

## METANOIA, COMMITMENT, INVOLVEMENT

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It has long been a tradition in our Communities and Schools to promote the devotion towards indulgences, both among the Sisters and our pupils. Actually, apart from the rosary and the way of the Cross and the Angelus, we recite daily the prayers *Anima Christi*, *Adoro Te devote* and *En ego, O bone...* after Mass and Communion. We have been exhorted also to gain all possible indulgences and to offer them to alleviate the lot of the poor souls in purgatory. Now, in our last community dialogue, the two Sisters who attend courses in theology objected very strongly against this tradition. They said that all this business of indulgences is outdated and inconsistent with the spirit of the Council. What we Sisters should do and what we should inculcate in our pupils, they contend, is not indulgences but metanoia, personal commitment, and real involvement. A discussion followed and you should have seen the confusion that arose. Some of the old Sisters even objected to the Sisters attending courses in theology.

We would appreciate it if the Reverend Father may help us to disentangle this situation. Kindly explain the meaning of metanoia and commitment and involvement that no Sister had heard of before in our old days. Is it true that indulgences have been done away with after the Council? Do we still gain indulgences when we recite in common the above-mentioned prayers?

There are two different problems involved here. The problem concerning Sisters studying theology, and the problem of whether or not indulgences are still relevant as real means of sanctification in our post-conciliar Church.

### 1. *The Crisis*

The concern of the Reverend Mother and the older Sisters on account of the confusion during their community dialogue is, indeed, justified. Such confusion has already spread far and wide and with much scandal throughout the Church. Many Sisters have lost their vocation, while new vocations for their Congregation have been badly stifled, all to the detriment of the work they are committed to in God's Church. And all this, ironically, comes about in the name of what is called *commitment* and *involvement*, terms stolen from modern Protestantism. And, to add insult to injury, this scandal may be traced to what has been called the *spirit of the Council*. The young sisters are not entirely to be blamed for their ultra-neomodernistic inoculation. There is a number of priests, both secular and religious, who have actually precipitated this crisis. Left to themselves and to their *charismatic* phantasies, these "theologians" have allowed no dogma of the Church to stand. The situation has become so grave that the word *crisis* is justified to describe this sort of doctrinal disarray in the Church.

Fortunately, salutary reaction against these deviations may already be felt among men of responsibility, prompted, no doubt, by the genuine Spirit of truth. In his Address to a General Audience, September 10, 1969, Pope Paul VI denounces these false "prophets" while he deplors the danger they cause to souls:

We hear much today of the troubles that are shaking the Church's life *from the inside* and have been doing so since the Council, in an unforeseen way that certainly does not derive from the Council itself through a logic of fidelity, but is even contrary to the Council's spirit, hopes and norms . . .

We might therefore, call the present trouble a *crisis of confidence* . . . when considered as something in the minds of those in whom it is fermenting and from whom it is coming. Or rather as a *crisis of lack of confidence*, . . . when its negative side is considered and that is the side We have to deal with now. A temptation to lack of confidence is attacking the souls of not a few circles in the Church. It is lack of confidence in doctrine and tradition . . . and it becomes a crisis of faith. Lack of confidence in structures and methods: and it becomes corrosive criticism and a mania for pseudo-liberation. Lack of confidence in men — and it becomes tension and polemic and disobedience. Lack of confidence in the very acts of renewal of the Church

— and it becomes resistance in some and indifference in others. Lack of confidence in the Church as it is — and that becomes a crisis of charity and recourse, often mean and servile, to substitutes from the opposing and profane life. The suspicion is spread here and there that the Church is unable to maintain itself and renew itself; the hope of a new Christian spring is given up; recourse is had to arbitrary ideologies, or to gratuitous charismatic suppositions, in order to fill up the inner void remaining after loss of confidences: in God, in the Church's leadership, in the goodness of men and also in oneself...

That is how it is. How could the Pope and those to bear the responsibility of giving the Church pastoral guidance together with him not suffer as they see that the *major difficulties are today arising out of the Church herself, that the most poignant pain comes to her from the indocility and infidelity of certain of her ministers and some of of her consecrated souls, that the most disappointed surprises come to her from circles that have been the most assisted, the most favoured and the most beloved?* How can they not feel sorrow at the waste of so many energies, used, not to give increase, but to engage in superfluous and sophistic efforts to raise problems and make them complicated and irritating? (*L' Osservatore Romano. English Ed. Sept. 18, 1969*).

With these denunciations of the Holy Father in mind, the Reverend Mother and the old Sisters will do well to look for suitable means towards protecting their community in matters of orthodox doctrine.

