began to be replaced by a conception of *anthropophobic* type. Claiming to attribute to the evolution of society a *self-creative* character, that is independent of the human consciousness and that only society itself would be able to describe and comprehend, it recurred instead to a constructivist paradigm of science aimed at freeing it from its traditional metaphysical presuppositions.

It has to be recognized that the twentieth century was fairly hostile to the tradition of Christian thought, both in metaphysics and in ethics, in spite of the innumerable efforts of renewal and dialogue made by great Catholic philosophers, such as Newman, Rosmini, Maritain, Gilson, Stein and Solov’ev, just to cite some of the most important, recalled by John Paul II in his encyclical *Fides et ratio*.³ At the beginning of the century, Pius X’s encyclical *Pascendi* was aimed at warning Catholics of the fundamental errors of modernist ideology that were then spreading, but it was received with considerable incomprehension not only outside and within the

³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, no. 74.

Church herself. As in the case of many other documents of the Magisterium, only in retrospect can we fully appreciate its undeniable prophetic value in relation to the subsequent development of Western thought: the spread of atheism and irreligiosity as a programme systematically developed through political ideologies that oscillated between utopia and dystopia (Marxism, Fascism, Nazism) and that tried historically to “realize” a social order for which God himself and the supreme values of metaphysics (truth, goodness, beauty) were a form of “alienation”, a projection of human needs on an illusionary transcendental level.

The intrinsic irrationality of this proposition ended with the regimes that had tried to embody it, leaving the human consciousness permanently scarred by the horrors of Auschwitz and the gulags. Mankind was now faced by a new stage of hope founded on the opportunities opened up by economic globalization and by the consolidation of democracy and the state of law. But despite these developments, the technological society of our time, that likes to define itself as an “information society”, does not seem to have resolved any of the basic problems presciently analyzed by the Magisterium: it has limited itself to giving a new form to the ideological currents inherited from the nineteenth century. Thus *Fides et ratio* warns that “surveying the situation today, we see that the problems of other times have returned, but in a new key. It is no longer a matter of questions of interest only to certain individuals and groups, but convictions so widespread that they have become to some extent the common mind”.⁴ The Pope continues by mentioning the deep-seated distrust of reason and the alleged “end of metaphysics”, the rationalism of some contemporary theologians, and the resurgence of fideism which fails to recognize the importance of rational knowledge for the understanding of faith. He concludes: “In brief, there are signs of a widespread distrust of universal and absolute statements, especially among those who think that truth is born of consensus and not of a consonance between intellect and objective reality”.⁵

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 55.

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 56.

No one may close his eyes to the fact that the proclamation of the “end of metaphysics” is but the claim to give rise to a post-Christian era. Nietzsche understood this right from the start. To the question: “What does nihilism mean?”, he replied: “[It means] that the supreme values lose value. The goal is lacking, the reply to the question ‘why’ is lacking”. And he added: “Radical nihilism is the conviction that existence is unsustainable, when what is at issue is the supreme values that are recognized, including the opinion according to which we don’t have the least right to pose a ‘hereafter’ or an ‘essence’ of things that is ‘divine’, that is living morality [...]. This is the antinomy. If we believe in morality, we condemn existence [...]. We recognize that we fail to attain the sphere in which we have placed our values, but the other sphere, the one in which we live, has not yet in the least gained in value as a result; on the contrary, we are tired, because we have lost the main impulse: all has been in vain!”⁶

This latter affirmation seems applicable, paradoxically, not so much to the Christian metaphysical tradition as to the philosophy of the post-Nietzschean “weak thought”, to the proclamation of the end of great “metanarratives” that had given unity to history, to the “deconstruction” of the tradition that seeks to renounce any kind of foundation. The glorification of the will to power in the first half of the twentieth century was followed, at least on the level of thought, by the perception of the absurd, of nonsense, of the existential void. In response to this void, numerous new forms of religion have emerged, none of which is able to offer the certainty of a revealed truth about the destiny of human history; rather, they legitimize the extravagance of a boundless imagination that is freed from the constraints of reality, and considers everything objectively non-verifiable as equally possible, equally true. Nothing is more pathetic in this regard than Vattimo’s assertion, that since the strong affirmation “I believe” is no longer tolerable, only the weak affirmation “I think I believe” is compatible with the democratic ideal of social community. What desire for truth could possibly be sat-

⁶ F. NIETSCHE, *The Will to Power*, nos. 2, 3, 6, 8.

ified with this answer? Were Nietzsche to return, we would once again exclaim: "All has been in vain!".

Yet this weakening of reason in search of the ultimate end, of the *why* of existence, though it tempered the anti-Christian ideological aggressiveness, is very far from having suppressed it. As Gadamer⁷ presciently noted, the thought of the Enlightenment, in its illusion of having stripped itself of every prejudice, ended up, it too – paradoxically and infallibly – by succumbing to the greatest of prejudices itself: the prejudice of having no prejudices, of thinking that reason is its own foundation and that therefore it has no need to justify itself for anything or anyone. The dogma that no dogma should exist, the utopia of a world without utopias, the affirmation of the value of the neutrality of values, or the intolerant affirmation of boundless toleration, have represented, in the second half of the twentieth century, distinct and recurrent forms of reason's self-enclosure from the Mystery that inherited and prolonged the previous ideological tradition. And by these forms the claim was advanced of justifying, also juridically, various models of the "war of the powerful against the weak" of which *Evangelium vitae* speaks,⁸ meaning by this the legalization of abortion, euthanasia and the manipulation of embryos for various ends. Certainty has been sought not in the openness and wonder in response to reality and its significance characteristic of the wisdom tradition and the contemplative intelligence, that build on the certainty that the truth is revealed,⁹ but in doubt, in suspicion, in the challenge of the intellect as an end in itself, in the process of the individual's own self-construction. The result has been that the vision of reality has been diminished and everything exploited.

In following this self-lacerating process in post-war thought, it is difficult not to agree with Del Noce, when he affirms that although "the

⁷ Cf. H.G. GADAMER, *Verità e Metodo*, Milano 1972.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, no. 12.

⁹ Cf. H. ARENDT, *Il pensiero secondo. Pagine scelte*, ed. P. Terenzi, Milano: Rizzoli, 1999, 87ff.

expansion of irreligion has never been so great, it is the thought that is usually called secular, and not the Christian thought, that is in crisis from the viewpoint of reason". And he adds: "The traditional theses of Christian thought may today be rediscovered in their authentic significance, on the basis of the insuperable contradictions to which the thought that claims to have overcome them inevitably succumbs".¹⁰ Nonetheless, as the same author suggests, this weakness, sterile from the viewpoint of reason, has sought a refuge in a kind of 'sociologism' that subordinates all rational decisions, especially at the moral level, to the social procedures in use. That is why, in spite of the terrible experiences of the totalitarian regimes and of so many tragedies caused throughout the world by the political use of violence, the dominant mentality has denied – or simply has been incapable of recognizing – a moral foundation of the social order, anterior and superior to the concertation of interests, to the political and ideological pact, to the legislative will, which has increasingly transformed its old programmatic character into the mere regulation of *de facto* situations.

In this context, the human being is seen as a product of the evolution of society, of the development of its productive forces, of scientific and technological progress, of the balance of eco-systems. And even though the dignity of the human person and of the individual and social rights that derive from it is proclaimed in the juridical order, no agreement has hitherto been reached on any foundation to give to this affirmation, other than the political will of the states that have concurred to sign it with an international pact. It might be said that the level of complexity reached by current civilization requires no regulatory principle other than the toleration of diversity. Now the hope is that the sum of social discrepancies may be reduced to zero in the mid term, and the fact that none of them presents a short-term advantage is seen as the result of the unequal distribution of competitive advantages, though this distribution may be overturned in a successive moment. The self-referential nature of the 'sociologism' of which Del Noce speaks has

¹⁰ A. DEL NOCE, *L'epoca della secolarizzazione*, Milano: Giuffr , 1970, 183.

had the effect of making the social power exchange its own ideological and juridical legitimation for the pragmatic legitimation of procedure and its results, so that “the theory of play”, as Pascal had in some sense forecast, has become the socially more popular operational method for taking decisions.

Nonetheless, it is worth asking oneself: is it reasonable to think that freedom may be achieved to the detriment of a universal and absolute truth? Is it realistic to trust that the protection of the rights of the person may be based exclusively on the political will of states and of whomever should happen to control their institutions at that particular moment? Can social harmony be achieved by making the human being renounce the ultimate questions of his destiny and trivialize his own existence to the point that he no longer has anything significant to ask himself about or to seek? The experience of the twentieth century leads us to reply with the words of *Fides et ratio*: “Once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery”.¹¹

Throughout the twentieth century, the Church has been faced by the need patiently to teach man that the Christian faith, far from being an obstacle to human freedom, realises it in its highest form. In the negative sense, it has done so by showing to reason the false idols that it may create for itself, consciously or unconsciously, in its desire for the Absolute. Not everything that appears as free choice, is really such. Genuine faith shows the feet of clay of idols. It helps reason to emerge from its self-isolation and open itself up to the horizon of its own vision in the presence of the Mystery.

John Paul II describes with a fine expression, inspired by the argument of St. Anselm, the liberation produced by the faith, pointing out that, in response to the mystery, “reason has its own specific field in which it can enquire and understand, restricted only by its finiteness before the infinite mystery of God”.¹² This restriction responds, in

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Fides et ratio*, no. 90.

¹² *Ibid.*, no. 14.

other words, to the reality itself of man in his relation to God. It is not therefore the coercion of an arbitrary human limit, but the true condition in which man exercises his own rational activity. God is recognized as God and the human being as creature. The false idols fall silent. Freedom is affirmed as the ontological dimension of the person: a freedom not granted by any social power, but inscribed in the very nature of human reason.

This seems to be the core of the current dialogue between the Church and the world, and the Magisterium has recalled it with particular coherence and perseverance throughout the whole century, both at the anthropological and cultural, and at the economic, political and social level, i.e. not only in response to heresy in the strict sense, but also, and mainly – in this period of weak thought – in response to the indescribable sufferings caused to peoples by an action or programme inspired or justified by the self-imprisonment of reason. The renunciation of the objectivity of the truth and the failure to recognize the transcendence of the person as the bearer of the intelligence of being cannot but be also a renunciation of the human dignity and the freedom that springs from it.

2. Modernization and the social question

Ideological conflicts, however, cannot be understood in all their significance unless they are referred to the specific social conditions that they themselves influence and the problems that they try to resolve. That's why we must also consider the hermeneutic criterion adopted in the social doctrine from *Rerum novarum* to *Centesimus annus*. At this level it may be affirmed that, in the past century, the social phenomenon presented itself to the human consciousness first as the consolidation of the industrial society, and then as its evolution towards postindustrial society, and lastly, in its more recent phase, as the emergence of the so-called globalized technological society. *Rerum novarum* reports the effects of the first stage of the development of this accelerated industrialization: the initiation of an accentuated process of urban concen-

tration caused by massive migration from rural areas to the big cities; the extension of the mechanism of the market of human labour, which had become a commodity in itself, with the consequent tension between labour and capital; the formation of the urban proletariat as social protagonist that presses for new rights and claims forms of social and political participation; the needs posed by this whole process to national states in terms of security, to guarantee the results achieved and promote development among those excluded from it.

The scale of these transformations may be gauged from the fact that economic development is not the spontaneous result of the coordination of private interests by a presumed invisible hand, but a collective enterprise, the outcome of huge public and private investments, with interests competing and in conflict between each other, with geopolitical consequences and results that not only influence in the short term, but also condition the life of future generations. The ideological tension between tradition and progress, between the doctrine of natural law and positivism is progressively shifted towards the tension between individual and society, since there is a growing realization of the disproportion between the puniness and the social irrelevance of the life of the human being, considered individually, and the collective force that may produce a society organized on the economic and political level.

In this context, it is not difficult to understand why the Magisterium of the Church, throughout the last century, had to devote itself to defend unconditionally the dignity of each human person irrespective of his capacity for work, his social productivity, his economic success. The value that the person has by the mere fact of existing has become ever more incomprehensible for those who, ideologically or practically, have begun to see in the power of the masses and in the force of social aggregation the only way of achieving the well-being and guaranteeing the survival and development of peoples. The fact that the twentieth century has had to support two devastating world wars may be better understood in the context of this generalized collectivism. And the same goes for the appearance of totalitarian regimes just in those nations that were conscious of their own puniness and their own

backwardness in relation to those who had begun their own process of industrialization much earlier, and that therefore tried to reduce “by forced marches” the social gap produced by the new scale of aggregation of value. And for the achievement of this objective any price was considered justified, even the sacrifice of a whole generation or of all those who, for various social reasons, did not “serve” this enterprise.

In the course of the century the Church never tired of constantly enunciating anew the principle of *subsidiarity* as the basic criterion for guaranteeing the justice and the common good of society, the freedom and the sovereignty of the human person and of “intermediate groups” to which the human person is naturally linked: the family, the school, the working community, the voluntary associations, the religious community, the nation. Without the well-known influence exerted in Europe by so-called “social catholicism”, the post-war reconstruction of the continent, and even its current process of unification, would have been almost inconceivable. The Church’s social doctrine was also a source of inspiration throughout the world for those social and political experiences that sought their own sovereign path and gave rise, in some cases, to the formation of political parties of Christian inspiration, or that stimulated, in others, the formation of associations and trade unions among workers in search of greater social justice: all this under the sign of subsidiarity.

The Church does not limit itself to proposing this principle at the doctrinal level, but stimulates Christians constantly to embody it in institutions born and sustained by ecclesial *communio*. I have in mind the huge network of mission-aid societies realized on a world scale throughout the twentieth century, in spite of the serious obstacles of nationalistic reactions and the strategic subservience of smaller and more marginal peoples to the great geopolitical and ideological blocs. I am thinking too of the Catholic schools which became a practically universal institution which benefited all levels of society, from the peasant and urban working class, to the middle classes in search of social mobility, right up to the managerial classes. The Christian presence has helped sensibly to alleviate the sufferings of the social marginalization

of emerging groups, favouring their integration and participation in the benefits of development. It has given rise to so many works of charity and assistance to the population; indeed, in many countries these represented in themselves an infrastructure of social development, which in turn represented, at least in part, the support for the successive social action of the states themselves. When Paul VI, in his address to the United Nations, called the Church “expert in humanity”,¹³ he was doing justice to the silent activity of thousands of Christians scattered all over the world, involved in evangelization and human promotion.

Here the role of Catholic Action undoubtedly deserves special mention. Under the impulse of Pius XI, it was responsible for organizing a more organic presence of the Catholic laity at the parish, diocesan, and national level and in the various spheres of social activity. It stimulated the active participation of women. It also provided the Catholics belonging to the newly emerging groups with a means of channelling their activities aimed at encouraging greater social integration. In a society that began to be increasingly structured by functional rather than territorial differentiations, Catholic Action also represented a vigorous impetus to the growth of the laity’s missionary conscience in their own social environment. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that this same organizational innovation was repeatedly the source of conflicts and misunderstandings, a situation that in some sense has not yet been entirely overcome. Catholic Action in its specialized form exposed its members even more strongly to the social tensions of their own environments, with the consequent risk of the loss of organic unity, of ideologization and subordination to dynamics coming from outside the Church. The radicalization to which some of these specialized activities have been subjected in many countries has ended up by leading to the dissolution of these groups.

It cannot be denied that the ideological tensions that accompanied the period of the cold war have very often divided Christians, to the

¹³ Cf. PAUL VI, “Address to the United Nations Organization”, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, III (1965), 517.

detriment of the sense of unity of their social presence. Since the Magisterium of the Church is, by its very nature, the focal point of Christian communion, it should be no cause for surprise that it has been challenged by Christians themselves, ideologically divided between each other. Having lost all reference to ecclesial unity, they have remained entirely defenceless, moreover, against the secularized tendencies that accompanied the whole of the twentieth century. The paradox of the polemical reception of Vatican II in the years immediately following its holding may thus be understood. At the same time, the passage of time and the constant work of interpretation of the conciliar texts by the Magisterium, now enable us to understand a great deal more deeply the organic dimension of all its teaching, as also the actuality of its evangelizing dialogue with the society and culture of our time, the distortion of view introduced by secularism in all its confused variants, by the mentality of weak thought, by the idolatry of power and affluence, and by practical atheism. And although this secularism has influenced thought in all its dimensions, it is especially the social doctrine of the Church that has most felt its negative effects. For in the eyes of society it seemed obvious that Christians themselves were not in agreement with each other on the essential and that for them ideological options took precedence over the criteria proposed by the Magisterium.

So deep a disaffection in the tradition represented by the Magisterium could only be overcome by an extraordinary intervention of the Holy Spirit to renew the life of the Church and the experience itself of communion. We may thank God that this renewal was really produced and that new movements, born from submission and obedience to the faith, together with the prophetic guidance of the Successor of Peter, once again placed the Church on the road of an evangelizing and missionary presence at the heart of the cultures of our age. This hope in a "new springtime of Christian life",¹⁴ as it was called by the Pope, nonetheless has a need of a lucid understanding of the new social and cultural megatendencies, which are no longer expressed in the language

¹⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 18.

of the great ideological debates of the first half of the twentieth century, but now use the new information technologies with which it is possible both to fragment and to reassemble the fragments into aggregations of meaning that tend to be posed in a globalized form.

3. *The current paradigm of modernization and globalization*

In this context I will limit myself to emphasizing only some characteristics of the current stage of modernization that seem to me significant and, since they have gradually spread throughout the world, represent a great challenge for Christian witness in this period of decline of the ideologies. As John Paul II recalled in his address to the UN in 1995, the fundamental criterion of this stage seems to be neither the deepening of culture, nor – which is tantamount to the same thing – the “sovereignty” of peoples and their cultures, but economic utilitarianism, measured by the results achieved, especially on a quantitative, i.e. monetary, basis.¹⁵ The result has been that the market mechanism has been progressively extended to all the important areas of social life and especially to the new sector of the services. Culture itself, healthcare, education, art and even assisted human fertilization are now regulated by market criteria. This is a wholly new phenomenon in the history of mankind. Freedom, as the capacity to choose rationally between various alternatives, is also beginning to be shaped by this same criterion. The result has been that the principle of comparability and indifference has been generalized in decision-taking. According to the “game theory” paradigm, in fact, a decision is considered reasonable if all the possible alternatives are placed on the scale, and the pros and contras, the costs and benefits, the opportunities and inopportunities are carefully weighed, before choosing the most effective and advantageous option. At most, a rational decision is one in which it makes no difference whether one chooses the one alternative or the other and choice is dictated by a subjective preference.

¹⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the General Assembly of the UNO”, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVIII, 2 (1995), 739.

This process, reasonable enough when it's a case of comparable and interchangeable goods, becomes irrational and even inhumane if it is applied to goods that are neither comparable nor interchangeable, such as the human person himself or those individual and social activities that concern the human person in his totality. That is the dramatic case of the current situation of marriage, the family and procreation, as also of most of the spiritual goods of culture. When it is considered a matter of indifference whether to form a family with this or that person, with someone of the same sex or of the other, whether to conceive a child or not, all according to subjective preferences, even if one wants to underline in this way the freedom in the act of preferring, what in fact takes place is the concealment of a comparison that declares the alternatives compared to be inconsequential. Only objects may be compared according to this criterion, precisely because they are replaceable. But persons – and human acts that regard them in the totality of their own subjectivity and their own personal conscience – are not subject to the principle of replaceability, since that would compromise their self-realization, vocation and destiny. As the anthropology of *Gaudium et spes* and the perennial tradition of the Church teach, each person is one and unique, and hence only available for the other in a free act of self-giving in love.¹⁶

It is no cause for wonder, therefore, that the generalized application of the criterion of choice by comparability and indifference should lead to the vindication of the ethical neutrality of the State and of all the public institutions and, by the same token, to the abandonment of any kind of anthropological criterion that would permit us to judge social decisions on the basis of the value and the significance of the human person. At the ideological level, attempts are being made to give foundation to this criterion by the idea of an ethical pluralism without frontiers, with the idea of the tolerance of dissent and branding as intolerant all those who defend absolute values. This also explains, in good

¹⁶ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 24.

measure, why the voice of the Magisterium, which has repeatedly pronounced itself in defence of the absolute value of each human person, both at the level of life and at the level of freedom of conscience and of all the freedoms that go with it, has increasingly become a “voice that cries in the wilderness”, even for many baptized.

When the replaceability of the human person is posed as a practical condition for economic and social development, justice is rendered impossible. For justice aspires to give to each and everyone what is due to him, as the value on which social life is based. Throughout the world, a dangerous dualism is being created between what is proclaimed as the norm of obligatory right for persons and States and the habitual practice, which either suspends that obligation or directly contradicts it in the name of effective solutions. While on the one hand there exists an ever more complex and sophisticated constitutional State, an extra-legal conduct is simultaneously developing in all spheres: corruption, traffic in illegal substances, organized crime, recourse to violence. Whole groups of persons are the victims of these tragic forms of social exclusion in many regions of the planet, if they are not being subjected to the logic of bloodletting and extermination in the various forms of local wars. All these facts are clear signs of a neo-Malthusian mentality that recognizes no other fundamental criterion of social conduct than the natural selection of the strongest; with the proviso that by “natural” is meant today not only the spontaneous manifestation of the instinct of survival, but also the effective aid given by scientific knowledge and by the complex technologies for the gathering and transmission of information.

In 1968, trying to define the technological society, Augusto Del Noce said with great perspicuity: “I would propose the following definition of it: it is a society that accepts all the negations of Marxism with regard to contemplative thought, religion and metaphysics; that therefore accepts the Marxist reduction of ideas to a means of production, but that rejects the messianic and revolutionary aspects of Marxism, hence what remains of religion in the revolutionary idea. In this respect the technological society really represents the bourgeois spirit in its

pure state, the bourgeois spirit that has triumphed over its two traditional adversaries, transcendental religion and revolutionary thought [...]. Technological society marks the abdication of Marxism from the inventors of the rational organization of industrial society, Saint-Simon and Comte, considering them both as exponents of the 'esprit polytechnique', separated from the bizarre religion to which they wanted to link it".¹⁷

In view of the tendencies of the historical development of Western culture successive to the fall of the Berlin wall and the growing homogenization of the models adopted for decision-making, I can only admire this very perceptive description of the situation. The "esprit polytechnique" has come to dominate not only social activities, but also the definition of man as such. John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus annus* expresses itself in this same sense: "The individual today is often suffocated between two poles represented by the State and the marketplace. At times it seems as though he exists only as a producer and consumer of goods, or as an object of State administration. People lose sight of the fact that life in society has neither the market nor the State as its final purpose [...]. Man remains above all a being who seeks the truth and strives to live in the truth, deepening his understanding of it through a dialogue which involves past and future generations".¹⁸ Observing this antithesis we may better understand how vitally important it is for culture to recover the wisdom tradition, and interrogate itself about the ultimate meaning of everything, as postulated by *Fides et ratio*. But to confide in the metaphysical capacity of human reason to seek God indefatigably in every natural and human experience is a necessary precondition for this.

Apart from recalling the central antithesis of our time, *Centesimus annus* gives the precious suggestion how the living actualization of the Christian tradition can be realized through intergenerational dialogue. It points out that "the heritage of values which has been received and

¹⁷ A. DEL NOCE, *L'epoca della secolarizzazione*, cit., 14-15.

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, no. 49.

handed down is always challenged by the young. To challenge does not necessarily mean to destroy or reject *a priori*, but above all to put these values to the test in one's own life, and through this existential verification to make them more real, relevant and personal, distinguishing the valid elements in the tradition from the false and erroneous ones, or from obsolete forms which can be usefully replaced by others more suited to the times".¹⁹

I sincerely believe that what is needed in the current situation is just this: the existential verification of the cultural heritage that has given meaning to our history. And where should this existential verification take place? In the family, in the school, in the university, at the workplace, in the communities and ecclesial movements, in charitable works. In other words, wherever it is necessary to opt for life and assume a common responsibility towards it. This rationality of wisdom, which the Holy Father invites us to rediscover and deepen in the dialogue between reason and faith, needs to be transmitted as an experience of verifiable life. This is the most authentic expression of the intergenerational solidarity that sustains personal and social life, as a gift received and given. The faith in reason that opens itself, moved, to the experience of grace, that kneels humbly and obediently before the threshold of the Mystery, before the uncreated gift, is the most important act that men and women can accomplish in their lives: "it is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth and chooses to live in that truth".²⁰ The witness of hope which the world needs is the freedom that flourishes when the human being reaches the certainty of truth.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 50.

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, no. 13.

Round Table

Healing Europe

TADEUSZ MAZOWIECKI

The blackest pages in the history of the twentieth century seem to concern Europe. For Europe was the cradle of the totalitarian systems that dramatically left their mark on this century. But Europe was also the continent where totalitarianism, in its various forms, was defeated and where the democratic system reconfirmed its value for the growth of the person and the development of peoples.

In 1914 a few shots fired by a lone gunman in Sarajevo precipitated the First World War. In 1992, on visiting the city which was then still under siege, I happened to pass, sitting inside an armour-plated car, close to the site where that assassination had taken place. To think of the cyclical nature of history was inevitable.

The European peoples have each experienced different events. Spain suffered an atrocious civil war. But the destinies of the whole of Europe – and of the world – were marked by the Second World War.

How can we forget the concentration camps, the gas chambers and the other systems for the mass-elimination of millions of people? Even before this there had been massacres, but what happened in those years was the “scientifically” planned extermination of a whole people, the Jewish people, condemned to destruction by the racist ideology of the Third Reich. The Holocaust remains the most profound mark of this century. But the ideology of racial superiority did not even spare the gypsies (the rom), they too exterminated according to a precise plan, nor the Slav peoples, forced into the role of slaves.

Recalling that period of bestiality, which was at the same time one of courage and sacrifice, the Pope wrote: “We remain bitterly struck, as Christians, in considering that ‘the monstrosities of that war were man-

ifested in a continent that boasted of a particularly flourishing culture and civilization; in a continent that had for so long been irradiated by the Gospel and the Church”.¹

The time of the concentration camps and the death camps – in both totalitarian systems – was not limited to the war years. Dachau was established even before the war, as was the Gulag Archipelago, which long remained active after it. But it is Auschwitz and Kolyma that continue in the collective consciousness to symbolize the many places of extermination.

At the roots of these experiences was a repudiation of the Ten Commandments as a universal ethical code of conduct and basis of human law and order. To give priority to the criterion of race in one system, and the class war in the other, meant a kind of idolatry of the ideological categories, the creation of new and “superior” codes of conduct, and the conferral of superhuman powers on those who ruled such systems. All this led to the substitution of the Ten Commandments (especially the commandment that makes each person our “neighbour”) – so deeply rooted in European culture – by the dictates of ideology. God’s commandments, the ethical rules coming from God, and inscribed in the human heart and in human nature, no longer formed the basis of law and the relations between human beings. And the godless world organized by such systems could not but become an inhuman world.

2. At the end of the war Europe was carved up in conformity with the accords ratified by the USA, the Soviet Union and Great Britain at Yalta. My country, Poland, which was the first victim of Nazi aggression, came out of the war with the bitterness of seeing its participation in the victory transmuted into a permanent subservience and into a system of government imposed from outside. The same fate was shared by the other countries of central and eastern Europe.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Message on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe*, no. 8.

This carving up of Europe soon became a division of the world into two power blocs, which seemed irremovable for over forty years, especially due to the possession of nuclear weapons by both.

Due to the total regimentation of all fields of social life that is typical of totalitarian systems, the post-war reconstruction of our countries, and the efforts to industrialize them and promote their educational systems, were accompanied by restrictions to freedom and civil rights.

Oppression existed everywhere, even if manifested in different ways and at different times in the various countries: from the Stalinist terror to a weakened totalitarianism which tried to build a consumer society without encouraging any aspiration to personal freedom.

The banning of religion from social life and the persecution of the Church, implemented in a different way in each country, led to the success, albeit in different degrees, of the planned "atheization" of society. The fixed common denominator of the system in the various countries was the identification of the State with the power of the Communist Party at all levels.

The uprisings against the system also exploded at different times and in different ways. Their outcomes and consequences were also different: Berlin, 1953; Poland and Hungary, 1956; Czechoslovakia, 1968; Poland, 1968, 1970, 1976 and finally 1980, the year of the foundation of *Solidarnosc*.

It's difficult to say how the societies of these countries, and especially the societies of the countries forming part of the Soviet bloc, succeeded in not letting their own hopes die. For the degree of subjugation, the degree of personal danger and the chance of remaining faithful to one's own values also varied from country to country.

In Poland, thanks to the support of the Church and of the world of culture, the aspiration of society to be the active protagonist of its own life, and the nation's aspiration to sovereignty, were never quenched.

At the end, what had seemed impossible for fifty years without precipitating a world war, became a reality: the system born at Yalta ceased to exist.

The wall of the Communist system began to crumble in 1980, following the events on the Polish coast that led to the foundation of *Solidarnosc*. The birth of *Solidarnosc* did not spell any change in regime, but it did represent the conquest of greater freedom. The Pope's first journey to Poland, which had had a decisive influence on consciences, had taken place in the previous year: it was as if Polish society had suddenly realized its own strength. *Solidarnosc* had become a movement composed of millions of people who pursued their struggles with peaceful methods. It was the first time since the time of Ghandi in India that the struggle for freedom was pursued in a non-violent way.

In spite of the introduction of martial law, there was no going back on these gains. Freedom was finally restored to us in 1989 and with freedom the responsibility that the State had to assume. Some months later we witnessed the "autumn of the peoples", the fall of the Berlin Wall which opened the way to the reunification of Germany, the "velvet revolution" in Czechoslovakia, the changes in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, the uprisings in the Baltic states, and the upheavals in the USSR itself.

In the post-war period, the development of the situation in the countries of western Europe had followed different directions. The reconstruction of democratic systems began in Italy, Germany and Austria. Almost everywhere efforts were stepped up to promote democracy and the unification of economic and political efforts which began with the entente between France, Germany and the Benelux countries and would lead to the present European Union. France had to cope with the Algerian crisis. In Spain and Portugal the dictatorial regimes were peacefully liquidated.

Over the years an improvement in the conditions of life was achieved. Living standards rose to a level never enjoyed before. At the same time there was an enormous development of science and technology to which Europe made a major contribution, and the reinforcement and growth of local, national and international democratic institutions. Among the negative aspects were the various waves of terrorism, which have still not been extinguished.

A phenomenon of global dimension was decolonization, which made many European countries more aware of the problems of the “third world”. Fomented by the rivalry between the two blocs, the problem influenced the conscience of many European societies, also due to its moral dimension. Today it is less felt and yet the differences in the development between rich and poor countries continue to grow.

In reviewing the history of the events that characterized the twentieth century – not least in Europe – we cannot of course ignore the event that changed the relation between the Church and the contemporary world. Vatican Council II was not merely an ecclesial event. The Pope who inaugurated it, John XXIII, now beatified, must be comprised among those great contemporaries who succeeded in closing the split that had been opened up between the world in growth in our time and the Church. Thanks to the Council, the existence of good also outside the pale of the Church was recognized and the world began to see the Church as a living institution.

More than once simple gestures assumed the significance of major changes. The world looked to the Church with different eyes after John XXIII interrupted Holy Mass in St. Peter’s basilica and ordered that the prayer be repeated omitting the words about *perfidis Judeis*. The same happened after Paul VI’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem, his meeting with the patriarch Athenagoras and so on, right down to the touching request for pardon for the sins of the Church pronounced by John Paul II in Rome and in Jerusalem.

The importance of this change is diminished neither by the repeated allegations of “exaggerated optimism” in Vatican Council II’s judgement on the contemporary world, nor by the debate on the extent of reforms in the Church. The relation between the Church and the world profoundly changed in the course of the century. Reciprocal mistrust gave way to dialogue. Those who took part in the Council are conscious of its great significance both in the history of the twentieth century, and its influence on Christianity and on the conscience of Christians.

3. In the second half of the century Europe experienced two processes aimed in different directions: on the one hand, the process of the unification and the reconciliation of peoples, and, on the other, the processes aimed at rendering politically independent, if not actually dividing, multiethnic countries.

The conflicts that took place had different origins and different outcomes, so that it is difficult to draw comparisons between them.

Northern Ireland was the theatre of continual conflicts between the two communities. In Spain terrorist acts by Basque extremists still continue. In Belgium, after a period of tension in relations between the Flemish and Walloon communities, a federalist state system was gradually achieved. In Italy forces that aspire to separatism began to appear.

In various Western countries nationalist tendencies, even if on the fringes of political life, came to assume forms of intolerance, if not downright xenophobia, towards those culturally different.

In central Europe two cases of the division of multi-ethnic countries took place, the one very different from the other: the peaceful separation between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the dramatic disintegration of the former Yugoslavia.

The Balkan conflict had a particular moral dimension. Faced by the impotence of Europe and the indifference of the whole world, crimes were committed which assumed a scale and a ferocity which people had fondly imagined could not be repeated after the experience of the Second World War.

More than once I expressed the opinion – and still confirm so – that the war in Bosnia did not have the character of a war of religion, nor was it caused by religious motivations. Three great confessions existing there were dragged into and exploited in this conflict. History itself was exploited: no longer *magistra vitae*, it was used to furnish false arguments to justify crimes, deaden people's sensitivities and rekindle hostilities between neighbours and even between families.

What triggered off the dramatic events that led to the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia was the fact that the unifying element of power, formerly constituted by the Communist ideology, was replaced

by nationalism. It was the nationalist claims – advanced in Serbia especially, but also in Croatia – that led to the realization of the programme of “ethnic cleansing”. The purges, suffered most by Bosnia, were not just the result of the war, but its purpose.

The warnings that a similar tragedy could be repeated in Kosovo did not prevent it from happening. Years of peaceful methods adopted by the Albanians for the achievement of their rights had no effect and now it's the Serb residents in Kosovo who have need of the protection of the multinational force.

What happened in Bosnia and in Kososo – as also in Chechenia and Rwanda – placed in the very foreground the great political and moral question of how to safeguard fundamental rights. The question about the right or the duty of international intervention in the case of mass crimes, or crimes against humanity, was posed in all its complexity and urgency. And it has clearly been shown in the contemporary world that the security of the intervention forces is better safeguarded than that of the civil population they are sent to defend.

4. The end of the division of Europe enlarged the scale of the process of its unification. Neither of the two parts, that had remained separate till 1989, was ready to undertake this task: each for a different reason and each in a different sense. The Western world, in spite of the advantage it acquired after the collapse of the Communist system, was unable to offer something following the example of the Marshall Plan, which had a great significance for the reconstruction of Western Europe after the war. In central and eastern Europe, on the other hand, it was hoped that its entry into the sphere of Western prosperity would be rapid and easy. The construction of democracy seemed a far simpler question than the destruction of totalitarianism.

In spite of this lack of preparation of both the one side and the other, important progress has been made in the last decade. The foundations of the democratic order and the market economy have been laid in our countries. This process has advanced everywhere throughout central and eastern Europe, even if at a higher price than could

have been imagined (the opposition to totalitarianism united, whereas freedom diversifies and even divides; the transformation of the economy required courageous decisions; problems due to the change of mentality and adaptation to the new conditions of life arose; areas of poverty and disadvantage were created).

Over the last decade we have also witnessed the development of the process aimed at the entry of our countries into the European institutions. Not a process of return to the heart of Europe, in which we have always spiritually remained, but a process of enlargement of these institutions.

The entry of our countries into the European Union represents an important step in the reconstruction of Europe. Now that the political and military division of the continent has ended, the time has come to undertake the process of overcoming differences in development and in civilization, a process that opens up new prospects not only for our countries, but for the whole of Europe.

The current debate on the future of the European Union is of great importance. People are asking whether we are heading towards a "superstate", which seems impossible in Europe, or towards a new system of collaboration between countries and societies, whose character we are not yet able to define. The Union undoubtedly needs to ensure the greater efficiency of its own institutions, but by growing pragmatically it will undoubtedly move in this direction. The diversity of European countries, of their traditions and of their interests is not necessarily a weakness; on the contrary, it may turn out to be a precious heritage of this union of states and societies.

Even after the countries of eastern and central Europe have entered, the European Union will not embrace the whole of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. The process of democratization in Russia and that of the consolidation of the idea of a Ukrainian state will have great importance for the future face of Europe. To use the Pope's words, Europe must breathe with both its lungs: that of the West and that of the East. This has an enormous significance both for its spiritual growth and for the stability of peace and democracy.

5. Between the totalitarian utopias – the consequences of which we experienced in the twentieth century – and the democratic concept of development there is a fundamental difference. Whereas the former, in the name of their own messianism, promised the future realization of a happy society in exchange for submission to the system, the democratic vision is based on the principle that no ideal system exists, but that the world can and must be improved. A significant point of reference for the democratic vision of development is Christian personalism: the human person, the inviolable dignity of each individual, and their supernatural vocation.

Europe today, and especially the process of its unification, is dominated by the economy. This is a crucial aspect for the future of Europe in the economic system conditioned by globalization and by modern technology. But countless examples demonstrate that Europe also has a need for the spiritual dimension and is seeking it.

The terrifying experiences of the twentieth century have demonstrated that faith in the omnipotence of the human intellect is an illusion. The problem, especially since the second half of the century, was the growth of a mass culture strongly impregnated with relativism and dominated by the primacy of entertainment over reflection. The ecologists, referring to the natural environment, speak of sustainable development. Now, this sustainable development is also necessary in the global growth of man and society. The quality of human life becomes a common concern for all those who draw on the deepest roots of the tradition of European culture.

We don't know what dangers the future holds out for us. But even now we can safely predict that they will concern respect for human life and the experiments conducted on it, as well as the consequences of the growing gap that divides the modern world between "civilization of development" and "civilization of survival".

John Paul II introduced the notion of "solidarity" into the social doctrine of the Church. In Europe we could speak of three spheres for the exercise of this solidarity: solidarity within the societies of the various countries; solidarity in the process of unification and the "healing"

of the two parts of the continent; and solidarity of Europe with the other continents, i.e. the solidarity of the whole human family.

At the end of the second special assembly of the Synod for Europe, the Synod Fathers wrote: "Illuminated by faith in Christ Jesus, with humble certainty, we know we are not deceiving you by saying that *today to hope is possible* and that *it is possible for everyone*".² Let us bear these words in mind when we think of the future.

² "Message of the Synod of Bishops", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 October 1999, 5.

Evangelizing Asia

THOMAS HAN HONG-SOON

The Asian continent is home to many races and populations which form more than two thirds of the world population. Asia presents great challenges to Christians. What is Asia to the Church? What is the Church to Asia? What is the mission of the Catholic laity in Asia? To answer these questions is the main purpose of the following remarks.

1. *A bird's eye view*

Religious situation

The Church in Asia is a tiny minority among the great religions of the world including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, and Taoism. Catholics constitute a mere 2.8% or 106 million out of 3.8 billion, whereas non Christians are 3.5 billion (92.4%), of which 756 million (20.1%) are Hindus, 812 million (21.6 million) are Muslims, 348 million (9.3%) are Buddhists, 284 million (7.6%) are Chinese folk religionists, 601 million (16% are nonreligious, and 121 million (3.2%) are atheists.¹

These religions present themselves as soteriological in character.² In some countries, freedom of religion is severely restricted and religious fundamentalism poses many problems for Christians, while in others Christians are persecuted outrightly.

¹ 1999 *Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year*.

² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 38.

Economic situation

Asia is a continent of blatant contrast between underdevelopment and superdevelopment. A widening gap persists between the areas of the developed North and the developing South.

On the one hand, some countries have achieved the so-called economic miracle during the past fifty years. For example, in the twenty years up to 1997, Asia's economies (excluding Japan) experienced annual real gross domestic product (GDP) increases of between 7 and 7.5 percent per annum.³ This means that Asia's GDP doubled every ten years, and quadrupled in real terms from 1980 to 1997.⁴

The Asia crisis erupted in 1997 partly due to structural defects and partly due to patronage and corruption in the banking and industrial systems of some of the so-called "tiger economies". Recently, the efforts made by these economies have begun to have positive results. In 1999 Asia's GDP totalled \$ 7,306 billion, 23.9% of world GDP, and its trade totalled \$ 2,037 billion, 19.0% of world trade.

During most of this period, the main economic power in the region was Japan. However, Japan's relative economic position in Asia and the world, having reached its apex, is on a long downward slide, whereas China, together with overseas Chinese, prepares for economic dominance in the new century. In fact, China's economy has doubled in just ten years: its share in world GDP increased from 1.8% in 1990 to 3.5% in 1999 and its share in world trade increased from 2.0% in 1990 to 4.3% in 1999. Japan's share in world GDP decreased from 14.8 in 1990 to 13.5% in 1999 and its share in world trade decreased from 7.5% in 1990 to 6.8% in 1999.

On the other hand, abject poverty, inequality, social injustice are glaring and saddening phenomena in many countries of Asia. Accord-

³ Compared to Western economic growth of less than 3 percent per annum in real terms during the same period, it is unsurprising that Asia was regarded an "an economic miracle".

⁴ JEREMY PINK, "Asia: The Lesson for Economics", in: ROBERT BEYNON (ed.), *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Global Economics*, 1999, p. 68.

ing to one estimate,⁵ of the 1.3 billion poor who subsist on less than one dollar a day, 73 % are in Asia. Most of the counties in Asia rank low in terms of human development. Most people live without access to safe water; health service, sanitation, etc. Not a few countries are trapped under foreign debt, negatively affected by the economic globalization currently underway, and bonded to multinational bodies.

Social situation

Such a situation is the consequence of the “evil mechanisms” and the “structures of sin”⁶ such as the caste system, colonialization, national and international vested interests, corruption, and political instability. In the midst of such a situation, rapid changes are taking place due to urbanization, internal and external migration, globalization of the economy, and the heavy burden of foreign debt. With the growth and expansion of the mass media and information and communication technology, cultural changes are also being accelerated, undermining religious, moral and cultural values and threatening life.

Despite the many negative factors at work in Asia, there are also many positive signs of hope in Asian society. Levels of literacy, education and research as well as an appreciation for democratic values are on the increase. Various regional organizations indicate a growing network of Asian collaboration.

The Asian way

The modernization of Asia is and will be the most significant event taking place in the world of today. For decades in Asia, to modernize meant to westernize. Asia embraced Western ways unconditionally, because they were considered to have laid the foundation for the West's

⁵ WORLD BANK, *Poverty Reduction and the World Bank: Progress in Fiscal 1998*.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 36.

material progress. As Asia is modernizing, however, the Asian conscience is rising. It is very much the Asianization of Asia. The "Asian way" is pursued in every aspect of life. Especially for young people who comprise half the population, it is a rediscovery of Asian roots in their way of life. Today, a collective consciousness of being Asian is emerging. Many young people throughout Asia are beginning to call themselves Asians for the first time. As we enter the new millennium, Asia will become the dominant region of the world: economically, politically, and culturally.

2. *What is to be done?*

In such a state of affairs, the Church in Asia is called upon to enter into a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor.

Dialogue with cultures

The work of incarnating the Gospel in the different cultures of Asia is an urgent necessity in order to sweep away the mistaken impression of some people that the Church is culturally foreign to Asia, especially in view of the emergence of the Asian way. "Only from within and through culture does the Christian faith become a part of history and the creator of history".⁷ Therefore, all of the People of God in Asia must make every effort to promote a fuller inculturation of the Gospel. The lay faithful must especially commit themselves to it as signs of courage and intellectual creativity, in the privileged places of culture, such as the world of the school and university, centres of scientific and technological research, places of artistic creation and humanistic reflection, and areas of mass media.

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 44.

Dialogue with religions

In Asia, dialogue with other religions is of particular importance. A dialogue of life and heart – a dialogue based both on openness to the believers of other religions and on love for them – is needed, always keeping in mind the dimension that interreligious dialogue is “part of the Church’s evangelizing mission”.⁸ Suitable formation for dialogue is needed for those involved and suitable models of dialogue – evangelization in dialogue and dialogue for evangelization – needs to be developed.⁹ To work for human promotion in close collaboration with the believers of other religions is an effective channel for dialogue.

Dialogue with peoples

Social and economic realities of Asia, undoubtedly being the consequences of the “evil mechanisms” and the “structures of sin”, call for dialogue with the poor based on solidarity which is “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good”.¹⁰ “The ‘evil mechanisms’ and ‘structures of sin’ [...] can be overcome only through the exercise of the human and Christian solidarity to which the Church calls us and which she tirelessly promotes”.¹¹

Such a commitment should begin with a radical change of lifestyle. “Solidarity with the poor becomes more credible if Christians themselves live simply, following the example of Jesus”.¹² Christians, Christian families, and ecclesial communities should adopt a new lifestyle based on a preferential option for the poor and on a commitment to integral human development. They should play their proper role not

⁸ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, no. 22.

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 31.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 40.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 34.

only as peacemakers among diverse social classes, but also as providers of both material and spiritual assistance.

Such a commitment should address itself to a radical change of mentality and structures on the national as well as on the international level. Priority must be given to the globalization of solidarity as well as the enhancement of transparency in the fight against corruption.

In the concern for the poor, special attention must be given to the deprivation of the right to religious freedom, that “special form of poverty”,¹³ which still prevails in some countries of Asia. Christian lay faithful, together with the clergy and religious, should express effective solidarity with those local Churches, while “heartily thanking God for continuing in our times to raise up lay persons of heroic fortitude in the midst of persecutions”.¹⁴

The social doctrine of the Church

Altogether the triple dialogue – with cultures, religions and peoples – addresses itself to living the Gospel by serving the human person and society. Therefore, it must be based on the social doctrine of the Church, which is “a valid instrument of evangelization”.¹⁵ The social doctrine of the Church proposes a set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgement, and directives for action for the family, for the workplace, for business, for politics, for culture, for the “new areopagi”. Therefore, it is essential that a solid formation in social doctrine of the Church be offered in all educational activities of the Church¹⁶ and that the lay faithful engaged in these fields be adequately formed in the social doctrine of the Church.

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 42.

¹⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 17.

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, no. 54.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 32.

Conclusions

The Church and Asia are mutually enriching in the work of evangelization. For the Church, Asia is a suitable place effectively to practice solidarity, by evangelizing the Church herself as well as Asia. Encounter with Asia provides the Church with new methods, new forms of expression, and new ardour of evangelization. For Asia, the Church is the unique and universal instrument of salvation. She is also an inexhaustible source of enrichment for Asia's own cultures.

The Church and Asia badly need new apostles capable of carrying out the triple dialogue between them in the new evangelization. So there is a need for these apostles to be adequately formed especially in the social doctrine of the Church. In view of the rapidly changing situations of Asia in the new millennium, a network is needed for the local Churches, especially the lay faithful, to work effectively in collaboration for the evangelization of Asia in this "new era of group endeavours".¹⁷ Continental meetings of the laity may serve as an effective channel for this network.

A new millennium, a great springtime for evangelization has dawned in Asia. It is time for the new apostles to act as witnesses of Christ without being afraid, and to consecrate Asia as a continent of hope for humanity.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 29.

The Rebirth of Africa

AGNÈS ADJAHO AVOGNON

Today it's not the custom to reflect on Africa other than in terms of backwardness, decline, marginalization, of a lost continent, devastated by war and disease, failed, overtaken.

After a long history, a great history, after its good and bad fortunes, with all the enormous handicaps by which it is burdened, but also with the strength of its geographic and human potential, Africa enters the third millennium bringing with it the enormous challenge of claiming its own place in the new century. That claim may seem foolhardy, since all the conditions to confirm her effective marginalization exist. But is it ever sufficiently repeated that to speak of Africa as a single entity – even if reduced to sub-Saharan Africa – is a gross simplification? Botswana is not Burkina Faso, just as Nigeria is not Ethiopia. Whatever may be its common denominators, Africa is a plurality, formed of the many different countries that compose it. It is a continent; so we cannot continue to speak of it in the same terms in which we refer to a single nation.

The grave handicaps that weigh on Africa's entry into the twenty-first century have been the subject of numerous studies and diagnoses familiar not only to the experts, but more especially to public opinion. Information tends to dwell on these handicaps. Indeed the reductive approach of the media to the opportunities, progress and enormous physical and human potential of Africa contrasts curiously with the massive dissemination of its admittedly serious problems.

It's not a question of denying, still less, concealing, the evidence. The generalized deterioration in the living conditions of the populations, and hence of the capacities – real and symbolic – of African players to intervene on the international and national stage, is a reality that can be daily confirmed on the ground and in the statistics. It seems

however that the predominant analyses often fall into the trap of hazardous generalizations and projections, transforming the intolerable realities of Africa today (famine, violence...), variously distributed through the continent, into inescapable structural data.

The announcement of a preordained death is periodically distilled in world thought, while the real potential of the continent's soil and subsoil, and of African men and women, is considered a negligible, if not aggravating fact. In many North-South relations a kind of manichaeism is encountered, dictated by a neo-materialism that privileges some types of quantitative variables, which are undoubtedly essential, but insufficient to understand the continent's reality in an exhaustive manner. These variables represent only one of the possible points of view.

Without complacency, but without masochism, it is our precise responsibility to take account of the serious handicaps with which Africa confronts the new millennium, and to try to mitigate their effects.

1. Handicaps that come from afar

The great rift caused in the development of Africa:
the slave trade

The twentieth century marked the end of ten centuries (9th-19th) of slavery and genocide in Africa. Today this fact, crucial for anyone wanting to understand the roots of some pronounced characteristics that still distinguish the continent's present evolution, is not even taken into consideration in the diagnosis of the past. The world would succumb to grave shortsightedness if it thought such a factor should no longer be recalled, if only because it has long been relegated to the lumber-room of history. But the scourge of slavery, although hidden under various masks, is still all too present in Africa today.

From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, between fifteen and twenty million people were forcibly wrested from African soil and

deported to America. They were bought and sold as slaves for lucre. From the ninth to the nineteenth century, between seventeen and twenty million Africans were deported to the Arab-Islamic countries; they too were bought and sold for lucre. Never in the history of the millennium that has just closed has a human hecatomb, a genocide, reached such proportions in duration and number of persons involved. Never has an historical tragedy had such enduring repercussions on the population of a continent, at the psychological, cultural, economic and political level.

The rift we mentioned is represented by the brutal interruption of the process of establishing huge States throughout the continent ever since the seventh century. Africa still bears the handicap of the grave consequences of this rift: the nation States had difficulty in consolidating themselves and the balances between different ethnic groups remained potentially explosive. But the deep-seated trauma caused by a general sense of fear and insecurity would also enduringly mark the disorderly migratory flows of the Africans. This hunting down of human beings as merchandise has left traces even in the topography and place names of some villages, and in local legends, thus revealing the psychological impact of the slave-trade.

The various phases of this tragedy are now well known – in spite of persisting shadow zones – thanks to the work of historians and to the voices that continue to be raised so that the executioner does not kill a second time by forgetfulness, to cite the words of Elie Wiesel. But no solemn act of reparation has so far been made, if we except the exploit of a French deputy, and native of the Antilles, who on 18 February 1999, during the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in France, succeeded in obtaining from the French Parliament (the first in the world to do so) the unanimous vote of a symbolic law that recognized the slave-trade against the negroes as a crime against humanity.

But the person who, above any other, has taken a moral stance against this crime is, in my view, John Paul II. During his apostolic visit to Senegal, he knelt at Gorée, emblematic place of the tragedy, facing

the tiny harbour where slaves were embarked for their journey to the New World and asked for forgiveness for this crime, whose perpetrators, according to the reconstruction of the historians, are numerous: the Christian West, the papacy, the Africans themselves who for a very long time practiced so-called domestic slavery.

This digression, however brief, on the most tragic chapter in Africa's history, is prompted, at this particular time, as a symbolic tribute to the memory of St. Bakhita, the nine-year old Sudanese girl, wrested from her homeland by slavedealers, enslaved, tortured, sold over and over again, until she ended up, by a providential series of circumstances, in Italian hands cleansed by divine mercy. Beatified in 1992, she was canonized by John Paul II on 1st October 2000 and thus provisionally projected into our blunted memories.

This sign that the Lord gives to us comes to remind us that, as Christians, we have a duty to keep the memory afresh of all those acts that have made man inhumane, in other words, that have alienated him from the image of the Creator, whatever the place and time in which they were perpetrated. Today the new, so-called modern forms of slavery are: the maltreatment of children; the trade in children, a serious problem against which many African countries are mobilizing their energies at all levels; sex tourism victimizing children, a scourge also in other parts of the world; paedophilia; the reduction of women to objects; the 300,000 children or adolescents conscripted into the armed forces who make war, kill and are killed – a phenomenon in which African too has her blame – in the some thirty or so countries throughout the world in which civil war has raged for years.

Colonization and independence

After three centuries of slave-trade, colonization found an Africa already drained of life-blood, and emptied of spirit, an Africa akin to a ripe fruit ready to drop. It could thus be rapidly reduced, in spite of the courageous resistance of heroes like Samory, Tehaka, etc., or of badly organized populations that tried to reconstitute dismembered States.

The installation of the colonial administrations, at least in sub-Saharan Africa, dates to the decade 1880-1890: that means that they had an average duration of 70-80 years, given that independence began in this part of the continent in 1960. The former Portuguese colonies won their independence between 1974 and 1975, at the cost of bloody wars of liberation.

Colonization had a duration far less than that of the slave-trade, but that doesn't mean that its consequences were any less grave.

At the time of independence, it favoured a territorial distribution accentuated by the irrational carving out of frontiers, and an upheaval of the economy caused by the plundering of raw materials. Another negative aspect was the support given by the former colonial powers to inept and corrupt African leaders, often maintained in power against the will of their own peoples.

If we re-evoke the colonial legacy to explain its devastating consequences, it should also be recognized that, thanks to it, the contact with modernity, the end of slavery, and not negligible progress in the field of healthcare and education, also took place. And it should also be emphasized that the Gospel reached Africa two thousand years ago and that the evangelizing mission deserves credit for significant social and religious advances.

2. Present-day handicaps

In spite of the progress achieved during the second half of the 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa enters the twenty-first century in the category of the numerous less developed, impoverished and heavily indebted countries. Even if Africa does not have a monopoly of some of the ills of the century that has just ended – armed conflicts, poverty, child soldiers, misgovernment – numerous problems in the field of development have a particular emphasis and a disturbing permanence in the continent. They may, in summary form, be enumerated as follows:

- the low rate of education, especially of children at the elementary level, the high rate of infant mortality; the epidemic diseases; malaria,

the main cause of death in the continent; the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, accounting for 70% of all cases diagnosed in the world;

- the poor results at the economic level; the low rate of investment and saving; the huge disparity in earnings, which makes the poor of Africa among the poorest in the world;

- the fact that Africa, far from forming an exception to the wars that bedevil the world, plays an important part in them. In 1990, one out of every five Africans was living in a country ravaged by war or by civil strife. Twenty million land mines have been sown in African soil, of which nine million in Angola alone. These wars greatly accentuated the backwardness of these countries, gravely compromising their chance of rapid recovery, because in Africa in particular the mobilization of resources for reconstruction is by far more uncertain than in other parts of the world;

- the crippling burden of foreign debt;

- the incalculable brain-drain that undermines the potential of the continent in the field of research and development;

- the generalized corruption, a factor that aggravates the impoverishment of the more vulnerable sections of the population.

3. Projects to be promoted or implemented

Popular participation and democratization

The process of democratization and the growth of popular participation are to be seen everywhere at the dawn of the new millennium. Ten years ago, South Africa freed itself from the bondage of apartheid. In many countries the democratic process is in the process of being consolidated. In 1999 almost all African countries had already held multi-party elections, albeit with great variability in their fairness or credibility.

The general democratic aspiration is translated into a growing multi-party system, in a very developed community life and in a marked attention to and participation in political ballots of every kind. In various parts of the continent a new generation of politicians is emerging, legitimated by demographic elections.

Regional regroupings and the plan for the United States of Africa

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) now comprises 53 nations. If its moderate objective was to promote cooperation through consent, its action has especially been effective in the support of wars of liberation and the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa. Today the project for the United States of Africa is rapidly gaining ground within the OAU.

Regional economic markets and free-trade areas have been created. They are equipped with systems of coordination to promote trade, enlarge markets, stimulate production. The Inter-African Deployment Force for the control and prevention of conflicts is becoming a reality in the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, etc.

The main protagonists of change on the African scene are subject to the measures dictated by the international institutions: World Bank, International Monetary Fund, UN Development Programme, etc. These measures, identical at all latitudes, produce – or don't produce – effects whose evaluation is dependent on such conditions as good government, the campaign against corruption, investment in human resources, macroeconomic reforms, construction of a constitutional state.

In the first half of 2000, the French daily *La Croix* dedicated a series of articles and supplements to Africa, which attempt, after a lengthy investigation of the various productive spheres, to discover the reality of the “magicians of daily life”, those who are severally described as “citizens”, “believers”, “businessmen”, “creators” and “pioneers”. It's the reality of an Africa capable of invention, creation and diffusion of ideas, an Africa that, in spite of everything, stimulates exchanges in

which not just sunshine, sand and sex are sought, but the meeting with something more that ensures that many people end up falling in love with this Africa.

Africa's progress is necessarily traumatic, due to the far-reaching transformations that are shaping it in the field of urbanization, communications, and the ever greater use of the new technologies. However, as a whole, and even more so in the interior of the countries, many villages undergo these transformations without traumas.

Despite the despair that Africa arouses, the ardour of thousands of men, women and young people has been sublimated by the appearance on the world scene of great figures at the end of the twentieth century, whose moral stature, influence and action embody the hope of a whole people, of a whole continent, and of the whole world. Nelson Mandela comes from afar and when he speaks of the "rebirth of Africa" – a challenge taken up by his successor and current President of the Republic of South Africa Thabo Mbeki – he means to say that the African people need to be pulled out from the quagmire as soon as possible, and that an Africa needs to be built in which the Africans take control of their own destiny as respected and respectable partners of their own destiny, Africans who make their own specific contribution to the building of a better world, of a more humane humanity; an Africa in which development is the new name for peace and peace is the new face of reconciliation. Another great African of our time, Kofi Annan, works with skill, faith and humanity in the difficult field of development and peace, where at times law enters into conflict with wisdom.

The Church, for her part, affirms the primacy of the person over property, even in the worst conditions of life. She teaches us "how much peace and, as its necessary condition, the development of the whole person and of all peoples, are also a *matter of religion*, and how the full achievement of both the one and the other depends on our vocation as men and women of faith. For it depends, above all, *on God*".¹

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 47.

4. The baptized, witnesses of Christ in Africa in the new millennium

More than ever Africa has a need for witnesses of Christ who live the grace of their baptism in daily realities. The grace by which Christ invests us with the newness of his Resurrection enables us to be reborn to new life. It gives us the strength and the courage to live and to work in his truth.

Working in the truth of Christ means distancing ourselves from the falsehood that dominates human relations, political and economic life, family life. It means being in the forefront of all progress in favour of transparency in political life, honesty in economic management, respect for the institution of the family, and the promotion of peace at all levels.

A retrospective review of the conclusions of the international Meetings of the African laity (Accra 1971, Yaoundé 1982) shows that many resolutions were taken in various fields. We have the certainty that the Holy Spirit was at work in everyone's heart and in our continent, even if this work was not translated into the hoped-for creation of a Pan-African Secretariat for the apostolate of the laity.

The Catholic laity engaged in the decision-making spheres of political life must confer greater visibility on their own personal witness as Christians and show greater solidarity among each other, so that their presence and their action may have a real impact.

Lastly, in a continent in which the burden of poverty is so strong, Christians must bear witness to the hope of Christ with a life-style always inspired by sobriety and simplicity, both in having and in being. The counter-witness given by some Africans with the boundless accumulation of wealth and with extravagant life-styles inevitably prevents us from seeing the innumerable Lazaruses who lie at the gate. Christians are prepared more than anyone else to participate in the enterprise of the "rebirth of Africa". And the Church in Africa at all levels (diocesan, national, pan-African) is called to support the apostolate of the laity in the spheres that are peculiarly its own, such as the family, profession, politics, culture and charity.

With the power of the Spirit that renews everything, we know that the grace of the Redemption traverses the whole continent. And we know that with Jesus Christ Africans, past, present and future, can present to the Father an offering pleasing in his eyes: an Africa in harmony with everything he had made and seen as very good on the sixth day of the creation (cf. *Gen* 1:31).

Building Peace in the Middle East and in North Africa

AMIN FAHIM

North Africa of the Maghreb (literally the countries where the sun sets) is composed of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, whereas the Middle East or Mashrek (the counties where the sun rises) is formed of the Near East (Arab countries of the area and Israel), Turkey, Afghanistan and Iran. What can we say about this Arab and Moslem world that is of interest to us laity engaged in building peace? How far do we feel ourselves touched by the situation of conflict in this explosive part of the world where Christians, Moslems and Jews live together in very different conditions?

Churches and Christians

Throughout this area, including Lebanon, Christians are a minority. In the countries of native Christianity (Near East), moreover, Catholics form a minority in comparison with Orthodox believers. When the Catholic does not belong to the local population, he is in a minority twice or even thrice over (North Africa, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan): so that one may well say that he is not only a witness, but a hero!

This Christian world is divided into various Churches and into various rites. Divided: the term unfortunately still holds good. The faithful are the first to suffer from this division, because the quarrel between rival Churches is more heated than ever, in spite of the efforts of dialogue and collaboration.

At first sight one would be tempted to condemn severely such forms of separation and rivalry. But one becomes more indulgent when

one realizes that the Churches, with their rites, have remained steadfast during many centuries, clinging to their faith, to their own traditions and cultures, and that all things considered, obstinacy, as also exclusion, so much deplored, are but the reverse side of a coin struck from the metal of resistance and heroism.

One praiseworthy initiative of inter-Christian dialogue is represented by the Ecumenical Council of the Middle East (ECME) which has for several years brought together the four great Christian families (Chalcedonian Orthodox, non-Chalcedonian Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant).

A spectacular historical event was produced by the first visit of an Orthodox Coptic Pope to the Pope of Rome, after sixteen centuries of separation, i.e. the visit of Shenouda III to Paul VI in May 1973. During this memorable meeting, the two popes signed a declaration in which they affirmed, among other things, their common conception of the nature of Christ; the schism between the Coptic, Syriac and Armenian Churches in 451 had been caused by the theological dispute on just this point.

It might be concluded, therefore, that the two Churches had separated in the fifth century as the result of a simple misunderstanding, but the “political” reality is quite different. The dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Coptic Church, begun amid general euphoria in 1973 and pursued with success in an initial phase, eventually became bogged down and is currently in a situation of stalemate. Here too, as at Chalcedon, the “political” reasons for the impasse need to be sought.

In this general climate of ebb and flow, of dissent and rapprochement, the laity suffer, even if they are determined not to lose hope. Many – perhaps too many – prefer to emigrate, discouraged by the divisions of their religious leaders in response to the semi-suffocating pressures of growing Islamic fundamentalism. The Christian laity, who remain in the region, meet together as far as they can and practice a living dialogue, especially through mixed marriages between Christians, professional life and humanitarian associations.

States and societies

Some constants can be identified in this heterogeneous world constituted by the Middle East and North Africa.

All the States are “religious” and most are also dictatorships, declared or camouflaged to a greater or lesser extent. In a State in which religion and dictatorship are mixed, democracy cannot but suffer. Fortunately, however, an unstoppable progress towards democracy can be noted. This process will undoubtedly take time and will have its heroes, its victims of ostracism and persecution.

In all these countries, real power is in the hands of the “Security”, while the real organized opposition is to be found among the more radical and fundamentalist religious movements; that explains Islamic terrorism. This phenomenon now seems to be losing ground. But this is offset by a gradual slipping of society into racial exclusiveness which risks dividing it into currents and ghettos, to the detriment of the concept of equality between all citizens. This is the result of twenty years of well-orchestrated and well-funded brainwashing, exercised on a huge scale.

The solution? The achievement of a secular, pluralist and democratic state everywhere, constructed by citizens of good will, each a believer in God in a salutary manner, according to his or her own religion. Lay Christians, witnesses of love and peacemakers, can play a key role in this process.

Building peace

How can we speak of peace when the air is filled with the acrid smell of shellfire, when children who throw stones are killed by a bullet in the head, when the drums of war are being sounded by extremists of every kind?

And if the Moslem Sadat went to offer peace to the Jewish Begin, what must we Christians do to contribute to the construction of this peace that seems to vanish from our sight like a mirage? There is only

one way of doing so: responding positively to the repeated invitations of John Paul II to build peace with our brothers and sisters of other religions.

All together, hand in hand, without fear, to build peace! As was affirmed in 1997, during the great congress organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in Lebanon on the theme: "Being constructors of peace, justice and solidarity".

Laity and globalization

In response to this new phenomenon that gains in strength every day, we feel ourselves wholly unprepared. On the one hand, the states join together in political blocs, on the other, the big multinationals gobble up the smaller companies and merge together to become financial monsters.

What becomes of the divided and separated populations in response to these two daunting conglomerates, competing between each other and anxious to control the universe? How can we work for peace and promote love when the two great blocs, the political and the economic one, are impelled solely by their own interests?

But it's just here that the heaven may make the dough rise. A third force may balance the relations between the other two. And this third force is represented by the institutions, by the associations and by the organizations of civil society gathered at the national, regional and international level. In this way this third force, that seeks neither power nor wealth, may become a world conscience, a means of exerting pressure. It may become an effective task force in dialogue with the powerful of every kind, and be able to transform society.

By globalizing this manner of proceeding – an enormous challenge – the Christian laity would be able to conduct a salvific mission in collaboration with all people of good will. But in our age the basic values, such as spirituality and courage, are losing ground to selfishness, corruption and violence. So, if we swim against the tide in this way, we must be prepared to fight this battle to the end, without hesitation and without compromise.

We must be conscious of the fact that, in this new mission to defend justice and spread peace, we will inevitably encounter many obstacles; if we are persecuted in the name of Christ, let us accept this trial as a grace, as a sign that we are proceeding along the right road. It's not only I that risk saying so: it is the Gospel that proclaims it.

America, Mission Land

MARY ANN GLENDON

I have been asked to offer some comments regarding the challenges to Christian witness in North America, with particular reference to the role of the United States in the ambiguous process known as globalization. That is a vast topic, but fortunately the recent Synod on the Church in America provides a concise starting point for reflection: the principal challenge to the Christian witness in North America is a set of habits and beliefs that are so deeply entrenched that they amount to a “culture”. Pope John Paul II calls it “the culture of death” and warns us that it is spreading with alarming speed.

The main elements of that culture are easy to enumerate (materialism, consumerism, relativism, hyper-individualism). But when one is actually immersed in such a culture, it is not always easy to recognize their influence on everyday life. Often it is the poet or the novelist who sees more deeply than the rest of us, and who is thus able to hold up a mirror showing the true face of our society.

Recently, the novelist Tom Wolfe painted a disconcerting portrait of the United States in his best-selling book *A Man in Full*. Late twentieth-century America, as Wolfe depicts it, has some uncomfortable similarities to Rome in the time of the empire. The old Republic of our ancestors is fading from memory, while the current polity seems in many ways more like an oligarchy than a republic. To be sure, this new polity has its excitement and attractions: there is far more wealth and social mobility than in the Republic. And there is far more personal liberty – if one is not fussy about the distinction between liberty and licence. Manners are relaxed; behaviour formerly frowned upon is now tolerated, marriage is easily terminated. Games and spectacles abound. In short, Wolfe shows us a society that has become unusually careless about its “moral ecology” – the

moral foundations upon which a free market and a free society depend.

This prosperous, permissive society is thus a new kind of mission territory – but quite different in one important respect from the pagan lands that Christians evangelized in former times. Paganism at least had the virtue that it was open to mystery and transcendence! But in the affluent countries of North America, paganism and Christianity alike are increasingly being displaced by an arid secularism, materialism and nihilism. And a society that has banished transcendence, we are beginning to realize, can be a pretty frightening place.

On the other hand, the bleakness of that picture is relieved by the continuing presence of unusual opportunities for Christian witness. The United States still has a much larger proportion of regular churchgoers than any other country in the world. And opinion polls prior to the recent election revealed that the majority of voters consider the most important issues facing the country to be moral issues – and that they perceive the country in a moral decline.

What is puzzling is that the same polls show a great reluctance to embody moral positions in public policy. That led political analyst Francis Fukuyama to contend in the *Wall Street Journal* that, despite their concern about moral decline, “the greatest moral passion of Americans as demonstrated in their *voting* is hostility to ‘moralism’ in areas related to sex and family life”.

Many religious leaders see it differently. They regard the disjunction between what Americans say they believe and what emerges from the political process as evidence of a culture war: a war of ideas between different segments of society holding different values – with secularism, materialism and individualism more pervasive among the economic and intellectual elites than among the population at large.

There is a good deal of truth to the culture war theory. The values of the men and women who hold key positions in governments, political parties, corporations, mass media, foundations and universities are often quite remote from the concerns of the average citizen. Strong ties to persons and places, religious beliefs, attachment to tradition and

even to family life are apt to be less important to those at the top than to the men and women whose lives they affect by their decisions. (And, incidentally, the elements of American culture that spread most rapidly round the world tend to be the values of these elites – they find a ready reception within a global technocratic class whose members often have more in common with their counterparts in other countries than with their own fellow citizens.)

But the culture war image has its limitations. Those who view society through that lens often see themselves as engaged in a struggle along the lines of the old western movies – with good guys in white hats on one side and bad guys in black hats on the other. The fact is, however, that the cultural situation is more complicated. The fact is that most American Christians who take their missionary vocation seriously have been operating with two theories that are on a collision course: On the one hand, we keep insisting that the majority of the American people possess more good sense and common decency than comes through in media images and public policies. But for years we have maintained that the American character is being adversely affected by the abortion mentality, by the divorce mentality, by sexual promiscuity, and by indifference to the poor. Now, it stands to reason that if the second proposition is correct, it will at some point undercut the first. The balance at some point will shift in favour of the culture of death.

I do not believe that we have reached the point of no return. And even if we have, it makes no difference to our duty as witnesses and missionaries. But if one wants to be a missionary, one has to know the territory. And in North America, no one has been untouched by the effect of living in a society where, for nearly thirty years, abortion on demand has taken one and a half million lives a year.

My point here is that the culture war is real, but it is not just a struggle between different groups in society, it is a war within the mind and heart of every American. The difference between what we say we believe and what we do is the same old moral impotence of which Paul wrote to the Romans: “I do not do the good I know” (*Rm* 7:15).

The wordsmiths of the culture of death have been quick to exploit that weakness of human nature. About thirty years ago, they came up with one of the most insidious slogans ever invented: “Personally, I’m opposed to [here you may fill in the blank], but I can’t impose my opinions on others”. That slogan was the moral anesthesia they offered to people who are troubled about moral decline, but who don’t know quite how to express their views in public. The Christian witness of countless good men and women has been silenced by that diabolically clever little phrase. Only recently have a number of Catholics, Protestant and Jews stepped forward to point out that when we advance our religiously grounded moral viewpoints in the public square, we are not imposing anything on anyone. We are proposing. That’s what citizens do in a democracy – we propose, we give reasons, we vote. It’s a very strange doctrine that would only silence religiously grounded moral viewpoints. But the anesthesia was very effective. And of course the slogan was a bonanza for cowardly and unprincipled politicians.

When all is said and done, the challenge for Christian witness today is the same as it was when Our Lord told us 2000 years ago, namely, that we must be the leaven in the loaf, the salt of the earth, and lights upon a hill. Though it is still a daunting challenge, at least it’s a familiar one – part of our regular job, so to speak. That should be encouraging. It’s also encouraging to recall what St. Paul told the Corinthians: “Do you not know that a little yeast has its effect all through the dough?” (1 Cor 5:6).

But is that is so, some may wonder: what’s the matter with American Catholics? After all, 62.4 million in the USA is a lot of yeast! But as St. Paul pointed out, there is good yeast and bad yeast. And just as good yeast spreads all through the dough, so can bad yeast. He told the Corinthians, a prosperous, self-satisfied, commercial people, that they had to get rid of the bad yeast – and that it was in themselves, as well as in their community (cf. *ibid.*, 5:7). In that connection, one cannot ignore two widespread attitudes that pose substantial obstacles to Christian witness in North America: On the one hand, many Catholics who are committed to the Church’s teachings on social justice bridle at

the Church's refusal to adjust her moral teachings to the comfort level of a hedonistic society. On the other hand, there are many Catholics who accept the moral teachings, but who resist the preferential option for the poor, a teaching that is difficult to follow in a materialistic society. To both groups, St. Paul would surely say what he said to the Corinthians: "Do not conform to the spirit of the age" (*Rm* 12:2).

Having painted a rather sombre picture, I want to conclude by saying why I remain confident that with prayer, witness and determination we can overcome these obstacles. Our Catholic social and moral teaching corresponds to all that is best in American traditions. Our social teaching gives us a vision of a society that welcomes the stranger, that supports and honours motherhood, and that lends a hand to the needy. Our moral teaching resonates with the cherished American belief in the possibility of a fresh start. We believe that there is no sin that can't be forgiven if one faces up to it, sincerely repents, make amends, and reforms one's life.

The challenge ahead is first, to witness by living those teachings ourselves, and second, to find ways suited for our times to articulate our Catholic vision in its fullness. We have to find and build on what is true and good in the culture, and to denounce and reject what is false and harmful. That is what Christians have always tried to do, in and out of season, in good times and bad. That is what Christians will do in North America – regardless of what history has in store for that continent.

II

The Church in the Contemporary World

The Mission of the Church at the Dawn of the Third Millennium: Disciples and Witnesses of the Lord

Bishop ANGELO SCOLA

VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAY FAITHFUL

“The field is the world” (*Mt* 13:38). The concise statement in Matthew’s Gospel may perhaps help us to trace the character of the Church’s mission at the dawn of the third millennium. In doing so, we will immediately place the interlocutors of our reflection, the lay faithful, in the foreground.¹ Evangelization, in fact, throughout the whole discourse of parables (cf. *Mt* 13:1-52), more than once identifies the world *tout court*² as the field in which the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven takes place. The Church herself, as firstfruits of the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. *Mt* 13:53 – 18), is essentially interwoven with the world, because it is above all in the person that she is realized (“in spirits”, as Romano Guardini would say).³ This is shown by the whole of

¹ On the Congress of the Catholic Laity the Pope affirmed: “This Congress, which will be above all a jubilee event for all those who participate in it, may act as a recapitulation of the journey made by the laity from Vatican Council II to the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation. Though it can be situated in continuity with similar meetings held in the past, the Congress will have to examine the specific aims and profile of the laity. Taking place towards the end of 2000, it will be enriched with everything experienced in this year of grace of Our Lord, nor will it fail to point out to the lay faithful the tasks that await them in the various fields of mission and service to man at the beginning of the third millennium” (JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity on the occasion of its eighteenth Plenary Assembly”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 1-2 March 1999, 5).

² Here, it goes without saying, we cannot exhaust the richness of meanings that the term “world” has in the New Testament. In particular we do not propose to take into account the use of the word in John’s Gospel (cf. H. SASSE, “Kosmos”, in: G. KITTEL-G. FRIEDRICH [eds.], *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, vol. 5, Brescia: Paideia, 1969, 877-958; R.E. BROWN, *Giovanni*, vol. 2, Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1979. 1450-1452). We will limit ourselves to the meaning of the word, so to say neutral, in Chapter 13 of Matthew.

³ Cf. R. GUARDINI, *La realtà della Chiesa*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1989, 21.

the so-called discourse on the Church (cf. *Mt* 18) in which such questions as the primacy of the little ones in the Kingdom, scandal, mercy, brotherly correction, forgiveness are tackled... And it is also testified by the affirmation of the primacy of Peter: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (*Mt* 16:18). This *you* of Peter is the foundation on which the Church is built. It is his person.

Separating the Church from the world is a vain, as well as factitious enterprise, destined – as unfortunately historical events and many theological formulations demonstrate – to give rise to serious misunderstandings.⁴ If, as Matthew's Gospel teaches us, the field is the world, and it is not therefore possible to separate the good seed from the weeds until the end of time, it inevitably follows that the destiny of Christians should not be distinguished from that of mankind for the whole of the historical period that separates us from the new era. Church and world form an *historically inseparable polarity* within the *one design* of the Father.

Here the speculative investigation of the relation between Church and world is not our business. That relation is one of the most troubled *crux theologorum*, destined, frequently, to bog us down in an inconclusive dialectic between the two principles.⁵ The apparently obvious affirmation of Matthew – "The field is the world" – enables us, however, in

⁴ We may cite, for example, the French historical circumstances linked with the appearance of the neologism "catholicisme". The term, which appeared as a substantive in the eighteenth century, then became, at the beginning of the nineteenth, the expression of a cultural alternative to the adjective "catholique" applied to the Church. It ended up by denoting a flimsy ecclesial belonging, based more on a sum of ideas or, at most, of customs and language, than on the concreteness of the *regula fidei* of the sacraments. On the process which led to the Church being conceived as "counter-society" cf. C. HELL, "Catholicisme", in: J.-Y. LACOSTE (ed.), *Dictionnaire critique de la théologie*, Paris: PUF, 1998, 211-213; A. BESANÇON, *Trois tentations dans l'Église*, Paris 1996.

⁵ The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes* represents a clear attempt to overcome the dialectical approach to the Church-world relation. In this regard see A. Scola, "'Gaudium et spes': dialogo e discernimento nella testimonianza della verità", in R. FISICHELLA (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2000, 82-114.

speaking of the *mission of the Church*, to eliminate at the outset any possible misunderstanding. First, because it places in evidence, immediately and without ambiguity, the essential task played by the lay faithful in the building of the Church. Second, because the original and inseparable link of the Church with the world prevents us from identifying her as a *preconstituted reality*: i.e. a reality that is without any relation with history, and is then transferred into the world as into a foreign region, almost as if it were a reality imposed on the world from outside. A consequence of this would be, among other things – as unfortunately has happened, and is happening –, the Church's inexorable non-incidence and, ultimately, her uselessness. On the contrary, the living building up of the Church is essentially bound up with history, with men and women touched at the heart of their own freedom by the gift of the event of Jesus Christ. So deeply are they transformed, in the daily rhythm of their affections and their work, by Christ's presence that they communicate it, gratuitously, to all those who naturally enter into relation with them. The essence of the Church is intrinsically missionary because the Kingdom grows, almost as if emerging from the very soil of the world: men and women are its *co-actors*. The *protagonist*, Jesus Christ, shows this original unity between the Church and the world in God's design (cf. *Jn* 17:21) because in him and through him the Kingdom of heaven is definitively realized (cf. *Mt* 13:53-57; *Mk* 6:16; *Lk* 4:14-30).⁶

This ecclesiological framework tends to ensure the vital dynamic that alone explains the Church's *raison d'être*: that of making transpire, as "sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men"⁷ – the face of Christ himself, *lumen gentium*.⁸

⁶ Origen, in this regard, spoke of "autobasileia".

⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 1.

⁸ "In this resides the true meaning of the Church as 'sacrament of salvation': that of representing the social dimension of the mediation of salvation, the communion of believers in receiving and transmitting the salvation given in Christ" (M. KEHL, *La Chiesa*, Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1995, 81).

Hence the need for all the lay faithful to testify to their own Christian identity in ways perceptible to others. *Who is the Christian?* That is the question that the world of men and women has not ceased in two thousand years to pose to the men of the Church! And how can a reply to it be given other than through the daily witness (*martyrion*) of those who live in all the spheres of human existence, i.e. the lay faithful? The holy people (*laòs àghiòs*) are the agents of the Church's mission.⁹ That does not mean underestimating the foundation itself of the Church – her trinitarian root rendered accessible by the incarnate Word accepted in Mary's *fiat* – or failing to recognize the essential space due within it to the institution, ultimately guaranteed by the structure of the ordained ministry. "Each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith to the best of his ability".¹⁰ The lay faithful, as convinced and convincing followers of Christ, are called, in the ordinary circumstances of their life, to render explicit to themselves and to all those whom Providence daily places in relation with them, the ecclesial form of the world in which the Kingdom of God is anticipated (*Ecclesia forma mundi*).

The centrality of the lay faithful in the mission of the Church derives from the centrality of their membership of the Church herself: "Thus, every lay person, through those gifts given to him, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself

⁹ Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, "Il laico e la Chiesa", in: IDEM, *Sponsa Verbi*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1969, 311-326.

¹⁰ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 17. The importance of this number of *Lumen gentium*, dedicated to the Church's missionary character, is well known. In fact it forms the hinge between Chapter II of the Constitution (no. 9-17) – the People of God – and the following chapters that tackle, in succession, the vocation and mission of the ordained ministers (nos. 18-29), of the laity (nos. 30-38) and of religious (nos. 43-47). The missionary character of the Church, rooted in the trinitarian economy, is therefore almost the gateway that opens reflection to the various types of vocation and states of life (cf. G. PHILIPS, *La Chiesa e il suo mistero*, Milano: Jaca Books, 1993⁵, 193-196; M.-J. LE GUILLOU, "La vocation missionnaire de l'Église", in: G. BARAÚNA [ed.], *L'Église de Vatican II*, vol. 2, Paris: Cerf, 1967, 681-698).

‘according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal’ (*Eph* 4:7)”.¹¹ Any diatribe on the nature and importance of the various states of life is, in this way, drastically reduced. The history of the so-called Catholic laity, at least in the phase that most directly interests us here – beginning, that is, from the last quarter of the last century – demonstrates this clearly.¹²

2. Who are the lay faithful? Overcoming sterile antitheses

The world, therefore, is the field in which the seed copiously scattered may take root and bear fruit. As regards the darnel inextricably tangled together with the grain, the harvesting time will come. Then, all the protagonists of the great theatre of the world will be enabled clearly to distinguish the good harvest from the noxious weeds. A balanced *theologia mundi* places in evidence the benevolent design of the infinite freedom of the Father who dialogues with the finite freedom of each man (*conversatus est cum hominibus*). Its elaboration owes much to the history of the so-called Catholic laity in the last century. While it is true that the phenomenon of the association of the lay faithful is attested right from the dawn of the Church, it is beyond doubt that only the foundation of Catholic Action, towards the end of the nineteenth century, gave a decisive acceleration to the Church’s awareness of the character and dignity of the laity.¹³

It is not possible here to trace the course of this development, nor to express all its significance by attempting a summation of the – by now fully developed – “theology of the laity”. But important pro-

¹¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 33.

¹² Cf. G. CARRIQUIRY, “I fedeli laici”, in: R. FISICHELLA (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, cit., 172-206.

¹³ Cf. E. ISERLOH, “Movimenti interni alla Chiesa e la loro spiritualità”, in H. JEDIN (ed.), *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. 10, part I, Milano 1980, 237-273; M. AGNES, *L’Azione Cattolica in Italia: storia, identità, missione*, Cassino: Sangermano, 1985; L. FERRARI, *Una storia dell’Azione Cattolica*, Genova: Marietti, 1989; J. STREEL-C. DOSSOGUE, *De l’action catholique à la collaboration*, Soignies: Jean-Marie Deanmois, 1992; C. MARÍN, *Cincuenta años de Acción Católica*, Madrid: HOAC, 1995.

nouncements of the Magisterium,¹⁴ and useful studies in pastoral theology,¹⁵ on the matter are not lacking. We will limit ourselves to recalling the four phases that seem, in our view, to have characterized reflection on the matter.¹⁶

The first began roughly in 1953, the date of the publication of the famous book by Yves Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïc*, which firmly recognized the dignity and role of the laity in the Church.¹⁷ By virtue of Baptism, the laity participate in the *tria munera* of Christ, and their secular character identifies their specific sphere of apostolate in *earthly realities*.

The second phase began immediately after the Council and extended to the early 1970s. In this phase the central theme became the *deepening*, predominant but not exclusive, of the laity's *secular character*.¹⁸ The urgent need for a "positive" definition of the lay state risked placing the laity's ecclesial identity in parenthesis.

The third phase is more complex and variegated. The themes debated can perhaps be reduced to the following: First, the one focused on the theology of the ministries, on the basis of the consideration of the Church as "wholly ministerial";¹⁹ second, that of the co-called "theology

¹⁴ The magisterium has always accompanied the development of the apostolate of the laity. It is enough to recall the sequence of papal pronouncements on Catholic Action and, as emblematic documents, Vatican Council II's Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem* and John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*.

¹⁵ Cf. G. ZAMBON, *Laicato e tipologie ecclesiali*, Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1996.

¹⁶ A synthesis of this development may be found in: A. SCOLA, *Questioni di Antropologia Teologica*, Roma: PUL-Mursia, 1997², 69-81; J. L. ILLANES, "La discusión teológica sobre la noción de laico", *Scripta Theologica* 22 (1990), 771-789; G. COLOMBO, "La 'teologia dei laici': bilancio di una vicenda storica", in: *I laici nella Chiesa*, Torino: Elle Di Ci, 1986, 9-27.

¹⁷ To this same phase belong the contributions of Spiazzi (cf. R. SPIAZZI, *La missione dei laici*, Roma: Edizione di Presenza, 1951) and Philips (cf. G. PHILIPS, *Le rôle du laïc* dans l'Église, Paris-Tournai: Casterman, 1954).

¹⁸ In this regard see the bibliographic repertoire in: *Il laicato. Rassegna bibliografica in lingua italiana, tedesca e francese*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987, 35-45, 118-168, 335-341, 366-376, 391.

¹⁹ Cf. B. FORTE, *Laicato e laicità*, Genova: Marietti, 1987.

of the Christian;²⁰ third, attention was shifted to a renewed “theology of laicity”, aimed at proposing a positive definition of the lay faithful;²¹ and, fourth, a more structured “theology of the secular character” began to take form.²² This reflection culminated in the 7th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the “Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council” and led, as a consequence, to the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*.²³ At the end of this stage, the question of charisms in connection with the new forms of movements of the faithful became increasingly more significant, within the reflection on the laity.²⁴

The fourth phase is the current phase, within which the theology of the laity seems to have achieved a better balance, thanks in particular to the pronounced urgency of the Church’s missionary task.

How can this theological position that we dare to call better balanced be summed up?

Let us begin by saying that, after having witnessed a proliferation of studies on the identity of the lay person in the period between the 7th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the publication of *Christifideles laici* (1987-1988),²⁵ it has to be admitted that reflection

²⁰ Cf. G. COLOMBO, “La ‘teologia dei laici’: bilancio di una vicenda storica”, cit., 9-27.

²¹ Cf. S. DIANICH (ed.), *Laici e laicità nella Chiesa*, Brescia: Queriniana, 1987.

²² Cf. P. RODRÍGUEZ, “La identidad teológica del laico”, in: *La misión del laico en la Iglesia y en el mundo*, Pamplona: Euns, 1987, 265-302; E. CORECCO, “L’identità ecclesiologicala del fedele laico”, *Vita e pensiero* 70 (1987), 165-167; E. BRAUNBECK, *Der Weltcharakter der Laien. Eine theologisch-rechtliche Untersuchung im Licht des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1993.

²³ An updated bibliography on the Synod Assembly and on the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* can be found in: R. W. OLIVER, *The Vocation of the Laity to Evangelization*, Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 1997, 311-346.

²⁴ For an extensive bibliography on the issue see A. SCOLA, “The Reality of the Movements in the Universal Church and in the Local Church”, in: PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS (ed.), *Movements in the Church. Proceedings of the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements, Rome, 27-29 May 1998*, Vatican City 1999.

²⁵ The essential bibliography to post-synodal studies may be found in: E. BUENO DE LA FUENTE, “¿Redescubrimiento de los laicos en la iglesia? Boletín bibliográfico sobre los laicos”, *Revista Española de Teología* 48 (1988), 214-249; 49 (1989), 69-100.

over the last decade has been rather meagre and with a particular paucity of contributions of a systematic character, of more particular interest to us here.²⁶ But of these we should at least cite the articles that tackle the question of the various “ministries” to be assigned to the laity²⁷ – the inter-dicasteral instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio* that aroused so much controversy in 1997 may be recalled in this regard –,²⁸ and those that tackle the problem of whether the lay faithful should participate in the government of the Church.²⁹ Useful systematic suggestions also emerge from a series of studies on the so-called spirituality of the lay faithful,³⁰ and on some articles on the phenomenon of association between the faithful, whose significance has increased in recent years.³¹ Particular mention should also be made of reflection in canon law, one of the fields that in more recent years has focused most

²⁶ The more systematic attempts resume the debates of the 1980s. Cf. for example M. VERGOTTINI, “La teologia e i laici”, *Teologia* 18 (1993), 166-186; T. MARCOS, “Laicos e Igreja”, *Estudio Augustiniano* 27 (1992), 523-550; P. NEUNER, “Was ist eine Laie?”, *Stimmen der Zeit* 117 (1992), 507-518; G. CANOBBIO, *Laici o cristiani?*, Brescia: Morcelliana 1992; M. SEMERARO, *Con la Chiesa nel mondo. Il laico nella storia, nella teologia e nel magistero*, Roma: Vivere in, 1991.

²⁷ Cf. E. PETROLINO, “Ministerialità laicale e nuova evangelizzazione”, *Liturgia* 29 (1995), 377-394.

²⁸ Cf. *Instruction on Some Questions regarding the Collaboration of the Lay Faithful in the Ministry of Priests*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1997.

²⁹ Cf. G. ROUTHIER, “Associer les laïques au gouvernement de l’Église”, *Lumen Vitae* 53 (1998), 161-169. In this context we can situate some more recent reflections, some of them debatable, on “laicity”: cf. G. ALBERIGO, “Facteurs de ‘laïcité’ au Concile Vatican II”, *Revue de sciences religieuses* 74 (2000), 211-225; J. S. BOTERO GIRALDO, “Teología del Laicado. Nuevas perspectivas en el postconcilio”, *Revista Teológica Limense* 33 (1999), 327-350.

³⁰ Cf. R. BERZOSA, “Apuntes bibliográficos sobre espiritualidad laical”, *Scriptorium Victoricense* 46 (1999), 343-374; L. DEL BURGO, “Religiosos y laicos ante el tercer milenio”, *Revista de Espiritualidad* 59 (2000), 63-84; R. BERZOSA, “La ‘espiritualidad’ del fiel laico en el Sínodo de 1987”, *Burgense* 31 (1990), 29-45.

³¹ Cf. G. DALLA TORRE, “Ecclesialità e ministerialità nelle associazioni laicali”, *Periodica* 87 (1998), 549-566; S. Recchi, “Per una configurazione canonica dei movimenti ecclesiali”, *Quaderni di Diritto Ecclesiale* 11 (1998), 57-66; A. CATTANEO, “I movimenti ecclesiali: aspetti ecclesiologici”, *Annales Theologici* 11 (1997), 401-427.

attention on our theme.³² Lastly, some theologians incorporate reflection on the laity in the wider context of ecclesiology, both that of communion,³³ and that of mission.³⁴

In spite of the evident fragmentation of the theological literature in question, it is not impossible to identify, in the duality *vocation* and *mission*, the element that permits all the decisive factors of the so-called theology of the laity to be treated.³⁵ By its very nature, this duality is based on the individual subject, the *singular concretum*. It thus permits us to recover, with realism, the terms of the long and variegated debate and provides us with reliable ways of resolving its problems. For the final objective of participation in the life of the Church – in the various forms of representation and ministry, charismatic gifts and modes of association – cannot be other than *mission* as the fulfilment, in history, of the Christian *vocation*. Mission shows itself capable of maintaining the unity of the various concerns of theological reflection of recent decades and, more particularly, that relating to the secular character of the lay faithful.³⁶

Above all, the thorny problem of the definition of the state of life of the lay faithful, including the correct relation between their ecclesial

³² Cf. D.G. ARISTIGUETA, “El problem de la secularidad: el debate postconciliar y su incidencia en el CIC”, *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 74 (1999), 737-786; G. GHIRLANDA, “I consigli evangelici nella vita laicale”, *Periodica* 87 (1998), 567-589; P. VALDRINI, “Ecclesialità e ministerialità nella missione del fedele laico”, *Periodica* 87 (1998), 527-548; P. ERDÖ, “Il cattolico, il battezzato e il fedele in piena comunione con la Chiesa cattolica”, *Periodica* 86 (1997), 213-240.

³³ Cf. J. A. BARREDA, “La Chiesa come comunione, soggetto di evangelizzazione”, *Euntes Docete* 49 (1996), 79-97.

³⁴ Laloux, in his study of the development of the Catholic laity in France, draws attention to the transition from a “pastoral of concealment” to mission in the aftermath of the new evangelization: cf. L. LALOUX, “L’apostolat des laïcs en France”, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 122 (2000), 211-237.

³⁵ Parenthetically, it is significant that this duality appears, almost continuously, from the *Instrumentum laboris* of the VII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod (1987) to the programme of the present Congress on the theme “Witnesses of Christ in the new millennium” (2000).

³⁶ Cf. M. SARDI, “La responsabilité des fidèles laïcs dans l’action missionnaire de l’Église”, *Antonianum* 72 (1997), 603-635.

identity and secular character, finds a solution in this renewed consideration. Thanks to the assumption of the *singular concretum* permitted by the vocation-mission duality, the nature and dignity of the Christian's lay state of life are clarified. Overcoming sterile antitheses, the role of the lay person emerges clearly and is clearly distinguished from that of consecrated Christians and that of those called to the ordained ministry. This distinction, avoiding artificial forms of exclusion, has to recognize – as *Christifideles laici* has well shown –³⁷ the importance of the “circularity” between the various states of life in the Church, according to the axiom, never sufficiently recalled, that they receive full light only from the primacy of the life conceived as vocation.³⁸

In substance, thanks to the call made, by faith and by Baptism, to their freedom, the lay faithful tend towards their fulfilment (holiness) in the daily communication (mission) of the astonishing and gratuitous newness given to them by “being found in [Christ]” (*Phil* 3:9). This ecclesial identity, that they share with the faithful called to other states of life, is inevitably expressed, however, by their pecu-

³⁷ “In Church communion the states of life, by being ordered one to the other, are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being *the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love*. They are *different yet complementary*, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service. [...] All the states of life, whether taken collectively or individually in relation to the others, are at the service of the Church's growth. While different in expression they are deeply united in the Church's “mystery of communion” and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission” (JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 55).

³⁸ In this regard the following reflections of von Balthasar are particularly illuminating: “The status of the Christian is truly revealed as a form of living in Christ [...]. The maintenance of the authenticity of the Christian state occurs within the world as it is in the here and now. This means, however, that the grace of the Christian state is not granted other than in the form of a mission. Mission inhabits the state and gives it its meaning. Within this mission must be found everything that the Christian carries out in the world. He must not mediate between Christianity and the world, but testify the form of Christ to the world. He must live it before the world and impress it on the world” (H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Gli stati di vita del cristiano*, Milano: Jaca Book 1985, 191-192).

liar immanence to the world (secular character).³⁹ The secular character is called to be the *vehicle* of their ecclesial nature. The lay faithful are at the centre of the field to be sown; they are at the heart of the world in which they live.

The concern to define, in a positive sense, who the lay person is, is thus satisfied without falling into the impasse of a sterile antithesis between ecclesial character on the one hand and secular character on the other; at the same time, the definition of the laity in terms only of what they are not, still present in Vatican Council II's Constitution on the Church is overcome.⁴⁰

In the second place, the vocation-mission duality provides a balanced and practical solution to another long-standing controversy: that on the relation between charism and institution in the Church. As Cardinal Ratzinger recalled,⁴¹ it is impossible to resolve the antithesis between the two terms at the level of the dialectic of principles. For the relation between sacramental grace and charismatic grace (*charis* and *charisma*) is essentially fluctuating, because both express the undivided act of grace of the Father through the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The sacramental institution of the Church thus has, by its nature, a charismatic root, and her charism, especially when it is shared to the point of generating aggregation, cannot but tend to a certain institutional stability. Between sacramental grace and charismatic grace, as Balthasar has suggested ever since the 1950s, there is a living analogy, a reflection of their ability to be distinguished (*distinctio realis*) albeit in their co-essential inseparability.⁴² Now, at least at the practical level, this living analogy

³⁹ Cf. J. L. ILLANES, "La discusión teológica sobre la noción de laico", cit., 784-788.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. SEMERARO, "Il cristiano laico nel testo conciliare di "Lumen gentium" 30-31", *Lateranum* 56 (1990), 143-181.

⁴¹ Cf. J. RATZINGER, "The Ecclesial Movements: A Theological Reflection on Their Place in the Church", in: PONTIFICIUM CONSILIIUM PRO LAICIS (ed.), *The Movements in the Church*. Proceedings of the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements, Rome 27-29 May 1998, Vatican City 1999, 23-51, and in particular 25-29.

⁴² Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, "La grazia e il carisma", in: IDEM, *Sponsa Verbi*, cit., 297-309.

that dissolves every sterile dialectical antithesis between charism and institution is found in the vocation-mission duality.⁴³

As John Paul II has recalled on various occasions, the institutional dimension and the charismatic dimension are co-essential to the life of the Church,⁴⁴ because they express the call of her children (vocation) to the total gift of themselves (mission) through the persuasive identification (charism) with the real and objective presence (eucharist-institution) of Jesus Christ in the history of every person of every time.⁴⁵

The ecclesiological premise for overcoming sterile conflicts between the more traditional forms of Catholic associations and the new movements and communities in the Church is also placed in this perspective. For to describe the character of the lay faithful in terms of their specific vocation and mission expresses the essence of the central methodological principle of a sound ecclesiology: pluriformity in unity.⁴⁶ The wise pastoral decision made by the ecclesiastical authority in recent decades to make room for the new movements without ceasing to recognize the value of the old ones, was not dictated by a lax conception of the Church, but by the inspired conviction that certain antitheses – positive or negative definition of the laity, institution versus

⁴³ Cf. D. SCHINDLER, "Institution and Charism", in: PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS (ed.), *The Movements in the Church*, cit., 53-75.

⁴⁴ "In the Church, both the institutional and the charismatic aspects, both the hierarchy and the associations and movements of the faithful, are co-essential and share in fostering life, renewal and sanctification [of the Church], though in different ways, so that here is an exchange, a reciprocal communion" (JOHN PAUL II, "Messaggio ai movimenti ecclesiali riuniti per il II Colloquio Internazionale", *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II X*, 1 [1987], 478; cf. IDEM, "Address at the Meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and the New Communities", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1-2 June 1998, 6-7; PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS (ed.), *The Movements in the Church*, cit., 19).

⁴⁵ What the Catechism of the Catholic Church says about the mission of the Church (cf. nos. 849-856) and about the lay faithful (cf. nos. 897-913) may be read together in this key.

⁴⁶ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Second Extraordinary General Assembly (24 November – 8 December 1985), "Relatio finalis 'Ecclesia sub verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi'", in: *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. 9, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1988, no. 1801.

charism, stable structures (dioceses, parishes) versus flexible forms of association (groups, movements), classical groups versus new forms of group endeavours, associations versus movements – that seemed to invoke a clear separation, were in fact inadequate to treat the scale and the truth of what the Spirit was saying to his Church.

Now a new phase has opened. It bears the hallmark of the extraordinary Jubilee Year of the year 2000. During the Holy Year, in many different ways, the Holy Father tirelessly recalled all the faithful and, with particular force, the laity to invoke the grace of the realization of their own personal and community vocation to holiness through their total offer of self, to the point of martyrdom, for the salvation of man.⁴⁷

In this new phase, that the Pope has called the phase of maturity,⁴⁸ it thus becomes decisive, for lay Christians and their groups, to reconsider the ever valid category of *apostolate* in the perspective of the urgent missionary task.⁴⁹ Far from sidelining the individual, it urges

⁴⁷ John Paul II has recalled the importance of the missionary vocation of the Church by referring to new evangelization. See further J. L. ILLANES, “Perspectivas para la Nueva Evangelización”, *Scripta Theologica* 29 (1997), 749-770; A TROBAJO DIAZ, “Boletín bibliográfico sobre ‘Nueva Evangelización’”, *Scriptorium Legionense* 36 (1995), 255-299.

⁴⁸ “Today a new phase opens up before you, that of ecclesial maturity. That does not mean that all the problems have been resolved. It is, rather, a challenge. A way to be followed. The Church expects from you ‘ripe’ fruits of communion and commitment” (JOHN PAUL II, “Address during the meeting with the adults of Catholic Action”, cit.; cf. IDEM, “Address during the meeting with the adults of Catholic Action”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 7-8 September 1998, 6-7).

⁴⁹ It is an urgent task that *Christifideles laici* itself recalls right from the start: “In our times, the Church after Vatican II [...] has come to a more lively awareness of her missionary nature and has listened again to the voice of her Lord who sends her forth into the world as ‘the universal sacrament of salvation’. *You go too*. The call is a concern not only to Pastors, clergy, and men and women religious. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church in the world” (no. 2). The missionary task of the laity is also recalled by the Holy Father in the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, when, speaking of the missionary character of the whole people of God and, in particular, of the laity, he declares that “the need for all the faithful to share in this responsibility is not merely a matter of making the apostolate more effective; it is a right and duty based on their baptismal dignity, whereby ‘the faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King’” (no. 71).

them to occupy a foreground role on the scene of the world: the field from whose earth the Kingdom of God is destined to bear fruit and which asks Christians to sow the seed anew.

AN ECCLESIOLOGY “OF MISSION”

1. *An universal mission*

One of the most significant episodes narrated by Matthew's Gospel (cf. *Mt* 15:21-28), which has a parallel in that of Mark (cf. *Mk* 7:24-30), traces out an unusual path for the enlargement of the *apostolate* of Jesus. It's the episode of the Canaanite woman, who appeals to the Lord to cure her daughter possessed by a demon.⁵⁰ The Lord seems at first (in Matthew's account) to ignore her. But then, in a second moment, he gives a justification for this attitude to her which seems to admit no reply: “I was sent (the verb is *apostellein*: apostolate-mission)⁵¹ only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (*Mt* 15:24). But the woman does not give up and continues undaunted to plead for Jesus' help. He – this is the third phase of the episode – does not hesitate to make use of a derogatory epithet to demarcate the recipients of his own apostolate: “It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs” (*Mt* 15:26). The woman, confronted by the bleak alternative either to withdraw offended by the Rabbi's position or risk everything for the cure of her daughter, finds the loving energy to abase herself. She does not care if she be considered a dog, because she does not belong to the chosen people; she does not claim for herself the bread destined for the children of Israel; the crumbs that fall from the master's table are enough for her. Then comes the significant fact on which we intend to place the emphasis: the woman's faith, in a certain sense, forcibly

⁵⁰ Cf. A. SAND, *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, vol. I, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992, 459-462.

⁵¹ Cf. K. H. RENGSTORF, “Apostéllō”, in: G. KITTEL-G. FRIEDRICH (eds.), *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, vol. I, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1965, 1063-1186.

extends the *apostolate* of Jesus. The power of the kingdom – let us not forget that the episode is inserted in the fifth section of the Gospel, dedicated to the Church, firstfruits of the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 13:53-18) – does not admit any demarcations or limitations. In the apostolic consciousness of Jesus himself, it sweeps aside every frontier and shows that the salvific dimension of mission is universal. Although he knows himself *sent*, and hence not able to dispose of his mission as he thinks fit – for he has received it from the Father⁵² – Jesus *lets himself be persuaded* by the faith of the Canaanite woman.

This Gospel episode clearly attests the essentially apostolic nature of the Christian vocation: “The Christian vocation is, of its nature, also a vocation to the apostolate”.⁵³ And – what is astonishing – it shows it to be so in the actions of Christ himself.

It’s not necessary, at this point, to review analytically the New Testament texts that document the meaning of *apostolate-mission*; nor to point out that the term “mission” is derived from the Latin translation of the Greek *apostollein*,⁵⁴ to recognize in the apostolate-mission of Jesus Christ not only the profound reason for his coming among us, but a revelation of the essence of his unique person.⁵⁵

Once again it is the Revelation that fully illuminates us. The Letter to the Hebrews (cf. *Heb* 3:1) does not scruple to call Jesus the *apostle* in the absolute sense. This definition, which occurs only once in the whole of the New Testament (*apax legomenon*), needs how-

⁵² “In John’s Gospel Jesus appears as the envoy of the Father; but this role of his serves only to clarify the importance of his person and of the history that is fulfilled in him, since God himself speaks and acts through him” (*ibid.*, 1189).

⁵³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.

⁵⁴ Cf. A. SEUMOIS, *Teologia missionaria*, Bologna; Edizioni Dehoniane, 1993, 44-51. The author summarizes the exegetical studies on the terms “apostolate”, “apostle” and “mandate”, and relates them to the Judaic term *seliah*, which the first Hellenistic Christian communities used to translate *apostolos*.

⁵⁵ Cf. A. SCOLA, *Questioni di Antropologia Teologica*, cit. 11-27 and, especially, A. SCOLA-G. MARENGO-J. PRADES, *La persona umana. Manuale di Antropologia Teologica*, Milano: Jaca Book, 2000, 50-66.

ever to be combined with the copious references in John's Gospel to the same theme (cf. *Jn* 3:17, 34-36; 6:29,39,57; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42). The nexus between person and mission in Jesus Christ⁵⁶ is so essential that a theologian like Balthasar has repeatedly proposed it as the fundamental axiom of christology and, consequently, of Christian anthropology.⁵⁷

The person-mission of the Christian takes form in the horizon of the person-mission of Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ Vocation expresses the person, and the person's face is fully defined only by his mission.⁵⁹ Jesus is the *apostolos*, the apostle *tout court*, i.e. his person coincides with his having been sent (mission); by virtue of the mission of the Word pronounced by the Father and that of the Spirit – loving bond between the two and the fruit of that love⁶⁰ – which, even in the supreme abandonment of the Cross,⁶¹ kept open the face of the Son (*Ant-litz*) to the Father's gaze (*Litz*).

How can Mary, or Peter, or Paul, be understood outside this bond between person and mission made evident by vocation?⁶² How, indeed,

⁵⁶ In this regard the International Theological Commission affirms: "The consciousness that Jesus has of himself coincides with the consciousness of his mission" (INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, "La coscienza che Gesù aveva di sé stesso e della sua missione", in: IDEM, *Documenta-Documenti*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988, 579).

⁵⁷ Cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3, Milano: Jaca Book, 1983, 141-154.

⁵⁸ Cf. IDEM, *Gli stati di vita del cristiano*, cit., 183-194.

⁵⁹ "Balthasar devotes himself thoroughly to the distinction between spiritual subject and person, through what he calls the "struggle for the theological concept of person". In essence, the foundation on which Balthasar's reflection is based is once again that of mission. Only mission makes the person, because it alone confers on the spiritual subject, that exists within the human species, its qualitative uniqueness. The person, properly speaking, is hence only theological" (A. SCOLA, *Hans Urs von Balthasar; uno stile teologico*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1991, 94).

⁶⁰ "Dual aspect of the eternal Holy Spirit in God, which is the most intimate source of the movement of subjective love of Father and Son, and its objective generation" (H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teologica*, vol. 3, Milano: Jaca Book, 1995, 247).

⁶¹ Cf. IDEM, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3, cit., 264ff.

⁶² In this sense cf. the portraits that Le Guillou presents of Mary, Peter, Paul and John, in: M.-J. LE GUILLOU, *Celui qui vient d'ailleurs. L'innocent*, Paris: Cerf, 1971, 221-277.

can each of us develop our own Christian consciousness outside this essential bond?⁶³

Apostolate and mission are thus linked, in a trinitarian, christological and anthropological perspective – through the notions of spiritual subject and person –, with the vocation-mission duality.⁶⁴ In this way, what we have called the balanced result of the long and tortuous process of the *theology of the laity* re-proposes the New Testament terms decisive for the character of the Christian, i.e. of the disciple and witness of Christ, called to communicate his fascination, in the vast field of the world. In this mission the Christian's person is wholly fulfilled. Responding to the Father's loving-kindness, the person discovers, by the power of the Spirit of the Risen Lord, his true face.⁶⁵

⁶³ It should not be feared in this regard that the ontological depth of the person may be rendered vain by the exhaustion of the categories used, especially the functional reduction of the terms "vocation" and "mission", to which a theology of the laity, often reduced to rehearsing the role of the various states of life in the Church, is not immune. Affirming on the basis of christology that mission makes the person, does not in the least mean denying the ontology of the spiritual subject as a substratum of the person (cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3, cit., 193-196). It means, on the contrary, giving a full sense to the relation with the Father who enacts his design (the hidden mystery of which Paul speaks [cf. *Rm* 11:25; *Col* 1:25-27; *Eph* 2:11, 3:13]); it means placing and maintaining in being each one of us, predestined (hence *called*), by grace, to that face, unique and unrepeatable, that the mission, assumed in full freedom in the *sequela* of Christ, never ceases to define throughout the course of our earthly existence (In this regard cf. R. PENNA, *I ritratti originali di Gesù il Cristo. Inizi e sviluppi della cristologia neotestamentaria. II. Gli sviluppi*, Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1999, 240-242). Each of us, spiritual subject ever since our conception, is called to our own realization through the mission assigned to us. The essential personal dignity of the spiritual subject is developed and flourishes in a mature personality gradually as we respond obediently in our life to the task assigned to us by this call.

⁶⁴ Oppositions of the kind nature-identity-mission-task are in this way radically resolved, on the basis of christology (cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 1, Milano: Jaca Book, 1980, 621-624).

⁶⁵ In the light of these affirmations we may better understand no. 22 of *Gaudium et spes*, which starts out by enunciating this proposition: "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear". It then goes on to describe the features of man in Christ in the fulfilment of his mission: "Conformed to the

2. The event of Jesus Christ: content of mission

Before introducing the ecclesiological result of the missionary dynamism that begins in the very heart of the Trinity,⁶⁶ and therefore before discussing the ecclesiology of mission, indeed, precisely to be able properly to define it, it will not be superfluous to devote some words to the content of this mission. For if *the person* who communicates it is decisive, no less significant is the *Gospel* that he communicates.⁶⁷

To sum up, we can say that the content of the Christian mission is the event of Jesus Christ itself. But under the category of *event of Jesus Christ*⁶⁸ we need to treat the various factors that constitute it. We can

image of the Son who is the first-born of many brothers, the Christian man receives the 'first fruits of the Spirit' (*Rom* 8:23), by which he is able to fulfil the new law of love. By this Spirit, who is the 'pledge of our inheritance' (*Eph* 1:14), the whole man is inwardly renewed, right up to the 'redemption of the body' (*Rom* 8:23)".

⁶⁶ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, no. 2: "The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This plan flows from the 'fountain-like love', the love of God the Father. As the principle without principle from whom the Son is generated and from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, God in his great and merciful kindness freely creates us and, moreover, graciously calls us to share in his life and glory. He generously pours out, and never ceases to pour out, his divine goodness, so that he who is creator of all things might at last become 'all in all' (*1 Cor* 15:28), thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our happiness". In this regard cf. A. WOLANIN, *Teologia della missione. Temi scelti*, Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1989, 31-81; A. SEUMOIS, *Teologia missionaria*, cit., 271-275; D. CALCAGNO, "La vita trinitaria e l'impegno missionario della Chiesa", in: *Chiesa sempre missionaria*, Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Settentrionale – Sezione di Genova, Genova 1992, 79-111.

⁶⁷ The various definitions of mission offered by scholars precisely depend on the content that is recognized in the missionary activity (cf. K. MÜLLER, *Teologia della missione. Un'introduzione*, Bologna: Editrice Missionaria Italiana, 1991, 45-69). As regards the purpose of the mission, cf. A. WOLANIN, *Teologia della missione. Temi scelti*, cit., 103-109:

⁶⁸ Here we refer specifically to the event of Jesus Christ, setting great store by everything that the "event" offers to us to express the inextinguishable richness revealed to us in Christ. On this category cf. A. SCOLA, "Libertà umana e verità a partire dall'enciclica 'Fides et ratio'", in: G. SGUBBI-P. CODA (eds.), *Il risveglio della ragione*, Roma: Città Nuova, 2000, 97-106.

distinguish three of these, and they need to be considered according to the methodological principle of distinguishing in unity.

First, the event is an individual one: it is the *fact* of Jesus Christ historically documented in his vocation and mission, and attested by the *traditio catholica*, which has its central nucleus in Holy Scripture.

Second, Jesus' resurrection from the dead authenticates the divinity of this fact, and reveals the absolute uniqueness of his humanity. The fact of Jesus of Nazareth transcends the time of the historical existence in which his earthly life took place: it is an *advent*. Jesus comes to meet (*ad-venio*) each person.

How? By giving himself to man's freedom. It is here that the third factor that constitutes the event is revealed. The advent of Jesus Christ calls each one of us: it calls our freedom to solve, by following in his footsteps, the enigma that characterizes it: the finite freedom must inexorably transcend itself (rise above itself) to fulfil itself, but is incapable of doing so by itself alone.⁶⁹ Jesus Christ, He who is among us, invites the freedom of this step, by testifying, in his Cross and Resurrection, to the singular fulfilment of his own freedom. By his death on the cross, he accomplished his total self-evacuation, and his resurrection is there to bear witness that, in this *kenosis*, his freedom achieved complete fulfilment. In the impotence of his extreme abandonment and humbling on the Cross, the glory of the Risen Lord shines forth.⁷⁰

In Baptism, genesis of the character of each Christian, Jesus places this capacity for fulfilment in a real sense at the disposal of finite freedom. The Eucharist already realizes it in the sign: in the eucharistic gift, by the power of the Spirit, is really anticipated the extraordinary result that the Catholic genius identifies with the dogma of the resurrection of the flesh.

That is the event of Jesus Christ in all its fullness!

The event of Jesus Christ thus offers the content of the apostolate-

⁶⁹ Cf. A. SCOLA, *Hans Urs von Balthasar; uno stile teologico*, cit., 101-105.

⁷⁰ Balthasar tackles this theme under the title *analogia entis cristologica* (cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3, cit., 206-214).

mission to the freedom of each individual, always historically situated.⁷¹ The subject of the mission must never be separated from this content, because to do so would be to evacuate the *traditio catholica*.⁷² Separation, in fact, would end up either by excluding the subject, reducing the content to a mere sum of intellectual notions, practical rules for conduct and devotional exercises, or would absolutize it, emptying the objective verifying power of the event and reducing it to pure religious sentiment and its ephemeral capacity of contagion.⁷³ How can we avoid the pernicious dualisms connected with this harmful separation between faith and life, already stigmatized by Paul VI and countered by Vatican II, which endowed itself with its particular *pastoral* character with a view to overcoming it?⁷⁴

There is no more pregnant reply than the humble recognition that the event is physically transmitted (the *traditio* is above all a practical fact of experience),⁷⁵ from person to person. Without interruption, the event of Jesus Christ, through the Virgin Mary and a small group of friends, the humble fishermen of Galilee, has been transmitted through the centuries and has reached us. Here the ecclesiology “of mission” and the ecclesiology of communion mutually integrate each other.

Emblem of the ecclesiology of communion may justly be considered the famous passage from the First Letter of John: “That which was from

⁷¹ In the sacramental form “the invisible grace of God not only becomes visible and graspable in the form of Christ, but Christ presents himself to us in turn in a valid form, sovereignly subtracted from every subjective fluctuation and, by imprinting himself in us, arouses our conformation to him” (cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Gloria*, vol. 1, Milano: Jaca Book 1975, 544).

⁷² For the concept of *traditio* used here cf. A. SCOLA, “The Reality of the Movements in the Universal Church and in the Local Church”, cit., 113-119.

⁷³ Subject and content of mission are harmoniously kept together by the reflection of the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*. Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, “La visione cristocentrica della missione nella ‘Redemptoris missio’”, *Rassegna di Teologia* 32 (1991) 347-368.

⁷⁴ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Problemi e risultati del Concilio Vaticano II*, Brescia: Queriniana, 1967, 109-113; G. COLOMBO, “La teologia della ‘Gaudium et spes’ e l’esercizio del magistero ecclesiale”, in: Idem, *La ragione teologica*, Milano: Glossa, 1995, 281-284.

⁷⁵ Cf. M. BLONDEL, *Storia e dogma*, Brescia: Queriniana, 1992, 103-137.

the beginning [...] that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship (*communio*) with us. [...] And we are writing this that our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 1:1-4). If it is *communio* that maintains physically united the persons touched by the event of Christ, and ensures the perpetuation of the vital integrity of this christological content, it must be added straight away that it forms a single entity, an inseparable whole, with mission.⁷⁶ And mission, by its very nature, demands that it be global in outreach. To the famous introductory passage of the First Letter of John corresponds the passage, equally decisive, that closes the Gospel of Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit [...] and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:19-20).

3. Essential features of an ecclesiology "of mission"

We can now describe in summary fashion the essential features of an ecclesiology that is truly adequate to the urgency of the missionary task,⁷⁷ so acute in this historical phase leading into the new millennium.⁷⁸

There are two main pillars to this edifice. First, such an ecclesiology, by virtue of the evolution of the experience and reflection matured in the Church since Vatican Council II, places the ecclesial,

⁷⁶ In this regard it should be pointed out that the apostolicity of the Church expresses both the (objective) guarantee of the permanence in history of the event of Jesus Christ, and the universal opening, in space and in time, to mission (in relation to catholicity). And the episcopal college in the Church ensures *communio* and mission at the same time. In this sense Cyril of Alexandria affirms: "Since they had to assume responsibility for initiating the world in Christianity by proclaiming the gospel of salvation to all peoples, they received the gift of tongues" (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Fragmenta in Acta Apostolorum* [Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca, 74], 758).

⁷⁷ As we have previously remarked, this ecclesiological attempt rises above the controversies that beset ecumenical reflection in the 1950s. Cf. G. RICHI ALBERTI, *Teología del misterio*, Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2000, 139-142.

⁷⁸ Cf. E. BUENO, "La misión hoy; aspectos teológicos", *Burgense* 35 (1994), 349-379.

personal and collective subject in the foreground, defined on the basis of his vocation to mission.⁷⁹ As Balthasar has presciently noted, the mission of the Church is indivisible from her essence, in analogy with the central christological axiom according to which the mission of Jesus is not an addendum to his person but is identical with it.⁸⁰ The central ecclesiological question, therefore, is posed not by the question *What is the Church?*, but by the question *Who is the Church?*⁸¹ It takes the form of a *communio* of personal missions grouped round the mission of Mary.

The centrality of Mary, personal core of the Church, permits the dual risk of individualism and impersonal collectivism to be avoided in ecclesial life.⁸² For, by virtue of Mary's special pre-election (predestination) as the archetypal subject of all missions, it has to be said that the Church precedes the individual; but, at the same time, the individual, by entering the Church, is not cancelled like a faceless number in a collective: on the contrary he/she is inspired by his/her individual personal mission to personally interact with the *communio* that has its inexhaustible source in the Trinity itself.⁸³

Second, an ecclesiology of the ecclesial subject, formulated on the basis of mission, shows that the Church is constituted, and can only be defined, on the basis of a dual relation: that with the person-mission of Jesus Christ, that represents her insuperable origin, and that with the world to which she is constantly sent. The latter relation identifies her purpose, which shall be finally completed in glory. The Church by her

⁷⁹ Cf. A. SCOLA, "La logica dell'incarnazione come logica sacramentale: avvenimento ecclesiale e libertà umana, in: I. SANNA (ed.), *Gesù Cristo speranza del mondo*, Roma: PUL-Mursia, 2000, 461-462.

⁸⁰ "Just as the mission of Jesus is not an addendum to his person but is identical with it, so the mission of the Church is indivisible from her essence" (cf. cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3, cit., 400).

⁸¹ Cf. IDEM, "Chi è la Chiesa?", in: IDEM, *Sponsa verbi*, cit. 139-147.

⁸² Cf. J. RATZINGER, "L'ecclesiologia della costituzione 'Lumen gentium'", in: R. FISICHELLA (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recensione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, cit. 80-81.

⁸³ Cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3, cit., 422-424.

nature cannot be reduced to a single definition.⁸⁴ But recognizing this does not mean prejudicing her identity and mission. Her *raison d'être* indeed is more sharply revealed by her intrinsically "eccentric" character.

The Church is, in herself and for herself, the *intrinsic medium* (subject as intermediary, sacrament) of the fascinating self-communication of the Trinity to the world, i.e. the event of Jesus Christ.⁸⁵ Therefore every form of self-realization of the Church (from the diocese to the humblest group of faithful) may comprehend itself only in the living hierarchical communion with the other forms.⁸⁶

Before briefly enumerating the salient features of this ecclesiology "of mission", it will not be irrelevant to recall that it was given its first significant codification by Vatican Council II. The studies devoted to the analytical examination of the preparatory process of the entire document *De Ecclesia* unambiguously identify the point of arrival of the conciliar discussions (i.e. the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*) as the general consciousness that the mission of the Church derives from her very nature and that, indeed, the essence of the Church is missionary.⁸⁷ This affirmation is not only referred to *Lumen gentium*, but also determines the logic of *Apostolicam actuositatem*, rightly interpreted as a significant application of the ecclesiology "of mission" characteristic of *Lumen gentium*. Indeed, as the more

⁸⁴ The richness of the mystery of Church cannot therefore be expressed by having recourse to a single category (communion, mission) or a single image (People of God, Body of Christ).

⁸⁵ "We will deal with the Church only in so far as she can be, and aspires to be, a mediation of the form (*Gestalt*) of the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In saying this we have probably posed the decisive question. And perhaps, with regard to the Church, there is no further question to be posed other than this" (H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Gloria*, vol. 1, cit. 522).

⁸⁶ In this regard cf. J. RATZINGER, *La Chiesa. Una comunità sempre in cammino*, Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni Paoline, 1991, 95-112.

⁸⁷ Cf. S. MAZZOLINI, *La Chiesa è essenzialmente missionaria. Il rapporto "natura della Chiesa" "missione della Chiesa" nell'iter della costituzione "De Ecclesia" (1959-1964)*, Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1999, 416.

recent reflection on the reception and actuality of the Council has shown, the four Constitutions of Vatican II, if read together, reveal all the missionary richness of its ecclesiology.⁸⁸ “It is on the basis of the self-revelation of the Trinity in Jesus Christ that the ecclesial subject, who lives by the interlacing of word, sacrament and ordained ministry, is made a transparent sign of salvation for the world”.⁸⁹ Described here is the ecclesial *traditio* as the concrete communication, from person to person, of the event of Jesus Christ. We may note, parenthetically, that this ecclesiology of mission enables the necessary distinctions to be made between the essential missionary dimension of the Church and the specific function of her mission *ad gentes*; as well as between mission, evangelization and new evangelization.⁹⁰ Moreover, if proposed in a balanced way, it shows the intrinsic need for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.⁹¹

Returning now to the features of our proposed ecclesiology, we may say that its first feature, based on the Baptism and the Eucharist, identifies its *dramatic nature*. The Church of Christ always lives in this polarity: if on the one side it is constituted by the sacrifice of Christ, the latter, on the other, must always, and ever anew, be ratified by the wit-

⁸⁸ Cf. R. FISICHELLA, “Approdo sintetico”, in: R. FISICHELLA (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recensione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, cit. 729-736.