Yet, dangerous as it may be, we do not think that the Sisters should stop attending courses in theology. If convenient at all times in the past, a serious preparation in the Bible and theology is nowadays a definite must. Sisters who, by profession — should we say *by the commitment* to which their profession is for life *involved* — are consecrated to teach in schools and colleges and thus cannot lack a solid preparation in these vital matters. On the other hand, not all priests and professors of theology have become afflicted by the heretical contagion. Such a view would be too pessimistic and even incompatible with the Spirit of truth which enlivens the Church. Rather, the religious superiors should exercise prudence in securing for their Sisters, especially for the young Sisters, the ministry — in service, as they say — of competent and reliable scribes who may bring, in harmonious blend, out of the stores of Church's faith "*both new and old*" (Mt. 13:52).

## 2. *Is the practice of indulgences still relevant?*

On this point — the core of the questions in the community dialogue of our interrogator — the Sisters may be reassured and they may go on undisturbed with their tradition of exhorting their pupils towards sanctification through the sacred indulgences. True to the ideal of renewal expressed by the Council Fathers on this matter, Pope Paul VI first published his Apostolic Constitution *The Doctrine of Indulgences*, dated January 1, 1967. Then, June 29th, 1968, through the Sacred Penitentiary, he issued the new *Enchiridion of Indulgences. Norms and Grants* (English Ed. by the Catholic Book Publishing Co. (1969 New York)). In his Constitution, the Pope summarized the traditional doctrine of the Church on the need for atonement and satisfaction of God for Men's sins as a means towards a perfect restoration of order between the sinner and the offended Lover. Herein comes the comforting dogma, *the Communion of saints*, by which, as members of the mystical Body, we are united with Christ our Head and, after having been absolved of serious offenses in the sacrament of penance, we offer to God to surpassing satisfactions of Our Lord, his Mother and the Saints as from a treasure which is common property of all who are in the state of God's grace and love. The Apostolic Constitution follows step by step the Church's pronouncements on indulgences from the Apostles, though the Fathers and the Councils, up to Vatican II and to the very Acts of Paul VI in his Epistle *Sancrosancta Protiuncidae*. Here the doctrine, just as that of all defined dogmas, remains untouched. Note the Pope's words:

As for those of the faithful who are repentant and *strive to attain this 'metanoia'*, the Church comes to their help, for the reason that, having sinned, they now aspire to that holiness, with which they were clothed in Baptism. By grants of indulgences, she enfolds these her children in a maternal embrace, helping and sustaining them in their weakness and frailty. An indulgence, therefore, is not an easy way, by which we can escape the necessity of doing penance for sin. It is rather a support, which each of the faithful, humbly conscious of his weakness, finds in the Mystical Body of Christ, 'collaborating in its entirety by charity, example and prayers to effect his conversion' (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 11): A.A.S., 58 (1966), p. 632. (*Enchiridion of Indulgences*, p. 101).

That much on the relevance of the indulgences after the Council. Now, in regard to the practice of distributing the Church's treasure, more suitable *Norms* have from now on been established. In accordance to these norms plenary indulgences, even those granted *toties quoties*, may be obtained only once a day. In this manner, the reduced number of plenary indulgences may promote a greater appreciation of the gift. Yet, *at the moment of death*, a new plenary indulgence may be obtained by the faithful even if the dying person has already obtained a plenary indulgence that same day. Also, a new measure, if the word be allowed in such spiritual matters, has been established for *partial indulgence*. The old measure on terms of *days* and *years* is no longer used. Instead we read:

The faithful who at least with a contrite heart perform an action to which a partial indulgence is attached obtain, in addition to the remission of temporal punishment acquired by the action itself, an equal remission of punishment through the intervention of the Church. (Norms. 5).

From the foregoing, we can see the theological vacuity of these modern expressions so appealing to beginners. But expressions of this kind have always appealed to all freshmen, and even to less quick sophomores.

### 3. *Three prayers.*

Yes, the prayers recited daily in common by the Sisters after Mass and Communion are still enriched with precious indulgences. These three prayers with a number of others are listed in the new *Enchiridion* and are as follows:

#### a. *Anima Christi.*

Partial indulgence. Grant 10.

#### b. *Adoro te devote.*

Partial indulgence. Grant 4.

#### c. *En ego, o bone et dulcissime Iesu.*

A *plenary* indulgence is granted on each Friday of Lent and Passiontide to all faithful, who after Communion, recite the above prayer before an image of Christ Crucified; on other days of the year the indulgence is *partial*. Grant 22.