⁸⁹ A. SCOLA, “*Gaudium et spes*”: dialogo e discernimento nella testimonianza della verità, cit. 89.

⁹⁰ Cf. A. SEUMOIS, *Teologia missionaria*, cit., 53-64; E. BUENO, *La misión hoy: aspectos teológicos*, cit., 371-372; K. MÜLLER, *Teologia della missione. Un'introduzione*, cit., 198-213; J. LOPEZ-GAY, “Redemptoris missio”, in: PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITÀ URBANIANA, *Dizionario di missionologia*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1993, 415-419; D. COLOMBO, “Fondamenti teologici e identità della missio ad gentes nella ‘Redemptoris missio’”, *Euntes docete* 44 (1991), 203-223, where the developments of the Magisterium from the decree *Ad gentes* to *Evangelii nuntiandi* and culminating in John Paul II's missionary encyclicals are traced.

⁹¹ In this regard, reference to the recent declaration *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is obligatory. For an analysis of the same question in a theological perspective cf. J. RATZINGER, *La Chiesa, Israele e le religioni del mondo*, Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2000, 57-74; A. SCOLA, *Questioni di Antropologia Teologica*, cit. 155-173.

ness of faith and by the giving of love.⁹² The dramatic nature is therefore inherent in the Church as communion as subject in the very moment in which it reveals all its force in the individual baptized. In fact, its having been rendered ontologically christiform by baptismal incorporation maintains all the dramatic character of the dialectic between divine freedom and human freedom.⁹³ So, saying that an ecclesiology “of mission” is essentially dramatic means placing in evidence, and holding in great respect, the freedom of each of its protagonists. Indeed, it is just the dualism between vocation and mission that saves all the significance of the freedom of each member of the Church.⁹⁴

We may introduce, at this point, the second feature that delineates the character of the Church. It springs precisely from her dramatic nature, indeed, it is aimed at showing its essential permanence in the life of the Church as a guarantee of freedom. A number of theologians, including Rahner and Balthasar, have indicated it with the formula of Church as *radical sacramentum*.⁹⁵ She infallibly receives her own existence from the essence of Christ (*ex opere operato*), but, in as much as she is a subject, must always ratify this gift received (*ex opere operantis*).⁹⁶ The *radical sacramentum* thus maintains the Church’s character as *intrinsic medium* (subject as intermediary, sacrament) of the event of

⁹² In this regard Balthasar offers us a fine answer to the question about the nature of the Church: “What is the Church? For the Mystery *in nuce* the answer is: the Church is the unity of those who are congregated round the immaculate, hence boundless, ‘yes’ of Mary, by consequence christiform in grace, and, being formed in this ‘yes’, are ready and willing to act in such a way that God’s will of salvation be fulfilled in relation to themselves and to all their brethren” (H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *La mia opera ed Epilogo*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1994, 57).

⁹³ In the light of this character we may better understand the relation between preaching-faith-catechumenate-baptism as proposed in *Ad gentes* (cf. nos. 13-14).

⁹⁴ Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3, cit., 395.

⁹⁵ Cf. J. WERBICK, *La Chiesa*, Brescia: Queriniana 1998, 484-514: Even before Rahner and Balthasar, Henri de Lubac had clearly affirmed: “The Church is a mystery, that is, in other words, a sacrament. Being ‘the point of encounter of all the Christian sacraments’, she herself in the great sacrament that contains and gives life to all the others. She is on earth the sacrament of Jesus Christ, just as Jesus Christ himself is for us, in his humanity, the sacrament of God” (H. DE LUBAC, *Meditazione sulla Chiesa*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1979, 135).

⁹⁶ Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 3, cit., 395.

Jesus Christ in the world.⁹⁷ She does not present herself as a substratum subsisting in herself but as a reality that is only embodied in the seven sacraments.

Just this latter consideration enables us to introduce the third feature of ecclesiology we intend to propose here.

So that the individual, always historically situated, be able to meet his form of inclusion in Christ, i.e. his vocation and mission, in the sacramental nature of the Church, a *place* in which all the factors of his freedom, including the possibility of sin, are considered, needs to exist in the life of the Church. The drama of each individual member of the Church needs, in substance, not to be predetermined. This *place* is the Eucharist, in which the event of Christ is donated to the believer's act of freedom. An ecclesiology "of mission" is essentially sacramental and eucharistic.

This is not the place to examine the need to integrate what has been called, not without sometimes excessive emphasis,⁹⁸ an *ecclesiology of communion* with an *ecclesiology "of mission"*, so as to make the ecclesiology of Vatican II emerge in all its many-sided actuality.⁹⁹ It is possible, however, to suggest a way of "receiving" in unity the lesson of the four great Constitutions of Vatican II. First of all, it is possible to grasp in this way the ecclesiological meaningfulness of what has been defined as

⁹⁷ With the formula that is not easily accessible to us modern Christians, but that figuratively expresses the nature of effective medium of the Church, Joan of Arc replied to her judges: "I think that Jesus Christ and the Church are the same thing, and that this ought not to be an obscure point". In the same sense cf. ST. AUGUSTINE, *De doctrina christiana* III, 31, 44. That does not repudiate, but presupposes, the subordination of the Church to Christ.

⁹⁸ "The connotation of the ecclesiology of Vatican II in terms of 'communion' is perhaps precipitous, in the sense that it skips over some obligatory passages. It is indeed recognized that the term emerged only submissively and almost inadvertently, as a happy surprise in the texts of the Council, in which moreover it maintains neither conceptual coherence, nor even terminological clarity in the text of *Lumen gentium*" (G. COLOMBO, "Tesi per la revisione dell'esercizio del ministero petrino", *Teologia* 21 [1996]. 327).

⁹⁹ The attempts to recover the centrality of the view of the Church as sacrament in the teaching of Vatican Council II can, it seems to me, be interpreted in this sense (cf. L. SCHEFFCZYK, *La Chiesa. Aspetti della crisi postconciliare e corretta interpretazione del Vaticano II*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1998, 29-42).

the Council's *pastoral nature*, which found its maximum expression in *Gaudium et spes*.¹⁰⁰

Here it will suffice to point out that only an appropriate missionary perspective – according to which the field in which the Kingdom is developed has the confines of the world – may enable us to understand the mystery of the Church. The mention made of *Gaudium et Spes* is thus shown to be particularly illuminating. An ecclesiology “of mission”, precisely because focused on the subject, must be written first hand and not by a third party. It inevitably implies personal witness. This shift from the impersonal to the personal, which seconds the intuition of Maritain and Guardini,¹⁰¹ is in fact more consonant with the essence of the Church and more in keeping with the missionary emergency of our time. It permits the freedom of each member of the Church to be realized.

Striking in this perspective of vocation as mission is the Christian conception of life as vocation which permits the various states of Christian life to be maintained, in unity and in distinction. In this perspective, each of the faithful truly possesses the same dignity, as member of the redeemed people.

MISSION AS METHOD OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

An ecclesiology “of mission” is therefore a *dramatic* ecclesiology (of freedom) based on the *radical sacramentum*, through which the event of Jesus Christ is donated *eucharistically* to the faithful's act of freedom. It may well be said that such an ecclesiology represents, in a certain sense, the anthropological concentration of the ecclesiology of communion. The one therefore implies the other; they reciprocally complement and integrate each other.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. A. SCOLA, “‘Gaudium et spes’: dialogo e discernimento nella testimonianza della verità”, cit., 103-113.

¹⁰¹ Cf. J. MARITAIN, *De l'Église du Christ: la personne de l'Église et son personnel*, Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, Bruges 1870; R. GUARDINI, *L'essenza del cristianesimo*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1993⁸, 49-59.

Our reflection now needs to make a further step. How can we proceed from the mission of the Church as such to the mission of the individual Christian and, in particular, of the lay faithful?

Without succumbing once again to the claim of deducing an *a priori* definition of the lay person from the permanent features of his mission, how can we take into account his secular character as the vehicle of his ecclesial identity?

These questions are subsumed in the problem, in my view crucial, of the pastoral mission of the Church today. The question is one of *method*. Let us say straight away that by *method* we do not mean a sum of techniques, whether individual or collective, which, with the help of the human sciences, are frequently used today in the pastoral ministry of the Church and in the systematic reflection to which it gives rise (pastoral theology).¹⁰² We use the term in its strong sense, and by so doing wish to refer to the method of Christian life. Method is the form (*Gestalt*) through which the event of Christ is communicated to the world, passing (*traditio*) from person to person. This form derives from the dramatic, sacramental and eucharistic reality of the Church herself, whose nature, it is worth reiterating, consists in being the *intrinsic medium* (subject as intermediary, sacrament) of the event of Christ to the men and women who live in the world.¹⁰³ So, to speak of the method of Christian life is the same thing as to speak of the method of mission. Parenthetically it may be noted that this method in the strong sense implies techniques, more or less discerning, aimed at better identifying the needs and aspirations of each interlocutor, each of them distinguished by highly differentiated social and cultural ties depending on age, social and environmental conditions of life, profession, etc.; but in no way does it derive its persuasive force from such techniques. The essence of the Christian event is a gift (love), which can never dispense

¹⁰² Cf. S. LANZA, *Introduzione alla teologia pastorale*, Brescia: Queriniana, 1994.

¹⁰³ "The Church is in essence fundamental sacrament throughout the whole of her reality, and hence first and foremost through the essential elements by which she is constituted" (K. RAHNER, "Che cos'è un sacramento", in IDEM, *Nuovi saggi*, vol. 5, Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1975, 483).

with the gratuitous. Disciple and witness of Jesus of Nazareth: the Christian is this above all! Vocation and mission require *sequela* and martyrdom, in a word, holiness.¹⁰⁴

It is surprising to note how little attention is paid to identifying the keystones of the method of Christian life. It is as if Jesus Christ, who defined himself as the way (method), had not proposed it himself, at least in its essential traits. We will therefore recall three of them. We will do so schematically, without any claim to completeness.

1. Logic of the Incarnation as sacramental logic

An important paragraph of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which I never tire of repeating, affirms: “[...] everything in Jesus’ life was a sign of his mystery. His deeds, miracles, and words all revealed that ‘in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’ (*Col* 2:9). His humanity appeared as ‘sacrament’, that is, the sign and instrument, of his divinity and of the salvation he brings: what was visible in his earthly life leads to the invisible mystery of his divine sonship and redemptive mission”.¹⁰⁵

This text effectively expresses the logic of the Incarnation: after meeting the man Jesus, convincing realization of the fullness of the human, his disciples follow him to the lacerating mystery of death. Even if they flee, recalcitrant and terrified, before this mystery, they can no longer dispense with him: “Lord, to whom shall we go?” (*Jn* 6:68). And, by the power of the Spirit, after having met him after his Resur-

¹⁰⁴ In this regard we cannot fail to refer to the following passages of the Magisterium: VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, nos. 39-42; IDEM, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*, nos. 4 and 6; JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, nos. 16-17; and also recall an apostolate of holiness present in the *Relatio finalis* of the extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of 1985 (cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Second extraordinary general assembly [24 November – 8 December 1985], *Relatio finalis* “Ecclesia sub verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi”, cit., nos. 1791-1893).

¹⁰⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 515.

rection, they recognize him as the Son of God. They are then willing to offer their own life, and sacrifice themselves in the mission of communicating all his salvific power.

The humanity of Jesus is therefore the primary *intrinsic medium* to enable his disciples to encounter his divinity: the humanity of Jesus is the *sacrament* of his divinity. The Incarnation – and the logic that derives from it – is thus revealed as the method chosen by the Trinity to communicate itself. The Incarnation is the method of mission! The trinitarian missions lead, through the mission of Jesus Christ, to the mission of the Church that, in concrete, coincides with that of each individual Christian.¹⁰⁶ But, if we consider well, we will realize that the logic of the Incarnation is always a sacramental logic. For in it signs and forms expressed by the senses, and clearly identifiable, transmit both the real and mysterious significance which is not empirically accessible.

The first cornerstone of the method of Christian life, in conformity with the eucharistic nature of the Church's *radical sacramentum*, will then consist in proposing Jesus Christ according to this logic of the Incarnation that is the sacramental logic. The Christian is called to be, in himself and in all his acts, within every sphere of human existence, the sacrament of the event of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷

2. *An event may be grasped only through another event*

Perhaps the most radical objection made against Jesus Christ today not only by nonbelievers, but often among the baptized themselves, is the

¹⁰⁶ “Each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith to the best of his ability” (VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 17).

¹⁰⁷ In this sense, particularly illuminating are the words of Peter Damien: “Thanks to the bond of mutual charity, the Church of Christ possesses so strong a cohesion that it is one in the plurality of her members, and at the same time, mysteriously everything in each individual. Therefore it is not mistaken to affirm that this universal Church presents herself singly as the One Bride of Christ, and simultaneously believes that she is in some way, by the mystery of the sacrament, the Church in her fullness” (PETER DAMIEN, *Liber qui appellatur Dominus vobiscum* 5 [Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina, 145], 235).

same that, ever since the Enlightenment and Romanticism, has reappeared again and again like a Proteus of infinite form. It denies Jesus Christ his character as event, reducing him to a mere episode that occurred in the past.¹⁰⁸ By repudiating his contemporaneity, it renders him otiose or, at best, relegates him to the evanescent form of myth or even of fable. At most, it recognizes his greatness, perhaps even recognizes him as the greatest of humanity by which to inspire one's own life, but it does not admit that he may still be alive, present here and now.

But who can meet someone who is not present in the here and now?¹⁰⁹ Once again the central ecclesiological problem is reposed: how can the event of Jesus Christ be communicated without dissolving it over the coordinates of space and time? In other words: how can I, who am still pilgrimaging on this earth, follow the Risen Lord who has already entered into the new era? How can I imitate the Inimitable to become his disciple and witness?

Once again it is sacramental logic, with its crux in Baptism and in the Eucharist, that solves this conundrum. It not only precludes the event from being reduced to pure material object (a thing) to be transported through space and time, but permits it to happen *here and now* for my freedom.

At this point emerges the second, and unrelinquishable factor of the method of Christian life (mission): *an event may only be communicated through another event*. A living reality, to remain such in space and time, has a need for another living reality.¹¹⁰ Knowledge is

¹⁰⁸ Cf. A. SCOLA, *Chi è il cristiano? Duemila anni, un ideale senza fine*, cit., 13-14.

¹⁰⁹ The well-known affirmation of Kierkegaard springs to mind: "The one ethical relation that one may have with greatness (and hence also with Christ) is contemporaneity. Relating oneself to a dead person is an aesthetic relation: his life has lost its sting, it does not judge my life, it permits me to admire him [...] and also permits me to live in quite different categories; it does not force me to judge in any decisive sense" (S. KIERKEGAARD, *Diario*, Milano: BUR, 348).

¹¹⁰ "The intimate and peculiar sense of an event, and hence the event itself in its truth, only opens itself to an experience that abandons itself to it and, in this abandonment, tries to interpret it; to an experience that is true if it adjusts itself to the event in question" (H. SCHLIER, *Linee fondamentali di teologia paolina*, Brescia 1985, 119).

either an event or nothing at all.¹¹¹ Liturgy, catechesis, charity in all its forms, as of every coming together in the Christian community, are called to document this essential character of event. It alone saves the dramatic nature of the Church, and hence her capacity to mobilize freedom. There is a test to ascertain the genuineness of any ecclesial act: its capacity to arouse change, immediately, even while it is still being performed. Is it not for this reason that we were so struck by World Youth Day, or the simple and moving gesture of the Holy Father while depositing the prayer of the Psalmist at the Weeping Wall? These were events, i.e. facts that are readily ascertainable, vehicle (sacrament) of a reality that occurs here and now for my freedom.¹¹²

3. *Sacramental nature of circumstances and relationships*

It is therefore the sacrament, by always challenging our freedom, that safeguards the profound truth of the event of Christ. Instituted by Christ and handed down in the Church with precise gestures and formulae prescribed by the rite, the Eucharist (sacrament) is the symbol (effective sign) of the transcendent God who gives himself to man. The

¹¹¹ Balthasar describes this characteristic of event that is peculiar to knowledge in the following terms: "Thought may give itself all the airs it chooses [...] it will be brought low [...] by the simple reality that something generally exists, that something flowers out of nothing, that existence triumphs over non-existence, and that it is incomprehensible thanks to being present and offering itself as an inexhaustible object of knowledge" (H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teologica*, vol. 1, Milano: Jaca Book, 1987, 108).

¹¹² In this sense, the words of Henri de Lubac are moving: "The Church has as its sole mission that of rendering Jesus Christ present in the midst of humanity. She must proclaim him, show him, present him to everyone. The rest, let us say so once again, is nothing but an extra. We know that she cannot fail in this mission. She is and ever shall be, in all truth, the Church of Christ: 'I am with you always, to the close of the age'. But what she is for us, must also be so through us. It is necessary that through us Jesus Christ continues to be proclaimed, that through us he continues to transpire. All this is something more than an obligation: it is, one may say, an organic necessity" (H. DE LUBAC, *Meditazione sulla Chiesa*, cit., 148).

freedom of God and that of man are co-present in the sacrament: truth and freedom coincide with it.¹¹³

At this point, I would like to venture an hypothesis that springs from what I have so far affirmed and that represents, in my view, the third pillar of the method of Christian life: all the circumstances and all the relationships, that form the fabric of human existence are, in a certain sense, inscribed in the sacramental logic characteristic of God's single plan. Therefore, circumstances and relationships represent analogically the sacrament of the transcendence of God that challenges human freedom.

The fact that the Christian exists in Christ, as a member of the ecclesial community, makes him/her an event that transmits (sacrament) the truth in which he/she takes part.¹¹⁴

In this perspective, each relationship that is given to the Christian asks to be lived sacramentally. Something analogous may be said of all the circumstances given to him/her (to be understood here in the broad sense, as facts or series of facts with the most varied characteristics). They are not, after all, given casually. Even without denying the many contributory causes that determine them, circumstances do not escape, in the last analysis, the unique relation of the freedom of God that

¹¹³ The other forms in which the intrinsic mediation of the Church is normally manifested have a strong analogy with the Eucharist. I refer to Holy Scripture (cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Teologia*, vol. 3, cit., 257-292) and to the ecclesial community. In this case too, objectivity needs to be guaranteed. Not all the readings of Holy Scripture, nor all the ostensible forms of communion, are a mediation that renders present the original event of Jesus Christ. Scripture and communities only become an effective mediation of the event of Jesus Christ if they respect the precise rules dictated by the sacramental action. For example, an effective Christian community is one that recognizes the hierarchical order of the liturgy by which the Bishop guides the Church because he presides over the celebration and does not preside over the celebration because he is head of the Church. The same may be said of Scripture: it must not be read subjectively, regardless of the sacraments, and hence of the Church.

¹¹⁴ "By his action he bears witness to his faith (and in it to Christ himself). [...]. The apostolate of the laity is therefore directly founded on its christianity [...]. It is missionary if it enacts its christianity in an exemplary way" (K. RAHNER, "L'apostolato dei laici", in: IDEM, *Saggi sulla Chiesa*, Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1969, 246).

appeals to (vocation) and mobilizes (mission) the freedom of man. But it needs to be stressed straight away that man, if left to himself, would be unable to grasp the character of sacramental event intrinsic to all the relationships and circumstances of his life. For this he needs to be immanent to an ecclesial community, expressed through the senses.

The logic of the Incarnation as sacramental logic thus reveals in depth in what the method of Christian life consists: life itself is vocation in so far as the freedom of man, in each of his acts, is called to opt for the gift of God anticipated as a promise. Outside the sacrament, it is not even possible to intuit the sacramental value of circumstances and relationships. On the other hand, however, so long as this value does not become concrete experience of the believer, moved in each act of his freedom by circumstances and relationships, his effective participation in the sacrament may be legitimately doubted. The method of Christian life, i.e. the method of mission, thus reveals the Church's essentially pedagogic nature: "Erunt *omnes* docibiles *Dei*" ("They shall all be taught by God") (*Jn* 6:45).

The final passage of a story by Chekhov, *The Student*, seems to me to epitomize – with the incomparably persuasive form of art – the crux of what we have here defined as the *method* of Christian life (mission): an event is only communicated through another event.

It is Good Friday. The protagonist, a young student, has just finished recounting to two women of the populace the Gospel episode that describes how Peter wept when, after his betrayal, Jesus turned round and looked at him (*Lk* 22:61). At the end of the student's narrative, one of the women bursts into tears. Chekhov writes: "The student thought once again that [...] that what he had just recounted, and that had happened nineteen centuries previously, had a link with the present: with the two women and, probably, with that deserted village, with himself, with all mankind [...]. And the joy suddenly quickened in his soul with such intensity that he had even to stop a minute and take breath. 'The past,' he thought, 'is linked to the present by an uninterrupted chain of events, the one springing from the other.' And it

seemed to him that he had just discerned the two ends of that chain [*Peter who had lived centuries before and the woman present in flesh and blood before him*]: as soon as he had touched one of the two ends, the other had vibrated. And as he crossed the river on the barge [...] he thought that the same truth and the same beauty that guided the life of men in the Garden of Olives and in the courtyard of the high priest had continued without interruption up to that day [*up to himself*], and had always formed the essential part of the life of man and in general of the earth here below”.¹¹⁵

This, then, is the great event: a past fact, the life, death and resurrection of the Nazarene become an event today thanks to the objective memory of the sacrament, the ever new gift of Jesus Christ to my freedom. That is the miracle of the Church.

MISSION, GIFT AND FREEDOM

Only if life is understood as vocation can the individual fully assume the particular state of life predisposed by God for his own good and the good of others. Only then can he live it in all its concreteness and uniqueness and, at the same time, in profound communion with all the other faithful, in whatever state of life to which they may be called.

Many problems that still present themselves today as burning issues for the Church and for her mission on behalf of the world could find, in this ecclesiological framework and in its decisive implication of method, more balanced ways of reaching a solution. We will limit ourselves to enumerating just a few.

We may think of the criteria for ascertaining and discerning the vocation to the state of life in the context of life as vocation. In this horizon the sacramental value of circumstances and relationships immediately places in evidence the influence of affections and work, as two

¹¹⁵ A. CECHOV, “Lo studente”, in: Idem, *Tutte le Novelle*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1956, 64-68, here 67-68.

indissoluble and essential dimensions through which the freedom of God daily calls that of man and impels him to missionary action. That is why the Church, almost like a voice crying in the wilderness, never ceases to urge the truth about the nuptial mystery (indissoluble bond between the two sexes, gift of oneself and of fertility)¹¹⁶ and about all the problems relating to life and death objectively connected with it.¹¹⁷ For the same reason, and by virtue of her very mission, the Church never tires of recalling the criteria of solidarity and subsidiarity in fostering the common good, in particular in the world of work, in the economy and in politics.¹¹⁸ The missionary task, addressed in particular at the lay faithful, emerges in all its urgency in this perspective. Affections and work therefore constitute essential dimensions of the new evangelization.¹¹⁹

This same ecclesiological interpretation permits a better understanding of the principle of pluriformity in unity which, in my judgement, could offer a way of alleviating many interecclesial tensions. I don't only allude to those to which reference has already been made – unity and distinction between states of life, institutional charism and charismatic forms, permanent elements of ecclesial life (dioceses) and classic or more recent forms of association – but also some problems on which the Magisterium has recently pronounced with clarity. I have in mind, for example, that connected with the theme of *potestas* in the Church: the question of the non-admissibility of women in the ordained ministry.

¹¹⁶ Cf. A. SCOLA, *Il mistero nuziale. 1. Uomo-donna*, Roma: PUL-Mursia, 1998; IDEM, *Il mistero nuziale. 2. Matrimonio-famiglia*, Roma: PUL-Mursia, 2000.

¹¹⁷ Cf. A. SCOLA (ed.), *Quale vita? La bioetica in questione*, Milano: Mondadori, 1998.

¹¹⁸ In this sense the objective importance of the social magisterium of John Paul II needs to be stressed (cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens*, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, and the contribution made by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith with its instructions regarding liberation theology: *Libertatis nuntius* and *Libertatis conscientiae*). On the Church's social doctrine cf. M. TOSO, *Verso quale società. La dottrina sociale della Chiesa per una nuova progettualità*, Roma: LAS, 2000.

¹¹⁹ Interesting remarks in this sense in: CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Direttive sulla formazione dei seminaristi circa i problemi relativi al matrimonio e alla famiglia*, Roma 1995.

An ecclesiology “of mission” – dramatic, sacramental and eucharistic – that reveals the Church’s nature as *intrinsic medium* (subject as intermediary, sacrament), testifies that she must live solely by the event of her Lord to be convincing in communicating him to the world. Not everything is in her power! Rather, her power is that of obeying the event of Jesus Christ. This does not permit her to admit women to holy orders.¹²⁰

The Church is, at the same time, Mary and Peter, and is called to permanently live this dual and unrelinquishable dimension. How can we do so other than by following the example of the obedience of Mary and Peter? Or again: how could the Church be herself other than by reproposing the co-essential relation between the two, that was expressed in the collegial affection among all the apostles? Here too the rule of distinguishing in unity holds good. Mary and Peter are not superimposable, but they cannot be separated.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Cf. A. SCOLA, “Dall’Inter insigniores’ all’Ordinatio sacerdotalis’, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 31 January 1997, 8-9. As regards the question of the participation in the government of the Church, the ecclesiological proposal we have presented permits us to link the question of the representation to its sacramental root, the *repraesentatio* (cf. M. KEHL, *La Chiesa*, cit., 391-394). It is well known that this was one of the terms most used by the sacramental theology to speak of the Eucharist: “Hoc enim sacramentum est repraesentativum Dominicae passionis” (THOMAS OF AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 83, a. 21). In this sense we may affirm that the representation in the Church springs from the sacrament (Baptism-Eucharist) and has its concrete form of exercise in witness. The Eucharist itself is the pre-eminent field of witness (cf. R. LATOURELLE, “Testimonianza”, in: R. LATOURELLE-R. FISICHELLA [eds.], *Dizionario di teologia fondamentale*, Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, Assisi 1990, 1130-1131). Those who represent the Church most are those who are more liberally implicated in the salvific event of Christ. The history of the Church shows us well how holiness has always been the real *power* that has governed the Church: it is enough to think of the relation of St. Catherine of Siena with the Pope or the life of those innumerable witnesses of the faith who, throughout the twentieth century, handed down the Catholic faith in circumstances in which it was practically impossible for the ordained ministry to act.

¹²¹ In this regard, cf. D. SCHINDLER, “Institution and Charism”, cit., 64-67. Witness, moreover, is the crux of the fulfilment of the Christian’s mission both in the Church and in the world (cf. E. BARBOTIN, “Témoignage”, in: M. VILLER-F. CAVALLERA-J. DE GUIBERT [eds.], *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique*, vol. 15, Paris: Beauchesne, 1991, 134-141; cf. R. FISICHELLA, “Martyrio”, in: R. LATOURELLE-R. FISICHELLA [eds.], *Dizionario di teologia fondamentale*, cit., 669-682). In fact the relations between Christians – relations of mutual witness

The mission of the Church at the dawn of the third millennium sees Christians at work on the stage of the great theatre of the world, as they have been for two thousand years. They are a new people, almost a new ethnic group, as Paul VI said.¹²² A people is, more closely considered, a sum of families. The ecclesiology “of mission” could perhaps help us to shape the life of our communities once again on the model of the family, reducing, as far as possible, the unfortunately too frequent reference to the dominant business model.¹²³

Who is the Church? She is the family that shares the new kinship inaugurated by Christ on the Cross in the reciprocal entrusting to Mary and John. Her children live in the reciprocal gift of self (sacraments), assigned to authority (Peter), whose loving strength they perceive even when they do not feel themselves understood. The Church is a holy people because every single member pilgrimages along the road of earthly existence determined by the ineffable gift of Holy Thursday (Eucharist) and sustained by the extraordinary promise of the resurrection of the flesh.¹²⁴

What guarantee of fulfilment could be greater than this? What more astonishing news to be communicated (mission) with uncontainable joy? One condition alone is asked of Christians: never to remove their own gaze from Jesus Christ, the one Way (method) to the Truth and the Life (cf. *Jn* 14:6).

– are the form of every relationship with every person, even with one’s enemy and persecutor (cf. A. SOLIGNAC, “Martyre”, in: M. VILLER-F. CAVALLERA-J. DE GUIBERT [eds.], *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique*, vol. 10, Paris: Beauchesne, 1980, 718-737).

¹²² “Where is the ‘People of God’ about whom so much has been said, and is still said, where is it? This ethnic entity *sui generis* that is distinguished and qualified by its religious or messianic character (priestly or prophetic, if you will), that converges as a whole on Christ, as its focal point, and that derives as a whole from Christ? What shape does it have? How is it characterized? How is it organized? How does it perform its ideal and invigorating mission in the society in which it is immersed? We know very well that the people of God now, historically, has a name more familiar to everyone; it is the Church” (PAUL VI, “Udienza generale”, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI* XIII [1975], 785).

¹²³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 63.

¹²⁴ So extraordinary that, to quote St. Augustine, “in no other argument will the Christian faith meet with so much opposition as in that of the resurrection of the flesh” (ST. AUGUSTINE, *Enarratio in Psalmos* 88, 2, 5).

Vatican Council II, Milestone in the Journey of the Catholic Laity

BISHOP STANISŁAW RYŁKO

1. *An historic turning-point*

Vatican Council II's teaching on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful was immediately accepted in the Church with great enthusiasm and gratitude. The people of God were hoping for that prophetic word and were not disappointed. New and fascinating prospects were opened up for the laity. Everywhere people were saying that the "time for the laity in the Church" had come. Everywhere the atmosphere of a renewed Pentecost could be felt. The Council marked an historic turning-point in the life of the Catholic laity.

Vatican II's doctrine on the laity was enunciated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* and in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*. But, in a more or less explicit way, the theme of the laity is present in all the other conciliar documents, and especially in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*.

The Council's teaching on the lay faithful is organically inserted in the long historical process of the promotion of the Catholic laity, of which it is both an historic milestone and a culmination. Among the various factors that in some way opened the way to Vatican II's theology of the laity it is worth recalling the liturgical, eucharistic and catechetical movement, which involved many lay people; the Church's growing awareness of the "social question" and the birth of so-called "social Catholicism", in which the role of the lay faithful was decisive; and the intensive research of theologians in the field not only of ecclesiology, but also of christology, anthropology and the theology of creation. The preconiliar theology of the laity

was given its most significant and comprehensive exposition in the book of Father Yves Congar, O.P., *Jalons pour une théologie du laïc*.¹ But the contributions of others in this field should also be recalled: especially Gérard Philips and Karl Rahner, who, together with Congar, played a significant role in the work of the Council. Last but not least was the contribution made by the Popes, such as Leo XIII, who tackled the social question in a prophetic manner;² Pius XI, who passed into history as the Pope of Catholic Action; and Pius XII, who gave valuable doctrinal guidance on the role of the laity in the context of the Church as mystical body of Christ³ and promoted the convocation of the first two Congresses of the apostolate of the laity, held respectively in 1951 and 1957.

Vatican Council II brought to completion the long process of the theological definition of the lay faithful. Its teaching on this question has represented a real evangelical ferment for the renewal of the Church in our time.

The postconciliar period was very fruitful. However, the sheer depth and scale of the *aggiornamento* promoted by Vatican II have also posed various risks. The interpretations of conciliar doctrine have not infrequently suffered from superficiality and partiality, if not even from the ideological influences of the time, i.e. the 1960s. Clearly, the debate on the role of the laity in the Church could not be exempt from all this. Not by chance, even recently, has the Pope spoken of “lights and shadows” of the postconciliar period, emphasizing the need for “the genuine intention of the conciliar Fathers not to be lost; it must, on the contrary, be recovered, overcoming prejudiced and partial interpretations which have prevented the newness of the conciliar magisterium from being expressed to the best”.⁴ Today, contemplating the wide-

¹ Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïc*, Paris: Cerf, 1953.

² Cf. LEO XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum novarum*.

³ Cf. PIUS XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis*.

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, “Address the participants of the international Meeting on the implementation of the conciliar teachings”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28-29 February 2000, 6.

ranging panorama of past decades, enriched by the experiences of the faithful and illuminated by the whole of the postconciliar Magisterium, we can better grasp the essence of Vatican II's doctrine also on the theme of the laity.

The process of the reception of the conciliar doctrine on the laity was very intensive and was punctuated by some particularly significant stages, which ought to be summarily recalled:

- the creation, within the Roman Curia, of the “*Consilium de Laicis*”, decreed in 1967 with the motuproprio *Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam* of Paul VI, who then gave a new structure to the office with his motuproprio *Apostolatus peragendi* in 1976; since then the Council has been called the Pontifical Council for the Laity;

- the Congress of the apostolate of the laity held in Rome in 1967 and the two world Consultations of the Catholic laity organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity respectively in 1974 and 1987;

- the Synod of Bishops on evangelization convened on the tenth anniversary of the closing of the Council and Paul VI's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of 1975, which gave a strong impetus to the missionary endeavours of the laity;

- the Synod of Bishops of 1987 on the “vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world” and John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* of 1988. In this document – which undoubtedly represents the *magna charta* of the contemporary Catholic laity – the Pope gave a magisterial interpretation of the conciliar doctrine on this question, and also tackled the new problems faced by the laity in the postconciliar period;

- the numerous pastoral Synods promoted in many dioceses throughout the world on the reception of the Council in the specific situations of the local Churches and realized with the active participation of the lay faithful. Their model and point of reference was the pastoral Synod of the archdiocese of Cracow held from 1972 to 1979, convened by the then Cardinal Karol Wojtyła. In these years he wrote

that each Bishop who has participated in Vatican Council II “feels indebted to it [...]. From this experience, historically closed, but ever spiritually open, arises the need to repay the debt”.⁵ And the only way of repaying this debt – he added – is by “learning” [the lessons of] the Council.

Thirty-five years after it closed, Vatican II remains a great challenge. Every new generation must be able to reap its important spiritual heritage with a sense of responsibility. The Pope stresses that it was “a true prophecy for the life of the Church; [and] will continue to be so for many years of the third millennium which has just begun”.⁶ The newness it brought into the life of the Church has in some sense become the daily “normality” of the Christian communities. But that does not mean that all its teachings have been exhaustively assimilated and implemented everywhere. On the occasion of the Great Jubilee the Pope therefore invited all the faithful to a serious examination of conscience that “must also consider the reception given to the Council, this great gift of the Spirit to the Church at the end of the second millennium”.⁷

Our present Congress will accept the Holy Father’s invitation. We will thus attempt a review, but will do so looking to the future in an attitude of hope, encouraged by the words of John Paul II: “The Holy Spirit is today urging the Church to promote the vocation and the mission of the lay faithful. Their participation and coresponsibility in the life of the Christian community and their many-sided apostolate and service in society, lead us to await with hope, at the dawn of the third millennium, a mature and fruitful epiphany of the laity”.⁸

⁵ K. WOJTYŁA, *Alle fonti del rinnovamento*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981, 11.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the participants in the international Meeting on the implementation of the conciliar teachings”, cit., 7.

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 36.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, “Address at the General Audience”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 26 November 1998, 6.

2. The reformed identity of the lay faithful

Let us begin our brief review of the conciliar teaching on the laity with the question of identity, which continues to be of burning relevance. Who, then, are the lay faithful in the Church? The Council, by concentrating on the essential, provides a highly articulated reply, but avoids giving precise definitions. In *Lumen gentium* we read: "The term 'laity' is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is, the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world".⁹ Starting out from this basic text, we will now try to identify the main elements that form the identity of the lay faithful.

The christocentric and sacramental dimension

The identity of the lay faithful is distinguished in the first place by its christocentric and sacramental character. The heart of Christianity is a Person. The Christian is a disciple of Christ. Christ has called him by name and that call changed his existence. He has recognized in Christ – Son of God who became man for our salvation – his own Lord and Master. Being Christians is a choice that involves a profound conversion of the heart (*metanoia*). Following Christ means totally embracing him and his word. Paul writes: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20).

Baptism is a decisive moment. The identity of the laity springs from the ontological reality of this sacrament. John Paul II writes: "It is no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to the knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that

⁹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God. [...] *Baptism regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; and anoints us in the Holy Spirit, making us spiritual temples*".¹⁰ Baptism represents the fundamental equality of all the members of the people of God – based on the equal dignity of the children of God – and makes them participants in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and in the mission of the Church. The baptized thus become "a new creation" (cf. 2 Cor 5:17) – new men and women, rooted in Christ and imbued with the Holy Spirit. All the lay faithful are therefore called to bear witness in the world to the newness, beauty and fascination of this life.

The ecclesial dimension

The identity of the lay faithful in conciliar theology is also distinguished by a strong ecclesial connotation. Hans Urs von Balthasar has written incisive words in this regard: "The Christian is such only as a member of the Church. Baptism is an act of the Church that incorporates [the faithful] in the community of the Church. No one is Christian on his own initiative. And the Holy Spirit, that makes man come of age if he wishes to do so, is first and foremost the Spirit of the Church".¹¹ It should be stressed that the theology of the laity elaborated by Vatican II forms an integral part of conciliar ecclesiology. Yves Congar himself spoke of a "total ecclesiology" as an indispensable condition for an authentic theology of the laity.¹²

Vatican Council II presents the Church as mystery of missionary communion. In this regard, *Christifideles laici* declares: "The communion of Christians with Jesus has the communion of God as Trinity,

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 10.

¹¹ H. U. VON BALTHASAR, "Chi è il cristiano?", in: IDEM, *Gesù e il cristiano*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1998, 151.

¹² Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïc*, cit., 12-13.

namely, the unity of the Son to the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit, as its model and source, and is itself the means to achieve this communion; united to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father. [...] From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience from one another: all are branches of a single vine, namely, Christ. In this communion is the wonderful reflection and participation in the mystery of the intimate life of love in God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed by the Lord Jesus".¹³ The Church is therefore a mystery because it is rooted in the trinitarian life of God himself and, at the same time, is sacrament of salvation for the whole of humanity because it is "a sign and instrument [...] of communion with God and of unity among all men".¹⁴

The Church is also an "organic communion", in which a diversity and complementarity of vocations, ministries, services, charisms and responsibilities exist. It is characterized not by contrasts and divisions, but by reciprocity and coordination: "Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body".¹⁵ Vatican II thus overcame once and for all a unilateral identification of the Church with the hierarchy which for a long time has dominated in ecclesiology, and opened the way not only to the rediscovery of the lay vocation, but also to a new style in the relations between the various states of life in the Church. From this image of the Church as mystery of communion it is clear that each Christian must perform his/her own task in the Church, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and that each is at the same time the object and the active protagonist of the mission entrusted to him/her by Christ. As St. Paul says: "speaking the truth in love, [we must seek] to grow up in every way into him, who is the head, into Christ, from whom the

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 18.

¹⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 1.

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 20.

whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (*Eph* 4:15-16). But to experience the reality of the Church in this way, we need faith and a deep *sensus Ecclesiae*. In our time, even among Christians, there is a marked tendency to consider the Church as a social institution like so many others, and this tendency is accompanied by the claim to be able to modify its structure according to the criteria of the dominant culture of our time. But the Church is a different reality and its essential principles are not those of modern democracies. The Pope insists: "The Church as communion constitutes the icon of the communion that is inherent in the Holy Trinity. Before an icon, rather than indulging in critical analysis, one feels the need to abandon oneself to affectionate contemplation to be able to penetrate ever deeper into the divine mystery: this is the background against which one may truly understand the Church".¹⁶

The secular dimension

The Council explains the specific nature of the lay identity through the concept of the "secular character" peculiar to the laity. It is a concept rooted in the conciliar view of the world and of the relation between the Church and the world. Here too Vatican II marked an epoch-making turning-point. After a long period of open hostility and conflict, a new period of dialogue and collaboration was inaugurated. The view of the world formulated by Vatican Council II is a profoundly theological view. It has two essential coordinates: the mystery of Creation and that of Redemption. An essentially positive attitude to the world was born of this approach. It was based not on a superficial optimism, but on the realism of the faith. The Church recognizes the "rightful autonomy" and the intrinsic value of earthly affairs such as science and culture; she

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, "Address to the Austrian Bishops", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 21 November 1998, 5.

fosters in this way man's dedication to temporal realities.¹⁷ At the same time, however, she does not forget the transcendental and eschatological perspective of the world and of man himself.¹⁸ Only in Christ and in his paschal mystery does the world find its fulfilment.¹⁹

The Church of Vatican II is therefore a missionary Church that is immersed in the world and that shows solidarity with the world. It is a Church that opens itself up to the world, and assumes towards it an attitude of service: it is the Church as "Good Samaritan of the world" (John Paul II). That does not mean, of course, that all the tensions between the Church and the world have been dissolved, as if by a magic wand. Indeed, in a world injured by sin the Church – if she is to remain faithful to her mission – cannot but be a "sign of contradiction", like her Master.²⁰

It is in this context that the question of the "secular character" of the laity needs to be placed. *Lumen gentium* declares: "By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties".²¹ The concept of "secular character" proposed by Vatican II as the key concept of the lay person's identity, since it distinguishes the laity from the other states of life in the Church, has been the object of lively debate. It has a strong theological connotation, rooted in the truth of the Incarnation, and

¹⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 36.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 39.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 38.

²⁰ Cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, "Cordula overosia il caso serio", in: IDEM, *Gesù e il cristiano*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1998, 177-249.

²¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

therefore must never be reduced to a purely sociological dimension. The life of the laity is the nerve point in which the Church and the world meet, and that is why the lay person becomes the voice of the Church in the world and the voice of the world in the Church. The lay faithful “incarnate” the Gospel in the daily reality of all the spheres of life. The “secular character” that determines their identity as Christians who live in the world gives a specific connotation to their apostolate, spirituality and holiness. For the lay faithful the world is not only the place of, but the means for, the realization of their own vocation and mission.

The holiness dimension

The call to holiness represents another essential component of the identity of the laity. The Council declares: “It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society”.²² Christian holiness is a gift of God and must primarily be accepted as a gift. The baptized participate in the divine nature thanks to the effusion of the Holy Spirit; already by virtue of this they are saints. In the New Testament the word “saint”, indeed, becomes even synonymous with “Christian”. The call to holiness is not a mere exhortation of a moral or moralistic order. Holiness is the deepest need of the Christian vocation, of our “being Christians”. And it must find expression in everyone’s action, in other words, in following and imitating Christ, in prayer, in the listening to the Word of God, in embracing the Beatitudes, in practising the commandment of love, in the sacramental life and especially in the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Penance.²³ In short, holiness must be expressed in the unity between faith and life. The holiness of the laity is not a division-two or second-class holiness, as in the past was

²² *Ibid.*, no. 40.

²³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 16.

thought by those who identified holiness with the so-called “state of perfection”. The Christian holiness of the laity is realized in the heart of the world and not through a flight from the world. Christian dedication in the world is thus ennobled and becomes one of the means of achieving holiness. Vatican Council II opened up to the laity fascinating horizons of Christian perfection lived in the light of the spirituality of the Incarnation. All this has borne and continues to bear precious fruit. Countless lay men and women have adopted the Council’s teachings as a programme for life, overcoming the temptation of mediocrity and indifference, and demonstrating great spiritual maturity and capacity for radical choices, inspired by the Gospel.

We have therefore seen what are the main components of the identity of the lay faithful. In the postconciliar period, the development of the theology of the laity has been marked by significant stages. An initial period of theological reflection concentrated on the duality: “hierarchy-laity” and in particular on the theology of the *proprium* of the laity, i.e. their “secular character”. This gave way, with the Synod of 1987, to a deeper reflection on their vocation and mission. In the last decade theological reflection on the laity has focused especially on the theology of the ministries and on the theology of “being Christians”.²⁴ This latter trend is very interesting. Giacomo Canobbio raised the question in a provocative manner even in the title of his book *Laici o cristiani?* – Laity or Christians? –, in which he writes: “At least part of recent theological reflection has identified the lay person with the Christian without any distinction and has thus implied that the real problem is not that of defining the lay person but of specifying the Christian role of the person who exercises the ordained ministry: the problem of the laity is merely a ‘pastoral’ problem, without any intrinsically theological value”.²⁵ It is clear that this approach is a reaction to certain interpretations of the laity, too abstract and formal, which seem

²⁴ Cf. G. ZAMBON, *Laicato e tipologie laicali*, Roma: PUG, 1996, 424-442.

²⁵ G. CANOBBIO, *Laici o cristiani?*, Brescia: Morcelliana 1997, 290.

paradoxically to forget that the lay person is above all a Christian. But it should be emphasized that it is possible to be Christians in many different ways, depending on the specific vocations, sacramental gifts and charisms received. The question of the vocation and mission of the laity continues therefore to be an important field of theological speculation.

In conclusion to this part of our reflections dedicated to the identity of the lay faithful, it is as well to underline that being lay people in the Church is a *genuine* vocation. Being lay people is a state of life willed by God. Hans Urs von Balthasar writes that the lay state may be defined “as the principal state, so to say, the basic state of the Church. In proportion as it is so (whereas the other two states are established by specific differences), these latter may come to be seen also as expressions, underlinings, embodiments of the former, towards which they exercise a relation of service”.²⁶ In this field the doctrine of Vatican II remains a prophetic and safe guide, even though both its comprehension and its application need to be further reinforced. The Council enabled us to rediscover especially the newness and ontological richness that springs from Baptism in the life of the lay faithful, and that then finds full development in Confirmation and constant fulfilment and support in the Eucharist. Faced by the greatness of the dignity of each baptized, how can we fail to be imbued with the profound wonder of the faith? In his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, the Pope, citing St. Augustine, affirms: “‘*Vobis sum episcopus, vobiscum christianus*’ (‘I am a bishop for you, I am a Christian with you’). On further reflection, *christianus* has far greater significance than *episcopus*, even if the subject is the Bishop of Rome”.²⁷ These are very significant words that prompt reflection.

3. *Mission as test-bed of the Christian identity*

In the life of the Christian vocation and mission are intrinsically united – the one implies the other. An old scholastic adage says: *Agere sequitur*

²⁶ H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Gli stati di vita del cristiano*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1996, 288.

²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, 14.

esse. To act follows to be: that is, the way we act is the consequence of what we are. The “action” of the baptized cannot therefore be segregated from his Christian “being”. It is our being Christians that gives a sense to our action, that is, to our mission. At the same time, this “being” finds its visible expression in “acting”. The vocation of the lay faithful is manifested and reinforced in mission. So the identity of the lay faithful is built up not only through a theological analysis of his being, but also, and in a particular way, through active missionary commitment.

For many Christians today this a real challenge. We live in a world in which “doing” is paramount, and in this frenetic pursuit of action, who bothers any longer about “being”? Activism leaves us no time to stop and reflect on the meaning of things. And, unfortunately, a certain kind of activism is also infiltrating the Church with the risk of perverting the significance of the apostolate and of evangelization. Activism, however, is not the only peril. Its antithesis, passivism, also poses a threat and is increasingly spreading: i.e. the trend to flee from the missionary commitment in the world and take refuge in a vague and disembodied spirituality, which relegates the faith to the sphere of the intimate and private. It is forgotten that the missionary commitment represents an important test of our being Christians, i.e. of our identity. And it is forgotten that no one is Christian merely for his own spiritual benefit, because each Christian, by nature, is an envoy, an apostle, a witness.

Mission *ad extra*

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). Christ assigned his missionary mandate to the whole Church. All Christians, therefore, are called to the apostolate. For, as the Council affirmed, “in the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission”.²⁸

²⁸ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.

In our day, the work of evangelization would be unthinkable without the active involvement of the laity. Vatican Council II declares: "The Church can never be without the lay apostolate; it is something that derives from the layman's very vocation as a Christian. [...] No less fervent a zeal on the part of lay people is called for today; present circumstances, in fact, demand from them an apostolate infinitely broader and more intense".²⁹ And John Paul II, speaking of the "modern *arepaghi*", often remote from or blind to the light of the Gospel, emphasizes: "A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. *It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle*".³⁰

All the lay faithful are thus called to participate actively in the evangelizing mission of the Church, today rendered particularly arduous by the growing secularization and de-christianization of our societies. "Always prepared to make a defence of anyone who calls [them] to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3.15), they must therefore be able to bear witness to an authentically Christian life in the family, at work, in social, cultural and political commitment. For – as the Council says – it is just in these contexts that they "are called by God that, being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven".³¹ Guided by the principles of the social doctrine of the Church and animated by the spirit of solidarity, the lay faithful must be in the front line in the building of a juster and more humane world, because they know that only in Christ can the responses be found to satisfy the deepest aspirations in the human heart.

A problem of crucial importance for the Church on the threshold of the third millennium is undoubtedly that of the dialogue between

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 1.

³⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 3.

³¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

the faith and culture of our time and between faith and reason. It is a dialogue of salvation, i.e. evangelization. And it is a task that is especially the responsibility of the laity. The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) was especially prophetic in this regard. Emphasizing that the split between the Gospel and culture is one of the greatest evils of our time, Paul VI wrote: "What matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots) [...] always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God".³² The task is one of extreme urgency because it is in this sphere that the future of humanity will be determined: culture, in fact, will either help man to be more himself or, by being drained of real values, will destroy him.

The dialogue between faith and culture implies the dialogue between faith and reason. In *Fides et ratio*, John Paul II urged the final overcoming of the attitudes that pit reason and faith against each other: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth. [...] It is [the Church's] duty to serve humanity in different ways, but one way in particular imposes a responsibility of a quite special kind: the *diakonia of the truth*. This mission on the one hand makes the believing community a partner in humanity's shared struggle to arrive at truth; and on the other hand it obliges the believing community to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God".³³

But how can culture be evangelized? The Gospel is identified with no culture, but it can impregnate them all with its values: it can ennoble them all and open them up to transcendence. John Paul II, who has closely at heart the problem of culture, points out the road to us: "The synthesis between culture and faith is not only a need of culture, but

³² PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 20.

³³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, nos. 1-2.

also of faith [...]. A faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully received, not completely believed and not faithfully lived".³⁴ How can such a synthesis be achieved? This process is realized when faith, as a personal choice of Christ, is lived in an authentic manner; when it is no longer enclosed in the private sphere and becomes a lifestyle capable of generating a profound communion between persons and appealing to and moving outside observers. As Cardinal Josph Ratzinger writes, "there are powerful ways of living the faith that reanimate persons and imbue them with vitality and joy, a presence of faith, therefore, that signifies something for the world".³⁵

Mission *ad intra*

The mission of the lay faithful also has a dimension *ad intra*; in other words, it must also be conducted within the ecclesial community. The vitality and missionary drive of our parishes depend a great deal on the intensity and quality of the laity's commitment. Both at the diocesan and parish level, the laymen and laywomen, to whom full-time tasks and offices are entrusted in the pastoral or administrative sphere, are becoming ever more numerous. The collegial structures with lay participation, such as the diocesan and parish pastoral councils, are acquiring ever greater importance. National councils of the laity are being set up in various countries: another form of effective participation of the lay faithful in the mission of the Church.

One question that deserves particular attention in this context today is that of the so-called ministeries. The problem emerged in all its complexity especially during the Synod of Bishops dedicated to the laity in 1987, but its roots can be traced back to the motuproprio *Ministeria quaedam* of 1972. In this apostolic letter Paul VI opened up to the laity, as such, the exercise of two ministeries hitherto reserved for

³⁴ JOHN PAUL II, "Address to the participants in the national Congress of the Ecclesial Movement of Cultural Commitment", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17 January 1982, 4.

³⁵ J. RATZINGER, *Il sale della terra*, Milano: Edizione San Paolo, 1997, 18.

those preparing for the priesthood: the office of lector and the office of acolyte. In *Christifideles laici* John Paul II summed up the synodal debate as follows: “The Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, for a good many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony. When necessity and expediency in the Church require it, the Pastors, according to established norms from universal law, can entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles that are connected to their pastoral ministry but do not require the character of Orders”.³⁶ The offices in question comprise, in particular, the exercise of the ministry of the word, presiding over liturgical prayers, conferring Baptism and distributing Holy Communion, in accordance with the prescriptions of Canon Law.³⁷

Apart from undeniably positive developments, some risks are however not absent from this field. John Paul II alludes to them in *Christifideles laici*, mentioning, in particular, the too indiscriminate use of the term “ministry” and sometimes a confusion, or even an equation, between common priesthood and ministerial priesthood. Not by chance did the Synod in 1987 urge an exhaustive study of the question.

The theological debate on ministries and ministeriality continues.³⁸ Some theologians – beginning with Yves Congar, who, in the last stage of his reflection, dedicated much space to the question³⁹ – see the future of the theology of the laity precisely in the concept of ministeriality. Bruno Forte, just to give one example, believes that the duality between hierarchy and laity needs to be replaced by the duality between communities and charisms/ministries.⁴⁰ But, at the same time, there are reservations that Giorgio Campanini sums up very well when he writes: “Behind the resistance being expressed on various sides to

³⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 23.

³⁷ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 230, § 3.

³⁸ Cf. *I laici nella ministerialità della Chiesa*, Milano: Glossa, 2000.

³⁹ Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Ministeri e comunità ecclesiale*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1973.

⁴⁰ Cf. B. FORTE, *Laicato e laicità*, Genova: Marietti, 1986.

the formalization of lay ministries is a widespread anxiety: that of a possible ‘clericalization’ of the laity, through their *de facto* absorption into the ecclesial structure, for the fulfilment of pastoral tasks in the broad sense, thus obscuring the *proprium* of the lay vocation, linked to the ‘secular character’ of the laity, in other words their prevalent dedication to service in the world”.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the Church recognizes great potential, and not only limitations, in the role of lay pastoral workers, men and women endowed with a profound love of the Church and considerable theological and practical preparation. It is a resource that needs to be managed with a great sense of responsibility.

This therefore is how, in broad outline, the vast field of the mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world presents itself today. Today, the vineyard of the Lord is enormous, so many workers are needed to labour in it, and Christ continues to say to all the baptized, to each one of us: “You go into the vineyard too” (*Mt* 20:4).

4. *Towards a new era of group apostolate*

The individual apostolate represents a fundamental need to which no baptized can fail to respond. But at the same time, the so-called group apostolate is acquiring ever more relevance, especially in our time. The Council affirms: “The group apostolate is very important also for another reason: often, either in ecclesial communities or in various other environments, the apostolate calls for concerted action. Organizations created for group apostolate afford support for their members, train them for the apostolate, carefully assign and direct their apostolic activities; and as a result a much richer harvest can be hoped for from them than if each one were to act on his own”.⁴² There is freedom of association among the lay faithful in the Church. In *Christifideles laici*

⁴¹ G. CAMPANINI, *Il laico nella Chiesa e nel mondo*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1999, 180.

⁴² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 18.

the Pope writes that “such liberty is a true and proper right that is not derived from any kind of ‘concession’ by authority, but flows from the Sacrament of Baptism, which calls the lay faithful to participate actively in the Church’s communion and mission”.⁴³ However, this right must always be exercised in communion with the Church, that is, in harmony with her nature and mission.

The “traditional” associations

A great variety of lay associations exists in the Church today. Their aims include apostolic activities, Christian formation, works of charity and the Christian animation of the temporal order. Some of them – confraternities, third orders and sodalities – already have a long and illustrious tradition behind them. Others are of more recent creation. Among the latter, some have a local, others an international character. An important role is also played by the Catholic International Organizations (CIO), whose members represent various social spheres or professional categories. The CIOs, having the official status of non-government organizations, have been pioneers in making the voice of the Church heard, through the mouthpiece of the laity, within the main international forums, such as the United Nations Organization. At the level of the local Church a special place is filled by Catholic Action, which is distinguished by its close link of direct collaboration with the hierarchical apostolate. Vatican Council II confirmed the importance of its role in the Church and devoted a section to it in its decree on the apostolate of the laity.⁴⁴ With a view to rendering its work even more incisive, the *International Forum of Catholic Action* (IFAC) was set up in 1995: a forum for dialogue, exchange and common endeavour between the associations of Catholic Action in various countries.

⁴³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 29.

⁴⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 18.

In our time, one of the fundamental questions to be borne in mind in speaking of lay groups is that of their ecclesial identity. The terms “Catholic” or “ecclesial” should not be reduced to a decorative function. They ought to indicate the deepest nature of a lay group and presuppose a precise programme of life and action that must be compatible with that nature. In the 1960s and 1970s a part of Catholic associations suffered from a very serious crisis, linked especially to superficial or tendentious interpretations of the Council, especially in terms of “opening to the world”, and to the influence exerted by the dominant, and strongly ideologized, culture of the time.⁴⁵ The almost absolute priority given to “opening to the world” increasingly pushed into the background the option of faith and membership of the Church. Words like Christ, Church, Gospel, evangelization disappeared from the programmes of some Catholic organizations, and the language used was transformed into a kind of sociological and political jargon.⁴⁶ The crisis was both one of identity (who are we?) and of style (what forms of Christian presence in society?). We all recall the heated debates on the culture of presence and the culture of mediation. It was a difficult period, that belongs substantially to the past and that has been recalled here only because it underlines the crucial importance of a clear Christian and ecclesial identity not only at the individual, but also at the group level. For this reason – responding to the explicit recommendation of the Synod Fathers who had treated the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world – the Pope in *Christifideles laici* listed five criteria which each lay association ought frequently to test itself against to authenticate and reinforce its own ecclesial identity.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ G. CAMPANINI, *Il laico nella Chiesa e nel mondo*, cit., 118.

⁴⁶ Cf. L. LALOUX, “L’apostolat de laïcs en France”, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 122 (2000), 211-237. The author speaks explicitly of a “Marxist seduction” of the period, to which several lay associations succumbed, drawing close to or even embracing various theses of Marxist ideology.

⁴⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 29.

The ecclesial movements

In the postconciliar period, new phenomena of surprising spiritual depth and of the extraordinary incisive Christian presence in society have emerged in the sphere of the Catholic group apostolate.⁴⁸ In *Christifideles laici* John Paul II speaks explicitly of “a new era of group endeavours” in the Church, which he describes as follows: “Alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted, with a specific feature and purpose [...]”.⁴⁹ The most significant expression of this new flowering is the extraordinary development of the so-called ecclesial movements. And, today, in a spirit of communion and reciprocal consideration, traditional lay associations, new movements and new communities are making a generous contribution to the mission of the Church.

John Paul II devotes a good deal of attention to the ecclesial movements and sees in them a particularly effective tool for the new evangelization. He affirms in this regard: “One of the gifts of the Spirit to our time is undoubtedly the flowering of the ecclesial movements which right from the beginning of my pontificate I have continued to indicate as a source of hope for the Church and for man”.⁵⁰ How can we fail to recall in this context the Pope’s historic meeting with the ecclesial movements and the new communities on 30 May 1998? Some 200,000 youth belonging to some fifty international ecclesial movements and, together with them, some of the founders of these movements, were present in St. Peter’s Square. It was an extraordinary epiphany of the unity of the Church in all the richness of its manifold charisms. On this occasion too the Pope recurred to the question of the ecclesial identity that is so close to his heart: “Today a new stage is unfolding before you:

⁴⁸ PONTIFICIUM CONCILIUM PRO LAICIS (ed.), *Movements in the Church. Proceedings of the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements*. Rome, 27-29 May 1998, Vatican City 1999.

⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 29.

⁵⁰ JOHN PAUL II, “Homily on the Vigil of Pentecost”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 27-28 May 1996, 7.

that of ecclesial maturity. This does not mean that all the problems have been solved. Rather, it is a challenge. A road to take. The Church expects from you the ‘mature’ fruits of communion and commitment”.⁵¹

All the lay groups, both the traditional and the new ones, represent a great richness and a great spiritual resource for the Church on the threshold of the third millennium. They are a sign of the vitality of the faith of the people of God and of its missionary impetus. These group forms of apostolate acquire special importance in the context of contemporary society, in a mass society that generates a sense of loss and a deep sense of loneliness. In the age of globalization, the person seems to count ever less. There is a great lack of truly human relationships, even within the family. The type of “compartmentalized” society is becoming increasingly consolidated. And this situation is deeply felt also at the level of the Church and of our parishes. Today the parish too is very often rather anonymous and unable to form a truly hospitable environment for the faithful. An urgent task is therefore that of constructing in our parishes a living microstructure of small lay communities, groups, associations and movements that may intermediate between people, create spaces for real communion and become genuine schools of active participation and coresponsibility in the Church. These spaces already exist in many places, but a great many more of them are needed. At the dawn of the third millennium, they are true beacons of hope and signs of the “springtime for Christianity” of which John Paul II speaks.⁵²

5. *Being Christians today*

At the end of our reflections on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the light of Vatican Council II, let us return once again to our

⁵¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Address on the occasion of the Meeting with the Ecclesial Movements and the New Communities (Rome, 30 May 1998)”, in: PONTIFICIUM CONCILIUM PRO LAICIS (ed.), *Movements in the Church. Proceedings of the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements. Rome, 27-29 May 1998*, cit., 222.

⁵² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, no. 86.

basic problem, the question of “identity”. Indeed, it is just identity that is the fundamental challenge that lay Christians today have to confront. How can it be safeguarded? How can it be made clearer and more visible? How can the laity be authentic Christians in our time?

We are living today in a strongly secularized, if not actually dechristianized and in various respects neo-pagan world, that tries in many ways to neutralize our being Christians and our Christian presence. In today’s pluralist society faith is increasingly becoming a strictly private matter, stripped of any socio-cultural value. At the same time, models of life without God are diffused and subtly imposed in every possible way. Every explicit form of Christian presence is branded as fundamentalism or proselytism. Many Christians feel marginalized and have strong inferiority complexes towards so-called lay culture. As a consequence, in our free and democratic societies, not to speak of those in which religious freedom is still denied, Christians are becoming increasingly less visible, increasingly more hidden. At the same time, attitudes of indifference are spreading among Christians themselves. They become prey to superficial and selective ways of living the faith, accommodating towards the dominant mentality, with which many of them easily succumb to compromise. The gap between faith and life is growing ever wider. Being Christians is often reduced to a merely formal or nominal fact. The picture of the situation I have painted is deliberately exaggerated, but the problem needs to be addressed: in our time the Christian identity is exposed to a grave danger and each of us is called to make decisive choices to express our faith in the way we live.

St. Peter exhorts the baptized: “Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall” (2 *Pt* 1:10). All of us must, in other words, return to the very roots of our Christian being, interrogating ourselves on what our vocation and our mission may be in God’s plan. We must rediscover the beauty and the greatness of the gift we have received, not by merit, but gratuitously. We must return to the essence of the Christian event, that is, to the vital meeting with the Lord. Christ continues to say to us today: “You are the salt of the earth [...]. You are the light of the world.

[...] Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (*Mt 5:13-16*).

According to the teaching of Vatican Council II, the identity of lay Christians is distinguished by some key elements that it is worth briefly summing up here:

- it is an identity that springs from the sacramental reality of Baptism, that therefore has a profound trinitarian and christological connotation, and that, if it is to shape our life, presupposes a faith conceived as a personal meeting with Christ that involves the whole of existence;

- it is born in the context of a specific ecclesial community and therefore assumes the dimension of ecclesial identity: the reference to the Church as ministry of missionary communion is therefore indispensable;

- it is an identity that, in the life of the lay Christian, is characterized by the "secular nature"; that signifies that it matures and grows in the heart of the world, in the ordinary circumstances of human life, for it "incarnates", so to say, Christianity in the world;

- the characteristic of "sign of contradiction" is profoundly rooted in it. Being disciples of a crucified Master is not easy and requires sacrifice. The Christian must have the courage to swim against the tide.

The question of identity in the life of the Christian – of every Christian – is thus a question that is ever open. It is a task that is never completed, because it implies choices coherent with one's own faith in every situation and in every moment of life. Its horizon is that of holiness.

Is it easy to live one's own vocation in this way? Certainly not! But with the grace of God it is possible, indeed, it is a wonderful experience and gives enormous joy. And so many lay Christians do live it in this way.

Today, two thousand years after the birth of Christ, we Christians are still a minority. But that's not the problem. Christianity cannot be

gauged by statistical data. One of the most famous Italian Catholic journalists of our time rightly emphasizes that the real problem is not that of being a minority, but the risk of becoming marginal, i.e. irrelevant and useless to the world.⁵³ The leaven is “minority”, but it raises a large quantity of dough, the salt is “minority”, but it gives taste to the food.

If we are not to become marginal to the world, we must return to what is essential in our Christian identity. Not by chance, on the occasion of the Great Jubilee, did the Pope begin to speak with some insistence of the martyrs of the faith, and especially of those of the twentieth century. The twentieth century was not only a century of dazzling scientific and technological progress, but also a century of harsh persecutions against the Christians on a vast scale; it was a century of martyrs. The Pope writes: “In our century the martyrs have returned, many of them nameless, ‘unknown soldiers’ as it were of God’s great cause. As far as possible, their witness should not be lost to the Church”.⁵⁴ The blood of the martyrs represents an inestimable treasure for the Church on the threshold of the third millennium. We are all, in some measure, debtors to the martyrs, especially to those of our century. Their witness, taken to the point of the shedding of their blood, challenges our way of living the faith. The martyrs remind us that Christ demands courageous choices from his disciples, a strong commitment: “I came to cast fire upon the earth” (*Lk* 12:49). “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (*Mt* 10:34). That’s what the Lord continues to say to us. The martyrs show us that to be Christians we must be prepared to pay the highest price. They teach us that in exchange for the precious pearl of the Kingdom of God we must give our all. St. Augustine, commenting on the Gospel parable of the precious pearl, said: “It does not matter how much you possess – what’s important is that you be prepared to give everything”. Today we truly have a need for this les-

⁵³ Cf. V. MISSORI, “Confessors of the Faith in our Time”, in: PONTIFICIUM CONCILIUM PRO LAICIS (ed.), *Rediscovering Confirmation*, Vatican City 2000, 21-22.

⁵⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 37.

son of the martyrs. Remembering the martyrs means examining our conscience in a rigorous way to gauge our way of living the faith both at the personal level and at the level of our Christian communities. Joseph Ratzinger writes: “We have a need for a kind of revolution of the faith in a multiple sense. Above all we have a need for it to refind the courage to go against the common opinions [...]. That’s why we must have the courage to go in a direction contrary to that seen as ‘normality’ for man at the end of the twentieth century, and rediscover the faith in its simplicity”.⁵⁵ This “revolution of the faith” in the Church, of which Cardinal Ratzinger speaks, received a powerful impetus from the providential event of Vatican Council II and its fascinating teaching on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful.

⁵⁵ J. RATZINGER, *Il sale della terra*, cit., 40.

III

Vocation

The Baptismal Roots of the Identity of the *Christifideles*

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To tackle this question we will base ourselves on the following texts: Vatican Council II's Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* and Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Code of Canon Law and especially the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world.

The present contribution aims to furnish a positive approach to the life and mission of the laity. To this end it will proceed in five stages.

1. *The identity of the lay faithful within the mystery of the Church*

One great merit of Vatican Council II is undoubtedly that of having relinked each Christian vocation and mission with the mystery of the Church and with the people of God as a whole.¹ As far as the laity is concerned, that means *amplifying* the old concept of the "mandate", in that their mission does not derive only from a mandate received from time to time from the hierarchy, but from the fundamental grace of Baptism and Confirmation.

At the same time, the identity and dignity of the lay faithful should be seen within the mystery of the Church as communion, according to the fine image of the vine adopted by *Christifideles laici* with reference both to the allegory of the vine and its branches in John's Gospel (Jn 15:1-17) and to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard in

¹ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the church *Lumen gentium*, chapters I and II.

Matthew's Gospel (Mt 20:6-7).² This conception excludes any purely functional approach to the identity of the lay person.

2. *The positive, and not only negative, definition of the laity*

With regard to the definition of the laity, the same Apostolic Exhortation cites the famous text of Vatican II, which begins by recalling the negative approach only immediately to transcend it in a positive form: "The term 'lay faithful' is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state sanctioned by the Church. Through Baptism the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world".³ In further reply to the same question (Who are the lay faithful?), the same number of *Christifideles laici* continues by quoting the very strong words of Pius XII who, in a discourse to the new cardinals on 20 February 1946, declared that the lay faithful, "they in particular ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness *not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church*, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the head of all, and of all the Bishops in communion with him. *These are the Church* [...]". This was already an invitation to proclaim: "Wir sind die Kirche!", but in quite another sense than that sometimes claimed today.

3. *The source of the identity of the laity in Baptism*

This is one of the essential points: Baptism is the source of the radical "newness" of Christian life – that celebrated by Paul in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (cf. 2 Cor 5:14-17) – with its twofold aspect of

² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, nos. 8 and 3.

³ *Ibid.*, no. 9, citing *Lumen gentium*, 31.

intimate consecration of life and mission in the world and in the Church.⁴

The trinitarian consecration of the baptized

In Baptism we should see not only the aspect of incorporation in the Church, however important that may be, because that would involve the grave risk of reducing its richness. For the first sacrament is also the *trinitarian consecration of the whole human person*, as has been emphasized by many mystics such as John of the Cross, Teresa of Jesus, Teresa of the Infant Jesus, Elizabeth of the Trinity, etc. In fact, by Baptism, we have been adopted by the Father as his children;⁵ we have been inseparably joined together as members of Christ's body and members of the body of the Church;⁶ we have been anointed by the Holy Spirit to form a spiritual temple.⁷

By virtue of this baptismal consecration, the lay faithful are called to a mystery of trinitarian and ecclesial communion, constantly ritualized in the Eucharist, so that the living participation in it is like a thermometer of the authentic meaning of Baptism.

The priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of the baptized

This aspect of the identity of the lay faithful is forcefully emphasized by *Lumen gentium* and then by *Christifideles laici*. Borrowing from the afore-cited Constitution,⁸ the Apostolic Exhortation describes in detail the three missions, priestly, prophetic and kingly, assigned to the laity. The laity are called to consecrate the world itself to God and, through the holiness of their life, to turn the circumstances of their ordinary life

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 10.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 11.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 12.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 13.

⁸ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, nos. 34-36.

into spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God: to bear witness, in word and deed, to the newness and power of the Gospel and the supernatural sense of the faith, to combat, in their own life and in the world, the power of sin and promote the Kingdom of God; and to order the creation to the authentic well-being of humanity and to the glory of God.

The Apostolic Exhortation can therefore conclude: "The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist".⁹

4. *The secular character of the identity of the laity*

When today we speak of the identity of the laity, we often risk thinking exclusively of their intra-ecclesial mission. This is undoubtedly valuable, but we should recall that *Lumen gentium* especially insisted on the mainly secular character of the mission of the laity: "Their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity.[...] But by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others. It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer".¹⁰

⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 14.

¹⁰ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

Following in the footsteps of Vatican II, *Christifideles laici* recalls, with an original formulation, that the world thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfil their Christian vocation. But it goes further, boldly proclaiming that the world does not constitute only the anthropological and sociological sphere of the mission of the laity, but also its theological and ecclesiological place, as is already expressed at the symbolical level by the gospel images of the salt, the light and the heaven.¹¹

Then come all the valuable tasks that the laity may fulfil in the intra-ecclesial sphere, as members of the pastoral councils or financial directors, as parish assistants, members of the church board, animators or members of the youth or adult movements, members of liturgical groups, lectors, members of the choir, musicians, catechists, volunteers who provide assistance to the sick or the elderly, teachers, etc. But all these missions and all these ministries, indispensable for the life of the Church, must not make us forget the primary mission of the laity, namely that of penetrating the realities of the world with the spirit of the Gospel.

5. The vocation to baptismal holiness as final horizon of the mission of the laity

The baptismal consecration of the lay faithful implies their vocation to holiness. Another merit of *Lumen gentium* is that of having emphasized the universal call to holiness in the Church.¹² For its part, *Christifideles laici* happily resumes this great inspiration of Vatican II: "The call to holiness is rooted in Baptism and proposed anew in the other Sacraments, principally in the Eucharist. Since Christians are reclothed in Christ Jesus and refreshed by his Spirit, they are 'holy'. They therefore have the ability to bear witness to it in all that they do. The apostle Paul

¹¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 15.

¹² Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, chap. V.

never tires of admonishing all Christians to live ‘as is fitting among saints’ (Eph 5:3).¹³ At the very heart of “doing”, the decisive factor is therefore “being”.

We need to accept this. Unless there is an utter rejection on our part, we are all invincibly called to become saints, preferably here below, in the full summer of earthly life, but also in the autumn and the winter of our old age and our agony, often also in the hour of our death and even after death, in the purification of our freedom by the merciful Love. That is the final destiny of us all. The consecrated life – especially that of religious – is nothing but the radicalization, here on earth, of the baptismal consecration common to the whole people of God. But the fulfilment will be identical for everyone, expressing itself in the immediate close relation of the human person with his God in an intimacy indissoluble from the universal communion of saints.

From this point of view, as the Apostolic Exhortation insists,¹⁴ the holiness of the laity is the most urgent witness of which the Church has a need in our time. In the last analysis it demands that the lay faithful be willing to give their own life for love to the point of martyrdom, since the supreme witness of the faith consists in risking one’s life for Christ who was the first to give his own life for us. But the characteristic trait of this “lay holiness” will always be its secular style, in other words it will always be a sanctification and a holiness in the world, as emphasized by the same text: “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities”.¹⁵

Conclusion

We can conclude with the words of the Pope himself, who closes in these terms the first chapter of his exhortation dedicated to the eccle-

¹³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 16.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 17.

sial identity of the laity: “At the end of these reflections intended to define the lay faithful’s position in the Church, the celebrated admonition of Saint Leo the Great comes to mind: ‘Acknowledge, O Christian, your dignity!’. Saint Maximus, Bishop of Turin, in addressing those who had received the holy anointing of Baptism, repeats the same sentiments: ‘Ponder the honour that has made you sharers in this mystery!’. All the baptized are invited to hear once again the words of Saint Augustine: ‘Let us rejoice and give thanks: we have not only become Christians, but Christ himself [...] Stand in awe and rejoice: We have become Christ!’”¹⁶

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Round Table

Participants in a Mystery of Communion (Trinitarian, Ecclesial, Eucharistic)

DINO BOFFO

1. *"Loosing" the laity*

Admit it: the emotion aroused in me by the Pope's words at the inaugural concelebration of the Synod on the laity in 1987 remains unforgettable. Faced with the task of guiding and giving a perspective to the debate of the Synod Fathers, John Paul II could find no better appeal than the gospel passage in Matthew that is usually cited to provide a foundation for the ministry that the Church performs through the sacraments (cf. *Mt* 18:18). On this occasion, however, the Pope made use of the passage to open up other treasures: "Have trust – he said – that the Holy Spirit given to us in the Church [...] will help us to 'loose' what needs to be 'loosed' in this vast field of the laity":¹ what needs to be freed, released, liberated. How wonderful, my friends. Just think, the hierarchical Church at a certain stage of its postconciliar history felt the need to bow down to this somewhat clumsy, dazed and handicapped "giant" represented by the Catholic laity, to kneel down before it to remove the bandages that kept it – and still keep it – incapacitated. It seemed to me that the scene of Jesus on the threshold of the tomb in which his friend Lazarus lay buried was being repeated and that the injunction "Come out!" (*Jn* 11:43) was being repeated to each of us lay Christians. Come out of the paralyzing death to which you have succumbed, strip off those bandages that stop you from making any new

¹ JOHN PAUL II, "Homily at the inaugural concelebration for the Synod of Bishops", *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 3 (1987), 787.

movement, and prevent a more complete articulation of the lay person. Come out of that mental and spiritual atrophy that keeps you on the edges of the vineyard. Exploit the resources that were entrusted to you, the talents that were given to you in safekeeping so that you would make them bear fruit.

It seemed that the postconciliar period had finally come of age, that the period of uncertainty, of absurd polarization, of unjustified timidity had been overcome. It seemed that the time had come for the laity's involvement in the vanguard of the Christian presence in the world that is, both by right and by grace, their peculiar mission.

2. The problem of identity

The contemplation of God's design for our life must make us overcome the widespread ingenuousness that has distinguished so much of this postconciliar period. I refer more particularly to a far too "lightweight" persuasion that has inadvertently insinuated itself into many of us: namely, the persuasion that an "important" presence of Christians in the world is only pursuable at the price of an attenuation or watering down of their baptismal identity. How can we fail to grasp here a fatal convergence between the natural tendency to avoid the exertion of involvement and renewal and the influence of a certain worldly spirit? A perhaps undeclared but strenuously pursued hostility such as to cow the Christian conscience, to intimidate it, to weaken it, to subjugate it... Have we not all perhaps experienced that a distinct consciousness of identity is an unwelcome guest in our time? Have we not felt that secularization, in its thousand disguises, penetrates the life of persons especially to this end, in other words, to weaken the metaphysical link thanks to which each lay person feels himself in the world not a "monad" led by chance, but as an essential piece in the grand design that involves us all and transcends us all, not to leave us behind but to project us into a scenario for which it is worth giving our life?

It is at this point, in my view, that the key message of the Great Jubilee reached us in a providential way: the message that calls us to

“revive” our identity at its source, i.e. our baptismal identity, assumed not only in all its inalienable theological and spiritual depth, but also in its cultural consequences. The Jubilee was an occasion, in other words, for a “return” to that authentic profile that establishes us as witnesses of the resurrection of Christ in the world, and hence of the most overwhelming and innovative event that has been produced at the very heart of our history. What the Jubilee called for was a full recovery of our Christian identity for a looser witness, a witness less constrained by bandages, less inhibited, more creative and surprising. Perhaps we have let ourselves get involved in too many disquisitions on the inevitable dialectic between the ecclesial and secular dimension, between pastoral militancy and political militancy, to realize that meanwhile we were losing sight to the fundamental root of our unique Christian personality, the event that lies at its origin but that demands to be lived as if it were contemporary. For only by doing so can it guarantee fidelity and resistance, fruitfulness and the impetus to take us forward. It enables us, in a word, to “give ourselves” to Christ, our thoughts, the opportunities of our life, and to do what he would do were he in our place. That is the fascinating adventure of each Christian!

3. *“Uninhabited” presence*

There is an unavoidable experience of loneliness for anyone who decides to follow Christ; but there is also a self-inflicted loneliness that we procure for ourselves and that has nothing to do with God’s plan. I refer to the situation that is created due to the superimposition of at least two types of factors: first, a widespread sense of individualism typical of the postmodern climate in which we live; second, a thoughtless improvisation typical of the self-taught in the life of faith that makes the individual Christian lay person unconsciously frail, and immediately thrown into disarray by the first objection. There is in our midst an ignorance that recalls the rather naive confession of those neophytes whom Paul met in Ephesus: “No, we have

never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (*Acts* 19:2). Oh, let's be quite clear, the Holy Spirit is there alright: it's just that we aren't aware of him; we don't take him into account, and we end up feeling ourselves castaways in a desolate land. In fact, by Baptism we are incorporated in Christ, in such a way that we can never isolate ourselves from others again. Exactly like our being sons and daughters of the Father, we can go away from him, dissociate ourselves from him even polemically, and perhaps end up, like the prodigal son, eating the pods that the swine ate. We can attempt to remove God from our life, and simply to act as if he did not exist, but he does not remove himself from us. He does not ignore us for an instant. He is ready to throw his arms around our neck without letting us even speak, overwhelming us with the exuberance of his love (in short, what happens to every prodigal son [cf. *Lk* 15:11-32]).

The almost physical experience of the Trinity accompanies the believer, if he only looks around him and accepts the evidence. And what was initially a feeling of isolation becomes instead a living perception of inward company, even of inward crowding. God – one and triune – inhabits us; at the same time others inhabit us. Even those who preceded us. The whole world inhabits us. We bear the whole Church inside our heart. We who don't wear ecclesiastical insignia and don't carry the episcopal banner before us, feel the pegs of the tent that is the Church lodged in our soul. And we experience her, the Church, as our own, as our haven, our home, our sustenance, our mother.

This mystery of trinitarian and ecclesial communion in which we participate is mediated by the Eucharist. By placing in our hands the body given and the blood shed by Jesus, in other words his concreteness as man in whom the fullness of divinity dwells, the Eucharist enables us to share the vital energy of Christ. In the Eucharist we receive Him who surpasses all our possibilities of acting, without destroying any of them, but progressively modifying all of them. And he gives us the wherewithal to change the earth, simply by making us children who receive a kingdom.

4. The paradox of communion

The ecclesiology of communion may become for us a far too sophisticated doctrine if we don't have any actual experience of communion with real persons; and if we don't bear the seeds of this communion in all the dimensions of our life: social, civil, political, economic, cultural, in science, in art, in communication.... beginning from the poorest and most abandoned, the riskiest and most remote realities. There is a paradox of communion in our time: everything seems to be converging on a reinforcement of the links between persons; towards a reciprocal and immediate co-involvement. Globalization is, in some sense, no more than a drastic reduction of the distance that separates peoples and nations. So, does not physically closer automatically mean more friendly, more fraternal, more united? No. On the contrary, at times it may lead to the exact opposite. Closeness may generate mistrust, disaffection, opposition. The other person is an obstacle to me; he is not primarily a source of enrichment but a rival, a competitor. In such a context is played out the laity's vocation as men and women of communion, a communion that is not only mystical but historical. They have become so imbued with the concern to know each other, to include each other, welcome each other that this has become second nature to them, a cultural attitude, a political project aimed at building bridges, extending networks, enlarging scope for encounter and cooperation. And that's how they measure the eucharistic truth that lives in their heart. Wherever they are in the world, the Catholic laity have their characteristic trait in this. It coincides with their irreducible contribution to the construction of political life: local and national, continental and international.

5. From conscience to conscience

The interventions that follow will clearly complete this argument and develop it in the various aspects of the lay mission. There might be, however, a tension that covertly traverses these various fields of activity, indeed the whole fabric of the lay existence. As members of Christ, nourished by him and animated by his Spirit, we become capable in the first place of

keeping alive the “inner sentinel” that is the conscience of each one of us. According to Dorotheus of Gaza, “when God created man, he planted in him a divine seed, a kind of faculty more living and radiant than a spark, so that it should kindle his spirit.... Whether we bury it or or allow it to shine forth and illuminate us, by obeying it, depends on us creatures”. And John Paul II points out: “The conscience is ‘the voice of God’ even when man recognizes in it nothing more than the principle of the moral order [...] without any direct reference to the Creator”.² And elsewhere: “The importance of this interior dialogue of man with himself can never be adequately appreciated”.³ It seems to me that it ought to be the task of us Christian laity not only to keep our conscience alive, unimpaired, and evangelically illuminated, but also to help each man and woman we meet to keep his or her own conscience alive; to let themselves be interrogated by it, and if possible listen to it.

Today, a form of *diakonia* is taking shape that is in some sense prejudicial to, and in practice more immediate than, this task of keeping alive consciences through interpersonal contact, relationships of friendship, professional relationships, the debate of public opinion, democratic capacities. Not allowing consciences to be drugged seems strategically indispensable, even with a view to other objectives. Of course, we in turn will be roused, and our conscience pricked, by others, and by the seeds of truth they bear with them. But let us beware of allowing ourselves to be influenced and expelled – because we are believers – from the field of public debate which deposits not a little in individual consciences. Here is developed that *colloquium salutis* that is accessible to us and that we discover in our normal relationships. It may fill us with unease, in *an opportune and, if necessary, inopportune way*, thus ensuring that a kind of cultural anaesthesia does not drug our conscience but rather reawakens it, and puts us on our guard against the compromises, surrenders and conformism by which we are threatened. So that not only the fear but also the joy of existence may be restored to each of us. May God help us!

² JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et vivificantem*, no. 43.

³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor*, no. 58.

Called to Holiness in the World

ALEJANDRO LLANO

The mission of the laity in the Church and in the world is imbued with historical significance: so a continuous reflection on their peculiar vocation is needed, to attune it to the “signs of the time” with which the Christian lay existence is indissolubly linked. All this should be interpreted in a radical, i.e. ontological way: the very being of the Christian layperson – like that of all the other members of the earthly city – is interwoven with the circumstances of the world in which he/she lives and works. That means that the layperson’s ecclesial vocation cannot dispense with its historical dimension, since it is the environment and object of his/her sanctifying role.

On the other hand, an historicizing, opportunistic or pragmatic interpretation of the essentially historical condition of the Catholic laity would be gravely reductive. In recent decades, interpretations of this kind have of course not been lacking – now in large part superseded; they suggested that Christians should camouflage themselves to merge into the dominant culture of the age, and conceal the fundamental attitude that the children of God should adopt in the laborious task of manifesting themselves in the world. The inferiority complex that such attitudes imply derived from an inadequate theology of the laity, conceived as a kind of *longa manus* of the clerical world: the result of a confusion between the ministerial priesthood and the common or kingly priesthood of the faithful. The distinction between them must overcome mere graduality but at the same time avoid a separation that would imply a split of ecclesial unity.

Having said that, it should be borne in mind that, at the present time, the dimension within which the free and responsible evangelizing action of the Catholic laity ought preferably to take place is no longer – as it was until a short time ago – of eminently political or exclusively

socio-economic, but of essentially cultural character. It should also be pointed out that the unilateral significance acquired by the politico-economic dimension in the laity's mission in the Church and in civil society had contributed not a little to obfuscating the true nature of the lay person's vocation to holiness within the world. The presence of Catholics in social life was frequently urged by the need to respond to a political situation considered hostile or to a clearly unjust economic structure, with the result of generating a certain tendency to encourage Catholics to form a single party or, at least, regroup themselves around confessional organizations called to give an appropriate response to such adverse situations. This position, apart from frequently involving the Church hierarchy itself in perhaps questionable temporal questions, has tended to obscure the radically theological and clearly spiritual character that alone may make the action of Catholics effective and original in public life.

Fortunately, the primacy of the politico-economic approach has long been overcome, thanks to the rapid evolution of a society in which postmodern culture and the new information technologies have produced a change so profound that we are still incapable of measuring its scale. As Pierpaolo Donati has remarked, the antitheses between *individual and state*, *public and private*, *state and market*, decisive factors of industrial society, are no longer so in the information society, distinguished by growing complexity and by the emergence of a new form of citizenship.¹ The decisive factor today is none of the three above-mentioned antitheses, if only because politics and the economy have ceased to be at the centre of an intrinsically decentralized society. If it is doubtful that politics have ever constituted the main impetus of social life, it is clear in any case that this is simply not so today. And in spite of appearances to the contrary, as sensational as they are superficial, the globalized economy does not represent the main driving force of international relations at the present time. Rather, it represents a precipitate of signs, clearly conservative and notoriously unsatisfactory for the

¹ Cf. P. DONATI, *La cittadinanza societaria*, Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2000.

majority of peoples, including the largest social classes of the developed countries.

The decisive factor today is that expressed by the antithesis between *human* and *non human*, with the proviso that this is not the simplistic antithesis between the ethically positive and the morally negative seen from the viewpoint of human rights and natural law, however much this aspect continues to be of capital importance. To understand the nature of this new parameter, attention needs to be paid to what is descriptively lucid in systematic sociology, represented especially by the work of Niklas Lubmann. According to this view, man is no longer part of the "system", but is situated in the "environment". He is no longer placed in the hard core of technological society, but seems to be relegated to the margins of the technological structure, having accepted the secondary role of consumer or passive recipient of the services of the welfare State. That gives rise to the paradox that "humanization" is no longer a unilaterally positive term, but may denote the introduction of factors of risk and of distortion that render problematic the efficient functioning of the system itself. The free human action is intrinsically contingent, so that the implacable advance of the systems must try to curb its impact, given that the main failures and dysfunctions would derive precisely from the "human factor". The traditional attitudes thus end up being reversed, with the result that what is *good* is currently what does not present ethical connotations, whereas what is potentially *bad* is what wants to break with the presumed systemic neutrality by introducing moral judgements which are situated outside and beyond the technical evaluations.

It might be thought that this clearly anti-humanistic panorama is a one-sided and forced description. However, many experts have demonstrated its significance in aspects such as the configuration of the so-called "procedural republic". Visible to everyone, moreover, are the enormous strides made by biotechnology at the price of the retreat of bioethics, both in the legislation of some States and in the attitude of public and private healthcare in many countries. And in these symptoms, as in many others, is registered the primacy of the *non human*

over the *human*, to the point that the defenders of humanistic positions are often maltreated by the mass media, which make them appear like retrograde defenders of positions that threaten the autonomy, the capacity for planning and even the health of individuals.

If this fundamental debate were to be restored to the exclusively politico-economic level, the error would be committed of taking part for the whole, and repeating the devaluation of the cultural that already Newman had identified in the Catholic world over a century ago and that, in my judgement, has not found sufficient rectification in spite of the repeated appeals of the Roman Pontiffs and especially of Vatican Council II.

Restoring the question to the cultural level also presents the decisive advantage of helping us to understand the most fundamental aspect of the mission of the laity at the present time. In a world in which the *non human* is forcing the *human* into a corner, we lay people must bear witness to a new *civic humanism* that makes appeal to the responsibility and initiative of primary and secondary forms of solidarity, and to the active presence of the rightful civic conscience of persons and basic groups in the public sphere, as the social doctrine of the Church has taught since the end of the nineteenth century, though without much effect. If, paraphrasing Marx, we may say that to be revolutionaries means being radicals, and radical for man is man himself, it is clear that the real revolution taking place is that of the manifestation of the children of God in the fields of information and culture, according to the tireless exhortations of John Paul II, especially in his addresses to the academic world. On 9 November 2000, speaking in the Faculty of Medicine of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome, the Holy Father proposed as the objective of a Catholic university the formation of professionals and scientists capable of “implementing a synthesis between Gospel and culture by striving to turn cultural commitment into a path of holiness [...] in intimate harmony between faith and reason”.²

² JOHN PAUL II, “Address on the Inauguration of the Academic year of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 November 2000, 6.

It's not a question, therefore, of limiting ourselves to opposing a bucolic humanism to the fearful evolution of science and technology, because the separation itself between the *human* and the *non human* may turn out to be extremely negative in the current sociological context. Using a terminology of Kantian inspiration, we might say that technology without ethics is blind, whereas ethics without technology is vain, and in the last analysis socially irrelevant. The key for the reconversion of a state of things that is producing a kind of "corrosion of character" in citizens, consists in establishing effective relations between the living world and the technological system.

The task assigned to the laity consists in their active presence in the most advanced scientific research and professional practice, so that the light of Christ may shine forth even there, as in all the circumstances and events of society. This is the message – ever actual – that the Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer transmitted through the spirit of Opus Dei since 1928: sanctifying oneself in work, sanctifying work itself, and sanctifying the world through work. Not living a kind of double life: religious and spiritual on the one hand, secular and technological on the other. Both terms of the equation need to be synthesized according to the logic of a unity of life in which the ascetic and apostolic aspects are harmoniously combined with the professional atmosphere in which, in one way or another, all of us Christians live today.

The key of this synthesis of the Christian lay existence consists in not understanding personal holiness as a kind of decorative adjunct to the implacable needs involved today by the practice of a profession in the information society. The identification with Christ, as the way towards the Father, by work of the Holy Spirit, constitutes the primordial energy that moves the Christian to devote himself to the construction of the earthly city with a sense that, if it is to be radically human, can only depend on the deepest needs of the Christian life. We are not once again on the sterile and much trodden pathways of Catholic confessionalism, but in the dynamism of the trinitarian life, which the Christian enters to transform the world from within, because this world itself is the original creation that proceeds from the Father; that regis-

tered the footsteps of Christ on earth; and that was transfigured by the action of the Holy Spirit through the fulfilment of the paschal mystery in the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The renewal and elevation that the life of grace operates on nature is a newness not derivable from nature itself, which does not destroy it, but respects its essential autonomy. And this *novum* is full of humanizing energies, in the integral sense of a “humanism” that far transcends the aesthetic or merely rhetorical aspects. The Christian who is radically what he claims to be is not only called to bring understanding and compassion to social relationships, but bears in himself, in his own life, a capacity for imbuing the human person with dignity, and for transforming social realities in an original and unpredictable way. The presence of Christians in society is the most decisive factor of innovation that can be imagined, so long as they are faithful to their vocation of holiness, and shun every attitude of conformism and subordination. As the Pope said, “the Holy Spirit today urges the Church to promote the vocation and the mission of the lay faithful. Their participation and coresponsibility in the life of the Christian community and their many-sided presence of apostolate and service in society lead us to await with hope, at the dawn of the third millennium, a mature and fruitful epiphany of the laity. A similar expectation concerns the role that women are called to assume. As in civil society, so in the Church too the ‘feminine genius’ is being ever more effectively revealed, and needs to be increasingly recognized in the forms appropriate to the vocation of women in conformity with God’s plan”.³

The universal call to holiness that involves the Catholic laity – men and women – together with the other members of the Church of Jesus Christ, is indissolubly linked to the mission of transforming the world of technology and culture, to offer it to the Father as sacrifice of reconciliation, thanks to the continuous action of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the faithful. This reconciliation not only has its dimension

³ JOHN PAUL II, “General Audience”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 26 November 1998, 6.

immanent to the Blessed Trinity, but also its essential repercussion on the salvific economy of this world of ours and contributes to fostering the dignity and justice of social structures. If our analysis is correct, the truly peculiar aspect of the mission of the laity in the present period will be that of combining technological and scientific mediation with the immediacy of the living world of persons and basic social groups, so that the system be progressively humanized and daily life absorb without conflict the undoubted advantages – also for the transmission of the Christian message itself – offered by the new information and telematic technologies.

Perhaps rarely in the history of the Church has the responsibility of the laity been so exciting and ineluctable. As rarely before, too, the need for a sincere personal conversion to achieve intimacy with Christ through regular participation in the sacraments, penance and personal and community prayer, has overcome the merely devotional sphere and been transformed into an imperative of vocational authenticity. In the last analysis, this radical authenticity comes from the participation of the Christian laity in the Eucharist, centre and source of the interior life and synthesis of all the mysteries of Christianity.

Where Christ is, there is permanent authenticity. For, as proclaims the Pauline definition that figures in the logos of the Jubilee: *Christus heri, hodie, semper*. For us lay Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century, ridding ourselves of every anthropological alienation means identifying with Christ through the secular tasks in which we naturally move. For Christ is the perennial fullness of the human, wisdom itself become flesh, in whom we recognize the best of ourselves.

The capacity of genuine Christianity to produce intellectual and social transformation is astounding, because it is “real”, in the sense used by Newman when he opposed the *real* to the *unreal*, the simply genuine to the sophisticatedly illusory. The humanism of Christian authenticity is a realism of liberty: it alone can provide the force of renewal in an information society that claims to unify knowledge but does not know what to do with solidarity, i.e. the love of Christ poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The key for actualizing the image of Christ in man today implies that the laity rediscover the trinitarian dimension that gives fullness to the whole of their life. A single monolithic God, as would seem to be proposed by some radical forms of “monotheism”, may end up by being considered a human invention, a transcendental projection of self, in which the dictum of Feuerbach is fulfilled: “Man is God for man”. By contrast, the Holy Trinity, as consummation of the love of the Father in the birth of the Son, and the personalization of the love of both in the Holy Spirit, cannot be a human invention, nor the product of any kind of psychological compensation. There is no culture, however spiritualized it has succeeded in becoming, from which may spring a conception in which the love of the Father for humanity is taken to the extreme of his only begotten Son abasing and humiliating himself to become one of us and die for us on the Cross.

The contemporary layperson’s understanding of communion with Christ implies the consciousness of *being loved* to the extreme point of a donation that is inconceivable for human reason alone. But it is not simply a question of converting our understanding and our heart to God from whom every fatherhood proceeds, but the fact that we are sons of the Father, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit. What happens in the work of salvation is an ontological *deification* of a being that is infinitely distinguished by God, created by God in his image and likeness, and adopted by God as his son. Such a deification is a work *ad extra* and hence common to the three persons of the Trinity. Nonetheless, the effect of this action consists in the incorporation of the human being in the flow of the intra-trinitarian life, so that the possibility of treating each of the three divine persons in a differentiated way is opened up to him. We are called by the love of the Father to participate in the procreation of the Son and the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. The presence of God in man and of man in God is more intimate and closer – more real – than the presence of each man in himself. Here we are confronted by the crux of the Christian paradox, that surpasses every merely human comprehension: our true authenticity is found in our transformation in Christ, who sends the Holy Spirit to us;

the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us from the depths of our being and cries to the Father “with sighs too deep for words” (*Rom* 8:26).

The profound sense of disorientation and alienation that accompanies the life of man in contemporary society – split between the threatening exteriority of the *non human* and the stifling narcissism of the presumably *human* – is a sign of the void left inside us by the generalized oblivion of the universal vocation to participate in fullness in divine intimacy, in other words, the search for holiness. The desire for authenticity and reconciliation – the desire to rediscover ourselves – may only be satisfied in the meeting with Christ, primordial gift that deifies us and confers on us the freedom to forget ourselves and immerse ourselves in the life of God One and Triune. So Christ lives in me and, through the circumstances of my ordinary life, makes everything new.

Sent to Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to All

BRIAN SMITH

God's righteousness has been made known through the life, death and resurrection of his son Jesus, the anointed one. It is by faith in him that we as humanity have been set free from sin, darkness and despair. By faith in God's providence in his Son we have been made acceptable, justified, cleansed of guilt and have become temples of his indwelling Spirit. This is pure gift, the grace of God freely given. All have sinned, all have fallen short of the glory of God, but by God's own righteousness and mercy all have been offered the saving grace of God who makes us one in communion with him (*Rm* 3:21-26).

Jesus Christ is the one and only Saviour of mankind. He alone is able to redeem and bring about our holiness in God. This is one of the foundational truths of Scripture quoted by John Paul II in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*: "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you. [...] And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4:10).¹

From the beginning of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, there has been a continual stream of encyclical letters, apostolic exhortations and weekly proclamations on the unique and salvific role of Jesus Christ in salvation. His work abounds in insight and wisdom as to the nature of Christ, the Church, his Kingdom and the mission to which we are called. The recent Declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, boldly proclaiming the universal role of Jesus Christ in the salvation of mankind, delighted me immensely, as in these past years there has been much confusion among the laity because

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 5.

many teachers have gone out among the laity confusing them in regard to the unique identity and role of Jesus Christ.

In 1978 I was one of the speakers attending a charismatic conference in Dublin when I was approached by a religious sister who had returned from Africa with a group of her sisters to attend a retreat given by a priest to their Order. What was presented to her at the retreat greatly disturbed her. She said to me that they were told that they need not worry any longer about the salvation of people in the mission field as God was going to save them all anyway. The sister indignantly said to me: "What does that mean about my life? Have I given forty years in the mission field for nothing? If God is going to save everybody, then why didn't I stay home here in Ireland and get married and have a family? Why was I out there in the mission field with great hardship these many years of my life in the hope and anticipation that we would bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world?"

Knowing the type of confusion about the role of Christ in salvation that was spreading throughout the Church, Pope Paul VI issued an Apostolic Exhortation in 1975 entitled *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and dealt with this very question. In this document he addressed the Church in this manner: "The respectful presentation of Christ and his Kingdom is more than the evangelizer's right; it is his duty. It is likewise the right of his fellowmen to receive from him the proclamation of the Good News of salvation. God can accomplish this salvation in whomsoever he wishes by ways which he himself knows. And yet, if his Son came, it was precisely in order to reveal to us, by his word and by his life, the ordinary paths of salvation. And he has commanded us to transmit this revelation to others with his whole authority. It would be useful if every Christian and every evangelizer were to pray about the following thought: men can gain salvation also in other ways, by God's mercy, even though we do not preach the Gospel to them; but, as for us, can we gain salvation if through negligence or fear or shame – what Saint Paul called 'blushing for the Gospel' (*Rm* 1:16) – or as a result of false ideas we fail to preach it? For that would be to betray the call of God, who wishes the seed to bear fruit through the voice of the ministers of the Gospel; and it will depend on

us whether this grows into trees and produces its full fruit”.² So the real question is not how God’s salvation may be realized for all mankind in Christ, but will we be saved if we fail to proclaim it.

In John’s Gospel we read: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:12-14). To become “children of God”, what does that mean? It means to carry on the work of the Father, through our re-birth in Jesus Christ. In Baptism we are born again, not of human will but of the Father, immersed in Christ, sharing Jesus’ call, his life and his mission.

Our baptismal identity and call incorporates us into Christ and his body, the Church. When Christians enter into the fullness of their Baptism, they are intrinsically carried along in his purpose and plan for our world. “Go make disciples” is his command. Baptism makes us the ones that are “sent” – sent into the world to make a difference. If we are the bearers of Christ and his message to those around us, then our very presence in our world, in whatever sphere we operate, must make a difference. To fail to proclaim in the world who we are as ambassadors of Christ and to announce the Good News of salvation would be to seriously fall short of God’s command to us to go and make disciples. Again John Paul, writing in *Redemptoris Missio*, quotes the documents of the Second Vatican Council in regard to our privilege of the grace we have received in our Baptism: “Those who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of *bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life* as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God. They should be ever mindful that ‘they owe their distinguished status not to their own merits but to Christ’s special grace; and if they fail to respond to this grace in thought, word and deed, not only will they not be saved, but they will be judged more severely’”.³

² PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 80.

³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 5, quoting Vatican Council II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 14.

To make “disciples”: what does that mean? It means to form others in the life and teachings of Christ, but more than that, it is more than the knowledge and admiration of this Jewish rabbi. It is to assist others to know and love him. It means the ongoing shaping of our minds, the challenge of our wills and most of all the loving with all our hearts. To be a disciple is to be one with Jesus in everything we do: in living his teaching, celebrating his sacraments, settings hearts free and on fire for him in our world. To be bearers of God’s righteousness in his Son is to partake of our daily world and where there is injury, injustice, poverty, despair, to bring hope and life where our world around us sees only its material world, or worse still, experiences its brokenness that can only lead to despair.

It is the spirit of Christ in us, in whatever vocation the Lord has called us, that makes all the difference in the Church and to the world in which we live.

We are called especially as lay disciples of Christ to make that difference to the world in which we live – look around you, the world cries out for release from its modern bondage. Be as Christ was to the blind, the deaf, the dumb of his time on earth, so we too are called to proclaim to the spiritually blind and dead of our day the Good News of Salvation; let the world know that our God is present, is loving us and inviting us into the more of his love. This is why he has come, that we might have life and have it more abundantly. It is said that the real poor of our day are not those impoverished in third world countries, or the homeless children on our streets, but equally are to be found among the top well-paid executives of our companies whose lives are so stuffed full of every material good, that they have little opportunity to receive anything else of lasting value. Circumstances abound in our daily life for the Word of God to be spoken and lived. Look around you for the many moments of grace to be the instruments to bring life to such realities.

It is this consciousness of being ambassadors of Christ that we become, in every situation of our modern world, the disciples that can facilitate change for the benefit of mankind. As we live by the values of

the Gospel, others will see in us the message that it is meant to boldly proclaim. Your life may be the only Gospel that some people will ever read. So the mission that Christ has given us is all powerful because we carry within ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit the power of God that is meant to touch, make whole and sanctify all those that we meet.

We have marvellous examples in our time of both priestly, religious and lay involvement in our world. We can recall Edel Quinn of the Legion of Mary and the great missionary work she did; we can think of Archbishop Oscar Romero, of Edith Stein, of Mother Teresa and Brother Andrew of Calcutta. Consider Pope John Paul II's influence on the young people of our world for their commitment to Christ and the spreading of the Gospel (and his powerful influence in support of the Polish workers movement whose encouragement and support eventually brought down the Communist regime), and many other great men and women of our time who have even paid the price of witnessing in their own blood. Their witnessing has been made in the circumstances of their daily life. Some of them did not have to travel far, but to stand their ground in their parishes and their hometowns.

Today in the life of the Church we see the action of the Holy Spirit in the way that many laity and even whole families are responding to God's call on their lives to enter into full time the apostolate for the spreading of the Gospel. Consider the many movements of the Church which clearly demonstrate this reality. It must be acknowledged, however, that this apostolate must arise from genuine faith communities which give daily encouragement and life to those involved in the apostolate, otherwise their efforts unsustained will lead to discouragement and a loss of vitality in this work of the Spirit.

With such major efforts being carried out in the work of evangelization we must be aware of the importance of faith communities as a base to which we bring those seeking the Lord that they may find the vitality of faith and a means of growing in their relationship with the Lord. It is a challenge that the faith communities, the movements and the parishes to which they belong provide them with such ongoing faith commitment. Otherwise we may see what some countries experience

in the 'Right of Christian Initiation for Adults' (RCIA) programme. Their loss of one third of the new converts to the faith happened because we have not yet found a more adequate way to support them in their continued growth in Christ. Because of this lack of support many new converts to the faith found themselves seeking such growth in the various pentecostal church streams.

This is a time of action, it is the beginning of the new millennium when the Church is called once again to be bold proclaimers of the Good News of God – not to hold back, not to be fearful – for God is with us.

As the Holy Father has said, we face a time in which we will bring about a new civilization of love or face a barbarism that the world has never seen before. The choice is ours. We either remain proclaimers of the Gospel in love and in deed, or we may face the dire consequences of our failed witness. At every level of the Church, priestly, religious or lay, we are called as witnesses, ambassadors, disciples in our particular vocation to engage in our world so that the message of Christ will bring about the new civilization of love.

Ready to Give our Life for Love to the Point of Martyrdom

ALEXEY YODINE

“One day, which may never come, but which could also be very close, the question will arise: is there at least one Christian left in the civilized world? Perhaps we will have to seek in the blind alleys or in the impenetrable undergrowth for the seeds of an heroic Christianity, expressed in the deeds of a courageous life, from which a new vision of the immortal tradition may begin to be forged. Will our dis-carnate Christianity collapse all of a sudden, without resisting the struggle, or will it slacken gradually, finally sinking into its own complacency? In one way or the other it cannot escape the judgement of history”. These anguished and enlightening words were penned by Emmanuel Mounier in the years 1943-1944.¹ Their pathos was generated especially by the humiliating condemnation inflicted by Friedrich Nietzsche on a “non-heroic” Christianity, which he saw as “in a state of disintegration”. Mounier’s injured Christian conscience was prompted in the first place by the situation of Christianity in Western Europe, which seemed in decline, in a condition of spiritual, moral and social paralysis. But it seems paradoxical that Mounier, so alert to the Christian’s existential reality, should not have seen at the same time another reality, the historical reality which already presented in those years the tragic and convincing testimony of Christian heroism: or rather of the heroic stature of the paschal mystery, in which “death and life were locked in a prodigious duel”. I refer to the witness of the new martyrs of Christianity, whose blood had irrigated the land of Mexico, Russia, Spain, Poland, Germany and other countries in the course of the twen-

¹ E. MOUNIER, *L'avventura cristiana*, Firenze: LEF, 1951.

tieth century. The paschal victory in the battle between life and death was made manifest by the tragic history of that century, through millions of Christian martyrs who bore witness to their faith. "In our own century the martyrs have returned, many of them nameless, 'unknown soldiers' as it were of God's great cause", writes the Pope in *Tertio millennio adveniente*.² The judgement of history has been fulfilled. The *sanguis martyrurum* has once again been proclaimed *semen christianorum*. Yet Mounier's words still appeal to our conscience, because they echo the far stronger and more admonitory words of Christ himself: "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (*Lk* 18:8).

The Christian relates to reality in an eschatological perspective. This dimension enables him to distinguish the action of God's judgement in human history. By grace of the Holy Spirit, the Christian is imbued with the courage and spiritual sharp-sightedness to discover in the bloody chaos of the history of the recent past the signs of this judgement, the witness given by the new martyrs to the triumph of Christ's resurrection from abandonment and death, and the witness to the true nature and destiny of man, restored and manifested in fullness by Christ and in Christ. The mystery of the new martyrs leads us to an understanding of the authentic significance of love; of the love of Christ, of the love of the whole of creation; of the love that re-establishes the real order of things and that opposes the deceitful "humanistic" significance of a love that is a kind of erosion of the conscience of contemporary man.

My reflections, without any claim to completeness or exhaustiveness, will be no more than *prolegomena* to the treatment of this inexhaustible theme.

First, some words should be devoted to the reality that presents itself to us in considering the documentation relating to the preliminary investigation of Christians persecuted in the twentieth century. This documentation is an invaluable source for the study of the history of the Church, for example, in Russia in the time of Communism, and

² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 37.

provides the basis for reconstructing the circumstances of the martyrdom and confession of faith of so many Christians. That is just what happened in the period of the early Church: many martyrologies were written on the basis of the “preliminary documentation” in Rome. But the documentation relating to the Christian martyrs in the twentieth century, as least as far as Russia is concerned, has a somewhat different tone and treats of different things: the image of the false gods has changed, and even the presence of the divine reality has become something remote and superfluous for the world. It is just this that the Holy Father spoke about on the occasion of the ecumenical commemoration of the witnesses of faith in the twentieth century: “So many refused to bow down to the cult of the idols of the twentieth century, and were sacrificed by Communism, Nazism, the idolatry of State or race”.³ These new idols claimed bloody sacrifices, even if more often than not the demand of denying the Christian God was not directly made. The new ideology has in some sense “deprived” God of the right to exist, and the coadjutor of this ideology – the “father of lies” – skilfully confused concepts that had been consolidated over the centuries. A fantastic machine of falsehood was thus constructed. And everyone, and especially Christians, who came across it found themselves in a “hall of mirrors” in which everything was reversed. So, in a still recent past, the innocent and honest testimonies of our own faith and of the faith of our own fellowmen, were distorted through the prism of the “conscience of class and of race” until they became unrecognizable and were transmuted into a terrible accusation. Falsehood, reciprocal suspicion and betrayal determined the judgement everywhere. And in this situation Christians, lumped together with millions of others in the one spate of victims of the new State and its ideology, became the sole testimonies of the only existential significance, of the meaning and value of suffering in a world that was a prey to the absurd. They were the bearers of the meaning of life that can only be revealed to the man of faith by the Lord, delivered up, humiliated and abandoned on the Cross; and that,

³ JOHN PAUL II, “Homily”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8-9 May 2000, 9.

in contrast to the reigning falsehood of the world, may restore the truth of God's love and reconstruct man himself in his most authentic dignity. "Where hatred seemed to have polluted the whole of life without any possibility of escaping its logic, they manifested that 'love is stronger than death'", said John Paul II.⁴

Returning to the starting point of our reflections, it is important to define the concept itself of "heroism". Can one call "heroic" the opposition of the Christian spirit to the new ideals of the twentieth century? In the "humanistic" sense of the term we need to reply simultaneously both yes and no. Christian heroism has its own dimension. Of course history has bequeathed to us numerous examples of wonderful steadfastness and courage in the martyrs and confessors of the faith, who pronounced words of love and forgiveness in the face of death and blessed their own executioners. They spoke with the language of the Cross, because they knew the genuine significance of what was being fulfilled, as also what would follow the visible end of their earthly existence. So, following the example of Christ, they invoked the mercy of God for the souls of their own murderers, for whose salvation they felt themselves responsible. There were also other examples, those of men dishonoured and morally prostrate, who experienced painful crises; who repudiated their own convictions and denied their own affections; who fell and tried with great suffering to rise again. They were not heroes, they were simply men, those for whom Christ himself came. We may recall the consternation and dread felt by the apostles after the arrest of Jesus. We may recall the conduct of Peter, thrice denying the Lord, in the courtyard of the high priest. We may recall all those cases in which God's mercy was opposed and is opposed to the judgement of men, to the judgement of history. Through these men too, as through the undeniable confessors, the judgement of God's mercy was fulfilled. The Pope, direct witness of that time of the new martyrs and confessors of the faith, reveals to us the profound significance, the spiritual fruit of these events: "But the witnesses of the faith [...] did not consider their

⁴ *Ibid.*

own convenience, their own well-being, their own survival as values greater than fidelity to the Gospel. Albeit in their weakness, they strenuously resisted evil. In their fragility shone forth the strength of faith and the grace of the Lord”.⁵

There’s another aspect that I cannot ignore as representative of the Church in Russia. In *Tertio millennio adveniente* the Holy Father writes: “Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is *the ecumenism of the saints* and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us”.⁶ The authentic sense of these words is incontestable; it is confirmed by the direct spiritual experience of many Christians – even of my generation alone –, who grew up in Russia within the single inheritance of the martyrs and confessors of the faith. The current religious situation in Russia, unfortunately, demonstrates that the criterion of “confessionalism”, the prejudicial segregation between one’s “own” martyrs and those of “others”, is beginning once again to predominate in that single inheritance. At times this is even taken to the point of denying the fact that another Christian confession offered victims for Christ in the years of persecution. This recrudescence of blind confessionalism reveals the shortcomings of the Christian world, the worst of which is the inability to love. A look at the history of those tragic decades shows that, in response to the common danger, Catholics and Orthodox in Russia once again understood the significance of Christian unity and felt the real need to unite their forces. The Russian Catholic priest Leonid Fedorov, direct protagonist of the growing fraternity between Catholics and Orthodox in the years immediately following the Revolution in 1917, wrote: “On the terrain of a common Christian stance against the growing atheism and militant Communism in 1918-1919 I succeeded in ensuring that Catholic and Orthodox priests united to combat the Bolsheviks, when these latter surpassed every limit in their persecution against priests and the Church. We signed protests together. The

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 37.

Orthodox, without the protection of the Tsar, felt themselves like children thrown onto the street, orphans deprived of their parents; and in the absence of the police, they didn't know what to do to defend themselves against the proliferation of the sects. That's why they were so strongly struck by the fact that, just in the worst moment, those same *Catholics*, whom they had been used to consider their worst enemies, strove to help them and to combat at their side". In unison with these sentiments of Father Fedorov, an appeal to put an end to the disputations among Christians had been made yet earlier at the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. On 20 January 1918, during a session of the Council, Count D.A. Olsuf'ev had prophetically exclaimed: "All Christians, Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox, must be united and not launch reciprocal anathemas against each other!"

In those years an emerging sentiment of unity opposed in a particularly strenuous way not only the brutal pressure of the atheist forces, but also the age-old prejudices of hostility among Christians themselves. It proved impossible, however, to re-establish this unity in a permanent way, and too often the Christian inmates in the prisons and gulags, divided by confession and jurisdiction, continued to regard each other with hostility. Yet, just in those years of persecution, something greater was born among them, something which they themselves, due to their customary "confessional shortsightedness", could also have failed to notice. This greater, or if you will more sublime, reality is revealed to us in an episode in the notorious concentration camp of Solovki. This scene was indelibly fixed in the memory of one of the women prisoners, Olga Jafa. I quote: "As the First of May approached, the preparations had begun to celebrate in a suitable manner the great proletarian festivity [...] And it was just on Holy Thursday (a day evidently not chosen by accident) that all the Catholic and Orthodox bishops who happened to be there at that moment were invited [to participate in the forced labour]. [...] From all the windows people were watching fourteen emaciated men in cassocks who, prostrated by fatigue, were struggling to drag up the slope an enormous sled laden with sand; some were dragging it forward by poles, others were push-

ing it from behind, others supporting it from the sides. Joined together in a single enterprise, a Catholic bishop, still young, evidently very short-sighted, shaven-headed, with round horn-rimmed glasses, and an Orthodox bishop, an emaciated old man with a white beard, ancient in years but strong in spirit, who was pushing the sled with indefatigable effort, were going forward shoulder to shoulder [...]. It will be up to those of us who sooner or later are able to return from hence to the world to bear witness to people of what we see here with our own eyes. And what we see is the rebirth of the pure and strong faith of the first Christians; we see the union of the Churches in the person of the Catholic and Orthodox bishops united in their heroic effort, the union in love and in humility, beyond all the Councils and discussions about dogma”.

Witnesses of Unity: “ut unum sint”

CHIARA LUBICH

Speaking about unity on the basis of my experience obliges me to speak about how the Movement of the Focolari has given and may continue to bear witness to it.

Unity for us Christians denotes the reality Jesus spoke of before dying, when he prayed: “[...] that they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us” (Jn 17:20-21).

Christ’s invocation implored the participation of all people in the life of the Holy Trinity by the grace that he was bestowing on them with his passion and death. He also asked that everyone who becomes a Christian, being one with Christ who is, in turn, one with the Father, may be one thing only with all other Christians, just as the Father is one thing only with his Son and with the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 17:21).

Unity is therefore for Jesus a supernatural and divine reality. By unity all of us compose the mystic Body of Christ, which is the Church, of which Christ is the head and we are the members.

In the times in which we live, however, unity is also a human aspiration. It is spoken of with ever greater insistence. It is a theme of great actuality; indeed it constitutes a “sign of the times”. For, despite the fact that the world today is marked by innumerable tensions (e.g. those between North and South, those in the Middle East, in South-East Asia and in Central America), and riven by the emergence of new conflicts, all of us can observe that humanity is tending towards unity.

In the Christian world, the Holy Spirit says so by urging the various Churches and ecclesial communities to unification, after centuries of indifference and conflict. The World Council of Churches and the increasingly close-knit network of ecumenical activities are a demonstration of this, admittedly amid many difficulties, even recent ones, but also with important results.

The Second Vatican Council said so. The Popes say so, as did Paul VI, whose doctrine is permeated with the idea of unity; and John Paul II often continues to say so today.

A sign of this unity is also the European Union, and international organizations and institutions such as the UNO.

The means of communication are also a sign of it; they are at once providential and challenges for the journey towards unity.

Yes, there is this striving towards unity in the world. And it is just in this context, it seems to us, that the Movement of the Focolari, with its charism of unity, should be conceived and seen.

The charism of unity, the remedy – as may be easily understood – to divisions, separations, traumas, began to manifest itself during that result of enmity and hatred, the Second World War.

We immediately perceived this charism as a new light in the intellect and a new force in the will: light to understand the Gospel better, source of love and unity, and the strength to live it with determination.

In the shelters in which we, the first Focolarini, sought refuge from the bombs, we read the words of God to each other, in the way that the Church interprets them; we were able to understand them in an utterly new way and immediately tried to put them into practice.

The effect was twofold.

If previously our way of living Christianity, albeit with conviction at times, had not made much impact on us, still less on the society in which we were living, we now realized what the Word of God was capable of doing, once better understood and better put into practice. It could trigger off not only in us, but in the world around us, the Christian revolution with all its beneficent consequences: the re-animation of interior life, conversions, return to the sacraments, new vocations, recomposition of families, the restoration of peace, etc. And we witnessed the formation of a community following the example of that of the first Christians, in which they were one heart only and one spirit only and in which everything they had was owned in common.

Moreover, by assimilating the Gospel and seeing its effects, it became ever clearer to us that, precisely because God is love, the whole

doctrine of Jesus could be summed up in a single word: love – love for God and love for our neighbour, as expressed by the words of the evangelist Matthew: "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (*Mt* 22:40).

At first we tried to love in particular the victims of war, the mutilated, the orphans, the abandoned, the hungry, the homeless, the needy.

Later, inspired as ever by the charism of unity, we understood that love must be lavished on all men and women on earth, no matter whom, just as the Father does who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (*Mt* 5:45).

One day, since war had become more dangerous than ever, desiring to put into practice that word which – as we thought – Jesus himself might have privileged, we came across the new commandment: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (*Jn* 13:34). "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*Jn* 15:13). And we began to practice reciprocal love among each other.

Indeed, we were so convinced of the importance of the new commandment as to seal it with a pact by which we each declared ourselves ready to love the other to the point of dying for him/her.

We consider this pact the foundation stone of our Movement. It determined the particular lifestyle that the Spirit proposed to us, a community-based, collective style, a road to be travelled together, and with our fellowmen. A spiritual journey similar to others that exist in the Church, but that are in general more individual.

By putting reciprocal love into practice, we made a singular experience: we felt in our soul a qualitative leap: a new peace, a new joy, never experienced before: a new light penetrated us.

We realized what was happening when we read the words in the Gospel: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (*Mt* 18:20).

Mutual charity had united us, we were united in its love: and the result of this was that Jesus was spiritually present among us. Everything we felt that was new in our life was the effect of his presence.

And, present in our midst, Jesus, in turn, set the seal on our unity. Unity!

To this sublime and supernatural vocation we felt ourselves called when, gathered in one bomb-shelter, we read together the testament of Jesus and had the certainty: that page was the *magna charta* of everything that was about to be born in us and around us.

And unity became our strongest pledge.

That does not mean that it was always easy to maintain it. At times, due to the failings, however petty, of the one or the other, we experienced the distress, the anguish of disunity.

But God's help intervened also to alleviate this difficulty.

One day, having learned that Jesus had suffered the greatest suffering of all when he cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46), we felt the call to follow him even in this in our life. And from that moment, it seemed to us that his presence could be felt, his face loved, in everything that expressed grief: in our personal, spiritual and physical trials and tribulations; in the sufferings of our fellowmen, which recalled that grief; and especially in every circumstance or situation that spoke of disunity, segregation, trauma, separation.

Such situations of disharmony that were not lacking even in our own Church, among the associations, for example, the movements, the groups, etc.

Later, love for the forsaken Christ led us to see him in a Christianity lacerated by the presence of so many separated Churches. And still later still, we saw him in a humanity with so many different religions, with so many peoples in conflict. As also in the world of nonbelievers.

But, following the example of Christ on the Cross, when he was released from the abyss of that immeasurable grief and abandoned himself to the Father, crying: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46), we too, with all those who had followed him in this Movement, were encouraged to tackle every unity that had been broken, wherever it might present itself, and help to recompose it.

The main apostolate of the Movement of the Focolari consists just in this.

It would be too long to inform you, even briefly, of everything that was done, and is being done in our Movement, in terms of the four dialogues suggested by Paul VI and recommended by Vatican II.

It will suffice to say that the charism of unity is active in all fields, on all fronts in the Catholic world, promoting unity and communion within many ecclesial structures, and thus helping to give to the Church its aspect as a Church of communion; just as it is also active in the most varied human structures.

To speak of its effectiveness in the ecumenical field, it's enough to think that the faithful of 350 Churches, with which we work to help restore the full communion of the Churches, also belong to our Movement as associate members, as is permitted by our Statutes.

As far as the interreligious field is concerned, the faithful of the thirty most important religions of the world are also present in our Movement. So high is the esteem they all have for the Movement's spirituality that we are invited to speak of our spiritual experience in Moslem mosques (several in the USA), in Buddhist temples (e.g. in Japan and Thailand), in Jewish centres, as in Argentina, and so on.

Some one hundred thousand others, nonbelievers but people of good will, also belong to our Movement, as associates.

Through this dialogue, a knowledge of Christ and his Church is spread in the world; age-old prejudices are removed; conversions are made.

The Holy Spirit has enabled us to establish in each dialogue a certain unity with everyone, emphasizing what we have in common with the Christians of other Churches and urging us to rediscover it: Baptism, Scripture, the Credo, the first Councils. With the faithful of other religions we especially share the so-called golden rule ("whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" [Mt 7:12]) that is present in almost all sacred books, seed of the Word that calls us to love. Lastly, the common interest in Jesus the man strengthens our brotherhood with all those who, although they do not believe in the faith, feel attachment to and often fight for the safeguard of authentic human values such as peace, human rights, solidarity, life and freedom.

The Holy Spirit, moreover, as was suggested to us by a new personal and community spirituality in the Church, has in this way shaped, in the course of the years, the structure of this Work of Mary within our Movement. Complex and wonderful, it is characterized by an ever renewed unity inside it, in which each relationship (between individuals, between branches, between the various zones, between the periphery and the centre) is inspired by the model of the Holy Trinity.

It was also the Spirit that inspired and helped us to construct some twenty international citadels in the various continents, to testify that the ideal of unity is possible and that universal brotherhood is not a utopia.

The Spirit also inspired the foundation, everywhere, of publishing houses, social and charitable works in great quantities, and a prudent but valuable use of the media.

The doctrinal content of the Movement is also largely the work of the Holy Spirit.

A team of some thirty professors of theology, philosophy and other human sciences are studying the intuitions [that lie at the origin of the Movement] and that we believe to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit; they are working to give form to the new doctrine, though anchored as ever in the Tradition, contained in our spirituality. And for the ever more concrete definition of it, the various human realities of the spirit of Christ are being fostered. A new form of economic management (which has already won important recognition), new forms of politics, art, education, sociology, psychology and justice are flourishing thanks to the inexhaustible newness of the Spirit.

This, in extreme synthesis, is the Movement of the Focolari. And this is the particular service that it offers to the Church and to the world.

Its diffusion (in 182 nations) and its size (it comprises millions of members) give rise to the hope that, in communion with everything that is being done in the Church, it may increasingly become a sign of the springtime of the Bride of Christ heralded and desired by the recent Popes.

Constructors, in Charity, of More Human Forms of Life

THÉODORE NDIAYE

Those who were born to life through Baptism fully share in the three-fold priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ that the laity are called to exercise in the specific circumstances of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. The Pope writes: "It is no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God".¹ Baptism, by uniting us with Christ and with his Body, the Church, turns us not only into witnesses, but also into constructors of a new, more human and truer life. As the Holy Father has reminded us, in this century that is just beginning and in which the face of humanity created in the image of God is still disfigured with deep wounds, "the world awaits a clearer witness of free men and women, gathered in unity, who by their life style may demonstrate how Jesus Christ offers in a totally gratuitous way the response that may satisfy their desire for truth, happiness and human growth".²

Missionary activity, and hence the activity of the lay faithful, must be placed in intimate relation with human nature, because "in manifesting Christ, the Church reveals to men their true situation and calling, since Christ is the head and exemplar of that renewed humanity, imbued with that brotherly love, sincerity and spirit of peace, to which all men aspire".³ The way of the Church is man, man in the reality of

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 10.

² JOHN PAUL II, "Address to the participants at the seventeenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 31 ottobre 1997, 5.

³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, no. 8.

his condition and daily life.⁴ That means that the lay person, by his very vocation, must go towards his fellowmen. He is like the Christ prophesied by Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; proclaim the year of the Lord's favour [...]" (Is 61:1-2).⁵

The Lord asks us laity to go into his vineyard, to go into the world to co-operate with him in the creation of a new world to be restored to the end of time, a world whose centre is the human person.

The lay faithful: witnesses, evangelizers, disciples in the world

The Council says: "The characteristic of the lay state being a life led in the midst of the world and of secular affairs, laymen are called by God to make of their apostolate, through the vigour of their Christian spirit, a leaven in the world".⁶

The laity are sent into the world to bear witness to Christ, to serve and manifest God's love for all people. And as disciples of Christ, they are called to share "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time who are poor or afflicted in any way".⁷

God sends the Christian faithful on mission into the world; he sends them to other men, believers and non believers alike, to manifest to them a "new man" (Eph 4:24). In the action of many of them, however, this mission seems to be optional, occasional, or at any rate limited. There are those who perform it in the manner of Paul: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16). There are others who dedicate themselves in specific sectors: the local district, the neigh-

⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 14.

⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 68.

⁶ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.

⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1.

bourhood... others feel called in specific situations: in response to a misery to be alleviated, a suffering person to console, a sick person to visit. But the mission must have a character of continuity and must be for everyone and everywhere.

Those sent on mission to bring the Good News must approach other people, know how to share, how to live with others – all others, even those of another race, language, culture, social class – helping them to become not what we want them to become, but what God wants them to be and what they themselves must discover in their relationship with him.

The witness of Christ sent into the world and in the midst of mankind must express his faith with works: “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works?” (*Jas* 2:14). But these works must be the fruit of love, because only the act dictated by love renders faith operative. The action must also be linked to the justice of the objective to be achieved and the truth of the means used to reach it.

The prophet Isaiah declared: “Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. [But the fast acceptable to the Lord is] a day for a man to humble himself, [...] to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free [...] to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless into your house (*Is* 58:4-7).

The lay Christian’s vocation is inscribed in the fabric of daily life: that of a man who – in his family, in his own environment, in relations with others, in work and in social commitment – works to break down the barriers that separate him from others, and restore ways of understanding, reciprocal respect, dialogue, exchange, sharing and love.

Evangelization and development

Evangelization is the proclamation of the Gospel and derives from the mandate of Christ to his disciples: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (*Mt* 28:19).

This proclamation is the good news of unconditional love of God for man revealed in the person of Christ;⁸ it is the proclamation that salvation is given to all people in Jesus Christ. And it is a proclamation that the lay faithful must know how to render operative.

That means, for example, that when life is threatened, evangelization must be translated into works, initiatives, commitments to defend life and develop new and more dignified conditions of life for mankind.

Evangelization is the bread, the shelter, the work, the clothes, the smile we give. It is the effective policies of healthcare, education, economic, social and cultural development that we offer, propose and defend. It is the respect of the rights of men, women and children; the justice and peace that we foster; the debt that we redeem.

Man is made for happiness. He yearns to live his life to the full. He needs to fulfil all his intellectual, spiritual and moral potential. He aspires to his full dignity as a person. So every gesture, every act, every Christian commitment aimed at the well-being, promotion and enhancement of each human person is an act, gesture and commitment of evangelization; it is a work of evangelization aimed at glorifying God the creator of everything.

The lay faithful, witnesses and disciples of Christ in the world, truly enter into the midst of mankind, and become with them constructors of more human forms of life, by cooperating in building up “a new heaven and a new earth” (*Rev* 21:1).

But who are these witnesses and constructors of a more human life? They are the lay faithful who have given birth to the “new era of group endeavours”⁹ of which the Pope speaks and who are giving proof of a great sense of ecclesial responsibility. Under the impetus of the Holy Spirit, in an extraordinary variety and complementarity of roles, they are now involved on all the fronts of life and of the world. They are the lay faithful who belong to the traditional movements, such as Catholic Action, and the Catholic associations that operate in such sectors as

⁸ Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*.

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 29.

international affairs, peace, development, human rights, mass media and information, teaching, professional life, interreligious dialogue, world of work, politics, culture, health.

In our age, however, it's not easy for a Christian to devote himself to the construction of a better world under the sole impulse of charity. Bishop Albert-Marie de Monléon writes: "How should the Christian conduct himself? What moral stance should he take on such issues as the explosion of information technology, of Internet, globalization and its positive and negative values, the invasion of the media, urbanization and the migrations of peoples, the progress and implications of medicine, corruption, the culture of death, etc.?"¹⁰ If it's true that the Spirit guides the lay faithful in their mission it's also true that the ways in which the Spirit is present in their midst may only be identified through a discernment illuminated by grace. The laity thus have a need to draw often on prayer and the sacraments, because "unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain" (Ps 127 [126]:1). Today, in the huge field of humanitarianism, there are so many engaged in relieving, restoring, curing, saving... Do we disciples and witnesses of Christ always do so in the way that our Master wants and asks, without expecting anything in return and and with the willingness to give our all, up to the supreme sacrifice?

Conclusion

Heirs and witnesses of Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, sent into the world for the salvation of mankind, the baptized are sent into an often dramatic, disfigured, inhuman world.

It is not out of place here to recall the moving words that the Pope wrote in *Ecclesia in Africa*: "Contemporary Africa can be compared to the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; he fell among rob-

¹⁰ A.-M. DE MONLÉON, "The Charisms and Gifts of the Spirit in the Life of the Lay Faithful", in: PONTIFICIUM CONSILIIUM PRO LAICIS (ed.), *Rediscovering Confirmation*, Vatican City 2000, 106.

bers who stripped him, beat him and departed, leaving him half dead (cf. *Lk* 10:30-37). Africa is a continent where countless human beings – men and women, children and young people – are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned. They are in dire need of Good Samaritans who will come to their aid”.¹¹

The third world and Africa in particular have been brutally maltreated since time immemorial: slavery of every kind, colonization and recolonization, ethnic and tribal wars fueled and exacerbated by subversive manipulations skilfully orchestrated by major economic powers, famine, exploitation of women and children. Today these countries are being further penalized by unequal co-operation, by a globalization without pity. In this state of affairs, how can the ecclesial dimension of witness be exercised? How can the laity be the salt of the earth and light of the world? How can they contribute to the construction of a world of justice and peace, restore hope to the young, combat AIDS, help alleviate the debt of the third world?

It is once again John Paul II who suggests a reply in the sixth chapter of the same Exhortation, recalling that the situation of numerous African countries is so dramatic as not to permit attitudes of indifference and detachment.¹²

Yes, more than ever, the world has a need of witnesses, of Good Samaritans to tend the wounds, alleviate the sufferings of all those who lie on the edge of the roads of the world, the outcasts consigned to the fringes of life, and make the earth more inhabitable. More than ever our world has a need of constructors, in charity, of more human forms of life.

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 41.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 105-126.

IV

Mission

Witnesses to Newness of Life

CARDINAL JEAN-MARIE LUSTIGER

The mission of the Church and the particular task of the laity

In the years preceding Vatican Council II reflection on what we now call the “apostolate of the laity” took the form of a very lively debate between theologians, heirs of an historical situation in the West that had persisted for over a millennium and that had been characterized by the opposition between spiritual power – represented by the Church and in particular by the Popes – and temporal power represented by sovereigns or emperors. This conflict of authority, that concerned the control of Christendom and the consequent distribution of tasks, had been formulated by jurists and theologians on the basis of a theory whose paternity was attributed by some to St. Augustine: the doctrine of the “two swords” (“Look, Lord, here are two swords” [Lk 22:38], say the apostles to Jesus who announces his imminent arrest to them; two powers, each of which, by virtue of its own authority, claimed precedence over the other.

In the modern period what remains of this situation is the separation between temporal and spiritual, whose scriptural foundation is sought in the words of Jesus on tribute: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Lk 20:22-25).

Once the old conflict between ecclesial and political power had disappeared, these notions were transferred to the balance of forces within the life of the Church herself: to the conflict of power or, rather, to the distribution of tasks between the clergy and laity. The laity, said some, were responsible for the management of temporal, and the clergy for the authority and management of religious affairs. The sphere of the laity, in short, was that of politics; that of the clergy, the liturgy and the apostolate.

It is incontestable that each of these two groups, socially defined in this way, was tempted to stray into the territory of the other. There have been no lack of priests who have ventured into political action, nor of laypeople who have participated in the specifically evangelizing mission of the Church, though their position remained in theory subordinate to the priests they assisted in a specifically sacerdotal task.

As its point of departure, Vatican Council II abandoned the exercise of power as the criterion for its distinction between the temporal and religious spheres; it adopted instead the vocation and mission of the Church in the world and the way in which her members participate in it. Since then, it has no longer been political or sociological concepts, but the concrete and historical reality of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Orders, that have permitted ecclesial society to be analyzed.

The mission of the sanctification of the world is the mission of the whole Church and should not be confused with the temporal power over society. The Christian leaven of holiness must be present in it in its own way. And clearly this is not without consequences for the exercise of power and political rights. The mission of evangelizing, of spreading the Gospel, is the mission of the whole Church, and the task of governing must be exercised in the manner of Christ, who made himself the servant of everyone, and not in the manner of "the rulers of the Gentiles who lord it over" the world (*Mt* 20:25). Each member of the Church, priest or layperson, is called to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ, according to the grace he/she has received through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Orders.

Vatican Council II, especially in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* and Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*, gives formulations that some have found ambiguous because they did not bridge the unilateralism of their position. The Council attributes the mission in its totality to the whole Church without the division between the task peculiar to the laity and that of ordained ministers corresponding to a division of work which would not only demarcate the functions of both, but also determine the incompetence of the laity in the field of the clergy and vice versa.

In no. 32 of *Lumen gentium* the Council distinguishes what is peculiar to the lay faithful from what is peculiar to the ordained ministers and religious. Although basing itself on ancient and precise canonical definitions, it immediately notes that “the [laity] who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, [...] share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world”. A few lines further on the same Constitution points out that “by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. [...] There they are called by God that, being led by the Spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity, they must manifest Christ to others. It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer”.

The complexity of these sentences shows clearly that the old division of “work” – temporal and spiritual, political and religious – does not help to elucidate the doctrine of the Church; it is an invitation, instead, to discover how faith, hope and charity can manifest Christ through the management of temporal affairs.

Rightly, therefore, the task of the laity is being presented here as *newness of life*.

What newness of life?

How should we understand and define this newness of life that the disciples of Christ introduce into the history of the world?

Newness is a notion that has been appropriated by our consumer age, in which the new ceases to be new with extreme rapidity: it very soon becomes obsolete, and makes way for a new newness! So newness is a reality that differs from what precedes it. But, by its very nature,

newness cannot but age in the indefinite flux of time. For what characterizes newness is not the ephemeral character of the new, but the date it carries, its situation in history, the fashion that changes each year...

The newness that God works in the world is not of this kind. It's a newness similar to that of birth, but a birth continuously taking place. It is also the newness of forgiveness that prolongs and renews the act of the Creator. It's not a restoration like that which restores an historical monument to its original splendour. By his mercy, God renews the existence of the human person he has created by purifying the memory of his past; purification is not forgetfulness; the signs of the wounds become the signs of liberation – like the wounds that the risen Christ shows to Thomas, like the memory of the bondage in Egypt that becomes the source of thanksgiving for the wonders performed by God. The remembrance of sin becomes the remembrance of the forgiveness received. The Cross, experienced with Jesus, becomes the birth-place in which we are reborn in the risen Christ.

God does not cease to create newness of life for his children and for the salvation of the world. If the history of man does not consist of the decay of each passing moment of our experience, of the rubble of dead cultures, of forgotten memories, this is due to God's creative and redemptive power. The history of man is also a journey already described by Isaiah: "You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel" (*Is* 30:29).

For this newness is the newness of a journey in which God precedes us. The guide he gives us is Christ himself, who came to us in our flesh and leads us in the fullness of the Spirit. He leads us to the fulfilment of which – to recur to the images of St. Paul – we only possess "the first-fruits" and "the pledge" (cf. *Rm* 8:23; *2 Cor* 1:22).

The newness brought by Christ consists in this journey towards what has already been given but still has to be hoped for, a journey that constantly renews the present. The newness of life is this power of grace that traverses the decay of the centuries.

The Christian newness is the power of the Spirit that embraces the existence of humanity and constantly gives it the power to transcend itself. It coincides with the initial gift that characterizes man “created in the image and likeness of God”, a free person who cannot find his own fulfilment in himself, and who can only realize himself in giving. For man is made to love: and to love not any object of this world, but the source itself of love, the Creator and Redeemer of this world; and hence to love our brothers of divine charity, as Jesus loves them.

The Christian newness therefore finds its source in the spiritual freedom that springs from decay and obstacles. The Christian newness permits man to explore the creation that God has entrusted to his stewardship and to realize all its potential of beauty, intelligence, love and communion. Man does not replace the one Creator; he freely obeys God’s commandments and the imperatives of the Holy Spirit that assigns to him the task of making the treasures of grace entrusted to him bear fruit.

I insist on this notion of “newness”. It is familiar to us. Yet let us not succumb to that “illusion of newness”, that spurious newness which St. Luke already remarked among the Athenians: “Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (*Acts* 17:21). It’s almost as if we were in the editorial offices of one of our television stations or in the waiting room of an advertising agency!

The Christian newness is necessarily expressed with the paradoxical affirmation of an incompleteness in search of fulfilment. This is the paradox described in the Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount, as reported by St. Matthew (cf. *Mt* 5:3-10), is a kind of charter of the union in the Spirit and hence of the newness of life that the disciples have the mission to attest. The beatitudes that the evangelist places at the beginning of the Sermon of the Mount, with their paradoxical formulation, alert us to the dimension at once historical and eschatological of this newness.

Only two beatitudes hold out a reward to us in the present, i.e. in the time of history, namely, the first: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven”, and the last: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”, which is also glossed in the ninth beatitude: “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Mt 5:11). Our recompense in the present is therefore the joy of the poverty we share with the poor Christ and the joy of the persecution we share with Christ the Redeemer.

The other beatitudes defer their fulfilment and our recompense to the future: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”.

So what is this future? Is it a future in history, in the sense of the slogan that was launched by the Communist Party in France and became very popular in the aftermath of the Second World War, proclaiming “a radiant future”? Or it is a blessing of which we shall only have the firstfruits or the pledge here on earth, but whose fullness shall only be given to us when we behold face to face Christ in his glory?

Christ’s salvation, source of newness of life. From the “beginning” to the “end”

“Behold I make all things new”, proclaims the voice of God himself from the throne in the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem described in the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelation. How is this divine action realized in our history by the one who describes himself as “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Rev 21:6)?

If we try to comprehend the journey that God makes from the “beginning” to the “end”, when [he shall wipe away] every tear from [our] eyes, [for] death shall be no more” (Rev 21:4), we will then be able to understand how, according to the phrase of *Lumen gentium*, the laity “may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven”.¹

¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

To help us, I propose to reflect on the teaching of Jesus in a fundamental field of the human condition: *the relationship between man and woman*.

In the beginning

In reply to a trick question posed to him by Pharisees on the right to divorce (cf. *Mt* 19:1-9), Jesus situates the man-woman relationship in the history of salvation. He traces that relationship “from the beginning”, from the creative work of the sixth day, when man and woman were both “created in the image and likeness of God”. Thus united by God in a common mission that the one cannot perform without the other, they testify to the irrevocable fidelity of God’s covenant with humanity: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (*Mt* 19:6; cf. *Jn* 1:27; 2:24).

The creative act of God reveals to the human being he has created what he/she is and what is the love that unites man and woman and that unites them both with God. And it reveals at the same time the extraordinary gift of the freedom given to man and his mission in the world.

To the objection made to him by the Pharisees, referring to the passage in Deuteronomy that speaks of a bill of divorce that could be given to a wife to send her away (cf. *Dt* 24:1), Jesus replies: “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (*Mt* 19:8). This sentence designates the state of the sinful man who is in thrall to sin and made so impotent by sin that he is unable to observe the divine law that he nonetheless desires to fulfil. Jesus himself proclaims the new covenant promised by the prophets, in which God changes the heart of stone into heart of flesh and writes the law on this heart through the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jer* 31:33).

So God works the redemption of man and woman and enables them to fulfil their own primary vocation which they have never lost.

Pentecost, in which the disciples receive the gift from on high promised to them by Christ, truly works the renewal of all things

announced by Isaiah: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (*Is* 43:19), "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth?" (*Is* 65:17).

Jesus' reply could prompt us to wish to prolong to its eternal fulfilment the union between man and woman re-established on earth in its original integrity. Husbands and wives, who have imbibed their love from the source of Love, dream to relive it in its fullness in the Kingdom of heaven. So why should not the husbands and wives of this earth remain bound to each other, hand in hand, contemplating God's face?

At the resurrection

But Christ gives us another teaching (cf. *Mt* 22:23-30; *Mk* 12:18-27; *Lk* 20:27-40). The Sadducees pose him a question about the resurrection, illustrating it with a macabre sense of humour: they invent the story of a woman who, to obey the law of the levirate – the Old Testament obligation for a man to marry his brother's widow – married six brothers in turn after the death of each of them: "In the resurrection – they ask Jesus – to which of the seven will she be wife? For they all had her". Jesus' reply is disconcerting: "You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are they given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven".

So is conjugal love too destined to pass away like "the form of this world" (*1 Cor* 7:31)? That's not the sense of the tension that the two teachings of Jesus provoke in our reflection.

For Jesus takes us even further to make us understand what newness he introduces into the history of the world with his disciples. When Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, after the episode of the rich young man, Peter asks him what those who have followed him, abandoning everything, might hope to obtain, Jesus replies: "There is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life" (*Lk* 18:29-30; cf. *Mt* 19:27-29). St.

Mark goes further and says he would receive a "hundredfold", but he adds that "now in this time" this hundredfold would only be obtained "with persecutions" (*Mk* 10:30).

What therefore is meant by this superabundance that St. Luke applies to all human relations and in particular to those within the family, if not a dilation, a spreading outwards right from this present time of the capacity to love, and to love in a different way? Conjugal love is called to become the origin of a still greater love. Right from the present, "now in this time", it transcends the limits of conjugal bonds; it opens up its particularity and inevitable exclusiveness to the measure of the charity of Christ that exhorts us to love our enemy.

This love is an anticipation of the love that shall be given in the sight of God when man and woman shall be like the angels in heaven; it transfigures the present.

Is it not perhaps what St. Paul said in wishing to describe the conduct to be maintained throughout the time we ask the Father "Your kingdom come"? The apostle addresses himself to the Christians of Corinth: "I mean, brothers, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it" (*1 Cor* 7:29-31). But let us not confuse this attitude with Buddhist detachment!

The paradoxical teaching of Jesus, far from being the negation of love, is the supreme development of it in its very self-transcendence; it ensures that its newness is constantly renewed. In the transformations of cultures and civilization, as also in the evolution of customs, it permits humanity to invent new forms of this supreme generosity for which man and women were created. Christ's salvation thus gives new dimensions to the original fruitfulness of the Creation. We understand better the strength and the realism of the joy that may be experienced by a barren woman, as echoed in the Magnificat of Mary: "He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them

sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children" (*Ps* 113 [112]:7-9).

Eunuchs for the Kingdom

St. Matthew reports a reply of Jesus that is even more disconcerting. It follows the discussion on divorce we discussed above. "The disciples said to him, 'If this is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry'. But he said to them, 'Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'" (*Mt* 19:10-12). The teaching seems very harsh. We may wonder what it is intended to mean. Jesus merely concludes: "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it".

What is he speaking about? Now, in the realistic condition of this time (the present), we must live what has been given to us in hope, and more than in hope: as a pledge of what is to come. Receiving a pledge, in ancient law, was tantamount to real possession: the contract was henceforth irrevocable.

We must live in this time, already having the firstfruits of what we are destined later to become. The firstfruits, in the Bible, hold good for everything that we will subsequently receive; for example the firstfruits of a harvest are offered to God in thanksgiving for the whole harvest. That's just what we believe with regard to the resurrection. For we already share in the resurrection of Christ, although we have still to enter into the condition of the death of our body, and although we are inscribed in the time of history in which there is the inexorable biological law of the succession of the generations and the succession of lives and in which human fertility is like a figure and promise of the eternity of life. Christ already gives us the firstfruits of our resurrection; he gives us the pledge of our inheritance, namely the Holy Spirit.

So we need to take seriously – but not from the material point of view – the provocative teaching of Jesus: what is implied is not a surgical operation, but a spiritual attitude, that of perfect chastity. Chastity for the Kingdom is an anticipation of the risen world and is possible thanks to the gift of the Spirit.

And the same also goes, analogically, for the chastity of spouses in marriage.

The holiness to which Christians are called is the leaven of the Kingdom of heaven that is placed in this world and that works in the human condition, in man's sin, in his weakness, in his dilemmas, in his errors, in his contradictions.

We have entered into a struggle in which we have the assurance of final victory, the victory of the love that is already at work in our weakness.

The bride adorned for her husband

This is the sense of the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelation: the whole Church that, in the glory of the Risen Lord, appears “as a bride adorned for her husband” (*Rev* 21:2). This symbolism of the bride and bridegroom is adopted by St. Paul in speaking of the union of man and woman in which the union of Christ and his Church is expressed (cf. *Eph* 5:32). At the resurrection husbands and wives shall be like angels face to face with God and share with everyone in the nuptial dignity of the Church. It is just the eschatological character of this fulfilment that is expressed in the assumption of the Virgin Mary, mother and figure of the Church.

The journey of grace and of glory we have made is not only paradoxical, but will be incomplete until the day in which the Son of man will come in his glory; yet, even now, the Spirit invites us to anticipate in the present the fullness of the times to come.

This tension is the source of the constantly creative newness: in the contingency of civilization, of customs, of cultures, it expresses a radical need, pledge of an ever astonishing beauty when the Christian in his

works enables something of the glory of the Father to be glimpsed: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (*Mt* 5:16).

Conclusion

The same tension, source of both personal and social renewal and newness, may be observed in relation to the ever essential question of riches and their possession.

We may recall the first of the beatitudes reported by St. Luke: "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (*Lk* 6:20) and its complement: "Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation" (*ibid.*, 6:24) It reveals the idolatry of material possessions that substitute service to God and, at the same time, the bondage of those who are possessed by the goods they own.

We could limit ourselves to denunciation, also illustrated by this reply of Jesus: "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (*Lk* 12:15). And he continues with the parable of the thoughtless rich man who takes delight in the riches he hoards and to whom God says: "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (*ibid.*, 12:20).

Jesus urges not only detachment from riches, but also their better use. The precept is demanding: don't accumulate treasures for yourself any longer, but enrich yourself towards God (cf. *Lk* 12:21). The real treasure will not be the goods possessed, the lands owned, the bank account, the stocks and shares, but the free and generous act with which we make use of them. We can find in them a foretaste of what shall be given to us on the resurrection: "Provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (*Lk* 12:33-34).

The consequence is, here too, difficult to understand for the common logic of man. It is Jesus' invitation to his disciples to live without

thought of their own life, of what they shall eat, of their body, or how they should clothe it. Life is worth more than all this: "Consider the ravens [...] Consider the lilies [...]. But if God so clothes the grass which is alive in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O men of little faith! [...] For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (*Lk* 12:24-32).

The radical nature of Jesus' teaching is not a recipe: For, if it were, it would be impossible to put into practice. It implies, rather, an attitude whose core is the faith according to the words of Jesus himself; faith in the goodness of the Father and of his providence that makes man free in his relation to material possessions; that permits him every freedom in his powers of enterprise and innovation; and that places his intelligence and his capacity to produce at the service of the true good of man.

That means completely reversing the attitude of man the sinner. The will to possess material goods is one of the main causes of conflicts and wars. Generosity in giving is a source of peace. Man, by "dispossessing himself" of what he has received, becomes capable of receiving already here on earth the "hundredfold" promised by the Gospel according to St. Mark and all the beauty of the creation that he will discover in his Creator and Redeemer.

So the Christian newness, lived at times at the price of great sacrifices by the disciples of Jesus, prevents humanity from withdrawing into itself and letting itself be guided by the avid lust for goods to the detriment of the respect and love that each person should have for all his fellowmen. In this sense, it is a struggle without truce to be continued through the centuries; a struggle that will only end with the end of history, when the Son of man shall come into his glory to judge the living and the dead.

I will limit myself to citing just one of the fundamental data of social life: *power and its exercise*.

It's enough to refer to the teaching of Jesus reported by St. John when on the evening of Ash Wednesday he washed the feet of his disciples: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's" (*Jn* 13:14). This is an echo of what he had already said to the disciples after the third announcement of his Passion: "The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (*Mt* 20:25-27).

This subversion never ceases to re-establish the balance of power among men.

When the Pope asked for the cancellation of the debt of the poor countries for the Jubilee year, he was reviving the measures of the biblical Jubilee (cf. *Lv* 25:8-17). He thus introduced into the unprecedented globalization that characterizes our century the commandment – that may be called "subversive" or even revolutionary – of charity that knows no boundaries: charity, that is, love for each and every person that gives the courage of equity and justice and makes possible the respect for each person's rights, first and foremost those of the weakest.

Charity has no sense unless it be inspired by faith in the Kingdom of God that has already come and towards which we journey, by faith in the Messiah, meek and humble in heart, and by faith in the Holy Spirit given to us to fulfil the "new" commandment (cf. *Jn* 13:34), pledge of all newness.

Round Table

Mission in Marriage and in the Family

ANOUK MEYER

When a man and a woman say “yes” to each other on the day of their marriage, an adventure of living *as a couple* begins. This adventure begins with the end of Mass.

Like the apostles in the Gospel, spouses are sent on a mission *as a couple* by Christ. But – and this is of capital importance – their mission springs from the sacrament of Matrimony itself. And it is just this sacrament that will help them to perform it: “For it is [Christ] who, by virtue of the fact that marriage of baptized persons has been raised to a sacrament, confers upon Christian married couples a special mission as apostles, sending them as workers into his vineyard, and, in a very special way, into this field of the family”.¹ Theirs will be a humble mission, hidden from the eyes of the world, for which no diploma will be awarded; indeed, at times they will be accused of being a hangover from the past. The mission of Christian married couples is twofold: to be faithful to each other and to bring up their children.

Conjugal fidelity

With the sacrament of Matrimony, Christ *makes a gift of the husband to his wife and vice versa*. They give themselves to each other. In a certain sense they no longer belong to themselves: something at once very simple and mysterious. Moreover, Christ *sends them to each other*, in such a way that the destiny of the one bears the name of the other. That means that it is by deepening his love for his wife that a husband deepens his love for God and vice versa.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, no. 71.

The first mission for married couples is that of deepening their love for each other, day after day. The happiness and the holiness of married couples consists in the search for each other's happiness. That is how *marriage is transformed into conjugal fidelity*. Husband and wife are sent on a mission to each other, and this love transforms their personal life: not by fusion, but by the discovery of their own uniqueness. It is thanks to my husband, thanks to his affection for me, that I become what I am.² This exchange of affection between husband and wife is the strength of love. They each feel themselves keeper of the other.

Fidelity in love needs to be fostered day after day. For love does not live by itself: it needs to be nourished, kindled like a flame; it needs to be cared for. That's why all the simple gestures of the couple's daily life become an occasion to make it grow. This love story will inevitably be lived as a couple through thick and thin.

"Love [...] is not a utopia", wrote the Pope.³ For God is faithful! Newly-weds must know that God rejoices in their love and blesses it. God wants it to grow. He accompanies them; he does not remain locked in the church where they were married! Nor is he a kind of spare wheel. He is the Friend.

To advance along the way of fidelity, Christ gives spouses the necessary spiritual means: prayer, the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

In daily *prayer* married couples entrust themselves to God and know that they cannot do anything without him. John Paul II writes: "From the outset they need to have their hearts and thoughts turned towards the God 'from whom every family is named', so that their

² In this regard the French writer Bourbon Busset, in a posthumous letter sent to his wife, wrote: "The secret is that the unity so ardently sought exists thanks to the tenderness of the other. Your tenderness has created my unity. I only felt myself a whole person under your tender gaze. I think that each of us is able to make a single being exist (that's a lot in itself). We become ourselves thanks to the other. (BOURBON BUSSET, *Lettre à Laurence*, Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

³ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, no. 15.

fatherhood and motherhood will draw from that source the power to be continually renewed in love".⁴

About the spiritual life of married couples a great deal could be said: I will limit myself to emphasizing that husband and wife each have their own "spiritual time" and that it is essential to respect the other's time.

With the *sacramental pardon* the couple experiences a love stronger than their own misery. When each bridge between persons seems broken, when love is transmuted into hate, the priest, with confession and pardon, is able to restore communion. *If I know that I have been forgiven, I can forgive in turn*: that is the experience of many couples and many can confirm it.

Thus reconciled, they will receive the *Eucharist*, bread of essential life to follow the way of fidelity. As has been said at this congress, "the heart of God beats in the Eucharist". Receiving it, the hearts of married couples will beat to the rhythm of the heart of God.

Thus *fortified*, their love will be the cement of the family and help them to comfort those suffering.

Mission as a couple to their own children

Husbands and wives are sent on a mission *as a couple*, to educate their own children *as a couple*: "Fatherhood and motherhood represent a responsibility which is not simply physical but spiritual in nature; indeed, through these realities there passes the genealogy of the person, which has its eternal beginning in God and which must lead back to him".⁵

Journeying as pilgrims, the one with the other, the one thanks to the other, and in a certain sense the one toward the other, husbands and wives see their mission of love enriched with a new dimension: the transmission of life!

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 10.

(How can we fail to stress here that “each love is fruitful”? The fruitfulness of love transcends the fertility of the body. The fruitfulness of a couple is a mysterious and splendid reality. It is not gauged by the number of children they have. Fertility is a condition of the body, fruitfulness a property of love. Each authentic love is fruitful! We are all familiar with barren couples whose spiritual fruitfulness is enormous).

Children are their greatest richness. They are entrusted to them for a period of time and they will educate them as a couple, in a complementary way. (At times some are tempted to delegate this duty to institutions and persons that would seem more competent than they: the kindergarten, the school, teachers, psychologists, priests, etc. It's certainly sensible to let oneself be helped, but married couples need to feel that their responsibility for this education is paramount. Nor is it rare for these same institutions and persons to lament the parents' “abdication” from their responsibilities; that makes their work very difficult and sometimes impossible).

Parents are reviving presences. Christian parents try to prepare the heart of their children and direct it towards the *real purpose of life*; they seek to *open their children's heart to God and to others*.

Children are “capable” of God from the earliest age. At times parents reduce their own task as educators to controlling the performance of their children at school for utilitarian ends. They pressure them with such questions as: “What marks did you get today? What do you want to do when you grow up?”. So it's natural that there should be nothing on children's horizon but educational, social and economic success. And they become convinced that their personal success and the development of their personality depend only on a combination of knowledge and convenience.

These aspects are not pointless, but parents, with tact and sense of personal freedom, also need to ask their children this question: “Have you thought what God expects of you when you grow up?”. At times they are afraid of this question. The fear of a religious vocation is also felt in Christian families. The word “vocation” strikes fear, as if God's call were an infringement of a person's freedom. Moreover, even after

Vatican Council II, there are still those who think that vocation is only reserved for priests and men and women religious, and have difficulty in understanding that there is also a *vocation to matrimony*.

We must not be afraid of what God will ask of our children. If we have no fear, we will be freer to show them the various paths open to them and enable them to discern what God wants of them. *Vocation to the priesthood and vocation to matrimony are complementary ways of building up the Church*; indeed, it is in the family that children learn to love the Church. And each Christian family should feel itself touched by the lack of vocations to the priesthood today and not think that this is something that only concerns their neighbours' families.

The notion of giving one's own life to God arouses fear in children. I think of one of my own daughters who at the age of eight whispered into my ear: "Mum, I don't want to be a saint, I want to be like you, get married and be a mother". I had to make quite an effort to reassure her, to explain to her that, in spite of appearances, it *was* possible to be saints in marriage.

God is at work in the heart of our children and we must help them to say "yes" to the call made to them, to become Christians conscious of their mission, and to take the best road to fulfil it. Parents, for their children, are a bit like John the Baptist. They prepare the way and their joy will be to see their own children "grow" and their own role "diminish".

What's great about education in the family is the fact that there's no need for classes, for lessons, for a curriculum, for text-books, as there is at school. It is in family life itself that children learn to live in a community and prepare to live in society. It's in the family that they learn the gestures of solidarity and charity, without which family life would be a nightmare. They learn to listen to the other person, to be deferential, to share, forgive, to begin all over again. So what happens within the family, will sooner or later have repercussions on what happens to them in the outside world.

Thus, the family becomes the laboratory of the civilization of love. It is in the family that the civilization of love is prepared: "[...] Jesus

Christ left us the commandment of love [...] Love then is not a utopia: it is given to mankind as a task to be carried out with the help of divine grace. It is entrusted to man and woman, in the Sacrament of Matrimony, as the basic principle of their ‘duty’, and it becomes the foundation of their mutual responsibility: first as spouses, then as father and mother. In the celebration of the Sacrament, the spouses give and receive each other, declaring their willingness to welcome children and to educate them. On this hinges human civilization, which cannot be defined as anything other than a ‘civilization of love’”.⁶

In the educational process, in order to transmit you first need to be convinced of what you want to transmit. So it’s a good thing if, between one commitment and the next, spouses find the time to speak to each other and exchange views with each other. It’s good that they should share the decisions that concern their children. In the *Équipes Notre-Dame*⁷ there’s “a duty to sit down together”. That seems to me an excellent idea to put into practice, for example whenever there’s a need to draw up a “strategy” to cope with the problems that are never lacking in the education of children, each of which needs particular care. For each child is unique and needs to be loved for this uniqueness. Parents do not love their own children *en bloc*, nor do they educate them *en bloc*, as perhaps might be done in a class of pupils. Parents will try to listen to Peter, aged 12, who is having difficulties at school; to discuss sexuality with Mary, aged 18, who is having doubts about the teaching of the Church; to cuddle little Suzy, aged four, who has lost her doll! These are just some examples to recall that, within the family, *children should have the experience of being unique and of being loved for themselves*. It’s this capacity to listen, to comfort, to encourage children to overcome obstacles that turns parents into real educators.

At times I say to myself that we parents are a bit like Geppetto with Pinocchio. You remember the story. A story that repeats itself. Like Geppetto, we often repeat the same advice, we want the best for our

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 15.

⁷ Movement of conjugal spirituality (translator’s note).

children and if they get lost we are ready, like him, to go and seek them even in the belly of a whale.

Faith isn't a lesson

Our faith is demanding. Whereas mathematical truths change nothing in the life of the pupils who study them, the truth of Christ is the way, the truth and the life. It is all-encompassing: it transforms the disciple's life from top to bottom. The consequence for our families is simple: faith is not something we make room for: faith either embraces everything or it is nothing. (Faith is therefore the "place" in which we educate. The challenge is how to make our children understand it and live it as a reality deeper than their life. Faith cannot be relegated to the private sphere. Otherwise the Christian would be perfectly in tune with society, but would lose his identity and even his "utility". And Christianity would become insignificant). The prerogative of Christian education, on the contrary, is to *present the faith as the light that illuminates the totality of life and is incarnated in all the situations and circumstances of daily life.*

In practice it's difficult for children to realize this. One of our own children, eleven year's old at the time, said to my husband one day: "Listen, dad, I have a problem: I would like to become a priest and a cow-boy!". The father's reaction was: Uh-huh? His son continued: "If I've understood rightly, I'll have to lay down my arms when I celebrate Mass!"

Children soon realize that Christian life demands coherence between what a person professes and what he does. One cannot believe one thing and practice something else. (But we know very well that without the sacraments, it's illusory to speak of the transmission of the faith. *Prayer in the family and participation in Sunday Mass* are therefore the essential prerequisites for the life of the Christian family. Christian parents will teach their children to pray and accompany them to Mass from their tenderest age. By going together to the meeting with the Friend, we are together on the right road. We must give an example;

but we know we are not exemplary. Our limitations, our failures, our sins are all too real. If we realize we have made a mistake, if we have been too brusque, if we have lost our temper, let us ask our children for forgiveness. They must understand that we are only trying to do our best, but we aren't supermen or superwomen).

Parents must show to their children that the Christian message comes from Someone who is far higher than they, and this permits the child to distance himself from this or that limitation of family education, without refusing the faith of the Church transmitted by this education. To develop and confirm this education, they will encourage them to frequent other families that pursue the same aims, to invite friends home, to meet other youngsters in the parish and to join groups and associations, such as the scouts, or dedicate themselves to volunteer service. The Christian family does not live in a glass case, it is open to others.

That's how *love for our neighbour* is learned in the family; it is learned through *love for our brother*. Brotherhood is not so simple to live, even if in the logic of love and the culture of life, a brother or sister is the most precious gift that parents can give to a child. This opening of the heart of the child to the gift of his brother or sister, to the person of the brother or sister as gift and responsibility given to him, is probably one of the least well known aspects of the parental mission.⁸

"This is my brother, I didn't choose him, but I love him". That's what each child ought to be able to say. (And each child ought to be able to discover that the love of their parents is indivisible. For parents

⁸ In the heart of each family is found the same need which is revealed to us by the very first pages of Genesis: Abel is your brother, not your rival! For this discovery to be possible, it is necessary that the parents – Adam and Eve – be close to Cain, that they reassure him, enable him to discover that he is unique but also that his greatest richness is neither his flock nor his offering to God, but his brother, the one who was given, sent, entrusted to him by his parents' love so that he protect and safeguard him. This aspect of the parental mission is aimed at enabling children to discover the authentic meaning of existence. It must therefore arouse in them an attitude of gratitude, in other words a willingness to return to our origins.

do not know how to count beyond one. There's Peter, Paul, Mary. They are not numbers. They are one and one and one. They are each unique).

In the discovery of our brother or sister there's the joy of understanding that each life is worth living! The culture of life begins here. Each life, however different from mine, however close to me or far from me, is a gift. Each child must be able to feel that he is desired and wished by God and that the same goes for others, no matter their situation. God loves each person for himself/herself.

The culture of life, lived in this way, will enable children to respect the life of others, and later to understand that in no case can we decide on the life or death of someone else. Only God is the lord of life.

The mission of the lay faithful in marriage and the family is to build the civilization of love. That essentially consists in reciting, day after day, the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries of the rosary of life, by saying yes to God, yes to love, and yes to life.

Witnesses of Christ in the Worker World and in the Economy

RAFAEL SERRANO CASTRO

A globalized economy

We all know the importance that the economy has in our societies. It is the fundamental activity around which the life of persons, peoples and nations revolves. We therefore need to keep in mind that the economy is not something aseptic, nor only a science that deals with percentages, numbers or variables, but that real people are involved in it; indeed it is an activity peculiar to persons, who have a need for the material goods existing in nature to satisfy their own needs and concur to their full development, goods that cannot normally be obtained without a job, individual or collective.

We now live in the context of a globalized economy that has direct repercussions on the lives of individuals, nations and peoples. In the words of John Paul II, “it is a new phenomenon that needs to be understood and evaluated with careful and detailed analysis, because it presents a pronounced connotation of ‘ambivalence’. It may be a good thing for man and for society, but it could also reveal itself as harmful, fraught with momentous consequences. All depends on some fundamental choices: namely, whether ‘globalization’ is placed at the service of man, of each and every person, or whether it contributes exclusively to a development decoupled from the principles of solidarity and participation, and outside a responsible subsidiarity”.¹

The social doctrine of the Church has always maintained that the economy cannot be separated from ethics, not even in the name of a

¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Discourse to Entrepreneurs and Trades-Unionists”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 May 2000, 5.

presumed future progress. Without ethics, without God and without taking account of his plan of salvation, the economy is a source of conflict and injustice, because, as Vatican Council II says: “[...] man is the source, the focus and the end of all economic and social life”.² And again: “the ultimate and basic purpose of economic production does not consist merely in the increase of goods produced, nor in profit nor prestige; it is directed to the service of man, of man, that is, in his totality”.³

The current situation of the worker world

The worker world is not the same as it was a few years ago: the introduction of advanced technologies, the exponential growth of the services sector and the progressive diffusion of part-time work have modified the classic concept of the worker. The transformation is evident not only in the way in which workers are dressed, but also in working conditions and lifestyles. The new social models break with the old working-class culture. A type of pragmatic, consumer-oriented attitude, and the assimilation of bourgeois models of life, have emerged in consumer society.

On the other hand, in numerous places on earth, the growth of productivity due to technological innovations is matched by the growth of exploitation due to the increased pace of work. The increasing recourse to overtime and “black” labour have concurred to the appearance of new forms of poverty: low-paid temporary jobs, loss of purchasing power, unregulated wage bargaining, growth of accidents on the workplace, exploitation of child labourers, and social and professional discrimination against women, immigrants and the young, forced as a result into clandestine employment.

The fragmentation of the worker world and the lack of work cause divisions and conflicts among workers themselves. Human relations

² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 63.

³ *Ibid.*, no. 64.

deteriorate. Mistrust, rivalry and growing xenophobia reign on the shopfloor. In many places labour legislation is not worth the paper it is written on; for, given the lack of jobs, people are willing to do anything to obtain work, to sign contracts *carte blanche* and renounce many of their own rights.

To have or not have a job is a decisive factor, because work continues to be one of the main sources not only of economic survival, but of personal realization and social integration. The lack of jobs and unemployment are translated into factors of exploitation, impoverishment and social exclusion; without work, a person doesn't count; he/she becomes an outcast, forced to live on the handouts of the State, of the worker's own family or of humanitarian organizations, civil or religious. Moreover, being unemployed is an injustice that brings with it a moral disorder due to the degradation that characterizes it, for the life of workers themselves, for their families who are the victims of it, and for the whole of society; for the relation of cause and effect between unemployment and various social ills, such as alcoholism, delinquency, drug addiction and mental illness, is sufficiently proved.

The new techniques of labour organization and control in many cases transform the worker into an isolated being. Far from being considered the subject, author and end of his work, the protagonist of the whole production process, as proclaimed by the social doctrine of the Church, he is seen as a mere instrument of production, a sort of "merchandise" that enters into the law of supply and demand. The immediate consequence of this is the negation of the person and the negation of God, to the advantage of materialism and economism.

Today we can speak of exploitation and slavery in work in a twofold sense: on the one hand, that of the social conditions and the production relations that are established in the field of labour itself and, on the other, that of the worker's subordination to the things he himself produces. For work is no longer an end in itself, but an activity rendered passive, programmed in advance, totally subordinated to the functioning of a system that leaves no scope for personal initiative. Work goes against the worker himself and sub-

ordinates him. In these conditions, man is transformed into a cog in a machine, and not only as a purchaser of goods: even before the production process has started, it is decided what to produce and how much, with the certainty that the goods produced will be consumed in a more or less determined space of time.

In other words, consumerism, or demand, supports the supply and all the economic mechanisms that regulate it require the reduction of man to a passive instrument, to the point of eliminating completely any power he may have to choose for himself in a free and responsible manner. He is manipulated from inside to persuade him to purchase the goods produced, thus converting him into a cog of the production system. He becomes an instrument of it. As a result of this mentality, work is subordinated to pragmatism, the person is reduced to pure manpower, the weak are oppressed, and the poverty of individuals and peoples is accepted as an inevitable consequence of the laws of the free market economy.

The Pope condemns these situations when he writes that what man produces, the result of the work of his hands, is subjected to “alienation”, in the sense that it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, and may be turned against man himself;⁴ and when he affirms that “Christ would never approve of man being considered – or of considering himself – only as a means of production, and of man being appreciated, esteemed and evaluated according to this principle. Christ would never approve it!”.⁵

The humanization of the economy

The changes that have taken place in the world of work and in production processes, in spite of their magnitude, do not alter the way in which the Church considers human work, indeed they make her social

⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, no. 15.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, “Address at the Cistercian Abbey of Mogila in Nowa Huta, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II (1979), 1507-1508.

doctrine even more relevant. The salient points, on the basis of which the Church tackles and illuminates the whole reality of the world of work, therefore need to be deepened and disseminated, namely: the reference to God, the reference to man himself and the reference to the community.

By his own work, the person, in realizing himself, establishes a series of relations with the world, with others and with God. For this reason, work does not only have a theological, but an ethical value, and cannot therefore be reduced to a mere economic or productive return. For, as John Paul II writes, “the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person”,⁶ created in the image and likeness of God, and called to collaborate with him in his creative work. In this sense it may be affirmed that each attack on the dignity of man is an attack on God himself.

If we take as our point of departure the reality of the world of work and what the Church tells us about the way of understanding human work, we may assert that work can only be experienced as a form of collaboration full of hope in the creative work of God and as joyful participation in the redemptive work of Christ, if this work be worthy of man, carried out in appropriate conditions, properly paid, performed in a context respectful of the person, and in a society in which the human person takes precedence over everything. But if these conditions are not met, as unfortunately is frequently the case today, work becomes a form of alienation, a need imposed to be able to survive, a piece of our life that we sell for a hunk of bread. In this perspective, the humanization of work is a requirement of faith, that necessarily takes the form of a humanization of the economy. That implies that, through the participation of individuals and institutions connected with the world of work, production and distribution, conditions be created to permit people to realize themselves in the way they are called to be, namely, as children of God.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens*, no. 6.

Contributing to “economic democracy”

In a globalized world and economy, in which the ascendancy of big business, markets and financial centres is ever more evident and ever more powerful, the need is posed of fostering the progressive incorporation of labour and civil society in the institutions of the market economy to create an “economic democracy”, which is an essential condition for justice today. Only through a co-responsible participation of all those involved in economic, financial, labour and market processes, will it be possible to ensure that the decisions and laws relating to the economy, to the market and to working activity, be truly aimed at the integral development of persons and not just at the production of profit.

Tackling a cultural challenge

The cultural domination of capitalism, legitimated by the modern welfare state and by consumerism, presupposes the imposition of economic rationality as a fundamental and almost exclusive criterion for the organization of social life. This rationality now embraces almost everything and many workers accept it, without perceiving the dehumanization that is the inevitable consequence when a worker is dispossessed of any control over his own work and is subjected to the logic of productivity and production.

That’s why the worker movement must struggle not only against the empire of economic rationality, but also against its legitimation through consumerism. It must strive to overcome the corporatist temptations of the more advantaged workers, and subordinate economic logic to ethical principles. The best way of combating alienation is to recover the centrality of work as a cultural project that may permit the formation of a social subject endowed with good will and concerned to construct a different society, starting out from ethical criteria which take account of the weakest and most impoverished sectors of the labour world and of society as a whole. This is the greatest challenge posed today to the

worker movement and to all the organizations that perform their humanitarian or evangelizing activity in the world of work. And we Catholics too must actively participate in this task.

Ensuring the Church's presence in the worker world

The relation between the Church and the worker world has been marked by an historic "missing date", whose consequences have now in large part been overcome. This is in part thanks to the collapse of the atheist ideologies that aimed to build a paradise on earth, dispensing with God and denying every humanizing dimension of the faith; but it is also thanks to the promotion of the worker world and its organizations that the Church has been progressively manifesting from *Rerum novarum* down to our own day.

The task that now has to be undertaken is to ensure that the Church has a presence in the worker world and that as large a number of persons as possible accept her and support her in her evangelizing mission. Steps must be taken to ensure that workers appreciate and serve the Church, that they consider the Church as their home, that they love and respect her not only for the social services she performs, but for herself, as the trustee of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the continuator of his work in the world.

Some priority tasks

Pastoral care of the world of work

The great economic and social changes that are being produced in the world make the theme of work ever more complex. The conflict of interests between capital and all those who depend on a wage to live continues to be real and represents a fundamental dimension of the "social question". However, the traditional manner in which this conflict was presented has undergone and is undergoing a transformation that obliges the ecclesial movements and organizations for

workers to place the pastoral care of workers on a different level than in the past.

The urgent need to humanize the economy, conditions of life and social relations in labour activities makes it increasingly necessary to promote not only pastoral ministry for workers but also an apostolate of human work, "entering into an explanatory dialogue with qualified representatives of the various economic and social categories, such as entrepreneurs, economists, trades-unionists, international institutions and the academic world".⁷ But at the same time the pastoral care of workers in the traditional sense must not be ignored, because in the moment of truth pastoral care is addressed at particular persons. However we cannot lose sight of the fact that we live in a social, cultural and economic context that conditions our life and has concrete repercussions, not only on the creation of conflicts but also on their resolution. For this reason it seems to me essential that both employers and workers do all in their power to turn the business into something more than a means of production and gain an awareness that its function does not consist merely in producing benefits: it also consists in creating a community of persons who place their own activity and their best energies at the service of the common good.

The apostolic organizations

The evangelization of the worker world must never be considered as a particular task, performed by some Christians on their own initiative and at their own risk. It should never be forgotten that it is the Church herself that evangelizes. The workers' apostolic organizations, as ecclesial organizations, have a fundamental and indispensable role to play in this task. For experience shows how effective they are in the evangelization of workers; they have helped many people, young and adults all over the world, to discover their own dignity as children of God, to see reality

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, "To the participants at the European Meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace", *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XX, 1 (1997), 1555.

with the eyes of faith, and to organize themselves to act, transform the world and establish a society of justice, as a way to the Kingdom.

If the Church wants to have an evangelically significant and non-confessional presence in the world of work, she cannot dispense with the role of the workers' apostolic movements, their experience, their method of work, their educational and evangelizing programmes.

The spirituality of work

Each spirituality is born from an experience of God, that places us on the road of a permanent transformation. We could say that a spirituality of work is a way of being, of living and feeling the life of the worker, in proportion as we are capable of perceiving our own efforts as a grace that enables us to collaborate with God and with others in the creation of a more brotherly world. In this sense, we need to insist on the fact that the spirituality of work, though including the effort aimed at improving social relations and the mechanisms of production, is something different, more complex and transcendent, because it tries to convert the life of the business and economic activity into a dimension in which the grace of God may circulate, in harmony with the gospel values.

Experience tells us that to maintain and reinforce an authentic worker spirituality, a specific Christian formation geared to the conditions of the world of work is needed. Other essential prerequisites are spaces of prayer, of the frequent celebration of the sacraments and of the Eucharist, as source and inspiration of a strongly committed Christian life. In this mission, the local Church, the parishes and the movements play an indispensable spiritual and human formative role in fostering an apostolic life in the world of work with the *sequela* of Christ as its central point of reference.

Conclusion

We Christians cannot stand by inactive while around us exploitation, poverty and hunger reign. We cannot accept this situation as a reality

for which there is no way out. In fidelity to Jesus Christ we must commit ourselves to building a juster and more human world, on the basis of the fundamental principles that the social doctrine of the Church proposes to us, namely: the fundamental equality of all mankind, as theological category of our existence as Christians and as human aspiration; the primacy of persons over structures and the superiority of the human person to his own social creations; the universal destination of goods, as expression of human solidarity and as principle regulating the meaning and conditions of private property.

These principles are not just theoretical: the transformation of society is possible on the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ. We must revitalize the utopia and propagate yearnings for freedom, participation and solidarity. We must proclaim the need for a new and different society, in which work or its absence is no longer a form of alienation. All this needs to be done in conformity with the gospel ideal of a new earth and a new human being, who may recreate his own existence on the basis of the presence of God.

Witnesses among the Poor and the Outcast

ANDREA RICCARDI

A great sign of newness of life in our contemporary world is the love of Christians for the poor. On the conclusion of Vatican Council II, Cardinal Congar wrote a moving piece on “The Church and the Poor”. “The poor – he said – are part of the Church. They are not only her clientele or the beneficiaries of her resources [and] the Church does not fully live her mystery if the poor be absent from it”. The poor are not the periphery of the life of the Church, as if they were clients, but exist in her very heart. Their presence concerns all Christians, especially the laity who live everywhere on the roads of the world. They encounter not only the most diverse types of poverty, but the faces of the poor. I don’t want to speak here of the journey that has led the St. Egidio Community from Rome to so many countries in the world, and which has been for me, and still is, a school of encounter with the world’s poor and of human and spiritual growth as a lay Christian in listening to the Word of God and in the celebration of the liturgy. This journey rescues us from a life concentrated solely on ourselves, insulated from the world of the poor. What I want to emphasize, however, is that the laity bear witness to newness of life particularly in their relations with the poor.

There exists a tendency to flee from the world of the poor. It comes from the prevalent mentality, founded on the reigning gospel of affluence, on the arrogance of *filautia*, as the Fathers said, i.e. self-love, which distinguishes the individual cultures and conduct of our time and of all times. The poor, whatever category of them we have in mind, are those that have nothing to give in return for the attention paid to them. And yet Christians cannot run away from them; on the contrary, they should show a predilection for them. I have had the privilege of working on the reports on the new martyrs which have been sent to

Rome on the invitation of John Paul II to ensure that their memory be not forgotten. A book has been based on these reports. Its title *Il secolo del martirio* (*The Century of Martyrdom*) sums up my interpretation of the Christian twentieth century. It was, for me, a revelation of an essential facet of twentieth-century Christianity. In this century, the most secularized in Christian history (not excluding the first centuries which were pagan), there have been so many lay people – men and women – who did not fear to sacrifice their own life also for love of the poor. I will mention to you one testimony that impressed me deeply, that of a young shepherd in the mountains of the Abruzzi, who during the second world war showed charity to some starving allied soldiers in his village. He gave them food, but was caught in the act by German troops and shot. At the moment of his death he declared with gospel simplicity: “I did what I was taught to do in catechism: give food to the hungry”.

There is a history of martyrdom for love of the poor. It reveals the profound link between a living faith and the many forms of expression of love for the poor. Those who, like me, experienced at close hand the years of the Council, saw so many flames of interest and enthusiasm for the very least and excluded being lit up; but were also able to observe how so often they flickered and died. Why does love for the poor so often grow cold? Why does it become a limited experience in the life of a Christian, only a phase in our youth or a passing moment? Love for the poor, in its simplest and most quotidian, as also in its boldest forms, has a need to be constantly nourished by a living faith fortified by prayer and by the liturgy. Love for the poor is a very concrete reality, often fraught with the difficulties of life and its contradictions. The love for the poor experienced by lay Christians is born from the prayer of the Church and returns to the prayer of the Church.

The liturgy manifests God's love for everyone: it strengthens love, supports it in moments of hardship, reawakens it in times of lukewarmness, protects it when it risks being squandered and lost. The Christian community that prays is not an island of devotees, but a source of love for everyone. And from that source the laity draw the strength to love

those who are loved by no one and have nothing to give in exchange for the time and effort lavished on them. The laity, by serving and loving the poor, continue to celebrate and enact the true service of love in their life.

For it is especially in her love for the poor that the face of the Church in her universality shines forth. John XXIII, on the eve of Vatican II, spoke of a Church for everyone and especially for the poor. Universality is demonstrated no more clearly than by the interest shown for those who have nothing to give in return. Service to them is the living proof that compassion has no limits. It is also proof that the Church, in a world in which everything has been reduced to merchandise, lives according to the law of gratuitousness.

Undoubtedly lay Christians, in the course of their life, will encounter not only the poor, but the problems of poverty. The social doctrine of the Church is also measured against them. Politicians, economists and others are called to alleviate them. However, we cannot fail to note the constant tendency of social life in all countries to marginalize the marginalized still further. It's an economic and social fact. It's the tendency for the gap between the impoverished South and the opulent North to be widened. But it's also a cultural and intellectual fact, that takes the form of the "ideologization" of the poor and of poverty. For the Christian laity the poor are a social problem, an open question, a challenge to the search for justice. They are called not to forget them, whatever be their work or their profession. For the Christian lay person the poor are above all men and women. The "ideologization" of the question of poverty may remove us from direct and personal contact with the poor. But direct contact with the poor is, in my view, an important factor in the Christian's life and spirituality. Anyone who does not see a poor person at close hand, perhaps, will understand little about man and also about God's love.

Yet the layperson, who lives in his family and in his profession, and who is always in a hurry like every modern man, will encounter on his road this absurd figure of the poor man. He's not only a problem, but a person. All of you will remember the Gospel of Matthew in chapter

25: "I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me" (*Mt* 25:36). It's a mysterious and yet real affirmation: Jesus is present in the poor. What does the layperson have to do, despite being involved in so many things and so many programmes? The gospel parable of the Good Samaritan asks him to stop to help the person who is suffering on the edge of the road.

For when I allude to the service to the poor I'm not only speaking of the Catholic aid programmes and charitable works that have characterized the life of contemporary Christianity in a very positive way. They are very important. I'm speaking of the need for the Christian to have a personal relation with the poor. We cannot be lay faithful by averting our eyes from the poor, avoiding their hand, running away from their problems. Yet men and women often evade the sick, the handicapped, the elderly, as if they feared the contagion of their misery. Christians, on the contrary, are called to consider the poor as their friends and travelling companions. The gospel discourse on alms-giving (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46) has its value, because it obliges us to turn our eyes to that hand stretched out to us, asking for help. In the poor there is a very mysterious presence, that of Jesus, alongside that of men and women in a very real situation of need.

A medieval bishop of Rome, Gregory the Great, commented as follows on the parable of the rich epicure and the poor Lazarus (*Lk* 16:19-25): "Each day we shall find Lazarus if we seek him, and, even without seeking him, each day we will run into him. The poor present themselves to us also by importuning us. They beg. But they shall also intercede for us on the last day". To the Christians of Rome, who did not consider the encounter with the poor decisive (perhaps the least decisive persons in the whole of their social life), Pope Gregory declared: "Do not therefore squander the time of mercy". I think of that squandering of resources, that waste of opportunities of which we lay faithful are guilty in our dealings with the Lazarus lying at our door. It is precisely by kneeling down to the poor of the world that the laity exercise their kingship in Christ. Love for the poor liberates us from the self-pity that is the disease of contemporary society; the disease that

makes us feel ourselves the victims because there's always something lacking in our lives, something we don't have, to make us happy.

When we speak of the poor, we think of those of our own countries. But the contemporary world places us in contact with the poor of every part of the world. The mass media bring into our living rooms images of appalling misery, famine, grief and war in every part of the world. To these images the Christian cannot acquiesce in a feeling of impotence which all too easily becomes indifference. Each Christian lives among the poor at home and those far away: these latter too he sees and hears. Lazarus is not only lying on the threshold of our home, but is portrayed on our television screen, while his voice reaches us through the radio and the press. It's no longer possible to pretend not to know or not to see. We are faced by the challenge of an international solidarity that forms a significant part of the communion of the Church. In fact, this Catholic Church of ours concretely shows, even in its communion, the solidarity of people of the North with those of the South. The movements of the laity, with their internationalism, embrace people both of the North and South: they clearly spell out the message that there cannot be two separate destinies.

And then there's the problem of peace and war. War is the mother of all poverty: it makes the poor still poorer; it impoverishes the rich, even the victors. As the St. Egidio Community, we helped to broker a peace deal in Mozambique, destroyed by a war that had lasted for over a decade. We have seen the consequences of that war for years and years, not only as the legacy of the anti-personnel mines that continue to claim victims, but more especially the many social ills.

The demon of war continues to rage in many countries. I think of Africa, but not only there. Too often we lay Christians are resigned to this, as if it were too great an ill, beyond our powers to remedy. This attitude often reminds me of that of the disciples in the Gospel, who are incapable of curing the epileptic demoniac (cf. *Mk* 9:18). These demons are expelled by prayer and fasting! For lay Christians the challenge of peace represents a major question, which cannot be shelved. It's the struggle against the mother of all poverty. In the twentieth cen-

tury the Catholic Church acquired a heightened consciousness of the futility of war. Is it not especially up to the laity today to ask themselves more whether they can truly work the miracle of peace? It's not enough to deplore war. We need to ask ourselves – with faith and hope – whether the laity, those involved in politics, in social life, in culture, those with social roles, but also those in ordinary life, should not believe more that the Lord may cure many peoples from the demon of war.

There is so much else that should be said. But one thing I feel it is my duty to testify. Service to the poor is not only a form of expertise, a specialized service, in the life of the Church: it does not concern just a few. It appeals to everyone, albeit in different ways. It is inseparably linked with the task of communicating the Gospel to which we have been recalled by the Holy Father.¹ Evangelization and love for the poor are not two alternatives, especially for us disciples of the Jesus who went into the crowds, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and healing every kind of disease. The experience of love for a poor person becomes a distinctive feature – that's how I see it – of the spirituality of a lay Christian, who is not only a pastoral worker, an intellectual, a professional, but also a humble friend of the poor. For I always say to my friends in the St. Egidio Community in Africa (we are present in over 25 countries), to people who often live in real difficulties; no one is ever so poor as not to be able to help a poor person! I think that love for the poor must be revealed and expressed in every lay Christian. This is a great hope and a great resource for so many poor people and for so many poor peoples.

¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, "Homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of the apostolate of the laity", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27-28 November 2000, 6-7.

The Mission of the Laity in Education and in Culture

NIKOLAUS LOBKOWICZ

Over the last forty years I have been a university man: researcher, professor, and rector for almost 23 years. My academic discipline is philosophy. Since my retirement in 1996 I have directed an Institute for Eastern Europe, which I founded with the support of private funding. Its main task is to help the academic institutions in the countries that were formerly situated on the other side of the Iron Curtain in the difficult process of reintegrating themselves in a democratic Europe.

Before speaking to you of my university experience, I would like to say a word about my idea of the lay Christian. I grew up in a family of good Catholics. After finishing secondary school I wanted to become a priest and had already registered at a Jesuit college. But then I met my future wife and renounced this objective with some shame and a little sadness. I was sad because I had been educated with the idea that there exists only *one* kind of vocation in the true sense of the word, i.e. that of the priest or the religious. I had been called by the Lord, I thought, and having fallen in love had thoughtlessly abandoned my vocation. The more elderly in my audience will remember that on the Sunday in which the Gospel reading was the passage of Matthew with the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16), it was the custom to pray for vocations to the priesthood. I too prayed, but, as I said, I felt a bit sad: in fact I thought I was not among those whom the Lord had called to work in his vineyard, or worse still, I thought I had been called but that I had failed to follow his call.

That is why it was a particular joy and liberation for me when during the Council I could read in *Lumen gentium* that we laity too had a vocation. As you will remember, chapter 31 declares: "It belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will". So I too had a vocation, a task

that the Lord had entrusted to me as my goal in this world: that of trying to direct things according to God in the situation and circumstances in which I was living and working, i.e. in the university world.

Curiously this passage of the Council, so important for us laity, had a diametrically opposite effect than the one that it was intended to achieve. The message in fact is clear: if you are a dentist, be a Christian dentist; if you are an engineer, live and work as a Christian; if you teach at the university, always think of what your teaching and research may bring for the Lord. But we are witnessing the almost comic spectacle of so many laypeople who, instead of working in the world outside the walls of the Church, are continually waltzing round the altar and interfering in all the questions that do not concern them, while priests often act as if they were particularly keen to distinguish themselves as little as possible from the laity. A superficial but nonetheless significant expression of this tendency is the fact that priests are no longer recognizable by their dress. I always say to priests: "If I were lying at death's door on the roadside after a serious road accident and someone bent over me with a gesture of blessing, it would be nice to know – indeed as a Catholic Christian I would have a right to know – what authority he had".

As you see, I form part of that deplorable species of conservatives for whom the words of the Council count, not the various crazy ideas that appeal to a supposed "spirit" of the Council and practice disobedience in its name.

But let's now speak of the university. I have an ideal image of the university that I have yet to see effectively realized in full. The university is a school whose teachers work on the most advanced frontiers of the development of knowledge and whose pupils embrace a profession on the basis of what they have learned at university. The university is therefore a place of research and teaching: a place of research, in the first place, because without this there would be no proper teaching; but also, and especially, a place of teaching. From an ideal point of view the university is also the sphere of a particular culture that is not easy to describe, may easily be destroyed, and may be reconstructed only with

the greatest difficulty. It may be defined as the culture of rational dialogue. At the university is permitted what is not permitted, or permitted only reluctantly, in the outside world in the name of political correctness: to maintain what one thinks and to raise doubts where it seems questions remain unanswered – but this only in the name of a quest for truth, with arguments backed up by reasons and always leaving scope for those who think differently. A thinker who is certainly not particularly esteemed by us Catholics, Voltaire, in the course of a heated discussion, summed up very well in a few words this culture of dialogue (which ought to predominate also in the relation between professors and students): “I couldn’t agree less with what you maintain, but I would give my life to defend your right to maintain it”. The greatest danger for the University is therefore when people engage in politics within it, because a politician usually does not wish rationally to convince, but to seduce. This is not necessarily an argument against politics. However, anyone profoundly convinced of God’s mercy ought not to devote himself to politics and, conversely, politics ought not to have anything to do with the university. Unfortunately this proposition is rarely respected and the collegial organs in the universities are too often places of demagogic discussions.

So what is the Christian’s mission in the university? I cannot tell you everything I would like to say to you on this point, but would like to limit myself to three points – three points whose premise is that the Christian ought to be a faithful disciple of the Lord and therefore ought to evaluate everything he does and says by always having before him the Lord’s face. Unfortunately, it’s no longer the custom, even in Catholic universities, to recite a prayer before classes, but I personally have formed the habit of silently reciting a prayer which goes more or less like this: “Lord, rather than I should deceive my audience and especially those who have turned their back on you and your Church and alienate them even more than they are already, turn me blind and mute in this instant!”.

The Christian’s first task in the university world consists, it seems to me, in being as far as possible a good researcher and a good teacher

(and analogically a good student). It's no use to anyone – neither to the world nor to us “useless servants” of the Lord – if the professor or the student be devout but mediocre. At the university we Christians too, and especially us, must distinguish ourselves and show ourselves to be as far as possible among the best in our fields. Up till a few years ago there were continual criticisms in Germany of what is called “performance”. It was said that one must have time for oneself and for one's own amusement, and not think constantly of “performance”. This idea is in part justified, but only in part. We cannot submerge ourselves in our earthly tasks to the point when there's no room for anything else. But as I have tried to explain on various occasions, we may also understand “performance” according to the classical model of the virtues. Asking for performance then means saying: “Perform your task to the best of your ability”. Applied to the university world: “Try, without being a zealot, to be the best possible researcher and teacher of your university (or the best student, if you're a student) and, beyond your university, of your particular discipline”.

But naturally that isn't everything. My second point is that we must see our research and our teaching, or our studies, with the eyes of Christ. You will ask me: how? The answer seems to me simple: with the love that Christ asked of us and also bearing in mind the doctrine of the Church. I often have occasion to observe how professors, who are good Catholics before entering university, leave their Christian convictions behind, in the way one places a briefcase in a locker or takes off one's coat and leave it on a peg. Of course, there is no such thing as a Catholic physics, not even a Catholic historiography, and properly speaking no Catholic philosophy, but only a good or bad physics, a good or bad history, or a good or bad philosophy. But this ought not to prevent us from examining with the eyes of faith the contents of what we teach, of, if we are students, what we learn. At one time this was obvious, but it often had ideological connotations. Everything was appraised *secundum mentem divi Thomae*. Nonetheless, although Thomas Aquinas is the greatest systematic thinker in the history of Christianity, this is no longer possible today. We Catholic intellectuals

have had to learn, not without suffering, that it is not possible to take the thought of a theologian and philosopher of the thirteenth century, however exceptional it was, and apply it with impunity seven or almost eight centuries later, making at the most some small adjustments. The consequence, which is also felt by theologians, is that we lack a framework of thought that offers boundless security. But why, even if it has become more difficult, should this prevent us from seeing our activity in the scientific field with the eyes of faith, for example by asking ourselves if the history of Western thought as it is taught in the universities today, in many cases from a Christian point of view, ought not to be interpreted in a different and more profound way?

I often think in this regard of the words of St. Paul in the First Letter to the Thessalonians: "Test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess 5:21). We have not yet really learned what it means to test everything. Up till the Council we saw errors, heresies, enemies on all sides. But ever since we understood that perhaps things weren't quite like that, we continuously succumb to the opposite extreme, accepting with enthusiasm everything we find in the world. Both the one position and the other seem to me wrong. Accepting everything there is in the world is not to test it; neither is rejecting out of hand everything that isn't of Catholic origin. Paul VI rightly deplored the fact that, ever since the Enlightenment, a split has developed between Church and culture. Too often we have ignored the fact that many of the requirements presented to the Church by her presumed enemies are in actual fact lost fragments of our inheritance, of the *depositum* that we must preserve.

The most important of the tasks that await those of us who consider ourselves "intellectuals" is that of discernment. A discernment free of useless fears, but rooted in the faith – in a faith which (among other things) also implies obedience to the competent authorities. It seems to me that the incapacity to "test" things in the Pauline sense is one of the fundamental problems for us Christians today. It is particularly important when we have anything to do with science. For not everything that claims to be science has the trustworthiness that ought to characterize it. Science is always part knowledge, part opinion. What has been

shown to be truly science we must accept: to do otherwise would be irrational. But the aura that often surrounds this scientific knowledge, and that is produced by personal opinions and ideological views, we are not obliged to accept. But we mustn't even reject it *a priori*: "Test everything; hold fast what is good".

The third point is the most delicate. Especially in the more developed countries we live today in a period of increasingly more widespread relativism. No one really believes any more that the truth exists, the truth in the simple sense in which one might say: "Things are as I say, however much my way of expressing it may be characterized by the limitations of human thought, intelligence and language". Anyone who is not a relativist is considered primitive, or even accused of being a "fundamentalist". The document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dominus Iesus* tackled this problem with clarity, as John Paul II had done with his reflections on historicism in his encyclical *Fides et ratio*.

We have to admit that we intellectuals are all infected in some way by this relativism. It seems to us that in order to be esteemed in the field of science and of culture in general we must give a relativistic interpretation to our work. The very culture of intelligent dialogue I mentioned above as a characteristic of any good university seems to demand it. Whoever it not willing to relativize his own convictions, or to have them relativized by others, is out of step with the times.

Anyone who has grappled with this problem knows that it does not permit easy solutions. Many things really are "relative"; they are dependent on point of view, on period and culture. And since we live in a culture of continuous reflection, in a culture which wants to know "what's behind" everything, it seems that in the end there's nothing really binding, there's no simply *true* proposition in the above-mentioned sense.

I cannot here touch on the rational strategies we have at our disposal to counter this relativism. We ought to tackle them with greater attention. What I want to underline however is that we must learn anew to see and teach to the "world" that the truth does exist and also a truth that does not only concern the empirical sphere. That does not

mean of course that we as Christians know everything and have an answer to everything. It means however that what we believe and what we confess is really true, however inadequate we may be in our way of expressing it.

In the last analysis, however, the coming to grips with the many forms of relativism of our time is not, or is not solely, a theoretical question. It's a question of fidelity, fidelity to the Lord. Even in areas where we don't have answers, we must always remind ourselves that we are servants of the Mystery, disciples of the Lord and of the universe and of history.

While I was preparing this text, I casually ran across an article of the German sociologist Helmut Schelsky, published in 1957. He wrote *inter alia*: "The problem of Christianity is not finding itself confronted by a new paganism. In contrast to previous periods, Christianity does not proclaim new truths to an old world, but defends an old truth to a new world". In a certain sense perhaps this is true. The truth we proclaim is as new today as it was two thousand years ago. We must only learn anew to see it, in other words to see that the incarnate Logos is alive and accompanies us in every step we take. Without this personal step of our faith, we don't have a mission worthy of the name.

The Mission of the Laity in the World of Politics and in the International Community

GEORGE WEIGEL

Five years ago, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly, Pope John Paul II described the quest for freedom as “one of the great dynamics of human history”. That quest, the Holy Father insisted, is “not limited to any one part of the world”, nor is it “the expression of any single culture”. Rather, the Pope reminded the General Assembly, “men and women throughout the world, even when threatened by violence, have *taken the risk of freedom*, asking to be given a place in social, political, and economic life which is commensurate with their dignity as free human beings”. Deepening the analysis further, the Holy Father argues that the *global* character of this quest for freedom is a “key” to understanding its significance, for the worldwide reach of this movement confirms “that there are indeed universal human rights, rooted in the nature of the person, rights which reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a *universal moral law*”.¹

How stands the cause of freedom, five years after the Holy Father identified and lifted up freedom’s moral core before the leaders of the world of politics? And what does the current situation suggest about the discipleship and mission of the baptized in the world of domestic politics and in the international community?

The twentieth century proved beyond dispute that ideas have consequences, for good and for ill. My suggestion is that the *idea* of freedom in a society and in the international community has everything to do with whether freedom is lived in such a way that the result is genuine human flourishing. If the idea of freedom in a society or in the international com-

¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization”, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVIII, 2 (1995), 731-732.

munity is defective, dehumanizing politics will inevitably follow. If the idea of freedom is sound, we may yet, as the Holy Father proposed in 1995, see a century of tears give birth to a “new springtime of the human spirit”.²

Therefore, the primary mission of the laity in the world of politics and in the international community is to *promote* the notion of *freedom for excellence* – freedom tethered to truth and ordered to goodness – and to *resist* the concept of freedom as a neutral faculty of choice that can attach itself legitimately to any object. Put another way, the lay task in the political arena is to insist that freedom means doing things the *right* way, rather than doing things *my* way.

Put yet another way, the laity will advance the new evangelization in the world of politics and in the international community by bringing to those worlds the teaching of *Centesimus Annus*, read “through” the teaching of *Veritatis Splendor* and *Evangelium Vitae*. That is, the teaching of *Centesimus Annus* on the priority of culture in the formation of democratic politics and the free economy must be read “through” the teaching of *Veritatis Splendor* on the public meaning of exceptionless moral norms, and through *Evangelium Vitae*’s analysis of the linkage between the life issues and the basic social and political conditions for living freedom justly and nobly.

Democracy and the free economy are not machines that will run by themselves. The free society will only remain free if the virtues necessary for freedom are alive and well, in and among the political communities. It takes a certain kind of people to make political freedom serve the ends of justice; it takes a certain kind of people to discipline and direct the remarkable energies set loose by the free economy. Absent the habits of mind and heart that link freedom to truth and goodness, the free economy will produce what Zbigniew Brzezinski has called the “permissive cornucopia”, and democracy will decay into new forms of manipulation and oppression. That is why the primary mission of the laity in the world of politics and in the international community is to teach, witness to, and embody the truth that freedom is not a matter of doing what we like, but rather of having the *right to do what we ought*.

² *Ibid.*, 744.

Ten years ago, in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, it seemed as if the cause of freedom, often identified with the democratic project, was irresistible. As I look out into the first quarter of the twenty-first century, it seems to me that the democratic project itself is under internal assault, politically, philosophically, and technologically. A brief outline of each of these threats may help us identify more precisely some of the most pressing issues to be addressed by the distinctive lay mission of the baptized in the world of politics and in the international community.

The *political* threat to the democratic future involves the increasing role of unelected judges in settling basic issues of public policy. This practice diminishes and demeans democracy, and weakens a people's democratic instincts. The judicial usurpation of politics on the life issues of abortion and euthanasia, and in the definition of marriage, is taking place on both the national and international planes, often in response to activist non-governmental organizations that cannot achieve their goals through legislation. Through this process, wrongs are being proclaimed as "rights", and the tools of law are being deployed to do evil, to justify evil, and to compel cooperation with evil. Here is the clearest example to date of what John Paul II warned against in *Centesimus Annus*: democracies deteriorating into "thinly-disguised" totalitarian systems in which the external forms of democratic government are maintained even as those forms are turned into instruments of coercion.³

This political threat is closely linked to the *philosophical* threat to the democratic project, which is the prevalence in public life of western societies of a soft utilitarianism married to a concept of freedom as radical person autonomy. Here is the "freedom of indifference" of which I spoke earlier in its most dangerous form. For freedom-as-personal-willfulness, coupled with radical scepticism about the possibility of our knowing the moral truth of things, is ultimately incompatible with democratic self-government. If there is only "my truth" and "your truth", and neither of us recognizes a transcendent horizon of truth by which we agree to settle our differences when our "truths" are in con-

³ JOHN PAUL II, Eyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, no. 46.

flict, then one of two things will happen; either I will impose my will on you, or you will impose your will on me. Press that method of settling differences far enough, and we find ourselves, rather abruptly, at the end of democracy. A careful survey of public life in the developing democracies suggests that we are already dangerously far down this path to democratic self-destruction.

The *political* threat to the democratic future and the *philosophical* threat often intersect in the many urgent questions posed for politics and the international community by the new biotechnologies. Within a very few years, the completion of the Human Genome Project will hold out the prospect of extending and enriching lives by early-detection techniques and precisely-designed vaccines, and ultimately correcting the genetic defects that lead to sickle-cell anemia, Huntington's Disease, and various cancers. These are entirely welcome prospects. Yet the new genetic knowledge and the power of the new biotechnologies also carry within them the temptation to re-manufacture the human condition by re-manufacturing human beings. Unless that temptation is resisted – unless the lay mission in the world succeeds in teaching the world the truth about our freedom – the world will suffer the kind of dehumanization that was once imagined only by novelists. Crossing the threshold of the twenty-first century, it begins to appear that Aldous Huxley was right and George Orwell wrong. The most profoundly threatening dystopia of the future is not the brutal totalitarianism sketched in Orwell's novel *1984*, but the mindless, soulless authoritarianism depicted in Huxley's *Brave New World*: a world of stunted humanity; a world of souls without longing, without passion, without suffering, without surprises or desire – in a word, a world without love.

In confronting the challenge that this brave new world poses for human freedom, the laity have a powerful model in St. Thomas More, recently proclaimed the patron of statesmen and politicians – and, by extension, the patron of all those engaged in public life. Contrary to the image created by the play and film *A Man for All Seasons*, Thomas More was not a martyr for the primacy of conscience, if by conscience is meant freedom as radical personal autonomy. Thomas More was a martyr for

Christian truth, the truth that “man cannot be sundered from God, [or] politics from morality”.⁴ Not all Christians are called to be “martyrs” in the strict sense of being called to suffer death for Christ and the Gospel. But all Christians are called by their baptism to be “martyrs” in the original Greek sense of *martus*, “witness”. Thus Catholic politicians, statesmen, and citizens engaged in the public debates that are the lifeblood of democracy are called to be *witnesses to the truth* about the human person.

For Catholics, that truth has been definitively revealed in humanity’s encounter with Jesus Christ. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council put it, “Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling”.⁵ To enter more fully into our baptismal mission in the world is to take upon ourselves more completely the three-fold mission of the Church into whom we were baptized: the Christ who is priest, prophet, and king. Thus we are to worship in truth, speak the truth, and serve in the truth.

Like every other aspect of the creation, freedom is “groaning as in the pains of childbirth” as freedom awaits the fullness of its redemption (cf. *Rom* 8:22). In this particular moment of the “in-between” time that is the Church’s life between Easter and the Lord’s coming in glory, the baptismal mission of the laity in the world of politics is to witness to the truth of the human person, human community, human origins, and human destiny revealed in the incarnate Son of God, who shows us both the face of the Father and the dignity of our human condition. In witnessing to that truth, in charity, we may hope to rebuild the moral foundations of the house of freedom – to persuade the political world of the twenty-first century that the future of freedom requires reclaiming and renewing the *idea* of freedom as a matter of having the right to do what we ought.

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, “Apostolic Letter Proclaiming Saint Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English Weekly Edition, 8 November 2000, 3.

⁵ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

The Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Building of the Ecclesial Community

PATRICIA JONES

I want to start from practical local reality. In my parish in Brixton, which is a poor inner city multi-racial area in London, at each Sunday Mass there are around 8-10 ministries and tasks being performed. People come forward to lead music, to read the Word of God, to catechize children, to serve at the altar, to distribute communion, to sell fairly traded goods, to raise funds for work with people with disabilities, to sponsor and accompany those seeking faith, to take part in ecumenical activities, and to volunteer to visit a local prison. The Sunday Eucharist is both the spiritual and sacramental heart of the community's life and the meeting point for its mission.

Secondly, last year I had the privilege of visiting the diocese of Torit in Southern Sudan, a diocese torn apart by civil war which prevents development and isolates a suffering people. In southern Sudan there is no infrastructure, very little health care or education, and severe hunger when the rains fail and the harvest is limited. The diocese is blessed with a prophetic and courageous bishop, who, in his own words, is like a mother trying to feed her hungry children. When I visited him, he was distressed because his diocesan catechists course, in a town called Chukudum, had got caught up in an outbreak of tribal conflict which scattered the local people, forced the catechists to flee and destroyed the few facilities they had in the most basic of pastoral centres. In the days I spent there, I met members of his diocesan development team, Sudanese laypeople leading diocesan programmes to dig boreholes bringing safe water in distant tribal villages. I heard of the need for peace building and reconciliation ministries to develop. In war-torn southern Sudan as in local churches everywhere, the ministries of the baptized are being developed to build the life of the Church.

As countless documents confirm, the growth of active participation of the baptized in ecclesial life, in ministries, roles and tasks, has been one of the most striking aspects of Church life in recent decades. It can be seen as a sign of the attentiveness of the whole Catholic community – its pastors and all the baptized – to the call of the Spirit.

There is no need to list the diversity and forms of participation, in liturgical ministries, in pastoral care, in community tasks and in leading the mission of the local Church in particular sectors. Equally, I hope we have grown in understanding of how this participation in tasks and ministries does not replace or diminish the essential role of the ordained minister. It is the priest who presides sacramentally and leads the community of faith in such a way that the gifts of all the baptized are drawn out and employed in its life and mission.

In *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* the Holy Father proposed an examination of conscience as part of preparing for the Great Jubilee. Among the many important questions, he asks us to reflect on whether the ecclesiology of communion set out in *Lumen gentium* is being strengthened in the life of the Church: “Does it leave room for charisms, ministries, and different forms of participation by the People of God, without adopting notions borrowed from democracy and sociology which do not reflect the Catholic vision of the Church and the authentic spirit of Vatican II”.¹ The evidence from my own experience, and from the experience of many local Churches, undoubtedly suggests a positive answer, even if qualified by the recognition that change and growth takes time and there is much still to be done.

Undoubtedly, too, the growth in Church life through lay participation and ministry sets people free to use their gifts and relieves burdens by sharing out the work to be done. It enables the parish to carry out much more fully the jubilee tasks which should permanently be part of ecclesial life. These tasks include the care and advocacy of the weakest, whether that means the widow and orphan described in the Old Testament or the refugees who are often today’s strangers, and the impera-

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 36.

tive of laying greater emphasis on the Church's preferential option for the poor and the outcast, as emphasized by the Pope in *Tertio millennio adveniente*.²

What does the Church gain from lay ministry?

When laypeople bring into ecclesial roles and tasks the skills and knowledge they have acquired in their wider experience, either through employment, education or simply life itself, this is a potential enrichment of the Church and its mission. However, it is also a process that needs dialogue, reflection and discernment, so that ecclesial life remains faithful and is open to new gifts. What seems important is a willingness to learn and discern, pastors and the baptized together. In this way, the involvement of laypeople in ministries and tasks becomes a school of evangelization of culture, both strengthening the ecclesial community and equipping laypeople to transform the wider cultures in which they live and work. This is part of the task of inculturation of the Gospel, which is needed today in the secularized and ambivalent cultures of Western cultures as well as in newer Churches elsewhere facing different cultural challenges.

In other words, I want to suggest that lay ministries themselves become a place of mission, of real dialogue and encounter between the Gospel we hear and the contradictory values and demands of the cultures in which we live. Lay ministries need not draw people away from their daily context: rather they empower the baptized to be better disciples in that context.

Working at all levels – a convincing sign of communion

For most of the lay faithful, their mission in building ecclesial life will be at the local level, in their own parish. And it may not be their primary sphere of mission: for most people, taking on ministries or roles

² *Ibid.*, no. 51.

in parish life comes second or even third, after their primary vocation and mission in their home and family and in their professional life or local community. But for some among the baptized, mission in ecclesial life becomes a primary sphere, either because they are able to dedicate a significant amount of their time and energy to it, or because it becomes their professional life as they take up a paid responsibility, usually at diocesan or wider national level. This is also a relatively new aspect of Church life. The Church is mostly a voluntary organization; this form of participation has meant we must learn how the Church can be a good employer, reflecting its own social teaching, in a complicated relationship in which vocation, faith and employment are inter-related.

Two further aspects of this development must be noted. The first is that the service of laypeople professionally employed and mandated by the Church is increasingly necessary for its mission. In England and Wales for example, the Bishops' Conference has mandated six agencies working at national level to take charge of particular aspects of mission, and all but one are headed by laypeople, three by women. The Church has the capacity and duty to bring its teachings to bear across all the areas of contemporary social, political, economic and cultural life, and the pastors and bishops of the Church cannot have all the professional skills and knowledge needed for this task. It is a sign of communion in mission when tasks of this importance are entrusted to laypeople.

The second aspect is simply to note that in Western culture at least, this makes the Church more attractive, because it makes visible the truth that the Church is a community that values the gifts of all, including women, even whilst holding firmly to its convictions about ordained ministry.

Communal action for justice and solidarity

We have in England and Wales an immensely rich tradition of Catholic action, and a more recent wealth in the growth of justice and

peace commissions at parish, diocesan and national level. But in most parishes, there is still a tendency to see action for justice as a programme for the few who are interested, rather than a constitutive element of living Catholic faith, both as an individual and in our communities. I hope and tentatively believe this is changing. Let me give an example. I work for the Caritas agency in England and Wales, which is called CAFOD, and like many other Caritas agencies, and Catholic development agencies, we have been part of the world-wide campaign for debt cancellation called Jubilee 2000. One popular action conducted world-wide as part of that campaign has been the debt petition, calling on the world's leaders to cancel the unpayable debts of the world's poorest countries. Over twenty million signatures have been collected. In England and Wales, we asked parishes to collect signatures, and were able to collect 400,000. As there are only around one million Catholic mass goers in England and Wales, this represents a real sign of commitment and willingness to act as well as pray for justice.

If our celebration of Jubilee as a Church is to leave a lasting imprint on our life and mission, it is in this area of justice and solidarity most of all that it must be visible. And it is this area of ecclesial life that cries out for lay leadership, energy, imagination and commitment. The Catholic community worldwide is immensely generous and deeply believes in and lives the value of solidarity; the challenge for the new millennium is to take a step further and equip ourselves to extend that solidarity into action at every level to transform unjust structures which create and perpetuate poverty. The debt campaign, although as yet unfinished, has shown that communal action can change global political thinking and policies as well as causing change in national governments. The task for all of us together, laity structures as well as justice and peace structures at all levels, and pastors and teachers, is to analyze globalization. This includes both the broad process of growing interconnectedness and the specific globalization of the market economy. We need to explore how these processes can be reformed in the light of Catholic social teaching to serve human development and poverty

eradication, and to act to achieve that reform. This is jubilee action that should continue.

Although this is the year in which we celebrate Jubilee in its fulness, the Gospel leaves us in no doubt that Jubilee should be a permanent mark of the Church. I hope that the mission of the baptized in ecclesial life will deepen further and serve us well in becoming ever more deeply a jubilee people and Church.

V

Formation

Towards Human and Christian Maturity

ARCHBISHOP ROBERT SARAH

My reflection on the question of formation starts out from the provocative statement of St. Caesarius of Arles: "It is we who must be the living and true temple of God!". It will be developed in three stages. In the first I will speak of the meaning and content of formation which must progressively shape the Christian's being: it must help him to cast off evil and sin, give a new orientation to his whole conduct, direct and lead him radically towards God, his Creator who has predestined him to be conformed to the image of his Son (cf. *Rom* 8:29). Second, I will examine the necessary conditions for bringing the baptized to "human and Christian maturity", and, thirdly, I will discuss the irreplaceable role of the Church in the primary task of formation.

1. *The meaning and content of formation*

Formation consists essentially in empowering the Christian's real and personal meeting with Jesus. The meeting with Jesus and faith in him demand a lifestyle completely renewed by the Gospel, transformed and transfigured by the death and resurrection of Christ, ritually celebrated in the liturgy and in the sacraments. Whoever wants to conduct an existence of this type must undergo conversion, accept the Spirit who revivifies and sanctifies, and abandon himself to the new birth in the trinitarian life. To this end, people need to be helped to discover the depth and greatness of their humanity redeemed by Christ. They need to be helped to root their faith in Jesus at this level of profundity and to raise it to this level of greatness.

Formation must be aimed at enabling us to discover God's love for our humanity and making us courageous witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, following the example of the Christians of the apostolic

Church. But our age demands a cultural preparation immeasurably deeper than what seemed to suffice in the past and that led us to content ourselves with forming “a Christian people”.

To understand what is meant by being witnesses of Christ among our fellowmen, we must begin by being his disciples, placing ourselves at the school of Jesus. That means being able to realize for ourselves, and to enact in our own lives, what happened between Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples two millennia ago. It means following in the footsteps of Christ, being willing to sit at his feet to listen to him and to learn to absorb his Word and his teachings to turn them into the nourishment of our own life and the light that reveals the sense of the immeasurable greatness and dignity of man. But it's not enough to have studied Christian doctrine and to be filled with enthusiasm for the great and glorious prospects it opens up. To understand what is meant to be witnesses of Christ, it is essential that “access to sacred Scripture [be] open wide to the Christian faithful”,¹ that the faithful freely cherish the Word of God, that they maintain continuous contact with it, through reading and diligent study,² that they forge bonds of authentic friendship with Christ (cf. *Jn* 15:15) and donate themselves to him in a personal consecration of their whole being to the Father in the Spirit (cf. *Jn* 17:19).

Only someone who has undertaken this essentially personal journey towards Christ is able to understand that it is based on human deepening, of which it is also the result, since discovering Jesus in all his depth is also an appeal to be more human. That's why a missionary can only effectively perform his own task if he strives above all to help people to be more human, not only by exhorting them to raise their level of life, but also by seeking to better understand the treasure hidden in their own traditions, which they experience only in a partial and mediocre fashion if they fail to gain full awareness of them.

Formation must help us to discover that the greatness of man and his inalienable dignity spring from his divine origin, from the love that

¹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*, no. 22.

² Cf. *ibid.*, no. 25.

God has for him, from the hope that God places in him. Ever since the origin of the world, in fact, God chose to adopt us as his children, through Jesus Christ, so that we might never doubt his love.

It becomes easy in this way to understand why the formation of the laity represents an extremely urgent pastoral priority for the whole Church. Nonetheless it cannot be reduced to a mere fact regarding the laity alone because, in the current context of our societies, it is perhaps priests, men and women religious that most have a need to change their mentality in this regard. It is therefore of the utmost importance to emphasize that formation represents an ecclesial priority for everyone. Vatican Council II, the Synods and the teaching of the Popes³ have amply treated the task of leading the ecclesial community in general, and each Christian in particular, to the mystery of Jesus and of the presence of God in the world and in history.

The Christian must be introduced to the great mystery of the irruption of God into time and into the world, that was historically realized in Christ and continues to be realized in each genuine Christian. God irrupted into the history of mankind. He came to meet man like a hurricane, a hurricane of love, to break through his hardened heart and lead him back to the pierced heart of the Crucified Lord. God is a whirlwind, a hurricane, an irresistible power of love (Daniélou). And we Christians have recognized God's love for us and believed in this love. What we must recognize, believe in and learn to enact in our lives is this fundamental and central truth of Christianity: "God is love". He loves us with a boundless and gratuitous love. And "he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16).

Yet such an irruption of God into our lives may be deformed, curbed or hampered by man. For we are incredibly cunning when it's a case of blocking the road to God. We shut ourselves off from God's love not only by the refusal to open ourselves to the mystery of God's

³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*; VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam actuositatem*; PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*.

love, but by the general commotion and hectic pace of contemporary life, often dominated by the obsession with purely material profit and success. That's why the Gospel remains a dead letter. We are no longer capable of perceiving the radical nature of the gospel message; we minimize it due to our boundless egoism; we don't dare to change our ways, nor devote ourselves to social reforms, fearing their consequences on our life.

The Cross: place and instrument
of the revelation of God's infinite love for mankind

It's important to understand that the irruption into the world of God who became man for the love of mankind was manifested in Jesus Christ crucified. The cross of Christ is the key that opens the door of the Christian's ultimate destiny, the only true flight of stairs he must ascend towards the totality of his covenant with God. The Cross is also the painful and uncompromising expression of the man who has said no to the world. It is the victory of the spiritual over the carnal man: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (*Gal 5:24*).

The key to a treasure is not the treasure itself, but the act of consigning it to someone; it becomes a treasure by being entrusted to others. The Cross is a precious key, even if it scandalizes our mentality and our quest for easy solutions. We want to be happy for eternity, but without paying its price.

The Cross is the place and the instrument of Christ's infinite love for us. With the Cross, Jesus vanquished all the obstacles that bar our way to the eternal beatitude. He himself said: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*Jn 15:13*).

Formation leads to our conversion

Formation must lead us to the recognition of the love that God has for us and encourage our conversion to God's love. Without this personal

conversion, it will be difficult for us to overcome our selfishness, our obduracy of heart, our caprices; it will be difficult to cross over the river to the other shore of humanity where God awaits us, so that in us too “the whole fullness of deity [may] dwell bodily” (*Col* 2:9). If on the other hand we succeed in dismantling the barriers of egoism that we raise in ourselves, we will experience anew God’s presence within us and learn what it means to be Christians today.

Formation must permit the Christian message to reach our innermost being, to rouse our conscience and touch our heart. It must prepare us to respond with all the depth of our being to the person of Jesus Christ. But that shall only happen if we open our heart. The reading and proclamation of a page of the Gospel alone are not enough to ensure that its content will penetrate the depth of our being.

Who then will open the door of our heart? Only God is able to establish this communication by generously approaching us, by opening himself to us and sharing in some way with us his divine intimacy. For God permits us to gain access to a sphere that transcends our natural resources.

However, it is up to us to cast out everything that may block the door of the temple we are and to adopt an interior attitude of acceptance and desire. We must aspire to meet Christ and be met by him. We must yearn for God to come and take possession of his own dwelling.

It would be a grave error to insist only on the human effort in the formation of the lay faithful. The most important thing is to help our brothers and sisters not to think they are self-sufficient, and to let themselves be met and be recreated inside by the risen Lord. To communicate to man the unfathomable love of Christ revealed on the Cross, we need in the first place to remove the bolts that close their heart, so that they may consent to communicate with God and accept the divine presence in the temple of their heart: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (*1 Cor* 3:16); “For – as St. Paul frequently reminds us – we are the temple of the living God” (*2 Cor* 6:16; *Eph* 2:19-21).

2. *Towards human and Christian maturity*

The journey of man towards the fullness of his humanity, towards “mature manhood, [and] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (*Eph* 4:13), takes place in stages. The first stage, as we have seen, is that of the formation that enables us to gain access to Holy Scripture, that opens our heart to the irruption of God’s love realized in Jesus Christ, that encourages our conversion and produces in us the first fruits of the being we are called to become: men and women in the full possession of their total humanity, restored to “the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (*1 Tim* 2:5-6).

The second stage is that of the personal discovery of Christ, of the personal experience of the Trinity in the intimacy of ourselves. Each of us makes the personal experience of being inhabited by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the overwhelming experience of bearing in ourselves a great mystery, the mystery of the One and Triune God. Jesus himself said: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (*Jn* 14:23).

Only by emptying ourselves so that God may fill the void and take up his dwelling inside us, only through this intimate personal meeting with God, can we accede to our true human and Christian maturity. The personal meeting with Jesus Christ, and the intimate experience of it we make, are indispensable for progressing in our humanity, maturing in the faith and remaining Christians. We must experience God’s ardent love for us and his tenderness as a Father if we are to continue following in the footsteps of Christ and fight the good fight each day, conforming our life and our existence to the needs of the Gospel.

The importance of this personal meeting with Jesus reminds me of a parable recounted by the desert Fathers that profoundly struck me during my biblical studies and that illustrates what I am saying very well. It has been translated from the Coptic and perfectly expresses the spiritual experience indispensable for each Christian life and existence: “A monk meets another monk and says to him: ‘Why do so many people abandon the monastic life? Can you tell me why?’ And the other

replied: 'The monastic life is like a dog chasing a hare: it runs behind it barking and baying; it is joined by many other dogs and all together they chase after the hare. But after some time, all the dogs that run without seeing the hare tire of the chase and, one after another, drop out; only those who see the hare continue to chase it to the end'. And the story ends by pointing out: "Only those who have their gaze fixed on the person of Christ on the cross persevere to the end".

Many true and compelling circumstances or reasons, such as our environment, influential persons or friends may have led us to be baptized, to follow in the footsteps of Christ, and become Christians, religious or priests. All this has had meaning for a certain period of time. But then comes the time of maturity, the time in which only the personal experience of Christ may be our guide. And this personal meeting with him is decisive for the rest of our life. It is the meeting experienced by St. Paul on the road to Damascus (cf. *Acts* 9:1-20), which so radically changed his life as to lead him to exclaim: "For to me to live is Christ" (*Phil* 1:21); "[...] it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (*Gal* 2:20); "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom* 8:38-39).

So each baptized person is called to become a temple inhabited by the Holy Trinity, to become another Christ, united with him (cf. *Rom* 6:5). *Lumen gentium* affirms: "All the members must be formed in his likeness, until Christ be formed in them. For this reason we, who have been made like to him, who have died with him and risen with him, are taken up into the mysteries of his life, until we reign together with him. [...] On earth, still as pilgrims in a strange land, following in trial and in oppression the paths he trod, we are associated with his sufferings as the body with its head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified".⁴

⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 7.

This personal meeting with Jesus and this intimate experience of God's presence in us are only possible in prayer. And prayer is like a sun whose rays warm us, nourish us and lead us to human and Christian maturity. By prayer we are immersed in God present in us and enabled to penetrate God's dwelling in us.

I would now like to propose to you a text written by a great spiritual figure of our time, Father Marie Eugène de l'Enfant-Jésus. This holy man, whose personal experience of God was exceptional, speaks to us of prayer in a sublime way. He affirms that silent prayer makes us seek God in the depths of our soul, and leads us to establish a supernatural relation with him. For where can we find him in a more intimate way than in the depths of ourselves, where he communicates his divine life to us, making each one of us his son? And Father Marie Eugène continues by saying that this God, who is present and at work within me, is truly my Father because he continuously generates me through the effusion of his life, so that I may unite myself to him in a filial embrace in which he gives himself to me: my Lord and my God truly dwell in me, the whole of heaven lives in my soul. Silent prayer, which enables me to keep company with the Holy Trinity who dwells in me, is more than a preparation for heavenly life; it is its real exercise under the veil of the faith.⁵

The first foundation of the Christian life is the presence of God, of the Holy Spirit in us, that Jesus himself revealed to us: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (*Jn* 14:23). This presence of God in us, which constitutes the core of the teaching of Jesus, would become an essential element ever since the earliest days in the history of the Church, in the first preaching of the apostles. St. Paul made it the foundation of all his preaching: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own [...] So glorify God in your body!" (*1 Cor* 6:19-20).

⁵ Cf. FATHER MARIE EUGÈNE DE L'ENFANT-JÉSUS, *Je veux voir Dieu*, Vénasque: Ed. du Carmel, 1988, 192-103.

St. Paul's courage and daring in telling the truth in Corinth, a city so corrupt that its very name was a synonym for prostitution, should be underlined. To this city, and to its inhabitants, Paul wrote: "The Holy Spirit [is] within you" (1 Cor 6:19); "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple are you" (1 Cor 3:16-17). It's just because he insisted so much on this that Paul would succeed in converting the Corinthians, in transforming them, in sanctifying them and in presenting them to God "as a pure bride to her one husband" (2 Cor 11:2). Only by starting out from the presence of God in man's innermost being would he succeed in transforming them into a "living and true temple of God"; "unfailing in patience and in teaching" (2 Tim 4:2). Only thus would he destroy in them "the old man", renew them completely and enable them to "put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).

We may therefore understand what a strong Christian commitment to renewal and transformation must be aroused in us by the vigorous exhortation of St. Caesarius of Arles: "It's we ourselves who must be the living and true temple of God".

3. The irreplaceable role of the Church in the formation of the lay faithful

The Church is the place of our formation and of our human and Christian maturation. The Church is our mother and our teacher, *mater et magistra*. It is she who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gives birth to us in the Christian life, nourishes us, educates us and leads us to maturity.

The Church, says De Lubac, is "the sacrament of Jesus Christ, just as Jesus Christ himself is for us, in his humanity, the sacrament of God. Without the Church we would not know Jesus Christ [...]. In the totality of her being she has as her goal that of revealing Christ to us, leading us to him, communicating his grace to us. The Church, in short, only exists to place us in relation with him. She alone can do so, and

can never cease to do so. There will never come a moment, neither in the life of individuals nor in the history of peoples, when her task might end. If the world were to lose the Church, it would lose Redemption. [...] ‘The divine education’ which is the task of the Church in the midst of us endures as long as time itself and therefore we have in it not merely an annunciation, a preparation for a forthcoming event, but ‘the whole advent of the Son of man’”.⁶ It is the Church that gives us the Gospel. In a certain sense, she precedes the Gospel and without her, the Gospel would be nothing but a book of the past: “Woe to him who separates the Church from the Gospel!”.⁷

In each line, the writings of the New Testament bear witness to a community of faith. The Word of God is the original rule of the faith, whose content the Tradition transmits to us. It’s always the Church that offers a living re-reading of it, attentive to the signs of the time and spurred by her desire to meet the various cultures and civilizations. The apostles transmitted to the Magisterium, i.e. to the ecclesial authorities, the mission of ascertaining how far this re-reading remains faithful to the message revealed.

Jesus Christ wished to remain visibly present among his disciples through the Word, but also through rites that relive, and perpetuate among us, the liberating gestures he performed in Judaea, Samaria and in Galilee.

Each sacrament, according to its own purpose, transmits Christ to his disciples and thus communicates his energies of new life, his pardon and his hope. Through the sacraments, Christ helps us fully to assume our responsibilities, to re-dedicate us to solidarity and to our projects for the future. But it is only and exclusively to the Church that this service is entrusted. The Church makes the sacraments, and the sacraments make the Church. Each liberating gesture of Christ, renewed in a sacramental rite, brings with it an invitation to the Christian commu-

⁶ H. DE LUBAC, *Meditazione sulla Chiesa*, vol. 8, Milano: Ed. Paoline-Jaca Book, 1993, 135-136.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

nity to discover, and enable others to discover, the infinite love of God for each and every person and to permit each person to enter fully into God, in such a way that God be fully present in him as in a living and true temple.

May this Congress of the Catholic laity, so happily set in the context of the jubilee celebrations, permit all of us to journey in the intimacy of ourselves and discover within ourselves the divine presence that dwells inside us. May the deepest and truest conscience of this presence reanimate us effectively to discharge the task and fulfil the filial obligation that St. Caesarius of Arles reminded us of: "It's we ourselves who must be the living and true temple of God!".

Round Table

Method and Content of Christian and Human Education

ONORATO GRASSI

I make no claim to treat such an important and challenging theme as an expert; I will limit myself to speaking about it as a simple believer, as a layperson. I propose to emphasize those aspects of educational experience with which I am familiar, and which university and family life in recent years have constantly reposed as important and fundamental.

I will start out from the fact that education is a fundamental dimension of human life, since there is no life, in any age, that does not tend to grow, to develop, to become what it was intended to be. Education, therefore, cannot be reduced to “educational” techniques and methods, although it must make use of them. It is always something more, something that is far more akin to the breath of life. For there is no discovery of truth that does not tend to communicate itself in gestures and words that may be useful occasions for the encounter with those whom circumstances place in some way, even casually, in contact with us. And there is no life worthy of the name that does not ask, to its very last breath, to penetrate into the great mystery of things, to grow and be educated by even the most trivial aspects of reality, by every suggestion of the journey to be made if we are not to lose ourselves on the way.

This constant of education – in the life of each person, but also of society as a whole, so that it may be judged on the basis of the educational rate it possesses – underlines the fact that reality is its basic source of inspiration and constant point of reference. For each authentic growth is produced by the strengthening, the affective and cognitive reinforcement, of our relation with reality, and by the development of personal capacities and aptitudes.

In the educational relationship two liberties encounter each other and seek to realize themselves in the attempted discovery of reality, in all its dimensions, and its correspondence to a hypothesis that this discovery permits us to make. Education is a risk, because nothing may be imposed, and remain extraneous. Everything that education proposes must be freely accepted. Only thus is the relation with reality not “reduced”. Only thus does it become “experience”, which is the term that sums up the human subject’s relation with reality as something that emerges in his consciousness and is thus recognized for what it is. Reality, in fact, is perceived for what it is when it becomes experience, when it loses its extraneousness and is recognized, not as it were by outside spectators, but by subjects involved in it. Freed from every suspicion of subjectivism, the word “experience” denotes the precise way in which the “real” is recognized, not in abstract terms, but by the way it concretely presents itself to the human consciousness. I think that proposing reality, concretely perceived and consciously recognized, as the origin and end of the educational process is the first step, and at the same time the fundamental prospect, of a genuine education that aims not merely at social efficiency and insertion in society – according to a pragmatic model –, nor at the learning of a culture and way of life to be mechanically perpetuated, but at the integral growth of the human person: the happy formula “living the real” sums up the original and indispensable commitment to life and the ultimate dimension of any dynamic of human growth.

A question of method

Education is not a sum of contents that are handed down from one generation to the next, but essentially a method by which these contents become hypotheses by which problems are tackled and solutions sought. The method consists of a proposal that can be verified. This proposal is presented as a kind of appeal to us consciously to place ourselves in things, to consider them without partiality, i.e., according to all the factors that comprise them, and to grasp their meaning. For reality

is not understood until its meaning is grasped, and this process may be favoured by those who have already travelled a part of the way, and can show the steps they have taken, so that the journey of others may be easier and less wasteful.

Someone who has sought responses to his own human needs with truth and daily passion, putting his own conception of life to the test, will succeed in this way in giving adequate reasons for the choices to be made, the judgements to be given, the forms of conduct to be assumed. He will thus become authoritative for others. The Pope recalled this, citing his predecessor Paul VI: "Contemporary man listens more gladly to witnesses than to teachers [...] or if he listens to teachers he does so because they are witnesses".¹ And the witness is someone who acts in conformity with what he says.

A proposal is only such if it can be verified: that is the most important and delicate aspect of any form of education. Only if a proposal is verified will it show how persuasive it is; this it does by showing its correspondence to the fundamental needs and to the original testimonies of human nature. For the criterion of verification is immanent to the subject, and is just as important as the fairmindedness with which a proposal is considered and evaluated for what it is and what it requires.

A distinctive feature of the entire educational mission of don Luigi Giussani consists precisely of this profound attention to the method by which the judgement may be authentic and, at the same time, critical and intelligent. It is summed up in the words he has addressed to students, right from the beginning of his teaching career: "I'm not here for you to accept as your own the ideas I give you, but to teach you the true method of judging for yourselves the things I tell you".²

Asking for the reasons for everything and trying to give a reason for everything that is said and done is the hallmark of a genuine intelli-

¹ JOHN PAUL II, "Homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27-28 November 2000, 7.

² L. GIUSSANI, *Il rischio educativo. Come creazione di personalità e di storia*, Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1995, XV.

gence and a critical spirit, which is capable of evaluating, in the present, the richness of the tradition to which a person belongs, the value that must be handed down, and the transient form that must be left behind, inseparably linked to its time. To endure and to grow, a tradition must be continuously placed in crisis, i.e. questioned, verified, in such a way as to throw light on the urgent questions facing man, thus favouring a conscious adult maturation. That is the aim of a critical education, the need for which is especially felt today, at a time when the taste for reason seems to have declined in comparison with a few decades ago and the dangers of inurement and conformism are becoming ever more insistent and enslaving. To quote Giussani again, the aim is to “liberate the young from mental slavery, from the homogenization that mentally turns others into slaves”.³

Showing the pertinence of a proposal to the needs of life is the central question for a form of Christian education that aims to show the reasonableness of the faith, since it corresponds to the fundamental structure of man, and responds to his most urgent needs and historical problems. A faith that were not reasonably embraced, a faith not transmitted by reason and hence incapable of illuminating the human experience, by improving and reinforcing its authentic values, would be all too easily pushed to one side and considered of little relevance. Equally, a faith that were not corroborated in action, as a practical response to human needs, and that did not lead to an involvement with Christian experience, which is an eminently community fact, would leave man alone, an easy prey to his own thoughts and the opinions of a frequently hostile environment.

Christian education and method of God

But there is a final point regarding Christian education that deserves to be mentioned. It concerns the nature of the Christian experience, which is not a religious construction of the relation with God, but the

³ *Ibid.*

recognition of the Mystery that came down to earth to “meet” man. The method of Christian education cannot fail to respect the method that God chose to make himself known to man: the method of having entered into human history, making himself present in space and time. Christian education has sometimes been understood as education in the virtues, in values, in knowledge: these are undeniably important aspects of life, but, by themselves alone, they would not suffice to justify the originality of Christian education. If we consider the nature itself of Christianity, we need to conceive of the human journey through life with reference to the “gratuitousness” and unpredictability of its origin. We therefore need to understand education as an acceptance of One who came to meet us, of a Man who made himself present and a presence for man. In response to this presence, man cannot remain inert or passive. He is “moved”; otherwise that presence would not even be felt. But this movement is characterized as a “going towards Him who came towards us and comes towards us”. That’s why Christian education is pre-eminently the communication, almost the description, of what happened and what is still happening, the turning to account of the signs of something that is happening in the world, not because man invents or creates it, but because he recognizes it.

That goes for the young, in the first place, but it goes above all for adults, i.e. those who confront life with responsibility as an occasion for continuous growth and discovery, with consciousness, because they have been tempered by human events, and with eyes full of wonder, like children.

Word of God, Liturgy and the Sacraments in the Christian's Formative Journey

EUSEBIO ASTIASO GARCÍA

My name is Eusebio, I'm Spanish and I'm married to Giulietta, who comes from Rome. We have seven children. By very different roads, the Lord led us to listen to the catechesis of the Neocatechumenal Way in which Jesus Christ, through the annunciation of the *kerygma*, touched our heart and moved us to become evangelizers in the parish of Santa Francesca Cabrini in Rome. Something very important thus happened in our life. Someone within us compelled us to bring the Good News to others and to give freely what we had freely received. Over the last thirty years we have spread the Gospel as an itinerant family in various regions of Italy and in Malta, always as members of an evangelization team, together with a priest, a young person or a seminarian. Our seven children have shared with us the call, the sufferings and the joys of evangelization. Our community in Rome, with whom we completed the neocatechumenal way in 1984, has always been for us an essential point of reference and has helped us a great deal. Today, over one hundred itinerant families perform a similar mission of evangelization all over the world.

The Lord has always been merciful towards us. The fire of the proclamation of the Gospel, to our great astonishment, has not been quenched, and today we are full of gratitude to Jesus Christ and the Church for the trust we have received. We wish the Lord to maintain us in this spiritual worship that is the preaching of the Gospel.

John Paul II, visiting the parish of Santa Maria Goretti in Rome, spoke of the fruits of Baptism in the Christian communities of the original Church, of how the first Christian generations had such a strength that, in a hostile pagan culture, they were able to give rise to a christianization that was spread not only among persons and families, but in

whole nations. Baptism had such a strength that Christians were willing for everything, even martyrdom for Christ: “And why – said the Pope – do we so often see the opposite in our environments, in our nations, in our traditionally Christian society? [...] We are living through a period of dechristianization; it seems that the believers, the one-time baptized are not enough to stem the tide of secularization, the ideologies that are contrary not only to the Church, and to the Catholic religion, but are [...] atheist, indeed antitheist”. And he continued; “That’s how I see the genesis of the neocatechumenate, of its way; someone asked himself: whence came the strength of the original Church? And whence comes the weakness of the far more numerous Church today? And I think he found the answer in this way”.¹

In the early Church, which arose in the midst of paganism, when a person wanted to become Christian, he had to undergo an itinerary of formation that was called catechumenate and was a synthesis between Word (*kerygma*), ethics and liturgy. The ancient Church especially had a *kerygma*, or “annunciation of salvation”. This annunciation of the Gospel, proclaimed by itinerant apostles like Paul and Silas, accompanied at times by married couples like Aquila and Priscilla, produced a moral transformation in those listening to them. They changed their way of life, helped by the Holy Spirit who accompanied the apostles. This moral transformation was sealed and corroborated through the sacraments. Baptism was administered in stages. Catechesis was a gradual initiation in divine life. When the catechumenate disappeared in the following centuries, the synthesis between *kerygma*, change of life and liturgy was also lost. *Kerygma*, as call to the faith that implies a moral decision, no longer exists; it has been transformed into a “scholastic doctrine”. Morality was converted into an “inner tribunal”, i.e. a private fact. The liturgy became the same for everyone.

The Neocatechumenal Way recovers this gradual initiation, this synthesis between *kerygma*, change of life and liturgy. It presents itself

¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Visit to the parish of Santa Maria Goretti”, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI, 1 (1988), 325.

today as a way that God has given to his Church following Vatican Council II to open in parishes a path of Christian initiation in stages, similar to that of the first Church. By this way contemporary man may be born to the new life that the risen Christ brought by his coming. It is called neocatechumenal because it is fundamentally proposed to persons who are already baptized, but who don't have a sufficient Christian formation. *Catechesi tradendae* affirms that today the situation of many Christians in the parishes is that of "quasi-catechumens",² while *Christifideles laici* calls for the presence in the parishes of a post-baptismal catechesis in the form of a catechumenate, by presenting again some elements from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, "with the purpose of allowing a person to grasp and live the immense, extraordinary richness and responsibility received at Baptism".³

The Neocatechumenal Way is a journey of gradual initiation in the faith, lived in small communities formed of different persons by age, social condition, mentality and culture, who, within the parish structure and in communion with the bishop, try to re-live their own baptism in full. The kerygmatic phase, which is the first phase, takes place in the parishes and has a duration of some two months; during this phase catechumens are enabled to meet the face of the Servant of Yahweh, who is obedient to death for us, who takes upon himself the sins of the world without offering resistance to evil, and who offered himself for sinners, for his enemies: "Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man [...]. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (*Rom 5:7-8*).

Love for one's enemy, for those who in some way oppose us or do us evil, is a new love that "appears" on earth, because it is participation in divine life. The Lord has risen. He conquered death with our humanity. He broke the circle that oppresses us, that prevents us from loving our fellowmen. Christ shares with man his victory over death and over sin. He gives us his own victorious spirit, his own life, life eternal. Man

² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, no. 44.

³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 61.

no longer dies: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 Jn 3:14). This divine life is manifested in a new form of love that leads us to love even our enemy: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. [...] But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Mt 5:39-44; Lk 6:27, 29). Everyone may freely receive a new spirit, a new life. That's why so many families leave everything, their home, their family, their country, their friends, their work, and take the road, bringing with them an inestimable treasure: Christ's victory over death. A victory in which we can all share through evangelization, i.e. through the Word and the sacraments: "Be baptized every one of you [...]; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

As part of this kerygmatic preaching, since the majority of parishioners are baptized, after the forgiveness of sins has been announced to them, they are then invited to put the seal on their conversion with the sacrament of Reconciliation. It is conceived as a second baptism. Even those who have desisted from this practice for years begin once again to confess themselves with joy, experiencing an inner peace that they had not felt for so long. A start is thus made to recovering the sacrament of penance, which had almost disappeared in some places.

The kerygmatic phase, leading to the formation of a community of 40-50 brothers, and sealed by the handing over of the Bible by the bishop, is then concluded. After the celebration of the Eucharist, a phase of conversion is begun. This is a post-baptismal catechumenate in which, little by little, stage by stage, we can immerse ourselves in the waters of eternal regeneration, accepting to die to ourselves so that Christ may live in us.

Nicodemus asks Jesus: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (Jn 3:4). These questions throw light on the spirit of the Neocatechumenal Communities. Their aim is to return us to the bosom of the Church, to our Mother, to the Virgin, so that she may give birth to us anew and

regenerate in us the seed of Baptism we bear inside us. This time of regeneration and growth is called by us "neocatechumenate". Mary, image of the Church and of each Christian, received a joyful annunciation, good news: from your womb the Messiah shall be born. After she had accepted this annunciation, the Holy Spirit came upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her. Jesus Christ gradually took shape in her womb until the day of his birth in Bethlehem. Annunciation, gestation, birth and hidden life in the small community of Nazareth where Christ would grow up until he had reached the necessary age to perform the mission assigned to him by the Father: these are the stages we are going through, convinced that, through them, the Church may renew herself to respond to the needs of our time and play her role in the contemporary world.

The post-baptismal catechumenate rests on three supports: "Word-liturgy-community" and is fundamentally celebratory. The Word of God is celebrated once a week. The Sunday Eucharist proposes to us a covenant with God active in our life, thus rendering present the paschal mystery of Our Lord Jesus Christ. During many years we have experienced the power of the liturgy celebrated in small communities, because, as the Holy Father said to the bishops of Canada, "the anonymity of the cities must not be allowed to invade our eucharistic communities".⁴ The third support is the community, which especially supports the family. Within Christian families, that transmit the faith to their own children in a Sunday liturgy, many vocations to the priesthood are being born.

All this ensures that a *koinonia*, a communion, a sign of new love, of charity, is gradually formed in this small community. The divine life is made visible in the Church: "See how they love each other!"⁵ And this has such a power of attraction that, where signs of love and unity

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, "To the Canadian bishops of Ontario", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 May 1999, 5.

⁵ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 39, in: *Opera*, Turnhout: Brepols, 1954 (Corpus Christianorum, Series latina, 7), 151.

are produced, many people far from the Church begin to draw close. Today, for example, there are 28 communities with roughly a thousand young people and adults in the parish of Santa Francesca Cabrini in Rome.

In view of this new-found vitality in parishes, the missionary impulse and the fruits of conversion that ripen from the efforts of the itinerants and families who evangelize, not to mention the vocations to the religious life and the priesthood, not by chance did the Pope write on 30 August 1990, "I recognize the Neocatechumenal Way as a Catholic itinerary of formation valid for society and for our time".⁶

I thank the Virgin Mary, the *Immacolata*, who has inspired this Way, by which so many people have met Jesus Christ, the greatest joy for us all.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, "Epistola al Venerato Fratello Monsignor Paul Josef Cordes", *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, LXXXII, 13 (1990), 1514-1515.

Personal Prayer and Mission of the Laity

LUDMILA GRYGIEL

Identity of the lay faithful

The laity, more so than priests and religious, are immersed in the world and involved in its affairs. Within the Church they therefore bear witness and recall to “priests, women and men religious, the significance of the earthly and temporal realities in the salvific plan of God”.¹ Yet if we examine their mission in the world today, we will see that the laity are even more responsible than priests and religious for the diffusion of the Gospel, because they are called to bear witness to Christ, to announce the Good News “in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2), wherever and whenever they are. The modern process of separation between State and Church and growing secularization makes it possible for the *christifideles laici* to perform their mission of evangelization in places and situations inaccessible to priests.

Although their “secular character” is an essential element of the laity’s identity, their ultimate *raison d’être*, and the reason for their action, is neither “secular” nor material. It seems to me that to properly characterize their identity, we need to take into consideration their interior life, i.e. that sphere of life that determines the layperson as “the living and true temple of God” (St. Caesarius of Arles). So prayer, that represents the mainstay of his spiritual life and determines its development and content, may serve as a valid criterion for discerning and describing the identity of the *christifideles laici*.

The Catholic acting in the world, if he is to preserve his Christian identity, must strike the right balance between spirit and body, between active and contemplative life. Such a harmonious balance is not a

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 55.

utopia but an evangelical ideal put into practice first by Christ himself and then by his numerous disciples, including St. Benedict who by his teaching forged the European ethos and determined the historical impact of Christianity. St. Benedict's teaching, often forgotten or undervalued, epitomized in the dictum *ora et labora*, has not lost its relevance for the Catholic laity today. It could be briefly explained like this. *Ora*: enter into yourself, reflect on and express yourself with all sincerity and humility before God, listen to him, remain united with him and be obedient to his commandments. *Labora*: come out of yourself, go into the world, do everything in your power to make it better, strive to preserve all that is best in the old and create all that is best in the new.

The synthesis between praying and working, i.e. between the spiritual and material dimensions, between interior and exterior life, helps man to live harmoniously with God and with his fellowmen. It helps him to realize his vocation to holiness and to perform his mission in the world.

In truth, Christianity has never separated these two spheres of life and every attempt to set the one against the other is purely theoretical, artificial and does not correspond to the real existence of the believer. The loss of an harmonious balance between the *ora* and *labora* is the prime cause of the dechristianization we are witnessing. An indissoluble interweaving between action and contemplation helps, on the contrary, to overcome the crisis of faith and avoid the risk of sterile activism or neo-pagan spiritualism. For the criterion that distinguishes Christians in the world is living faith and assiduous prayer, in other words, the continuous contact with God and obedience to his commandments. This is particularly evident in the situations and environments in which Christians act not as Catholic associations or movements, but as individuals. Let's take for example the case of the Catholics who work in institutions like the international humanitarian organizations or the UNO. They are in the first place "agents of God" and their position clearly reveals that the laity today are more than ever involved in the front line in the battle for the respect of the rights of God in the world. They must make their personal, difficult, courageous preferential

choice for God every day; a fundamental choice, crucial for their identity and decisive for their mission.

In a world often hostile, or at any rate indifferent, to the values of Christianity, Catholics must be spiritually strong and rich if they are to be convincing witnesses of Christ. If they were not, even if they work in ecclesiastical structures or in Catholic institutions, they would end up being mere employees. An employee may do many things, may take initiatives useful for man and for humanity, but if his activity is not accompanied by an intense life of prayer it won't be a Christian mission, it won't be an annunciation and witness of Christ. Such a man will be an easy prey to the reigning ideologies and power groups; not only will he not bear witness to God present in history, but he will not even respect the divine dignity of the human person he serves. The spiritually impoverished man does not have the strength to bear witness to God, or to defend the rights of God. His labours will be unfruitful, even if he talks intelligently about God, even if he does important things for the Church, even if he is appreciated by the world, applauded by congresses and praised in the media. This kind of activism of the *christifideles laici* is one of the phenomena that reveal the secularization of the Church herself, a secularization *sui generis*, generated from inside.

Without prayer, without this simple but fundamental act of faith, no action of the believer can bear witness to God. On the contrary, all his "doing" may even distance from God both himself and those for whom he acts. When prayer becomes less important than action, man risks sinning from pride, because he wants to do everything without God, or even doing more than the Almighty himself and consequently sidelining God in his own life. When God is not at the centre of his life, the Christian begins to distance himself from God. Even nonbelievers will realize this, for they know how to recognize spiritually strong men because they are intimately united with God; they esteem them, and respect their authority. In our age dominated by the secular mentality, the warning of St. Teresa of Avila retains its relevance: to her sisters she taught the need to have a strong spirit, to "hold fast to what is eternal". She recalled that Christians should always perfect themselves because

“none of their imperfections will pass unobserved. Many of their good works will not be appreciated, and perhaps not even recognized as such, but as for their bad and imperfect works, not even one will escape notice”.² This rule holds good today: it is confirmed both by the implacable criticisms of the “imperfections” of Christians and by the expressions of esteem and admiration for persons close to God, who pray assiduously, such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta and John Paul II.

The example of the great mystics who knew how to wed contemplation and action and for whom prayer remained the principal “work”, in spite of their fervent activity, may be particularly useful for the apostolate of the laity in the third millennium. It is thanks to their intimate, intense contact with God that they succeeded in overcoming all the difficulties, in doing so many great things that influenced the course of European history (It’s enough to think of St. Catherine of Siena or St. Teresa of Avila). They are an invaluable model for Christians today, to whom technological progress gives enormous scope for action, but at the same time exposes them to great risks. Christians today can do so much, move about from one place to the next, communicate with each other with unprecedented speed and facility, but they have difficulty in absorbing themselves in contemplation and prayer. They are inseparable from their laptop and cell-phone but don’t always carry about with them what many “experts” on spiritual life (from St. Ambrose to Kierkegaard) call “the prayer cell”, i.e. that spiritual place within us to which we can withdraw wherever and whenever we like to closet ourselves with God and remain alone with him for a while. Each of the faithful, to be able to act well, has a need to “rest in God”.³ So he

² SAINT THERESA OF AVILA, *Cammino di perfezione*, 2, 4, in: IDEM, *Opere*, Rome: Ed. Postulazione Generale dei Carmelitani Scalzi, 1981, 550-551.

³ St. Anselm advised: “Abandon your occupations for a moment, hide yourself from your tumultuous thoughts for a little. Abandon your heavy anxieties now, defer your tiring recreations. For a time dedicate yourself to God and rest in him. ‘Enter the room’ of your spirit, leave outside everything except God and what may benefit you to seek him and, ‘on closing the door’, seek him” (*Proslogion* 1, in: *Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmidt, Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt: Frommann [Holzboog], 1968, vol. 1, 97).

must take this “cell” with him, wherever he goes, the cell which only he can open and only he can enter. The possession of this cell ensures man a great sovereignty, which renders him free from exterior conditioning, because it bases his activity on what is spiritual, in the last analysis on God. The man who is rooted in God does not let himself be dominated by the powerful of this world and does not suffer the influence of current opinions. Poets particularly sensitive to transcendence (such as G. Leopardi, C.K. Norwid, E. Dickinson)⁴ have also described in a very expressive way this condition peculiar to the person who prays. In prayer man experiences his own freedom and his own power; he gains awareness of his own potential to act in a sovereign and fruitful way.

The most effective and simple defence from secularization is the defence of the sovereignty and integrity of the “cell” of our spirit in which God dwells, i.e. the defence of man as the “living and true temple of God”. No tyrant is capable of destroying such a temple. So long as God finds a dwelling in someone, Christianity shall exist. Even if no exterior, material trace of Christianity were to be left on the face of the earth, but the presence of God were to remain in the souls of a few Christians, the world would not be dechristianized. These few would continue to be convincing witnesses of Christ and constructors of his Kingdom “which shall never be destroyed” (*Dan* 7:14). That was how it was in the first centuries of Christianity and was so in various other periods. Even in our own time this truth has been confirmed: the faith preserved in the hearts of a few “babushkas”, the faith nourished by their simple, assiduous prayer was a little spark that ignited and spread like wildfire through the vast territories of the former Soviet Union. The power of Christianity does not derive from its numerical strength, not does it depend on the scale of its material resources.

⁴ We may cite just one lyric of the American poetess: “The Soul selects her own society / Then shuts the door; / On her divine majority / Obtrude no more. / Unmoved, she notes the chariot’s pausing / At her low gate; / Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling / Upon her mat”. (Emily Dickinson (1830-86). Complete Poems. 1924. www.bartleby.com).

In the fulfilment of their mission in the contemporary world the lay faithful must overcome many difficulties, but not even when they act alone are they orphans deprived of the support of their big family, that is the Church. They can recur to the teaching of the wise masters and follow models tried and tested in the course of a history stretching over two thousand years. But above all they must follow Christ and remember that before he began his public ministry, Christ spent forty days in the wilderness in prayer and meditation (cf. *Mt* 4:1-2). Jesus always prayed before beginning a difficult task or taking an important decision; we see him in prayer before choosing the apostles (cf. *Lk* 6:12) and also before the Passion. This lesson of Christ, repeated by numerous masters of spiritual life, demonstrates a fundamental rule of how the lay faithful should live and act. It may be formulated like this: *primum orare deinde agere* (first pray, then act). Christians will always succeed in proclaiming the Good News about God and bearing witness to his presence in the world if they are people of prayer. The direct and heartfelt meeting with God must take place before the Christian undertakes any action; only after that can he go into the world, perhaps limping like Jacob, but strong in the consciousness of the mission he has received and sure of the help of God who walks at his side or who sometimes takes him by the arm or carries him on his back.

Prayer as action

Prayer is the most powerful form of activity of the laity in the world, their most fruitful endeavour. It is the only occupation that the Christian is obliged to practice at all times (cf. *Eph* 6:18) and that can be practised at any time and in any place. It is an occupation that requires no tools, no structures, no particular conditions. Christians are also given the exceptional ability of acting spiritually, of acting when they are physically weak and economically poor. They can change the history of the world even if they are only a few.

Prayer is one of the most powerful forces operating in history, because it involves not only man but God. The Christian involved in it

must humbly admit that without God he can do nothing (cf. *Jn* 15:5). And he must also accept the fact that such action is seldom recognized or understood or in some way repaid in this world. Lay people involved in the most varied forms of apostolate find in prayer comfort for their activity and confirmation of their programmes.

Prayer as dialogue

Prayer is the truest and most unconstrained act of faith that the Christian may perform. In prayer the Christian stands before God in his totality as a bodily and spiritual being; before God who perfectly knows him. The person who prays must therefore be utterly sincere, without any pose or hypocrisy. It may therefore be said that prayer reveals man to himself. It reveals the divine, the indelible imprint on the fragile clay from which he is made. It recalls the Creator's plan and demonstrates that "man infinitely surpasses man" (Pascal). Prayer expresses the hope for something that infinitely surpasses human potential and earthly realities. It expresses the tension of man torn between the real and the ideal, his nostalgia for the eternal and the infinite. Prayer testifies that man is not a "being directed towards death" (Heidegger) but a being directed towards eternal life.

Prayer reveals in a striking way man's peculiar condition: his dramatic but happy existence on earth but directed at heaven, his living in time but destined at eternity. The person who prays is like an archer who shoots an arrow at a target that he alone cannot reach. From prayer we draw an extraordinary strength. The person who prays is not someone static, but rather ec-static, because he is launched towards the infinite and the eternal, projected towards God. Thanks to this, prayer saves man from the risk of narcissistic self-contemplation, morbid self-analysis.

Prayer helps man to make choices that concern not only his ultimate destiny, but also very concrete things. It helps him to decide what to do, how to withstand temptations. The echo of the angel who dwells inside each one of us is heard in prayer; the struggle against the devil that tempts each of us is revealed in it.

Prayer creates a real and powerful link between man and God, because thanks to it the finite, imperfect and limited man is able to draw close to the infinite. He speaks with him and seeks in him the fulfilment of his own happiness. Only with God's help does he succeed in overcoming the limits of his own weakness and acting effectively.

Prayer has the character of dialogue. It is a real conversation between finite person and infinite Person. It is a dialogue that takes place in the context of the interpersonal meeting. So it is a way of overcoming loneliness; the person who has someone to dialogue with is never lonely. A hermit who prays does not suffer from the loneliness of the inhabitant of a metropolis who does not pray. However, we cannot dialogue with an abstract idea, nor with a force of nature. Christians enjoy the exceptional privilege of being able to dialogue with God and in being able to call him Father, like his Son, who became man and entered into temporal history on which he left his mark for ever.

True dialogue consists not just in speaking, but also in listening, and when the dialogue is between man and God it is the attitude of listening that must prevail in man. That does not mean man's oppressive submission to the orders of a dictator, nor his being cowed into a terrified silence before someone infinitely more powerful than he. It means, rather, a humble entrusting of himself to an all-merciful Father who has prepared a mysterious plan for his salvation. The person who has a dialogue in prayer with God is utterly free, because God does not force him to do anything, unlike what often happens in interpersonal relationships. God listens *better* than man and acts *far more* than man, but he demands from man neither humiliating passivity nor blind obedience.

In an age of words, such as our own, the ability to remain silent, to listen, has been lost. So the difficulty of modern man before God is not so much saying something, or asking for something, but stopping to listen, and hearing the reply. Man today, when he finds himself before God, has no difficulty in expressing himself because he is usually very eloquent. He had no difficulty in finding things to ask for, because he has so many needs to assuage. But he has difficulty in lis-

tening with patience, in remaining mute to hear the voice of God. He must therefore be careful not to suffocate God with his words and invocations. He must try to avoid the temptation to speak with himself, because monologue is not prayer. What God wants from prayer is not to know the needs of man, but to revive his yearnings, to prepare each to accept what God has decided to give him. And God often gives us what man does not even dare hope for. The perfection of prayer is gauged by the ability to listen.⁵ The man who aspires to perfection will try to turn his prayer into a means of listening; he wishes his prayer to become, as a Polish poet wrote, “a responsive and attentive ear, that hears everything that the Lord will say”.⁶

Man's dialogue in prayer with God reveals the continuous presence of God in the world and in temporal history. Dialogue with the Omnipotent is not a solemn celebration, but an episode of daily life. Daily prayer expresses the living faith in God's tireless will to help mankind; for the God of the Christians is close to man whenever he calls upon him (cf. *Dt* 4:7). And that's why Christians have the right to ask of the Omnipotent even the most trivial, “mundane” and material things (“*uxorem, villam, vestem, alimentum*”, as G. Cassiano concisely listed them). Praying means opening our own heart to God, confiding our own problems, anxieties and desires to him, not to get rid of them, but to speak of them with the all-merciful God and with faith ask him to help us, and entrust ourselves and all our daily preoccupations to him.

In recent years there has been a good deal of discussion of the “technique” of prayer. It has undoubtedly revived interest in prayer, and helped some to pray better. But it also presents some risks. The greatest is that of concentrating on words, on gestures or on the posi-

⁵ “The person who prays for an immediate response has a need for many words, and that's why in essence he is so demanding when he prays; the person who truly prays adopts an attitude purely of listening” (S. KIERKEGAARD, *Diario*, VII A, 56, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1963).

⁶ K. BRANDSTAETTER, *Hymn do modlitwy* (Hymn to Prayer), in: IDEM, *Księga modlitw*, Poznań 1985.

tion of the body, while ignoring the strictly spiritual aspect. The most important thing for prayer is not the method, nor the words, still less the gestures, but the interior attitude that Rosmini called “the spirit of prayer”. The method often generates a certain routine; it suffocates the spontaneous sincerity and the originality, i.e. the personal character of every prayer. The exaggerated importance attributed to method also derives from the fact that prayer is used as one of the many therapeutic methods of spiritual healing and not as a means of communion with God. Undoubtedly prayer does help to overcome difficulties and overcome moments of sadness or despair, but it cannot be manipulated and exploited to respond to psychological needs. Undoubtedly, as a Catholic psychiatrist has said, “prayer too is a medicine in the ‘pharmacy of the spirit’”,⁷ but such a medicine only helps to achieve a cure if taken with faith in God.

Prayer, to express the truth of the person, must never be too regimented and controlled. It must spring spontaneously from the heart of the person praying and not from the mind of the teacher, however erudite and holy. Everyone has a need for spiritual masters and fathers, but no one may be “disciple for life” in the school of prayer and mechanically repeat formulae and gestures dictated by others. Study does not help us to speak with God, nor does the eloquence of prayer increase the “efficacy” of its requests. Christians know their prayers “are listened to not by profusion of words, but by purity of heart”.⁸

Prayer is not an examination of intellectual capacities, nor a vain exhibition of erudition, but an expression of a person’s most intimate desires, setbacks and needs. “May prayer therefore be brief and pure” – recommended St. Benedict to his monks, adding with the holy wisdom acquired during long years of monastic life – “unless it be prolonged by an inspiration of divine grace”.⁹ Prayer is not the practice of

⁷ G. DACQUINO, *Credere e amare*, Milano: Mondadori 2000, 173.

⁸ ST. BENEDICT, *Regola*, 20, in: *La Regola di San Benedetto e le Regole dei Padri*, ed. S. Pricoco, Milano: Mondadori, 1995, 185.

⁹ *Ibid.*

a skill, but the expression of the truth of the human being. The Christian knows that he must continuously seek to improve his prayer, and that his prayer is never perfect, but at the same time he continuously feels that the Holy Spirit is coming to his aid (cf. *Rom* 8:26). Only the Holy Spirit suffices.

Christianity, in contrast to the sects or the oriental religions, leaves great freedom to man in prayer, and it would be reductive to consider it a school of prayer. Christ did not dictate a detailed and rigid method of prayer and left only a few recommendations on the matter. He advised that we pray in secret, unobserved (*Mt* 6:6); and that we do not waste too many words, heaping up empty phrases (*ibid.*, 6:7). He prayed more often than he spoke of prayer. He introduced his disciples to the intimacy of his dialogue in prayer with the Father and left them "the text" of the invocation to his Father, who is also the Father of all those who believe in him. So the disciples of Christ should not concern themselves with formulating new theories on prayer, but simply pray at all times and in all places, conscious that the secondary details are just that, secondary and that it is dangerous to give too much significance to exterior forms. Gestures alone do not constitute prayer, because "camels too kneel, gramophones too recite prayers and lauds, onion-slicers too weep" (G. Papini). Christianity is not a religion of appearances.

Prayer as means of formation

Prayer is indispensable for the Christian's spiritual growth and for the realization of his vocation to holiness. God is a great teacher, and entering into dialogue with man through prayer he educates him in a wholly divine way, i.e. sometimes severe and often incomprehensible but always full of compassion and love. Prayer educates man in the obedience that does not repudiate freedom. It teaches man the humility that does not suffocate the proud consciousness of his own great dignity.

The dialogic character of prayer ensures that it is a privileged means of the integral formation of the person destined to communion

with other persons and with God. Prayer prepares man for interpersonal dialogue and the life of communion with others. It is a real school of life that is conducted in familial, social and political communities.

Prayer teaches humility and develops our capacity to listen to and understand both the other person and God. The Psalmist epitomizes the perfect attitude of the person who prays by saying: "I am dumb, I do not open my mouth; for it is thou who hast done it" (*Ps* 39 [38]:9). The perfect attitude of the person praying is characterized by the openness to the gift, by the effort to listen to and understand the one with whom he is conducting the dialogue. Without listening there is no understanding and the consequence is not communion.

Prayer, "an ear" that hears God, also becomes a means of knowing God, and in this sense helps the reason to understand some truths of the faith, while at the same time manifesting its irrational character. Prayer indeed helps man to come to terms with the Mystery; it teaches him how to "behave" in the right way in response to things that he fails to understand, to situations in which he fails to explain everything or realize everything that he considers just and useful. Prayer makes us able to accept what we cannot understand. In prayer we experience the wisdom of not doing, the usefulness of not acting. Prayer helps us to cope with setbacks and failures in a mature and serene way. It enables to us grasp that not all our projects can be realized; that not all our actions can be performed according to human predictions; that even our best-laid schemes can come to grief. It frees us from the self-centred protagonism that threatens many lay people involved in important missions. It becomes an effective means of spiritual perfection that consists among other things in renouncing our own programmes, in abandoning everything that prevents God from inhabiting the cell of our soul.

Prayer educates us to accept the gift freely given but often not requested, not expected and not even desired. One of the characteristic features of the attitude of prayer is the willing acquiescence in not having our prayers fulfilled. The fact that they haven't been fulfilled doesn't mean that they haven't been heard. St. Augustine described this

painful situation in a brilliant way in the scene of the leavetaking from his mother before he set sail for Rome. Many years later he understood God's plan and comments on it as follows in the form of a confession addressed to God himself: "In the depth of your wisdom, you granted the wish that was closest to her heart. You did with me what she has always asked you to do".¹⁰ Prayer liberates man from his own plans of life, it makes him less selfish, less possessive.

Prayer, especially meditation and contemplation, demonstrates the great value of silence in placing ourselves in contact with God, to find in him the strength and the inspiration to act. Silence should be understood not as a moment without sounds or words but as *mentis silentium* (St. Bonaventure), an attitude of contemplation that enriches the heart and the mind, permits us to hear the voice of God and better understand ourselves. Contemporary man, who lives in the midst of continuous noise, bombarded by words, images and sounds, has a need for silence to feel communion with other people and with God. Silence will enable him to understand that the words of prayer are only the sign of "what is closest to his heart"; they are but the frame of a silence rich in inexpressible thoughts.

The prayer of thanksgiving and adoration teaches the precious value of disinterestedness. It educates man in the value of giving without any thought of a return, even to the point of the total offering of self. The oblation attitude ensures the success of every type of activity and especially of the apostolate that represents a specific form of offering of self, of our own talents and our own strengths.

The prayer of intercession teaches us responsibility to others, even to the whole world. St. Faustina Kowalska said: "In those moments it seems to me that the whole world depends on me". Prayer demonstrates to Christians that they have huge potential for action, even the potential for a few to contribute to the salvation of the world. It demonstrates the great effectiveness of the spiritual activity of the believer who

¹⁰ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, V, 7, 15; translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1961, 101.

cannot remain indifferent to the events of the world and the needs of mankind, but who must not necessarily have political power and material resources to change the course of history and the destiny of mankind for the better. The Lord of history has a need for the help of man to create history. By prayer man may help God to fulfil his salvific plan “in the here and now”. This was understood very well by a non-practising Jew, close to Christianity and full of nostalgia for God, Etty Hillesum, who, in 1942, in the ghetto of Amsterdam, just before her deportation to Auschwitz, i.e. in a moment and in a place considered emblematic of the absence of God, succeeded in safeguarding the presence of God in the “cell” of her soul. Devoid of any chance or any means of acting, she wished to do great things for man but with God. In a praying dialogue with God she addressed these words to him: “One thing is becoming ever more evident to me, namely that you cannot help us, but that it’s we who must help you, and in this way help ourselves”.¹¹ We now know that her desire was shared and realized by many courageous witnesses of Christ, as by the Jewish Edith Stein and the Polish Franciscan, Maximilian Kolbe. They were not only witnesses but servants of God, defenders of his presence in times of pagan terror. Thanks to them, even at Auschwitz and Kolyma, God had a “house” in which to dwell.

The ecclesial dimension of prayer

Prayer educates man in the life of communion in the Church and deepens the ecclesial conscience of believers. Each prayer is a unique personal act, but at the same time forms part of the prayer of the Church as a whole, of that metahistorical community of worshippers, comprising the faithful of past and present. The ecclesial dimension of prayer permits us to better understand the Church (*sentire cum Ecclesiae*). It helps us to act according to the Magisterium and to form that *sensus Ecclesiae*, that represents one of the fundamental traits of the identity of the lay faithful.

¹¹ E. HILLESUM, *Diario 1941-1943*, Milano: Adelphi, 1999, 169.

The various forms of prayer practised in the Church help us to understand the role of prayer in the life of individuals and of the community. Community prayer does not eliminate its unrepeatable form in the act itself. Christians who pray do not stand before God like a mass but as a sum of sovereign and unrepeatable persons. God knows each by name, each has his own name written forever on “a white stone” (*Rev* 2:17).

The fact that each personal prayer is also a prayer of the Church is the source of its strength and the guarantee of its efficacy: “Through each sincere prayer something happens in the Church, and it is the Church herself that prays because it is the Holy Spirit, who dwells in her and ‘prays for us with unutterable sighs’ in each individual soul”.¹²

The ecclesial dimension of prayer demonstrates some important rules of the life of prayer. For example, it shows that each prayer serves someone, because it serves to build up the patrimony of the Church to which each faithful may have access. So no prayer is wasted. Each prayer serves the good of someone, because it is inserted in the interior life of the Church. Each member of the Church benefits from this rule. As St. Ambrose said, “if individuals pray for everyone, everyone prays for individuals and the advantage is greater [...]. If you pray for everyone, everyone will pray for you. For you too form part of the totality”.¹³ Each personal prayer forms part of this *mirabile commercium*, this reciprocal gratuitous assistance in prayer, which is a source of hope and of strength for individual Christians and for the whole Church.

From the prayer of her members the Church draws the strength that enables her to survive crisis and persecution. Vice versa, it is the Church who gives to individual Christians the strength to overcome the difficulties and dangers they encounter in their life and in their mission in the world.

Let us recall briefly some prayers indicated by the Church and recited by the ecclesial community, that in a particular way form the

¹² E. STEIN, *La preghiera della Chiesa*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1987, 27.

¹³ ST. AMBROSE, *Cain and Abel*, book I, 9, 34, 38-39, in: *Libro delle Ore*, vol. 4, 309-310.

Christian identity. For example, the prayer for the dead reveals the eschatological dimension of being Christians. It also demonstrates that we can and must help our fellowmen even when they are no longer with us and no longer have a need for daily bread or work. The prayer of intercession addressed to the saints is the manifestation of a purely spiritual, metatemporal link, but not in the least unreal or useless. The fact that we today can ask for and receive the help of a Christian who lived a thousand years ago prepares us for eternity. Living intensely our faith in the *communio sanctorum* means having a foretaste of the communion of the saved. God wills that all Christians like “the saints may reciprocally communicate grace by means of prayer, so that in heaven they may love each other with great love, with a love far greater than that of the most ideal family on earth”.¹⁴ Each prayer expresses the hope for such a life.

Liturgical prayer demonstrates the continuity of the communion of the faithful in prayer and the strength of the bond of faith, that transcends the limits of time. This prayer reflects the history of “eternal duration” (*éternelle durée*) peculiar to Christianity and forms the enduring, faithful memory peculiar to the Christian. The Church is the only “institution” that always remembers, and shall remember to the end of history, all her members, living and dead. The Church never forgets those whom the world has relegated to oblivion; in fact, each day in Holy Mass the Church recalls Perpetua, Felicity, Linus, Cletus and many others. Liturgical prayer educates believers in responsibility to their brothers and sisters in the faith, even those whom they do not personally know and those to whom according to the “mundane” criterion they owe nothing. The gratuitous character of prayer educates Christians in generosity in every other form of their activity, in their mission in the world. So, *primum orare deinde agere*.

¹⁴ SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX, *Novissima Verba*, in: IDEM, *Gli scritti*, Rome: Ed. Postulazione Generale dei Carmelitani Scalzi, 1969, 337.

The Parish Community as Place of Formation

ERNESTO PREZIOSI

*From Vatican Council II:
renewal of the Church and of the parish*

For the laity who experience the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of our time, Vatican Council II retains all its charge of newness and hope. Over thirty years since its conclusion, the words that permitted the Council Fathers, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, to set about a task that it is also up to us to continue have lost none of their actuality in the Church: *aggiornamento*, renewal of the Church for an ever new proclamation of the Gospel, and for the new evangelization in our time. Nor is it by chance that the Pope addressed these words to us: "In this epoch-making period of transition, the lesson of Vatican II seems more than ever actual: present-day conditions, in fact, require your apostolic commitment as laity to be even more intensive and extensive. Study the Council, examine it in depth, assimilate its spirit and teachings: you will find in it illumination and strength for bearing witness to the Gospel in every field of human existence".¹

The parish is going through a phase of far-reaching reform today: there is talk of pastoral units, such as basic communities, movements and new communities, of new confines of the parish, as also its irreplaceable role, and the right of all believers to find a welcoming home in it. The idea of the parish remains that of a Church transformed into a specific territorial reality, and the territory consists, in the eyes of believers, especially of the people who inhabit it. In other respects the process of the redefinition of the parish has hardly begun. It will have

¹ JOHN PAUL II, "Angelus for the Jubilee of the apostolate of the laity", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27-28 November 2000, 6-7.

to take account of the needs and the riches of many, as also of the estrangement or indifference of the majority of the men and women who live in that particular territory. The parish is thus rediscovering old and new ways of incarnating the community according to its demanding vocation of making Christ credible.²

The Council, in combining newness and tradition, stressed the indissoluble and vital link of the parish with the particular Church, where “the parish offers an outstanding example of community apostolate, for it gathers into a unity all the human diversities that are found there and inserts them into the universality of the Church”.³

In the ensuing years the reflection of the Magisterium on the parish has continued. We may recall for example the Code of Canon Law,⁴ the Catechism of the Catholic Church,⁵ and the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*.⁶ Nor are important references to the parish lacking

² Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 9.

³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the apostolate of lay people *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 10.

⁴ “A parish is a certain community of Christ’s faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor” (*Code of Canon Law*, Can. 515, § 1). Also in its juridical formulation (on the juridical nature of the parish cf. F. COCCOPALMERIO, *De paroecia*, Roma 1991), the definition of the parish places at the centre a stably established “community of faithful”. Just this link with the territory, understood in the socio-anthropological sense and hence inhabited by man, makes us think of the tent, of the house of the Lord who comes to dwell with humankind, to share their company in history (cf. *Mt* 28:20) close to the houses of men (cf. *1 Pt* 1:17; 2:5), that helps to redefine the parish today on the basis of its mission.

⁵ “A parish is [...] the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ’s saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love: ‘You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2179).

⁶ *Christifideles laici* dedicates ample coverage to the parish and to the laity in relation to the parish: the parish is born from the Eucharist: “The parish is founded on a theological reality, because it is a *Eucharistic community*. This means that the parish is a community

in the documents of the continental Synods held in recent years.⁷ Bishops' Conferences, such as that of Italy, have also devoted wide-ranging reflections to the Christian community and to the parish in their post-conciliar ten-year plans.

*The parish community as place of formation:
visible expression of the Church of the Council*

Images of an open and living parish

There are some images that are inseparable from the journey made by the laity since Vatican II and that are particularly cherished by those like me involved in Catholic Action. They are images that have motivated our commitment in the Christian and civil community, but that are still regarded with some degree of suspicion.

The first image is that of the "village fountain", recalled by the Blessed John XXIII. It's not only a fine image, serene and in some sense idyllic, but also refers to a real rooting of the parish in the territory and its capacity to make that territory happy and fruitful by fostering as great as possible openness and welcome to anyone who lives in it, even if only in transit, even if only for short periods.

Far from being merely an "office" to which to apply for various services, the parish should become the "place" for the daily meeting between persons who draw sustenance from the source of the Lord's grace, persons of all generations, even those who today, under the

properly suited for celebrating the Eucharist, the living source for its upbuilding and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church" (no. 26); the parish constitutes itself as people of God: "[...] the parish is a *community of faith* and an *organic community*, that is, constituted by the ordained ministers and other Christians, in which the pastor – who represents the diocesan bishop – is the hierarchical bond with the entire particular Church" (*ibid.*); the parish is a family: "The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit", 'a familial and welcoming home', the 'community of the faithful'" (*ibid.*).

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 100.

influence of a disintegrating culture, seem more like nomads than pilgrims, but who do not cease to seek the living water they crave and who can grasp the signs of the Mystery in a community that has the task of communicating it.

The second image is that of the parish as “cell of the diocese”, emphasized by the Council as the basic element of the vitality of the particular and universal Church.⁸

It is in the parish that the Christian lives the fundamental stages of his faith from baptism to the grave, passing through the sacraments of Christian initiation and those that sanction his/her vocation, in particular for the laity the sacrament of matrimony and the family. But above all the parish must be the place where the faith is celebrated in the liturgy, verified in the light of the Word and of prayer, and enacted in the pastoral and missionary life of the Church.

While the parish enables us to experience the humility of being “only” a cell, always deferring to the body that is the Church, it also helps us to grasp the responsibility of each cell for an organic and living body.

The third image is that of the “family of God” that we find in *Christifideles laici*. It primarily refers to the parish as a community of faith, and the fact that the members of this community, thanks to a providential design and not by their own choice, are held together by a strong bond, similar to that of kinship and blood, which no division can dissolve. For the community is not formed merely on the strengths of reciprocal liking and friendship; indeed, it remains a Christian community even when the parish community is riven by moments of crisis.

Saying that the parish is the family of God also means underlining the fact that it is not exclusively or primarily a sociological fact, but a mystery of communion and mission based on the trinitarian model.

New motivations of the role of the parish, and how it should be lived, derive from this. The parish is called in the third millennium

⁸ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the apostolate of lay people *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 10.

increasingly to become a model of community among all the baptized and among all men and women of good will, a concrete sign that God the Father does not give preference to anyone.

Lastly, the image of the “tent”: it recalls the origin of the incarnation, of the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us. The tent is the place where people gather, it is the tent of the congregation; but at the same time it is always ready to be dismantled and rolled up, to be taken wherever God himself will indicate. For God meets men and women in the circumstances of their daily life. From this derives a new way of understanding the parish, ever less bound up with static structures and ever more open to the mobility that is progressively influencing the life of contemporary society.

Place of formation in communion and mission

After having proposed four images that challenge the parish in the third millennium, I will now tackle the core of the theme assigned to me: formation. And I will do so by starting out from a definition of the terms “place”, “communion” and “mission”; I do so not to repeat the findings of pastoral theology, but to underline the need to speak of the parish in a positive way: I will try to express what our expectations as laity “of the parish” are and what we are willing to do “for the parish”.

By “place” we mean the persons who inhabit the territory, their life within the territory, and the contexts with which they interact. We mean both believers and nonbelievers, committed Christians and those who regularly attend Sunday mass; those who have a deep sacramental life and those whose experience of the sacraments is purely traditional. The parish community will only fulfil its role as place of formation if it addresses itself in a significant way to all its intended beneficiaries. It cannot therefore dispense with the participation of the laity as active protagonists of formation, because the laity are like a bridge that takes the Church into the world and the world into the Church.

Only thus shall we have an “open parish”: i.e. a parish that is not just for insiders (who perhaps may offer an image and a jargon for ini-

tates), but open to everyone. That is the great challenge posed to us by an intuition of the parish's role inspired by its apostolic origins: that of rooting in the territory a small exemplary experience of the Church, exploiting for its own formative aims the simultaneous belonging of the laity both to the parish community and to its territory.

In short, in response to the plurality and problems of old and new centres of education (family, school, associations, movements, new media, virtual forums...), the parish must redesign its role if it is to be a place of authentic human and Christian formation.

To achieve this objective, formation in the parish must start out from the structural and essential elements that determine the Church's very being: faith, communion and mission, with distinguishing features such as *unity of life* and *accessibility*.⁹

Let us now focus on these two aspects: formation in communion and formation in mission.

"Forming in communion" means first of all recognizing the gift of God, trinitarian communion. It means recognizing that "the essence of our ethical and moral life consists in translating into everyday gestures the Sunday contemplation of the trinitarian mystery, discovering the dignity of the person in the whole of humanity, recognizing their fundamental equality and respecting the characteristic features of their distinction".¹⁰

A consequence of this is that formation in *communio* in the parishes must be translated in the first place into the culture of welcome. Welcoming the other person for what he is, respecting him in his identity, becomes the first form of charity.

This risks becoming commonplace today, also for the parish community. For the context in which we live, too often predominated by egoism, activism and rivalry, sometimes exacerbated to the point of dis-

⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, nos. 39 and 63.

¹⁰ A. BELLO, "La cultura delle relazioni per una AC esperta in umanità", in: D. AMATO (ed.), *Fino in Cima. Scritti e interventi di mons. Antonio Bello all'Azione Cattolica*, Molfetta 1998, 69.

honesty, has modified the way men and women relate to each other in daily life. Hence the need to experiment with new approaches, new methods of teaching communion and dialogue with a view to a substantial, and not formal, exercise of charity. This also requires increased commitment to promoting the possible co-existence not only of cultural and generational differences (overcoming the current formative model that sees the various age groups rigidly “divided” and without interactions), but also of disparities between ethnic groups, social conditions, etc.

Nor can formation in *communio* dispense with formation in forgiveness. In a human climate where vendetta, feuding, retaliation at the personal and collective level are becoming devastating projects of death (as witnessed by the many murders, wars, conflicts...), the gospel of forgiveness becomes the capacity to forgive the other not just once but “seventy times seven” (*Mt* 18:22). It means breaking the spiral of hatred that is increasingly gripping us; it means forgiving also our enemies, according to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

Formation in welcome and forgiveness becomes the antidote to a society that is selective, xenophobic, intolerant, a society that foments disparities, that tends to abandon pockets of poverty and creates perverse systems that make the rich ever richer and the poor ever poorer.

Formation in communion also means bearing in mind that a parish community consists of particular persons, of different age and different social and professional conditions: too often the way in which it is structured does not seem to take due account of this.

The community is also formed of those who aren’t but could be there. Our liturgies, our meetings, all our activities cannot ignore those who are absent. Indeed they must favour communication, and be conceived also in the measure of those who aren’t there. The parish is not a community for the few who regularly frequent it. It is essential, therefore, that thought be given – and here too the laity may make an indispensable contribution – to the participation in all its activities of the many that are not yet involved in them. This can only be based on a personal meeting.

Formation in *communio* must also culminate in the active and heartfelt participation of the faithful in liturgies that may help them to grasp the Mystery in its deepest dimension.

Communion will become all the more visible in parish communities the bigger the heart of the Church is. It will become a privileged occasion to experience the local reality in a universal dimension.

“Forming in mission” is the second principle proposed to by *Christifideles laici*: “Communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion”.¹¹

The vocation of the parish is “historically” missionary: born to go from the city to the pagans; the bishops entrusted the eucharistic bread (*fractio panis*) to lay catechists who went into the rural areas...

But how does the parish form for mission today? The parish of the third millennium must perforce redefine itself in the light of a changing world. In a changed social fabric, where believers in the Lord are only a tiny flock, it's natural that the missionary dimension of a parish should be stepped up. And if it is to be a sign in the surrounding territory, the parish must necessarily make better use of the laity, who are now called more than they were in the past – or, rather, in an increasingly comprehensive way – to bear witness to Christ in the world and to bring the secular dimension into the Church.

From a strictly formative point of view, too, we should ask ourselves what is meant by the affirmation that the Church is intrinsically missionary and how the “popular” quality of the ecclesial form is to be realized. It is called to be a sign of the universal accessibility of the Gospel. It is formed to discern what is Christian in every occasion of life.

A priority in this respect is undoubtedly that of unity in mission (“[...] that they may all be one [...] so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” [*Jn* 17:21]). This is an emphasis that permits the role that associations, groups and movements may play to be enhanced, especially if, as in the case of Catholic Action, they opt for the local Church as their field of action.

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 32.

Today it is more difficult to welcome and promote all the charisms, to foster the missionary communion that we have difficulty in recognizing amid the lethargy that often overcomes bodies like the pastoral councils. Thirty years ago one dynamic priest might have been enough to instigate renewal, but today no longer. Today the need for an educated laity is ever more urgent, especially adults who are capable of operating for unity and enlivening a parish community as a protagonist of evangelization in its own right, alongside the clergy and in communion with the bishop. A laity capable of listening to and dialoguing with all Christians, with all believers of various religions, with the “city of man”, a city that risks becoming a new Babel,¹² but in which we choose to dwell. A laity that may cooperate in building a parish that may be – according to an image I have loved since my childhood – *a house among houses, a Church among the people*.

In the parish with the style of Nazareth

The parish thus described, even if only schematically, finds a model in the icon of Nazareth. The thirty years spent by Jesus in Nazareth may become a model full of consequences for the parish and for the formation of the “adult” Christian, but only if we consider the parish as the first and essential place of Christian formation, and only if we bear in mind the scope and significance Nazareth occupies not only in the economy of the Incarnation, but in the life of Jesus, culminating in the events of Easter.¹³

Just as a certain interpretation of the “hidden life” of Jesus, as preparatory for his “public life”, reduces the truth of Nazareth to a preliminary stage in his subsequent ministry, so a minimalist conception and practice of the parish often reduce it to an anachronistic residue;

¹² Cf. G. FROSINI, *Babele o Gerusalemme? Per una teologia della città*, Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni Paoline, 1992, 270.

¹³ Cf. P. SEQUERI, “Incarnazione e laicità”, in: *Sei parole per il Giubileo*, Roma: Fondazione Apostolicam Actuositatem, 1999, 9ff.

the essence of an authentically Christian and spiritual experience is placed at “another” level, either different or later.

Nazareth is not the obscure premise of something that would only come later. It is already in embryo the history of the event that would later be consummated at Easter. The link between Nazareth and Jerusalem is the link between the child God and the crucified and risen God. It might be said that the child God is the crucified, precisely because the child is already the whole of what he is later to become; he is so in the form of a gift that he receives as a promise, of a destiny that is given to him to make it his own and determine in a way that could not be known in advance. Wanting to have a child is not yet knowing whom one wants; it is wanting it in the form of a willingness to follow it and letting the truth of its identity be given by the child itself. The Kingdom is in the midst of us like a child. It must be accepted like children. Accepting Jesus is no more than accepting a child.

The parish is the *elementary school* of Christian formation.¹⁴ But it is so not as the premiss for some other, more demanding kind of formation, as if its “elementary” nature should be followed by a further and more advanced stage of education in the faith. It is, and already permits, everything that is necessary and sufficient for cultivating good relations with God, with oneself and with others. This may be adequately expressed in terms of holiness – before God and before man. So the parish should not be seen as a moment *ad intra* for a successive mission *ad extra*; but as a model parish, concrete “form” of Christian life for which the effective forms of living are not irrelevant.

So the parish, based on the model of Nazareth, must be the form of the Church that represents a place of education of everyone in the role of disciple,¹⁵ which may of course exist elsewhere, but which is the *form of the common life of the Christian*. This too qualifies the parish: the fact of showing and realizing that the truth of the Gospel is for all those who consent to follow Jesus in a determined territory and time, at whatever

¹⁴ Cf. M. CÉ, Pastoral Letter, *Il granello di senapa*, Venezia 1990.

¹⁵ Cf. G. MOIOLI, *Il Discepolo*, Milano: Glossa, 2000.

age and in whatever condition of life, and who become *like* him due to the fact of being *with* him, instructed by his word and nourished by his food.

“Dear lay faithful, men and women, you are also called to accept willingly and generously your share of responsibility for the life of the ecclesial communities to which you belong. The image of your parishes, called to be welcoming and missionary, depends on you. No baptized person can be idle”.¹⁶ With this appeal the Pope asks us to implement the Council also starting out from the parish. The fact that he made it in the jubilee year helps us to ask for forgiveness for the many sins of omission that have marked the implementation of the Council in the particular Churches and in the parishes throughout the world over the last thirty years.

Like each Christian and each Christian community, the parish shall only become itself if it makes visible Christ’s face. This was the mission of the first apostolic communities and it continues to be ours today.

The many descriptions of the daily life of the Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. *Acts* 2:42; 4:32; 5:12; 6:1; 9:31; 10:44; 18:1) may be a model for our examination of conscience and for renewing our fidelity as disciples to the perennial message of the Gospel.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, “Message on the occasion of the Congress of the Catholic Laity”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 26 November 2000, 7.

The Contribution of Movements and Associations to the Growth of the Lay Faithful

MARTINE CATTÀ

In recent decades the Holy Spirit has aroused many conversions and renewed the faith of Christians.

Now that the mists of conformism and neo-jansenism have been dispelled, innumerable Christians have rediscovered the joy of their faith. They have opened themselves to praise and thanksgiving. They have wished to gain a better knowledge of Holy Scripture and to deepen their own formation. They have begun to evangelize to transmit their own hope by proclaiming the Christ they had met. So many of them have felt the need to associate themselves in ecclesial movements or to establish new communities, a fact that is particularly evident within Charismatic Renewal. These movement and communities, although they have their own character, have also had some influence on the traditional parish structures or long-established associations. We have thus witnessed a rediscovery of adoration and the development of a formation more centred in Christ.

Today, alongside the constant growth of new communities and ecclesial movements, we are witnessing on all sides – through the activities of evangelization and also outside them – another powerful action of the Holy Spirit, especially among the young. It is characterized by three main elements. The first: many young people are expressing their longing for God and their search for him. Many others are touched, almost as if by surprise, by this thirst for God, for it is “Jesus Christ who [...] is the first to [seek them]”.¹ The second: in the very moment in which they are

¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Address during the celebration in St. Peter’s Square for the opening of the world youth gathering in the year of the Great Jubilee”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 16-17 August 2000, 6.

touched, they become missionaries – as if the meeting with God were accompanied by the sending on mission: “You go into the vineyard too” (Mt 20:4). And they hasten to go into it. That is what happened in Paris last autumn. Two hundred young people who had taken part in World Youth Day 2000 became protagonists of a mission on the eve of All Saints: they invited passers-by to enter the church of Saint Severin: “Take heart; rise, he is calling you!” (Mk 10:49). And the ancient church, a real jewel of gothic architecture, was full of the most diverse people, some dressed up in fancy costume for Halloween, for the first time in their life contemplating Christ exposed in the Holy Sacrament. Wonder and awe could be read in many faces. The third of these elements is the force of attraction and of conversion exerted by Jesus in the Eucharist.

The desire of the young to get to know and follow the Lord is deepened in the meeting with nonbelievers in mission; a meeting that confronts them with their own limitations, their own incompetence, their own lack of religious culture. They then feel and express the need to receive a formation, to be accompanied in their spiritual and human growth; they want to know more about it to be able to respond to its demands and to occupy their place in society, in the economy, in culture... The scale of what happens represents an event and a new challenge for the movements and communities: how can these youngsters be supported? How can they be helped to grow? *How can the new communities and movements help to respond to this need of our time?* Only a few points can be made in reply, sketched out on the basis of my experience of the Emanuel Community, but bearing in mind the situation in general.

1. *The community, place of growth because place of mission*

In the various types of mission we organize with the young, as often as possible in collaboration with the parishes, we try to go towards people with benevolence to listen to them, to listen to their questions, and wherever possible, we propose to them a direct contact with Christ: “Come and see!”. We then very often discover people’s real quest, their profound yearning which penetrates the heart. And at the same time we

discover with awe that it is God himself who takes the initiative and who acts with power, even if he uses us as intermediaries. Some examples:

At Warsaw, a passer by, at the invitation of some evangelizers, enters a church. The Holy Sacrament is exposed. He sits down and a short while later confesses: "It's the first time I feel a sense of peace I never experienced before... can I stay here?" This meeting lasted half an hour.

Same thing in Vienna: an unbaptized tourist visits the cathedral during a mission. His glance rests on the monstrance in which the consecrated Host is exposed to the adoration of the faithful. He stops in front of it and bursts into tears. He sits down, continuing to weep. Twenty minutes later, his wife urges him to come out. "Leave me alone", is his reply.

At São Paulo in Brazil thirty young people are proclaiming Christ in front of a church. A journalist, who happens to be passing by, completely confounded, decides there and then to begin all over again to live as a Christian and to confess himself. On the following day he is killed in a road accident while driving to work...

Being witnesses of the action of God, in the front line, like the apostles, strengthens the faith of young missionaries. They discover that their nascent faith grows whenever they share it with others. They also discover that this sharing of their faith is the condition for continuing to live. When they see with what loving care God looks after people, they receive for themselves a totally new hope and trust in God: "He won't abandon me". And their desire to follow Christ grows: they become Christians thanks to the mission.

The fact of being together, of forming a community, gives us a strength and a daring which we would not have, were we to act alone. That helps us to overcome timidity, the fear of meeting strangers, the fear of arousing their hostility, the fear of finding ourselves confronted by doubts and incredulity that risk reawakening our own incredulity, our own doubts... At times we need to take a stance and it's not always easy. That's why the older missionaries accompany the younger ones

and share their mission with them. They are not just a support: they themselves receive a new zeal and rediscover “the love [they] had at first” (*Rev* 2:4). A real unity and faith in charity is thus created between the generations. That, in itself, is a form of witness.

Carrying out a mission means learning to give oneself without waiting to be formed or perfected. I can give myself just as I am. In mission I see the action of God, but I also see that he makes use of me. He has a need of me. For him, the Almighty, I am important. What value does my life therefore have? I emphasize this point because, at the moment of conversion, these young people have been snatched from “the snares of death” (2 *Sam* 22:6); the weight of the culture of death of their environment and of their own personal experience is such that at times they need time to readjust, time to pass deliberately and definitively to the side of life, and to accept it in all their humanity. The Eucharist, but also the mission itself, as an experience of life and source of deep joy (cf. *Lk* 10:17), will help them a lot to relate to God and to others.

2. *The community, place of growth thanks to common endeavour*

What brings the members of a movement together is a “particular charism” aroused by the Holy Spirit in the Church. Together with others they have chosen Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel. The sharing of a common grace between different persons, the exercise of a charism, the carrying out of a mission, open up the body to the spirit. The fact of being banded together in a common endeavour strengthens our solidarity. It reciprocally stimulates us in Christian life and in the gift of self: if I fall, they will pick me up; if they weaken, I will support them. When someone close to us lives the Gospel, we see that this is possible; in the presence of a person who is changing, the hope that we too can change is strengthened in us. We try to propose to each person, young or not so young, someone who can accompany him in his relation with God and with others, and support him in the harmonious wedding together of apostolic life, social life, personal life. For “a brother helped is like a strong city” (*Prov* 18:19). Common endeavour

fosters the virtues of steadfastness and fidelity, lasting values, in a age in which efficiency and emotional immediacy have all but eliminated the sense of long-term commitment. The young thus find roots in those who have made an existential choice before them, or alongside them, and this will help them to insert themselves actively in the world.

A source of growth is also the solidarity between the various states of life. Being close to persons of other states of life helps to reveal to each his/her own call to holiness, whatever be his/her situation or aims in life. Solidarity between states of life, in the mission, teaches us to recognize our own place and our own complementarity: when we place ourselves at the service of others, each state of life both stimulates and is stimulated. So, for example, the consecrated show spouses the value of service to the Kingdom; they show that the gift of self in the primary choice of God may be a source of joy. In communion with our ordained brothers we are re-directed towards the person of Christ. The zeal of young people in their gift of self and their thirst for the absolute reawaken the less young. And from married couples a sense of fidelity and welcome is received. We thus discover that marriage and mission are not at all incompatible. Very often the young have never had any real contact with priests and those in consecrated life. Living alongside consecrated married couples, whose marriage is not only steadfast but happy, is a revelation, at times a source of deep healing, for some. That makes them able to plan their own marriage with hope, as an option coherent with their desire for holiness, or more freely directing their steps towards another state of life. Others again are freed from the anguish of suffering and death by being in contact with the more elderly who are preparing for their own encounter with God in praise and in charity. Each member of the community thus grows thanks to the others, in a truly dynamic solidarity.

Growing maturity helps each gradually to accept his own limitations and to recognize the capacities of others. Nonetheless community life or joint endeavour are not exempt from difficulties due to one's own failings, or those of others, limitations, misunderstandings... A quarrel or a conflict which could lead to a split become occasions for practising the virtue of forgiveness: sustained by God's grace and Christ's example, the

members of the community can then freely choose to forget the past and to open themselves anew to the other in charity; they mutually renew their own faith. The common mission is thus enriched with new impulse and new hope. Thanks to forgiveness, God recreates relationships and renews hearts on the model of the gentleness and humility of Christ. What gives witness, and what makes people grow, is not the perfection of relationships and persons, but the fact that these relationships are continuously nourished by the salvation of God.

3. The community, place of growth through formation

Meeting Christ and deciding to follow him prompts a series of new questions. Who is Christ? What is his message? How can we seek the truth in our own life and conform it to the light of Christ? What does it mean for me to be a man or woman? How can we recognize the truth and embrace the truth? How can we place our own intelligence at the service of the truth? How can we become truly obedient to the Holy Spirit? How can we help our fellowmen to become more human? How can we live with contradiction? How can we remain steadfast, bear witness, be formed to respond to the questions of others?

In recent years, a massive dechristianization and the almost total loss of any point of Christian reference have meant that most young people have not received any Christian formation at all. But they have a vital need for it, if they are properly to relate as Christians to themselves and to others. So steps must be taken to provide them with a basic catechetical formation that is both dynamic and adapted to their life.

To respond to this need we have created “schools of charity and of mission” in the Emanuel Community. Young students or young professional men and women, who are not yet members of any movement, meet together in these schools one evening a week and one weekend a month for a total of eight months. They are young people who wish to be formed in the faith to enable them to respond to a real vocation to evangelization: to pass from particular missionary experiences to a commitment in the mission of the Church in following in the footsteps of Christ. Our schools

propose missionary activities which are specially created or for which they take the initiative, but which they would not dare to undertake by themselves alone: shared meals, street-based evangelization in collaboration with some parishes, musical groups, etc.: a basic Christian formation that takes its cue from the personal questions or the questions posed during their meetings; a community experience that accompanies their everyday life. Throughout the course each of these youngsters is regularly and personally followed, an accompaniment that helps them to unify personal life, social life and apostolic Christian life.

Launched in Slovenia and in Portugal in 1996, these schools, whose model is easily reproducible, have proliferated. There are now some fifty of them. They are scattered throughout the world, and this year have been attended by some 1500 youngsters. The “students” recruit each other from their own ranks.

As regards the truths of the faith and of the Church, among adults too the lack of clear points of reference is felt. Some feel a great sense of confusion. They too have a need for formation. They are accompanied by more elderly and already formed lay people, who themselves feel the need for a complementary formation with a view to mission. The fact of working together – priests, laity, those in vows – obliges the laity to acquire a certain theological and biblical formation. We try to fill the gap in formation between laity and clergy.

Conclusion

Like the fledgling Church of the first century, the Church of the twenty-first century has no other option but that of evangelizing. The Holy Spirit precedes us on this road, urging the young to engage in mission. The new communities contribute to the growth of these young people with missionary commitment, solidarity and formation.

But it is all together that we must work for a new deployment of the Church in the age of globalization. Together we must build a living, dynamic, evangelizing body of Christians renewed in the Spirit.

Schools of Theological and Pastoral Formation for the Laity

NAZARIO VIVERO

Speaking of schools of theological formation means referring to a *sphere* (schools), a *method* (formation) and an *intellectual discipline* (theology). In the present report, therefore, the question will be tackled bearing in mind the correlation between the main contents of this formation at the institutional, methodological and theological level.

My objective is to champion the laity's rightful autonomy of thought, action and organization, which is expressed as a serene and firm justification rooted in theology. I am convinced that, beyond the necessary witness of life, communion and common service, at times moving and always challenging, what is needed is a specific theology based on the integral human person and expressed on the basis of the radical demands of the Revelation.

I therefore place my remarks on schools of formation under the theological, philosophical, ethical and cultural motto of St. Anselm: *credo ut intelligam* and *intellego ut credam*, adopted by the Pope as mottoes in *Fides et ratio*,¹ of Kant's *cause for thought* and Gabriel Marcel's *creative and critical fidelity*. A motto that finds a corollary in the triple prophetic, priestly and kingly office linked to our baptism.

1. *Some prefatory remarks*

My remarks are not based on specific studies, but refer to a Latin-American experience, re-echoing in good measure the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, in which John Paul II collected and

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, Chapters II and III.

summed up the contributions and conclusions of the special Synod for America.

My analysis will fall into three parts. First, I will consider the institutional reality of schools of formation. Second, I will discuss the educational problems of formation, the crux of my argument. Third, I will address the theological question, such as the “origin” (*arké*) or “end” (*telós*) of any formative activity, according to the Christian horizon and contents, and its social structure in the various schools.

Reality is not, nor does it show itself to be, radically monist or radically dualist. Rather, it is articulated in degrees, for each of which it may be said, with the men of the Middle Ages, that they are *totum sed non totaliter*, in other words, they “are in everything, without being everything”. This goes for the socio-economic field, or the field of the satisfaction of needs; it goes for the political field, or the regulation of social life through power and the regulation of power through law. It goes for the ethical and cultural field, or the articulation of meanings and values. And all this might be paraphrased in Kantian terms by saying that the last without the first two would be empty, while the first two without the other would be blind. In this framework, the Christian life inscribed in the religious-salvific level irreducible to the others (in other words, in the life of the human being as a redeemed person, destined to fullness) is not added to them from outside, nor does it empty them of significance, but is posed as a gratuitous and free mode of existence itself in which it is incarnated. The Christian life assumes that existence and transfigures it on the basis of the mystery of reality and grace that is the divine trinitarian presence, revealed in Jesus and actualized by the Spirit of God.

For Christians today, the meeting with the world takes the form of a dialogue between faith and science, on the one hand, and dialogue between faith and politics, on the other. Science and its corollary, technology – now in good measure independent – are the culminating expression of the functional rationality that effectively dominates reality, while politics characterize the public arena, as the exercise of the transforming capacity of liberty, in respect for and in promotion of the dignity of each, in a common history and in a shared project.

The theological dimension and the pastoral dimension of the formation of the laity, though the former is doctrinal and the latter practical in order, are closely connected the one with the other. All Christian theology, in fact, is pastoral, because its fundamental objective, its *telós*, is not factual knowledge divorced from its salvific and loving source. Nor is pastoral care activism. It is, on the contrary, an activity that entirely involves the Christian, and that calls into question his truth and his freedom. Paraphrasing Walter Kasper, it might be said that the horizon of theology and pastoral care, or theology as pastoral care, is *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* and *ad maiorem hominis salutem*.

A final prefatory remark: the connection between Christian life, culture and the link between theology and pastoral care consists in what has been called “the hermeneutic age of reason”, understood in the way in which this term is used in the Revelation and permanently transmitted by its authentic interpreter, the Magisterium, in particular that of John Paul II, and deepened by theology: a reason that, in analogy to faith, is not a “possessing”, but a “living in”, and at the same time an “awaiting”, thus emphasizing its eschatological dimension. It is a reason that opens itself to the *auditus* and to the *intellectus fidei*, in the obedient listening to the Word and in the search for the truth, and that aims to articulate them in an organic and comprehensive manner. Faith and reason thus testify that God is greater than both, because he is their origin, their *humus* and their ultimate goal. A twofold methodological consequence derives from this: on the one hand, theology is a response of “second degree”, exercise of the reason nourished by faith, conscious and free opening of the Revelation, gratuitous offer of life in its totality; on the other hand, according to what is taught by theology, there exists a “hierarchy of truth”, so that not all the doctrinal affirmations have the same link with the core of the Revelation.² This is an important fact for the way of living the secular character of the vocation and mission of the laity in their relation with contemporary culture.

² Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on divine revelation *Dei verbum*, no. 12.

2. *A sphere of memory and project*

The schools of formation being discussed here, though they are at the service of the first kerygmatic annunciation of the faith and of catechesis, must also, and especially, be characterized by their theological specificity, in other words, by the particular intelligence of the faith illuminated by reason. This activity, obviously personal, is realized as People of God, and this postulates a certain institutionalization, as witness and appeal. In this sense, these schools (on the model of faculties of theology) must be an “institutional” expression of the interest and the importance that the Church gives, especially at the diocesan, but also regional and national level, both to the individual and group formation of the laity, and to their dialogue with persons, ideas and projects that come from other horizons but that dialogue with the faith, to deepen the meaning of life through the meeting with the Mystery and to identify and promote common values such as justice, solidarity and peace.

These schools of formation must also offer real scope for freedom. They must make possible the structured meeting between like-minded or diverse interlocutors. The schools’ existence and “quality” represent a test to measure the awareness and dedication of the Church, and of the laity themselves, to the value of formation, its horizons and prospects. For, if we can apply to these schools, by analogy, the dictum attributed to Hegel, according to which the institution without freedom is despotism, but freedom without the institution is chaos, the institutionalization of memory and the formulation of projects are of vital importance both for the formation of the laity and for the anthropological and cultural service that the Church can and must vigorously perform with particular goals in mind. We allude here to the need to increase the number of educators, and to bring them into contact with the poorest, those, that is, who suffer one of the deepest forms of poverty, i.e. cultural poverty. Being able to express all this at the religious and theological level is a way not only of expressing the preferential option for the poor, but also of helping to reduce the split between faith and life, that is one of the causes of the marginalization and exclusion of so many of our fellowmen.

Institutionalization inherently represents a will to endure, to transcend immediacy and individual good intentions, with the aim of proving that formation is not a sum of isolated activities, but a process that follows the rhythm of life and its experiences: in practice, a “living the today of God” experienced as community and people who must be able to recognize their own path, their own call to conversion, to communion and to solidarity and the needs that derive from it, and to express them in the form of “creative fidelity” (Marcel). Both at the human and Christian level we are beings whose “foundation is memory”. That memory is rooted in a history whose actualization is our responsibility. The institutional reality, with its physical and material character, its symbols, its rules, its contents, enables this memory to experience fidelity in a new way, far from the temptations connate with any kind of organization: the dangers of routine and loss of meaning. At the same time, the institution provides the practical basis for a critique understood as discernment, as the necessary distancing to permit an evaluation that does not succumb to the “impertinence” of a merely negative action, incapable both of alternative responses and proposals.

An innovative mode that is beginning to be explored with success is the creation of schools of formation on-line: they are characterized by flexible hours, rationalization of resources and, especially, flexible curricula that provide the indispensable notions, while respecting at the same time the needs of students.

Institutionalization as the possibility of effective action through the multiplication and coordination of protagonists, resources, functions, coincides with the function of “government”, of administration of the common good, present-day translation of the *kingly* office of Christ, which all the laity share by virtue of Baptism. Hence the structuring of schools not so much “for the laity” as “of the laity”. Just as it is recognized as appropriate, indeed essential, for the laity to evangelize the laity, and with good reason, so it is hard to see why, in the organization of schools – both in their administration and in the academic formulation of contents and methods –, the teaching activity and specialized advisory services should not be entrusted to the lay faithful themselves, both men and women.

3. *A methodology combining conviction and research*

What's needed is not a methodology relating to the management of things or ideas, but *teaching method, formation, education*.

In this process it is of fundamental importance to recognize that the first and supreme educator is God himself, and in his footsteps, the Church, *mater et magistra*. The educational activity, in its objective of opening the person to the Mystery that reveals to him the meaning and the destiny (as project of liberty opposed to a destiny understood as pure fatality) of life as personal and collective history, is equivalent to an activity of meeting in the truth, of praise and of thanksgiving, of the acceptance of a salvific gift. Another key aspect is represented by the fact that the *alter ego* of God in this process is not an object, but a subject: it is the person. So it is an event of personalization, of an establishment of identity. Ricoeur would perhaps sum up this dynamic by affirming that "to be oneself one needs to dialogue with others, and to dialogue with others one needs to be oneself", according to a dialectic of opening and interiorization.

For personalization means growing in "self-consciousness" through the opening to and the acceptance of the Other *par excellence*, the One who establishes me and makes me capable of accepting others, who makes me their "neighbour" in an act of self-giving without calculation or second thoughts.

Personalization is a particularly urgent need in our time, in response to the risk of a culture of utilitarianism, entertainment and the virtual being translated into the real incapacity to "remember and forget", wherever that capacity is a guarantee of humanization, of the conscience of the people, of local or national integration, of identification with the habitat.

The establishment of identity is also an anthropological, cultural and ethical task of humanization in response to the anonymity" of "systemic processes", guarantee of individuality and otherness and hence of authentic beings in a free society. This task of humanization, rooted in the offer of divinization that the Father offers us in Jesus, through the

Holy Spirit, confers on formation a *newness* assimilable to a re-creation.

Formation conceived as a letting oneself be educated by God, as personalization, as growth in identity, is therefore a gift, i.e. an expression of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. But it is also a task, an ethical endeavour, a “political” commitment to make it a shared reality, a common good and a humanizing service. It is a *locus* of our Christian existence inasmuch as it is growth in faith, search for holiness, “sacrament” of our presence, of our accompaniment of the faithful, and of brotherly service. Formation enables us to live our Christian vocation and mission in an “intelligent” way, and avoid the two opposite extremes of an inhuman fideism anything but sympathetic to quest, doubt, error, or a dis-identification of the convictions.

4. Construction of a discourse that listens and comprehends

The foundation and horizon of formation and schools of formation consist in their theological character. Just this is the basis that permits the lay Christian faithful, single or in association, to intervene and work for a just autonomy anchored in the truth, in the service of the good, structured in freedom and expressed as a sound “protagonism” of promoters of justice, solidarity and peace. Now, on the contrary, the reaction to forms of clericalism, overt or covert, apart from being expressed in requests disguised by moralizing motivations or in power struggles, often generates sharply critical positions among the laity themselves. One of these consists in abandoning the field of the theological foundation, horizon and contents (that are the exclusive prerogative of no ecclesial “state of life”), thus depriving it of the contribution of experiences and prospects deriving both from the secular character of our vocation, and of the view we can form of them by virtue of our specific competence exercised in dialogue with the Magisterium and with the community of theologians.

In the scheme proposed at the beginning, we placed this exchange under St. Anselm’s motto, *credo ut intelligam* and *intelligo ut credam*, to describe the relation between believing and understanding, faith and

reason, corresponding to the exercise of the prophetic office expressed as proclamation of the Good News and commitment to propagate and incarnate it.

A first consideration concerns the radically contemplative character of the theological foundation that consists in the personal meeting with the mystery of God one and triune: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This personal experience of love, and of the understanding that leads to love, is only possible in the Church and as the Church. That means that it is only possible in a history of salvation and in a dual form: first, meditation on the Word of God in Holy Scripture – particularly in the New Testament – received and transmitted in the living Tradition, authentically interpreted by the Magisterium and deepened in a rational and systematic manner by theologians in dialogue with the Magisterium itself; and second, the living presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, source and culmination of the Christian life. Here the truth is the person of Christ, who makes himself known and gives himself as source of life and of life in abundance.

A second consideration, of a doctrinal order, concerns theology as *auditus et intellectus fidei* and consequently its near horizon, i.e. the attentive listening to the truth as capacity to understand the contents of the Revelation, and their successive systematic, reflective and speculative elaboration, with the aid of the human sciences and philosophy. By its very nature, the primary *locus* for this elaboration is dogmatic theology, in which attempts are made to establish and present the internal, ontological and logical connections between the various elements of the Revelation, in particular those relating to God in his trinitarian life, his loving plan, as Creator and Redeemer, as also the reality of the Church and her fundamental sacramental structure that maintains alive God's salvific plan and makes it known to humanity through the action of the Spirit.

In current cultural conditions, a theological school of formation for lay people ought, in my view, to centre its own contents in fundamental theology, which has the classic function of obeying the injunction to "always [...] make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pt 3:15). Without any inferiority complex, such

a school ought to grapple with the more radical questions posed by our contemporaries and respond to them in the light of the faith.

Four questions in particular require to be treated directly and explicitly in a theological perspective, if we do not wish to give the impression that the Revelation, the faith, the Church, theology and Christians, while they may have words of moral denunciation or condemnation of the temptations, dangers and situations of evil, are unable to offer a positive content to the history of freedom that is being laboriously constructed amid uncertainty and even mistrust.

The first question, parallel to the affirmation that after Auschwitz it is impossible to conduct theology in the same way as before, concerns the need for people in Latin America to ask themselves how it is possible to conduct theology in response to the persistence of poverty and misery caused by Catholics themselves to large sections of their brothers in the faith. This scandal cannot be taken lightly, but needs to be addressed with lucidity and a willingness to achieve reconciliation.

The second question concerns the reformulation of the relation between faith and politics. The current massive and profound mistrust in democracy, due to its formalism and its incapacity to root out the widespread corruption that is corroding it from within, must not make us lose sight of the fact that the real challenge is that of the life or death, the dignity or the dehumanization of millions of human beings.

The third question is this: according to the outline of the history of the Church proposed by Karl Rahner, with Vatican Council II and the conception of the Church generated by it, we have now entered into the phase of the “universal Church”, a Church that is for the first time truly “ecumenical and catholic” in its historical embodiment. So, in a world that is being economically and culturally globalized, and that has a need for geopolitical structures capable of governing in a responsible and effective manner, what does it mean to be “Catholics”, living in the prospect of a universality in unity “that God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor 15:28)?

The fourth question, perhaps the most challenging of all, is this: what could or should be meant by the confession of faith, in response to a world

that on the one hand seems to have excluded the very idea of salvation and on the other seems to be seeking it in an obsessive manner through a whole series of scientifically unfounded and anthropologically reductionist or immanentist offers? The proclamation of Christian salvation as absolute, transcendent, gratuitous? The proclamation of a personal God, who has a plan of love that has entered into history, who became flesh and even died as a man, and who is confessed living and active in this same history that he continues to guide in love and in freedom?

5. *Conclusion*

In a world that presents complex and profound transformations in man's capacity for knowledge, communication and action, Christians have the responsibility to confess their own hope in God, mystery of life, truth and freedom, and to show their own capacity for a love that transforms, assuming in full solidarity the joy and hope, but also the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time.

This programme is entrusted to the responsibility of every believer, but in particular to theologians and to the schools of formation for the laity, in dialogue with the Magisterium, and without ever losing sight of the questions posed by our fellowmen.

Paraphrasing Péguy, perhaps we should say that the Christian way of life in the new millennium that has just opened shall either be contemplative, intelligent and effective, in other words, mystical, theological and humanizing, or it will not exist at all. For a Catholic, these are not three distinct perspectives. They are closely interrelated: for the real mysticism is the certain knowledge of God and the wisdom of man, while the theological aspect expresses as truth what it has "seen and known" in the emotional experience of a profound personal meeting. On the basis of that experience it humanizes. Radical humanization has its own foundation in the privileged dialogue of man with his Creator and Redeemer. It is expressed as a true and real discourse about man himself, in relation with others and in the freedom destined to transcendence, insuperable origin and goal.

VI

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation

Remembrance of Baptism

CARDINAL CHRISTIAN TUMI

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (*Rom* 6:5). With these words St. Paul tells us that if we die with Christ, we will also live with Christ.

So the physical death of the Christian is not a termination, an end in itself. Death is a passing over, the passing over that Christ was the first to accomplish at the moment of his Passover, the Passover of the bread given for the life of the world (cf. *Jn* 6:51), the Passover of the New Lamb in which Jesus takes the place of the sacrificial victim, institutes the new feast of the Paschal mystery, Christ's Passover, and accomplishes the passing over from this world to the Father (cf. *ibid.* 13:1).

Thanks to the victory of Christ over death, the last word of human history shall belong to life.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul announced as follows the final transfiguration of our being that will pass from death with Christ to eternal life: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (*1 Cor* 15:51-52).

The Christian Passover, the passing over from death to the Father, is dominical, annual and eschatological. It is dominical, because it is on Sundays that Christians meet together for the breaking of bread (cf. *Acts* 20:7, *1 Cor* 16:2), the gesture that reminds them of the resurrection of Christ; it unites them with him in the Eucharist, it directs them to the awaiting of the second coming of Christ in glory, the *Parusia*, because Jesus shall return.

The Christian Passover is eschatological, since it makes us think of the ultimate end of each individual: death, particular judgement, and

the return of Christ at the end of the world; the last judgement, the resurrection of the dead, heaven and hell. Never let us forget the last things: death, judgement, heaven and hell.

The Christian Passover is also an annual celebration – Easter – that gives a new content to the Jewish Passover. On that day the Jews celebrated their liberation from foreign bondage, while awaiting a Messiah who would liberate them in a purely nationalist and political sense. We Christians, on the other hand, annually celebrate at Easter our liberation from sin and death, we unite ourselves with the crucified and risen Christ to share the eternal life with him, resting our hope on the expectation of his second coming. With Christ we live the paschal mystery, dying to sin and reborn for a new life (cf. *Rom* 6:3-11).

That is why the feast of the resurrection of Christ became right from the start a privileged moment to celebrate Baptism, the sacrament that makes us capable of following Christ in his victory, after all the sins were put to death in us. As baptized, we form the People of God in exile (*1 Pt* 1:7): after having prepared our mind for action (*ibid.* 1:13), freed from evil we walk towards the promised land of the Kingdom of heaven. Since Christ, our paschal victim, was sacrificed, we must celebrate the paschal feast not with the old leaven of misconduct, but in purity and in truth. If we are already in communion with Christ, through a death similar to his, we shall be in even closer communion with him through a resurrection similar to his.

Our death is therefore only a door that leads us to Christ; it is a passing over to the eternal light; it's only the penultimate act of our existence in its relation with the world. For the last is the resurrection, that will reward the just with the glory of life without end. But to be able to gain access to it, to be saved, we need to be born anew in the spirit; we need to be born to divine life through faith and Baptism: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (*Jn* 3:5-6).

So there are two orders of birth: the one of the flesh, incarnate and natural; the other of the spirit, discarnate and supernatural. Carnal

man, the weak man, the limited man, the mortal man, cannot enter alone into the Kingdom of God, but must be born to the faith through the Holy Spirit. Accepting Jesus as the Word of God in the faith, the believer is accepted by God as a child. He thus becomes a child of God: born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (cf. *ibid.* 1:13).

Divine sonship is a gift of God that no one may arrogate to himself and that has nothing to do with birth in the flesh. A true son of God loves the Son whom God sent, the Christ come from God through the Incarnation. A true son of God is attached to the person of Christ; he lives, but it is no longer he who lives, but Christ who lives in him. If he dies, he dies for Christ; if he lives, he lives for Christ. In death, as in life, he belongs to Christ. May the Lord Jesus give to those who were born from water and from the Spirit the strength to proclaim before the world that, in Jesus Christ, God is with us for ever.

The Kingdom of God demands only one thing: a rebirth. No one can enter the Kingdom if he is not born from water and from the Holy Spirit. Only he who accepts to open himself to the Spirit may be born to divine life and discover the mystery of Jesus. Let us never cease thanking the Lord for the grace of our rebirth, for the grace of our baptism, for the grace of our Christian initiation.

Remembrance of Confirmation

BISHOP STANISŁAW RYŁKO

During this Congress we feel ourselves united by the almost palpable presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a presence we feel in the jubilee celebrations, in the listening to the Word of God, in the dialogue with our brothers, in the exchange of experiences, in testimonies that speak to us of a faith often lived in very different conditions than those familiar to us at home. It is an extraordinary experience of ecclesial communion and of the universality of the Church scattered in the remotest corners of the earth. The Church, that bears the face of its manifold charisms, but that always remains the same: one, holy, catholic and apostolic, as we profess in the Nicene Creed. We are all attentively listening to what “the spirit says to the churches” (*Rev* 2:7) in this historic moment, at the beginning of the third millennium.

2. In this eucharistic celebration we remember Confirmation, the sacrament of Christian initiation that leads to the consummation of the baptismal grace. Confirmation is the sacrament that gives us the immeasurable gift of the Holy Spirit, soul of the Christian, soul of the Church and living memory of the Church: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (*Jn* 14:26).

Unfortunately there are many Christians who no longer have a living consciousness of all this; indeed it seems that Confirmation has no sooner been received than it is forgotten. Paradoxically, for many Christians the Holy Spirit is still an “unknown God” (*Acts* 17:23), remote from their daily life. For this reason, in the examination of Jubilee conscience, the Pope exhorts us to seriously tackle two essential questions. First: What have I made of my Confirmation? And second:

How have I turned to advantage the gifts and charisms of the Spirit in my life? The Great Jubilee calls us to discover – not only theoretically, but in a concrete and vital way – the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life as Christians and in the life of the Church.

3. The Christian and the Holy Spirit... For the Christian this relation is vital, it is constitutive of his very being. St. Paul explains to us that “all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (*Rom* 8:14) and that “When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (*ibid.* 8:15). The Christian therefore is someone who lives in the Holy Spirit and lets himself be guided by the Spirit.

Today there is a lot of talk about maturity: of mature men and women, but also of mature Christians, of mature lay people. And it is the usual practice in such talk to emphasize such characteristics as autonomy, independence, self-determination and freedom pushed to extremes. In the context of the Christian existence maturity is presented in different terms. Here the key terms are words like “obedience” and “submissiveness”. Hans Urs von Balthasar clearly shows the deeper sense of maturity when he writes. “The more we are obedient to the free Spirit of Christ, the more we can believe ourselves free or mature. All the rest is treacherous self-illusion [...]”. And he adds: “Anyone who does not understand the christian and ecclesiastical unity between maturity and obedience is far from being mature. But the connections between them are perceived only by those who pray with living faith; without this presupposition everything is lost in superficial and dangerous chatter”.¹ Obedience and submissiveness to the Holy Spirit are therefore constitutive of our Christian being and also become the measure of our real maturity.

4. In this Eucharist, we wish to remember our Confirmation. Who of us remembers that day? Perhaps many years have gone by since that

¹ H.U. VON BALTHASAR, “Chi è il cristiano?”, in: IDEM, *Gesù e il cristiano*, Milano: Jaca Book, 1998, 150, 153.

moment and our memory has faded with time... But it was a decisive moment of our existence as Christians: thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation, the Christian attains his full identity. The very name “Christian” derives from “Christ”, which means “anointed” – anointed, that is, by the Holy Spirit.

St. Ambrose exhorts us: “Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God’s presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts”.² That is the greatness of the gift!

Today, all our assembly of sons and daughters of the Church coming from all the continents and belonging to different nations and cultures, but united in the same faith, hope and charity, wants to relive the mystery of the community of Pentecost. The Church often returns to the community of the Last Supper in Jerusalem to rediscover the power of her origins and to go out into the streets of the world with a renewed sense of mission. The risen Christ says to us all: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses [...] to the end of the earth” (*Acts* 1:8). The prophecy of Christ has continued to be realized in the Church right down to our own day. And it is also being realized in this very moment.

² ST. AMBROSE, *De mysteriis*, 7. 42 (*Patrologiae cursus completus*, Series latina, 16), 402-403.

The Eucharist in the Life of the Lay Faithful

BISHOP JAVIER ECHEVARRÍA

Once again the words of St. Paul to the faithful of Corinth are being fulfilled: "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said: 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" (1 Cor 11:23-24). And, after having recalled the commandment of Jesus regarding the cup of the new covenant in his blood, the Apostle adds: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Echoing the words of the Apostle, once the bread and the wine has been consecrated, you shall acclaim, in response to the priest's invitation: "We announce your death, we proclaim your resurrection, in the expectation of your coming!"¹

The salvific content of the Eucharist is very rich. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes it as follows: "The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood".² It is also the sacrament of the real presence of Jesus Christ, hidden below the cloth of the sacramental species, that are preserved in the tabernacle once the Holy Sacrifice is ended, to be the food of the sick, the Last Sacrament of the dying and the consolation for our souls, whenever we have a need for it. And it is lastly an anticipation of eternal life that Jesus promised to all those who are well prepared and well disposed to receive his body and blood in the eucharistic Communion: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54).

¹ *Ordinary of the Mass. Acclamation after the Consecration.*

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1582.

These texts, that recall the glorious coming of Christ, are perfectly attuned to the liturgical time in which we find ourselves: the last week of the ordinary time. In these days the Church recalls with particular insistence the last days of man and of the world, before beginning Advent. Perhaps, in the eyes of a spectator little familiar with the Catholic faith, this choice might seem inappropriate: are we not speaking at this moment of the apostolate of the laity, i.e. of men and women whose specific vocation – as proclaimed by Vatican Council II – consists in “seeking the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will”?³ Why exhort them to consider last things, those that refer to the life to come, instead of urging them to concern themselves with what they have already in hand?

We Christians know very well that the invitation to raise our eyes to heaven, while maintaining our feet firmly planted on earth, is not incongruous. On the contrary, it is the only logical attitude in the life of a believer. The Lord himself, who recommended us not to put our heart in earthly things (cf. *Mt* 6:24), also commanded us, before his Ascension, to work tirelessly here below. *Negotiamini dum venio* (cf. *Lk* 19:13). In other words, devote yourself with all your energies to draw interest from the talents I have entrusted to you – the spiritual and material qualities that each of you have received –, preparing with your efforts, in your ordinary existence, the full coming of the Kingdom of God.

Let us listen once again to the teachings of the last ecumenical Council: “The Church was founded to spread the kingdom of Christ over all the earth for the glory of God the Father, to make all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them to establish the right relationship of the entire world to Christ. Every activity of the Mystical Body with this in view goes by the name of ‘apostolate’”.⁴ The apostolate of the laity is one of the forms in which the Church exercises

³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the apostolate of lay people *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.

the mission entrusted to her by her Lord. It is not a duty that is added to the life of some faithful. “The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well”.⁵

Conducting apostolate, contributing to the new evangelization to which the Pope invites us, is not a circumscribed mission entrusted to only a few. It is a task that involves all Christians, by the unique and unrepeatable fact of having received Baptism. I may remind you of what John Paul II wrote at the beginning of his apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*: “You go too. The call is a concern not only of Pastors, clergy, and men and women religious. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world”.⁶

So necessary is this collaboration of each Christian in the carrying out of the Church’s mission that – as Vatican Council II declares – “a member who does not work at the growth of the body to the extent of his possibilities must be considered useless both to the Church and to himself”.⁷

That *the time of the laity* has come in the Church has been much discussed in recent years. And it’s true. You are all called to be in the forefront in the new evangelization of society, through your personal apostolate. I stress the word “personal”, repeating the urgent appeal that the Holy Father has made to you and also proposing to you the message of the Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, who at the end of the 1920s began to disseminate this good news, at the time practically forgotten. With the words of the founder of Opus Dei, I wish to remind you that the Lord invites you to propagate “the divine message – by doctrine and by example – to the ends of the earth”. He asks you “that, as citizens of ecclesial society and of civil society, performing

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 2.

⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the apostolate of lay people *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.

your duties with fidelity, “each of you may be another Christ, sanctifying your professional work and the duties of your own state”.⁸

Wonder is aroused by the variety of forms of associated apostolate that flourish in the ecclesial community and that have a lively awareness of the commitment that each person, as baptized, has assumed with the Lord: “The dignity as a Christian, the source of equality for all members of the Church, guarantees and fosters the spirit of communion and fellowship, and, at the same time, becomes the hidden dynamic force in the lay faithful’s apostolate and mission”.⁹

The personal apostolate of the example set by the layperson in the exercise of a profession, in family life, in political and social commitment, etc., in full conformity with the Christian faith, as it is proposed by the Magisterium of the Church, is indispensable. To this must be added the apostolate of the Word: we must “always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls [us] to account for the hope that is in [us]” (1 Pt 3:15), i.e. all those we encounter in our daily life, beginning by those closest to us: members of our family, relations, friends, colleagues at work. If the common and ordinary circumstances of our existence in the world were not to form the normal place of your Christian struggle and your apostolic zeal, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to attract those who have lost their faith, encourage those who neglect their own Christian duties, and be credible witnesses of Christ in an often hostile or indifferent environment.

To achieve this unity between faith and practice in Christian life, it is indispensable that we have recourse to prayer, the offer to God of small sacrifices or mortifications – in the first place those that help us to better carry out our professional work and render more supportable the life of all those who surround us – and, above all, to have frequent recourse to the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. Without the serious commitment constantly to renew our own personal relation

⁸ BLESSED JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *È Gesù che passa*, Milano: Edizioni Ares, 2000, n. 150.

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 17.

with the Lord, we cannot participate effectively in the mission of the Church; we cannot be authentic apostles of Christ.

If, at the end of this Jubilee, you return to your countries with the determination to pray more, to have more frequent recourse and show greater devotion to the sacraments, to help your friends and colleagues to draw closer to God, through your friendship, then you will have used very well the days you have spent at the tombs of the Apostles, close to the Vicar of Christ. Our hope in the glorious coming of the Lord, as brought to our remembrance in each eucharistic celebration, urges us to do so. It is what the Church asks of us today: that this sacrament of love may be always for us a sign of unity and a bond of love,¹⁰ so that, in receiving the body and blood of Christ, the bond of brotherly charity may be strengthened in us,¹¹ and the zeal of conducting many souls to God be revived in us.

We ask this, entrusting ourselves to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, Queen of the Apostles. Amen.

¹⁰ *Collect of the votive Mass of the Eucharist (formula A).*

¹¹ *Prayer after Communion of the votive Mass of the Eucharist (formula B).*

VII

What Laity for the Third Millennium?

A Pastor's Voice

CARDINAL BERNARD FRANCIS LAW

In preparing for today, I met with a lay friend who suggested to me this exchange between an inquirer and Cardinal Newman. As repeated to me, the exchange went like this: "What do you think of the laity, Your Eminence?" The Venerable Servant of God is said to have replied: "Well, we'd look pretty silly without them, wouldn't we?"

Indeed, we would! If we add together all bishops, priests, permanent deacons, sisters, brothers and major seminarians in the world, they come to less than one and a half million. The worldwide total of laity in the world, on the other hand, tops the one billion mark. As a matter of fact the number of laity in the archdiocese of Boston alone is greater by 880,000 than the worldwide number of bishops, priests, etc. We would look pretty silly, indeed, if our ranks were bereft of the laity.

We have often heard the laity described as a sleeping giant. I stand before you as a Pastor of the Church filled with gratitude to God that this giant, even though still lying down, has begun to awaken. The hope that I have for the Church as we begin this third millennium is a hope largely inspired by what God is doing in our day to help the Church appreciate more deeply the nature of the Church and the role of the laity.

When he began his ministry as Supreme Shepherd of the Church, John Paul II addressed us, each one of us, who with him and in Christ constitute the Church. Hear these stirring words again, so appropriate in this Jubilee gathering: "Do not be afraid! Open, indeed, open wide the doors to Christ! Open to his saving power the confines of states, political and economic systems, as well as the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows, 'what is inside a person'. Only he knows! Today too

often people do not know what they carry inside, in the deepest recesses of their soul, in their heart. Too often people are uncertain about a sense of life on earth. Invaded by doubts they are led into despair. Therefore – with humility and trust I beg and implore you – allow Christ to speak to the person in you. Only he has the words of life, yes, eternal life”.¹ The Holy Father quotes this passage in *Christifideles laici*, underscoring its importance with these words: “To all people of today I once again repeat the impassioned cry with which I began my pastoral ministry”.² To *all* people of today! Here is revealed to us at the beginning of his Pontificate the degree to which the Holy Father is rooted in the Second Vatican Council. Implicit in this Shepherd’s charge are the insights of *Lumen gentium*: “Protected by such great and wonderful means of salvation, all the faithful of every state and condition are called by the Lord, each in their own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father is perfect”.³ And again. “It is the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering those in accordance with the will of God”.⁴

It is the Magisterium of John Paul II, rooted so firmly in the Second Vatican Council, which helps the Church make her way with courage and great hope through the doors of the new millennium. It is precisely the Council’s focus on the laity, so powerfully reflected in the teaching and life of Pope John Paul II, which strengthens my hope for the future. In these two texts from *Lumen gentium* are summarized the two poles of the vocation of the laity: the call to holiness, and the call to give witness to Christ specifically in the midst of the world, “by engaging in temporal affairs”.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, “Homily at the beginning of his mission as Supreme Shepherd of the Church (22 October 1978)”, *AAS* 70 (1978), 974 (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, 1 [1978], 38-39).

² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 34.

³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 31.

Involvement in the archdiocese

To trace the profile of the laity in the third millennium, I will base myself on my pastoral experience as Archbishop of Boston. I leave it to you to extrapolate from this rather narrow cultural context what might have wider applicability.

Boston was established as a see only in 1808. My nation, however, was not founded until 1776. Catholics have grown from a very small minority to the majority of the population. What was one diocese in 1808 is now two archdioceses and nine dioceses. The Archdiocese of Boston today numbers 2.1 million faithful and 368 parishes. As this particular Church moves into the third millennium, the lay faithful constitute a source of great hope. I will shortly appoint my third chancellor in sixteen years: each of them has been a layman. Our next chancellor, typical of the others, is sixty years of age. He studied at the University of Notre Dame and Harvard Business School. He has been very successful in business, having begun and sold several businesses. He and his wife are deeply committed Catholics who have continued their education in the faith and who are committed to spiritual growth.

Many archdiocesan offices are headed by laywomen and men, including Family Life, Pro-Life, Young Adults, and Catholic Charities. The competence brought by laypersons to various boards is indispensable. The archdiocesan pastoral council and finance council are of great help to me in my administration, and are paralleled by pastoral and finance councils in each parish.

The pastoral plan of the archdiocese is rooted in our Eighth Synod in which the laity had a key role. Our Catholic schools are staffed primarily by laywomen and men. The parish catechetical programs for those not in Catholic schools are carried out principally by lay volunteers numbering 16,000 catechists.

Our development of recent years which should directly impact the profile of the laity in the third millennium is the emergence of young, lay theologians. In my country, at least, this is a new phenomenon. Many of these young theologians represent a departure from what

might be termed the theological establishment controlled by their older peers. The new theologians are rooted in the Church's teaching and represent something of a recovery of theology.

Laity play a much more significant role in the archdiocese of Boston's internal life than they did twenty years ago. The phenomenon is replicated in other parts of the United States, and will accelerate in the future.

As important and as positive as this development is, however, there is a danger that lay involvement in the mission of the Church be reduced to her internal life. If all the laity thus involved in the archdiocese and in the parishes were to be numbered, they would constitute but a fraction of the laity of Boston. Moving into a time of greater lay participation in the internal life of the Church, it is of paramount importance that we not "clericalize" the laity.

A failure to appreciate the specific vocation of the laity to bring the light of Christ into the temporal order, can lead to a misplaced emphasis on lay service within the life of the Church as a validation of active lay involvement. Such a line of thinking can place totally out of context the importance of roles such as extraordinary minister of the Eucharist and lector. Important as these are, they certainly do not define the active layperson.

A further misunderstanding of roles is fueled by the contemporary obsession with power. Unfortunately, holy orders are not infrequently characterized as the source of power in the Church. In this construct, the exclusion of women from holy orders is perceived as a discriminatory exclusion of women from access to power. This subversion of the meaning of holy orders is more facily accomplished to the extent that the universal call to holiness is obscured.

Speaking of the laity, the Holy Father has written: "Their responsibility, in particular, is to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response – consciously perceived and stated by all in varying degrees – to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society. This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life,

to again take up in their daily activities in family, work, and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel".⁵

Early in the same document John Paul II underscores two temptations which the lay faithful have not always been able to avoid in the post-conciliar period: "The temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to be actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel's acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world".⁶ With the first temptation I have already dealt. It is the second, the separation of faith and life, which represents the greater threat. Even as I write these words, my mind is flooded with examples of lay faithful who are just that, – full of faith and aware of the necessity of an integration of faith and life. These include young legislators in a very hostile political environment, a Harvard professor of law, a Nobel laureate in medicine, the chief executive officer of a Catholic health care system, several business entrepreneurs, several financial analysts. There are many other examples of persons whose work would not impact the culture as strongly as these. Those I have listed, however, are the exception to the rule. They have committed themselves to the hard task of integrating the faith with their professional life. In a culture increasingly more hostile to the faith, a culture characterized by scepticism concerning truth, and by moral relativism, a culture which can rightly be termed a culture of death, it is both difficult and demanding of great courage to allow the truths of faith to permeate the whole of life. The consequences of this failure is all too painfully evident in those politicians who explain their support of legalized abortion by saying that they are personally opposed but that they cannot impose their personal views on others.

If the numbers of those lay persons in positions of critical influence in the dominant culture of my country is to increase, then, it seems to

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

me, Catholic universities must be more effective in challenging students to engage the culture from the perspective of faith. All too often graduates from Catholic Universities seem indistinguishable from their peers from secular universities in the pursuit of their professional goals. The vocation of the layperson with a mission to the temporal order appears not to be understood or accepted. To be a Catholic for many young laypersons is reduced to religious practice and a few narrowly circumscribed personal, moral choices. For some, participation in movement or other associations of the faithful may help to heighten a fuller appreciation of the lay vocation. The larger Catholic universities, however, have not been successful in instilling an appreciation of the lay vocation.

The challenge of globalization

To speak of the third millennium we must consider the phenomenon of globalization. Because of it, it is possible to speak of a world-culture even as we acknowledge the particularities of individual sub-cultures. In tackling the growing challenge of globalization, these words from the Second Vatican Council provide inspiration and direction: "Among the signs of our times, one particularly worthy of note is the ever growing and inescapable sense of solidarity between all peoples. It is the task of the lay apostolate to cherish this and to transform it into a true and genuine desire for fellowship".⁷ And again. "The condition of the modern world lends greater urgency to this duty of the Church [i.e. to declare with greater clarity to the faithful and the entire human race the nature of the Church and her universal mission]; for while men of the present day are drawn ever more closely together by social, technological and cultural bonds, it still remains for them to achieve full unity in Christ".⁸

⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the apostolate of lay people *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 14.

⁸ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 1.

In a very realistic way, the Council accepted globalization as a fact, and urged the Church to utilize this phenomenon as a means for the evangelization of culture. It was a similar thought which under girded the suggestion of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 to the Holy Father that a compendium of the truths of the faith, or a Catechism, be prepared; the result of this suggestion is *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* promulgated by the Holy Father on 11 October 1992.

Is it too much to hope that the Church might more effectively utilize the methodologies of globalization to establish worldwide networks of faithful, grouped around specific professional areas of interest, who would mutually reinforce one another in overcoming the separation of faith and professional life? This Congress suggests such a possibility, as do some of the initiatives of other Pontifical Councils. There is a new world of instant communication which could be put at the service of a Catholic laity awakening to the challenge of evangelization of the dominant culture.

Fostering Christian feminism

Among the challenges of the third millennium is the evangelization of feminism. Not to mention this would be to fail to acknowledge what is at once a challenge and an opportunity for the Church. The Holy Father has been a leader in the articulation of a Christian feminism. It is, however, the special task of the lay faithful, and specifically catholic laywomen, to give credible expression to this new feminism. The U.N. World conference on Women at Beijing illustrates both the dauntless challenge of a secular feminism and the way to effectively meet that challenge. The head of the Holy See's delegation was Professor Mary Ann Glendon, a Professor at Harvard Law School. She and her colleagues were able to mount an effective effort in support of the integral advancement of women. This type of leadership will, hopefully, be more the rule as the Church continues to develop and champion Christian feminism.

I have been most heartened by what has been done by a group of women in Boston, and what has become a national and even an inter-

national effort, through an organization called *Women Affirming Life*. Focusing on the abortion question, a pivotal question in secular feminism, these women give witness to a contemporary feminism which embraces motherhood as a constitutive element of what it means to be a woman.

The culture of death can be overcome if we unambiguously affirm the inviolability of every human life. We will be successful in this to the extent that women, under the banner of an authentic, Christian feminism, have an evident leadership role in the Church's efforts to imbue the dominant culture with Christian values. Here again, we need to develop a global network with a global strategy.

Defending life, the family and the poor

Such a global strategy for the evangelization of the dominant culture, and the myriad of subcultures, might be expressed, albeit too glibly, in these terms: Pro-life, Pro-family, Pro-poor. It is there that the Church must be; it is there that the laity can be most effective: in proclaiming the inviolability of every human life, in championing the rights of the family as the basic unit of every society, and in expressing solidarity of justice and love with the poor and whomever else is weak and marginalized. It has been said that the social doctrine of the Church is our best-kept secret.

In my country the Church is sometimes vilified for an alleged exclusive concern for life in the womb. Nothing could be further from the truth. While we need make no apology, quite the contrary, for our insistent defence of life from the first moment of conception, the fact is that there is no other non-governmental institution in the USA which provides more service to the poor and destitute than the Catholic Church. Our focus is simple. We *are* pro-life. We *are* pro-family. We *are* pro-poor. Each one implies the others.

As future ages look back on our own, the Church will be praised for having been often a lone voice in defence of the fundamental right to life. The same will be said of our advocacy on behalf of development

and peace. The Holy Father ceaselessly attempts to focus world attention on the forgotten continent of Africa, for example. His has been a persistent voice in support of relief from the debt that is burdening third world nations. The faithful laity of the third millennium will, hopefully, find new and effective ways of translating the Church's social teaching into the cultures of politics, business and academe.

The way of the family is the way of the Church, as the Holy Father has reminded us. It is the way of humankind. It is in and through the family that the lay faithful make their greatest contribution to the Church and to society. Please God, the third millennium will see an ever stronger focus on marriage and the family in the life of the Church. Here is where the world so desperately needs the light of the gospel and the Church's teaching.

Universal call to holiness

When *Lumen gentium* was promulgated, I can still recall the enthusiasm generated by the document's emphasis on the universal call to holiness. Certainly this was not new teaching. For too many, however, it has become obscured by an exaggerated emphasis on what distinguished different states in the Church. Our fundamental unity in the order of grace is through baptism. We are one in Christ. We can say with St. Paul, each one of us, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20). Our communion with Christ through baptism, and our communion with one another in consequence of our communion with him, is the truth that can set us free from the divisions, the polarities which are so destructive of human society. Called to live in Christ through baptism, we are therefore called to be holy. In that fundamental unity of grace and vocation we can meet one another with gratitude and respect as lay faithful, religious, deacon, priest, as man or woman, as young or old, as strong or weak, as rich or poor, as professional or worker.

It is a paradox, but nonetheless true, that we are able to witness more effectively within the world to the extent that we realize that we

are not of the world. These last days of the liturgical year provide a fitting context for this Congress. As we look to the laity in the next millennium, the Church bids us to reflect on the Kingdom beyond the millennia. As we seek to respond to the challenges and opportunities of history, the Church stretches our thoughts to a Day beyond time.

Earlier this week the Office of Readings contained a passage from a treatise on John's Gospel by St. Augustine. In reading it my thought related the text to this moment when I would be addressing you. His words serve us well: "I implore you to love with me and, by believing, to run with me; let us long for our heavenly country, let us sigh for our heavenly home, let us truly feel that here we are strangers. I am about to lay aside this book, and you are soon going away, each to his own business. It has been good to be glad together. When we part from one another, let us not depart from him".⁹

⁹ ST. AUGUSTINE, *In evangelium Iohannis tractatus*, 35, 8-9. Turnhout: Brepols (Corpus Christianorum, Series latina, 36), 321-323.

A Layman's Voice

GUZMÁN CARRIQUIRY LECOUR

What laity for the third millennium? The reply to this question is not easy, because in speaking about the laity in general, and what is more the laity referred to a whole millennium, we risk succumbing to abstraction. It has been said that the first millennium was pre-eminently monastic and was followed by the second millennium, which was pre-eminently clerical, whereas the third millennium shall be pre-eminently lay. The idea is suggestive, but in truth excessive! Nor can the answer to our question give rise to dreams, to utopias, which are no more than mere human fantasies. It must, on the contrary, spring from the living experience of us all, children and heirs of a Tradition, from an experience therefore imbued with the past and open to the future. In chronological terms, our times we are living in, – the beginning of a new millennium – coincide with a epoch-making transformation. For is not a new phase in human history being inaugurated, now that the twentieth century, in the post-Yalta period, has ended? This phase, to which the name “post-modern” has been appended, also denotes the exhaustion of the historical and cultural parabola of the Enlightenment, of the totalitarian ideologies and of the expressions of messianic atheism, which aimed to reformulate and replace the Christian hope. Are not people talking everywhere of “postindustrial societies” in a new “information era”, of “globalization of the markets”, of internationalization, of the (confused) search for new paradigms in the international order? The acceleration of scientific and technological innovations is already placing us in a perspective of astonishingly futuristic contours. In this turning-point in human history, the Jubilee is a providential *kairós* of witness and proclamation of the Word, that became flesh two thousand years ago, and that is present here and now. It invites us to enter the third millennium, the new age which can be

glimpsed on the horizon, by passing through the Holy Door which is the paschal passing from sin to grace, from slavery to freedom, from death to life.

2. In speaking of the laity, too, we risk succumbing to abstraction. We laity form no less than 95% of the People of God. We are innumerable persons of the greatest variety who, under the guidance of our Pastors, live the most varied degrees of belonging to, involvement in, and coreponsibility for the life of the Church. Speaking of the laity means speaking of the baptized, of Christians called to live the Christian newness in the most varied circumstances of personal and social life, and to bear witness to the glory of Christ among humankind. Only a few years ago we Catholic baptized topped the one billion mark (17% of the world population): an impressive figure, but one that has to be seen in a context in which Moslems too number over one billion, and in which the oriental religions, considered until recently something exotic, are spreading and permeate present-day culture. As John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris missio*, “the number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. Indeed, since the end of the Council it has almost doubled”.¹ Of that 17%, moreover, only an average of some 10% are regular Sunday churchgoers, an inadequate but nonetheless revealing index. A survey recently conducted among “practising” Catholics, on leaving Mass, in the planet’s most affluent and cultivated zones, i.e. Western Europe and the USA, showed that roughly 50% believed more in reincarnation in various forms than in the resurrection of the flesh, the *unicum* of the Christian hope. For many, moreover, Baptism has remained a dead letter, buried in the past, or has become encrusted with indifference. While it is certain that only God knows and judges our faith and that his Spirit works far beyond the visible confines of the Church, the reality indicates nonetheless that we Catholic laity form part, as Scripture affirms, of a “little flock” (*Lk* 12:32) or – as Paul VI said – an “ethnic group *sui*

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, no. 3.

generis” in the midst of the nations. We are very far from the vainglory of considering ourselves among the “happy few”, the hardcore of the real believers, a vainglory that so easily degenerates into a kind of pharisaic and sectarian attitude. We are, on the contrary, *ekklesia*, members of the community of the elect, convened and gathered by the Holy Spirit, poor sinners, reconciled only by God’s merciful grace, and sent into the world to celebrate, witness and proclaim the unprecedented event of the Incarnation and Redemption of a God who wills all mankind to be saved and to learn to know the truth. Ours cannot be the future of an “assimilated” (and hence insignificant) minority, but of a minority that brings the salt and light of the world in earthen vessels.

3. Our Christian identity, at the dawn of the third millennium, can no longer rest on (nor properly nourish itself from) what remains of traditional forms of Christianity, in which the Christian tradition was transmitted almost by socio-cultural osmosis; for these forms have been subjected to strong erosion and are already in a phase of decomposition. We feel the pervasive and powerful influences of a secular culture, which is ever more distant from the Catholic tradition, and which tends to reduce and reformulate the Christian confession and experience according to its logic and interests. We must guard, in particular, against three modes of the reduction of Christianity that are clearly visible on the horizon. The first is the reduction of Christianity to an irrational religious preference, just one of the huge variety of interchangeable “spiritual” offers with which the shop windows of consumer society are stuffed and which are expressed both in a lightweight sentimentalism and in the more hardline forms of pietism and fundamentalism. The second is a selectively moralist reduction, as if Christianity were only the symbol of compassion for like-minded people, an edifying social volunteer service, a mere ethical input of functional integration for social fabrics disintegrated by the fetishism of money, exclusion, violence and human impoverishment. The third is the reduction of Christianity to a clerical establishment, which is preoccupied primarily by power, and in which ecclesiastical agendas and lifestyles are dictated by the pressure of

the media. Not by chance do we live in times of a recrudescence of nihilism – without foundations or meanings, without ideals or well-founded hopes – and its “spiritual complement” in the most varied types of eclecticism of abstract religiosity. It will not be easy, but it is undoubtedly crucial, to live passionately in the world without being of the world, in a world ruled by the universalism of power, by an empire that does not seem to have a visible capital or leaders, but that profoundly determines the life of persons and peoples – and claims to do so in all fields, from genetic make-up to the contents of conscience, to the paradigms of existence – creating zones of affluence and poverty, peace and war, life and death. How much truth do we experience in the fact of being a pilgrim people amid the tribulations and persecutions of the world and the consolations of God! No one shall separate us from the love of God, even though it is beyond doubt that we will not be spared situations of exclusion, exile and martyrdom.

4. The key question, which we cannot evade, is that of our vocation and mission. Laypeople, i.e. Christians, above all *christifideles*! That is the highest title of our dignity and responsibility: of how we accept, celebrate and communicate the gift of faith that was gratuitously given to us. In other words, of how we are conscious of our baptism and of how we live our baptism as “new creatures” (2 *Cor* 5:17), or protagonists of the Christian newness in the world. Everything is at stake in this witness that forms part of an uninterrupted chain of witnesses, since the times of the *traditio apostolica*, over a period of two thousand years.

There are two mainstays that support our hope at the dawn of the third millennium. The first is fundamental and decisive: it is to trust in grace, constantly invoking the Spirit to enable us to know and love Jesus Christ ever more, something we are unable to do by ourselves. We know that grace is not a thing, but a Person: it is Jesus himself, who makes himself known by communicating his Spirit to us. This is the providential jubilee grace we need to implore: to renew a meeting with Jesus Christ in the particular circumstances of our present life, experi-

encing the same newness, the same reality, the same power of attraction and persuasion with which this meeting was experienced by his first disciples two thousand years ago. We need the simplicity of the Marian *fiat* if our freedom is to embrace this Presence, if we are to let ourselves be embraced by his mercy, and if Christ is to make flesh of our flesh to the point of being able to exclaim with the Apostle: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20). We are called to be Christ himself, as St. Augustine wrote and as John Paul II has reminded us. "In Christ": thus, in all soberness, the Apostle describes the Christian identity in all the dimensions of life.

All this is combined with the other mainstay of our hope: the realism of experiencing and knowing that the "heart" of man – his reason and his affections – is made for truth, for happiness, for beauty. These are desires connate with the person, that do not admit limitations and that cannot be ignored. It is true that the consumer society in which we live functions like a gigantic machine of entertainment – of *divertissement*, as Pascal would put it – that atrophies these desires, that censors the questions they pose, that cheapens the consciousness and existence of the human, converting it into a mere functional network in the framework of a trend towards growing technological self-regulation. But can the reality of things, the adventure of life, remain deprived of meaning? Is our happiness nothing but a dream, an ephemeral fantasy, in the last analysis unrealizable? Is life a "futile passion"? Are we condemned to our own limitations, to the power of death, to nothing? That would be the most absurd and iniquitous of injustices. The two million youngsters who converged on Tor Vergata in Rome for World Youth Day ask for far more. They aspire to far more. Irrepressible yearnings are now emerging from the most various expressions of culture and the religious sentiments of peoples. And to us has been given the privilege of experiencing and confessing that only Jesus Christ may give a superabundant response to these yearnings for truth, happiness and justice, and the certain promise of their full satisfaction. That explains why in the magisterium of John Paul II there is no more often cited or more decisive text than that of

Gaudium et spes: “It is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear”.² Only Jesus Christ reveals and realizes the vocation, dignity and destiny of man. In him rests every certain hope. We can walk in his footsteps, follow the traces of God’s plan of love because we have been embraced and pardoned, transformed and instilled with hope. We have no other treasure than this: to live life as vocation, witnesses of God who became man, as merciful and salvific companion of all humankind.

5. The roots of the Christian’s identity, yesterday, today and for ever, are in the event of Christ, who, in the sacrament of the Christian community, offers himself and proposes himself to the freedom of the person, calling him/her to a life-long decision. Without adding anything else, it would be enough to let the decisive words of the apostolic tradition reverberate in our heart as a living memory: “Know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”, “If any one is in Christ, he is a new creature”, “Remain steadfast in the Lord”, “Don’t conform yourself to the mentality of this century”, “Christ freed us so that we might remain free”, “I have forgiven you your sins”, “This is my body and this is my blood”, “Love each other as I loved you”, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them”, “Be my witnesses to the end of the earth”, “Come Lord Jesus”... Here there is a whole programme for the laity in the third millennium, but we would not be able to experience it alone, scattered as we are here and there. The fragility of the person’s Christian life is, in general, directly proportioned to a formal and fragmentary relation with the ecclesial community in which the baptized remains reluctant to draw on its services. In times in which the faith is like a seed threatened and sometimes obscured by the gods and lords of this world, it is more than ever essential to remain steadfast, rooted in the mystery of communion which is the sacrament of God among men, in com-

² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22.

pany with the saints. For the lay faithful at the dawn of the third millennium the decisive factor is their being members of the Body of Christ, their being incorporated or not in the Christian communities to which they have been entrusted by the providence of God. Only there can the experience and consciousness of that "tremendous mystery" of unity that finds its source and culmination in the Eucharist grow. Only there can the living remembrance of the presence of the Lord in all the dimensions of life be nourished. It is more than ever essential that the fidelity to Christ and to the Christian tradition be sustained and comforted by an ecclesial context really conscious of how indispensable it is. Moreover, in societies characterized by marked inequalities and forms of "exclusion", ever more fragmented in a multiplicity of particular interests, cultures and conflicts, in which human relations are characterized by alienation and indifference or by enmity and exploitation, of fundamental importance is the witness of visible communities formed by persons who, albeit in their diversity, are bound together by genuine relationships, defined more by "being" than "having" or "power". All this is miracle and gift for the conversion and transformation of the world. Christian families, authentic ecclesial *communautés de base*, renewed parish communities, diversified forms of community in ecclesial associations and movements, communities of laypeople in consecrated life...are called to support Christian life, to "reknit the fabric of Christian life", as reflection and sign of the mystery of communion, to form dwellings of authentic humanity so that the Christian fabric of society may be gradually reconstituted. We live in a period of the "revolution of communications", but this is not matched by a growth in communion. It is characterized, instead, by situations of radical individualism, loneliness, lack of genuine friendship and companionship on the one hand, and by anonymous standardization and conformism on the other. Only a love greater than our human measures may be the foundation and impulse for the reconstruction of the bonds of social cohesion, solidarity and communion so necessary for the new millennium if they are not to be reduced to a wasteland and a bad copy of the human.

6. What is expected from the lay faithful in the third millennium is a witness of true persons, who take seriously their own existence; who tackle the human condition with realism and passion; who affirm their own freedom in truth and in responsibility; and who are passionately interested in the life and destiny of others, because full of gratitude, joy and hope for the gift of a new life which they experience and share. The mission of the laity is to communicate the gift of the meeting with Christ, who has given another dimension, another freedom, another happiness, another humanity to their life, imprinting the form of charity both on the mind and on the affections. We are called to experience “martyrdom” in all the depth of our daily life: in other words, to give our life to the service of our fellowmen for the love of Christ. The reality of eternal life and of the “hundredfold now in this time” must be expressed in the love of our own spouse, our own children, our own friends, in the way of carrying out our own work, in the total gift of ourselves to respond to the needs of our neighbours, in living each instant and each gesture in their dimension of eternity. We are – and must be increasingly through the invocation and acceptance of grace – protagonists of this astonishing newness of life in the world, in all human environments. We must be ever ready to share this gift, which transforms our life and to proclaim the reason of the hope that is in us, so that those we meet may feel, in spite of our limitations and our inadequacies, a ray of truth and a promise of felicity that are for everyone. How, in any case, can we fail to accept and turn to account any sign of truth, goodness and beauty, which – beyond any confessional boundary or ideological label – may enrich the human, because it is an expression, however small, of the salvific plan that the one Lord and Saviour will bring to completion? Our life, our meetings, our tasks, our works are under the sign of a positive hypothesis.

7. But if the lay faithful are truly to bear witness to their faith, what is needed is an extensive educational task, an intensive work of catechesis, a “new evangelization”, so that all the baptized may grow in the Lord, and their original presence, their new humanity, their new conscious-

ness of reality, their constructive passion, their missionary proclamation may be expressed in all the fields of social life. We must open ways to the Gospel in all the frontiers of the world, spreading charity in the *polis*, announcing and realizing the good news of the dignity of the human person, and inculturating the gospel as "force of freedom and message of liberation". Now that the utopias and ideologies that promised paradise on earth have disintegrated and shown themselves to be so many hells, we no longer have prefabricated and "enlightened" models for social construction. We know that the idols of power, money and luxury are at the root of each force that leads to slavery and violence. To solve the problems of man we cannot place our trust anew in mere "procedural rules" of an ever more concentrated and oligarchic power, nor in ever more complex and state-regulated measures as a way of adjusting the ills of society, nor in the mere glorification of the presumed "invisible hand" of the market. We must give concrete form, instead, to the fruitful criteria of the social doctrine of the Church in collaboration with countless men and women of good will, under our free responsibility, without waiting for clerical directives. Only thus shall we be in the forefront in the defence of the life, dignity and freedom of the person, wherever the person runs the risk of being treated as a "cell of nature" or an "anonymous element of the human city". In response to invasive concentrations of power, the battle for freedom is decisive; and that battle encounters its crucial tests in religious freedom, in freedom of education and in freedom of association. So much needs to be done for the defence and implementation of the natural rights of persons and peoples. The application of the principle of subsidiarity is now fundamental for a real democratic process that may extend the scope for freedom and participation, and release the necessary energies for enterprise and cooperation in all fields of social life, to respond to human needs, inspired by an ideal of the good life. The *caritas Christi* inspires a solidarity that excludes no one, and that is incapable of tolerating any indifference to situations of injustice, poverty and violence, of which growing sections of humanity are the victims and which are unleashed on whole peoples, leaving a humanity suffer-

ing from impotence and despair. The historical transformation represented by these times of passage from one century and one millennium to the next poses ever more dramatic challenges to us. And these challenges are translated into the duty to tackle an enormous educational task, the defence and promotion of a culture of life, the safeguard of truth and the good of the family; into the need to extend authentic human communion; in the necessary wisdom to impress an authentically human direction on the technological revolution underway; in the re-foundation and development of democracy; in the re-orientation and intensive growth of a human and social economy aimed at a new contract of solidarity and justice within nations and between nations; in the search for more effective ways to multiply and distribute the occasions of work; in the tireless struggle to promote conditions of peace and reconciliation everywhere; and in the processes of cooperation, integration and negotiation with a view to a more equitable and effective international community. Any appeal to this responsibility of Christians cannot but seem grossly inadequate, given the enormity and complexity of the task. There are no easy recipes, but only the freedom and intelligence of man. We Christians share in this search and this passionate collaboration with everyone. We claim no dominion, no hegemony of any kind. But we entrust ourselves to the faith as original factor and source of indomitable and constantly renewed energy, to tackle the whole of reality with the most varied forms of apostolate that may be the fruitful expression of charity in the construction of more human forms of life. We cannot dispense with Christ, the cornerstone of every genuinely human construction. We have been told: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt 6:33). Only thus shall we be custodians and protagonists of hope in the third millennium.

VIII

Final Message of the Congress

On the threshold of the third millennium over 550 *christifideles laici* participated in the Congress of the Catholic Laity held in Rome as part of the Jubilee of the apostolate of the laity.

Delegates of the local Churches, associations, movements and new communities, we met together with joy, hope and gratitude. Conscious of the priestly, prophetic and kingly function that we derive from our baptism, we vigorously reaffirm our Christian faith with a renewed commitment to respond to our vocation and perform our mission as lay faithful in the Church and in the world.

1. The Holy Father has retraced the journey made by the laity from Vatican Council II to the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 with their gaze fixed on the future. Symbolically entrusting the Council's documents to all the *christifideles laici*, John Paul II has demonstrated great faith in us and great devotion to us. And we, for our part, assume the responsibility of living the Gospel, a task that is becoming ever more urgent in current circumstances. This responsibility is rooted in the full and constantly renewed consciousness of being called to work in full harmony with the Magisterium of the Church.

2. The twentieth century witnessed the birth and collapse of totalitarian regimes that tragically marked the life of many countries. It saw the forging of alliances that proved fatal, and two world wars that caused the death of millions of people. Evil ideologies sowed destruction and turmoil. Today, indifference, nihilism and ethical relativism are spreading in our societies. Our age seems to be prey to the "culture of death" (abortion, euthanasia). Yet there are signs that people are passionately seeking God and the true meaning of life. In response to all this, we are

seeking ways of proclaiming Christ, the one Saviour of the world, and are willing to place our energies at the service of formation and education in the faith that must be aimed at ourselves in the first place.

In the secularized world of our time the main task of the lay faithful is to witness Christ in the construction of a more human society together with other Christians, believers of other religions and all men of good will. The Holy Father forcefully reminded us of this by citing the words of his predecessor Paul VI: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses".¹

If it to convince the men and women of our time, the verbal or cultural transmission of the Christian message is not enough. To touch their hearts a personal meeting is needed. That's why we feel strongly challenged by the Pope's appeal to us seriously to ask ourselves: "What does it mean to be Christians, today, here and now?".²

3. The work of the Congress has placed us on the right road to finding an answer to this question. We have re-examined the baptismal roots that make the *christifideles laici* "a new creation" (cf. *Gal* 6:15). Recognizing that we belong to Christ, we look to him and his mission as "envoy" of the Father. And, as baptized, we know we have been called to identify the mission that is peculiarly our own through the historical circumstances of our vocation. Quoting *Lumen gentium*, the Holy Father reminded us that our special vocation is "to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will".³

We can bear witness to the beauty of being lay people, i.e. Christians, in the Church and in society. In spite of the difficulties, in spite of our limitations and our resistance, the meeting with Christ has

¹ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 41,

² JOHN PAUL II, "Homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the laity", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27-28 November 2000, 7.

³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 31.

changed our life. It has made it more human in all its dimensions: from conjugal love to the education of our children, from friendship to study, from political involvement to our professional activity and every tiny gesture of our daily existence.

4. In response to the great challenges of the new millennium – war, biotechnology, genetics, globalization, interpersonal relations, peaceful coexistence between peoples – we accept John Paul II's invitation to bring the light of the Gospel to the world, where we are called to be prophets of Christian hope and apostles of "him who is and who was and who is to come [...] the Almighty" (*Rev* 1:4, 8).

The celebration of the memory of the Christian martyrs of the twentieth century, many of whom were lay people, has confronted us with the crux of our mission, which is to bear courageous witness to Christ. We are ready to accept the Cross, in the full consciousness that we shall only be capable of doing so if we are closely united with the Lord and illuminated by him. This union is one we live by walking at the side of Christ, who leads us to the final meeting with the Father, when we shall see him face to face. The martyrs of the twentieth century remind us of the greatest challenge, that of holiness, true humanity and fullness of the Christian life. And the Pope encourages us "not [to be] afraid of accepting this challenge: that of being holy men and women!"⁴

5. The contributions of the participants to this Congress who, in their variety, are an expression of the spiritual richness both of the more traditional associations and of the ecclesial movements and the new communities, make it clear that the truth of the Christian experience is not measured in terms of quantity, of power: "You are the salt of the earth. [...] You are the light of the world" (*Mt* 5:13-14). As has been said at this Congress, the real danger for Christians is not that of being a minority, but of becoming marginal, irrelevant, useless for the world.

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, "Homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of the apostolate of the laity", cit.

To this world we are called, on the contrary, to bring the distinctive and fruitful character of our faith. We are called to transform this constantly changing world according to God's plan of love.

6. The Holy Father has reminded us that the presence of the Christian message in the various fields of life and thought is often owing to the lay faithful and their commitment.⁵

In these times of cultural change that will influence our ways of thinking and acting and our conduct, we feel ourselves especially called to bear witness to the world of the reality of the Church, sacrament of salvation, people of God and mystery of missionary communion, to whose evangelizing work we pledge to contribute actively. For we are conscious that the growth of the Church is part of our history of men and women touched in their freedom by the vital meeting with the Lord.

"If you shall be what you ought to be, if, that is, you live Christianity without compromises, you will be able to set the world afire",⁶ John Paul II told us at the end of the Jubilee of the apostolate of the laity. The spark of this fire will be the humble certainty of the work of the Lord in our life, that makes us capable of perceiving reality in a new way and of authentic gestures aimed at safeguarding the dignity of each person, especially the poor and the defenceless.

Thirty-five years since Vatican Council II, we *christifideles* who have taken part in this Congress of the Catholic Laity discern the signs of a new springtime. And with this hope we enter the new millennium, remembering the words of Jesus: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (*Jn* 15:5).

⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, "Angelus address for the Jubilee of the apostolate of the laity", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27-28 November 2000, 6-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*

CONTENTS

Introduction, <i>Cardinal James Francis Stafford</i>	V
----------------------------------------------------------------	---

The word of the Pope

Message of His Holiness John Paul II	3
Homily of His Holiness John Paul II on the Occasion of the Jubilee of the Apostolate of the Laity	11

I. A TIME OF EPOCH-MAKING CHANGES

Retrospect of a Century and Prospects for a New Historical Phase: Challenges to Christian Witness, <i>Pedro Morandé</i>	19
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

Round Table

Healing Europe, <i>Tadeusz Mazowiecki</i>	39
Evangelizing Asia, <i>Thomas Han Hong-Soon</i>	49
The Rebirth of Africa, <i>Agnès Adjaho Avognon</i>	57
Building Peace in the Middle East and in North Africa, <i>Amin Fahim</i>	67
America, Mission Land, <i>Mary Ann Glendon</i>	73

II. THE CHURCH IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The Mission of the Church at the Dawn of the Third Millennium: Disciples and Witnesses of the Lord, <i>Bishop Angelo Scola</i>	81
Vatican Council II, Milestone in the Journey of the Catholic Laity, <i>Bishop Stanislaw Rylko</i>	119

III. VOCATION

The Baptismal Roots of the Identity of the <i>Christifideles</i> , <i>Bishop André-Mutien Léonard</i>	147
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Round Table

Participants in a Mystery of Communion (Trinitarian, Ecclesial, Eucharistic), <i>Dino Boffo</i>	157
Called to Holiness in the World, <i>Alejandro Llano</i>	163
Sent to Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to All, <i>Brian Smith</i>	173
Ready to Give our Life for Love to the Point of Martyrdom, <i>Alexey Youdine</i>	179
Witnesses of Unity: “ut unum sint”, <i>Chiara Lubich</i>	187
Constructors, in Charity, of More Human Forms of Life, <i>Théodore Ndiaye</i>	193

IV. MISSION

Witnesses to Newness of Life, <i>Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger</i>	201
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Round Table

Mission in Marriage and in the Family, <i>Anouk Meyer</i>	217
Witnesses of Christ in the Worker World and in the Economy, <i>Rafael Serrano Castro</i>	227
Witnesses among the Poor and the Outcast, <i>Andrea Riccardi</i>	237
The Mission of the Laity in Education and Culture, <i>Nikolaus Lobkowitz</i>	243
The Mission of the Laity in the World of Politics and in the International Community, <i>George Weigel</i>	251
The Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Building of the Ecclesial Community, <i>Patricia Jones</i>	257

Contents

V. FORMATION

Towards Human and Christian Maturity, <i>Archbishop Robert Sarah</i>	265
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Round Table

Method and Content in Christian and Human Education, <i>Onorato Grassi</i>	279
Word of God, Liturgy and the Sacraments in the Christian's Formative Journey, <i>Eusebio Astiaso García</i>	285
Personal Prayer and Mission of the Laity, <i>Ludmila Grygiel</i> .	291
The Parish Community as Place of Formation, <i>Ernesto Preziosi</i>	307
The Contribution of Movements and Associations to the Growth of the Lay Faithful, <i>Martine Catta</i>	319
Schools of Theological and Pastoral Formation for the Laity, <i>Nazario Vivero</i>	327

VI. THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Remembrance of Baptism, <i>Cardinal Christian Tumi</i>	339
Remembrance of Confirmation, <i>Bishop Stanislaw Rylko</i> . . .	343
The Eucharist in the Life of the Lay Faithful, <i>Bishop Javier Echevarría</i>	347

VII. WHAT LAITY FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM?

A Pastor's Voice, <i>Cardinal Bernard Francis Law</i>	355
A Layman's Voice, <i>Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour</i>	365

VIII. FINAL MESSAGE OF THE CONGRESS 377

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