

# **BOLETIN** **ECLESIASTICO** de **FILIPINAS**

## **ON THE ADMISSION OF WOMEN TO THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD**

**Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**

## **WOMEN PRIESTS**

**Louis Boyer**

## **THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN ACCORDING TO THE CHURCH**

**Raimondo Spiazzi, O.P.**

## **HOMILETICS FOR MAY**

**Bernard J. LeFrois, S.V.D.**

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN ORGAN

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## Pananagutan Natin

Significantly the **ALAY KAPWA** theme has moved from a call to personal accountability, "Kapwa Ko, Pananagutan Ko" (1976) to a summons for communitarian responsibility, "Kapwa Natin, Pananagutan Natin". Both the individual and the communitarian aspects of our involvement in works of charity and justice need emphasis.

To get Christians personally concerned over the sorrowful plight of countless persons struck by a disaster or oppressed by injustices, it is necessary to let them feel the sting of individual duty. But to make sure that our acts of charity are not just *ningas cogon* and our participation in just causes not merely a fad, something higher, deeper, broader and longer is needed than just the harmonized goodwill of many individuals for a short period.

Acting together does not necessarily mean getting involved as a community. For example, in times of disaster many people join hands to help but they promptly disband when the crisis is over. They act together but they do not act as a community. They lack that spirit that moves them to care, share, interact, work together, so as to grow together.

Our charity and justice, to be truly Christian, must be communitarian — they must be the charity and justice of the Body of Christ. This means that we must love and do justice inasmuch as we are moved towards our brothers and sisters by the Spirit of Jesus. Our love and

justice for our brothers and sisters must also be governed by Christ the Head, draw life from him, originate from him, be centered on him, and be oriented to him.

"Kapwa Natin, Pananagutan Natin" also means that our charity and justice are not just "special projects" of our community but must be acknowledged as the warp and woof of our community life.

This year's ALAY KAPWA theme is beautiful. Looking at it one way, people should realize that works of charity and justice must be backed by a community in order to be truly effective. Looking at it another way, people should see that these works are necessary for a community to grow.

To make one theme out of the Church's concern for social involvement and for community building is the special merit of this year's ALAY KAPWA motto, "Kapwa Natin, Pananagutan Natin."

## In This Issue

**WOMEN** take the spotlight in this issue. Although the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith confirms the age-old tradition of the Church barring the ordination of women to the priesthood, the document it has drawn up to explain its stand helps us appreciate the great dignity given to women by God. Priesthood is a function. It does not make the priest a better Christian, a greater Christian or a higher Christian. It only differentiates him from others as having a function different from their functions. Priestly ordination is not a promotion to a special caste of Christians. It is a consecration to a special service.

It should be clear that the assignment of different functions to men and women should not militate against their basic equality. The ordination of women cannot be raised as a valid issue of women's equal rights. No one ever has a right to ordination. God, through the Church, bestows it as a free gift. Why he gives it to men and not to women is a question we cannot resolve through our own wisdom.

**DECLARATION ON THE QUESTION OF THE ADMISSION  
OF WOMEN TO THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD**

**INTRODUCTION: The role of women in modern society and the  
Church**

Among the characteristics that mark our present age, Pope John XXIII indicated, in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of 11 April 1963, "the part that women are now taking in public life... This is a development that is perhaps of swifter growth among Christian nations, but it is also happening extensively, if more slowly, among nations that are heirs to different traditions and imbued with a different culture".<sup>1</sup> Along the same lines, the Second Vatican Council, enumerating in its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* the forms of discrimination touching upon the basic rights of the person which must be overcome and eliminated as being contrary to God's plan, gives first place to discrimination based upon sex.<sup>2</sup> The resulting equality will secure the building upon of a world that is not levelled out and uniform but harmonious and unified, if men and women contribute to it their own resources and dynamism, as Pope Paul VI recently stated.<sup>3</sup>

In the life of the Church herself, as history shows us, women have played a decisive role and accomplished tasks of outstanding value. One has only to think of the foundresses of the great religious families, such as Saint Clare and Saint Teresa of Avila. The latter, moreover, and Saint Catherine of Siena, have left writings so rich in spiritual doctrine that Pope Paul VI has included them among the Doctors of the Church. Nor could one forget the great number of women who have consecrated themselves to the Lord for the exercise of charity or for the missions, and the Christian wives who have had a profound influence on their families, particularly for the passing on of the faith to their children.

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 55 (1963), pp. 267-268.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 29 (7 December 1965): *AAS* 58 (1966), pp. 1048-1049.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI, Address to the members of the Study Commission on the Role of Women in Society and in the Church and to the members of the Committee for International Women's Year, 18 April 1975: *AAS* 67 (1975), p. 265.

But our age gives rise to increased demands: "Since in our time women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various sectors of the Church's apostolate".<sup>4</sup> This charge of the Second Vatican Council has already set in motion the whole process of change now taking place: these various experiences of course need to come to maturity. But as Pope Paul VI also remarked,<sup>5</sup> a very large number of Christian communities are already benefiting from the apostolic commitment of women. Some of these women are called to take part in councils set up for pastoral reflection, at the diocesan or parish level; and the Apostolic See has brought women into some of its working bodies.

For some years now various Christian communities stemming from the sixteenth-century Reformation or of later origin have been admitting women to the pastoral office on a par with men. This initiative has led to petitions and writings by members of these communities and similar groups, directed towards making this admission a general thing; it has also led to contrary reactions. This therefore constitutes an ecumenical problem, and the Catholic Church must make her thinking known on it, all the more because in various sectors of opinion the question has been asked whether she too could not modify her discipline and admit women to priestly ordination. A number of Catholic theologians have even posed this question publicly, evoking studies not only in the sphere of exegesis, patrology and Church history but also in the field of the history of institutions and customs, of sociology and psychology. The various arguments capable of clarifying this important problem have been submitted to a critical examination. As we are dealing with the debate which classical theology scarcely touched upon the current argumentation runs the risk of neglecting essential elements.

For these reasons, in execution of a mandate received from the Holy Father and echoing the declaration which he himself made in his letter of 30 November 1975,<sup>6</sup> the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith judges it necessary to recall that the Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination. The Sacred Congregation deems it opportune at the present juncture to explain

<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 9 (18 November 1965): AAS 58 (1966), p. 846.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI, Address to the members of the Study Commission on the Role of Women in Society and in the Church and to the members of the Committee for International Women's Year, 18 April 1975: AAS 67 (1975), p. 266.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. AAS 68 (1976), pp. 599-600; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 600-601.

this position of the Church. It is a position which will perhaps cause pain but whose positive value will become apparent in the long run, since it can be of help in deepening understanding of the respective roles of men and of women.

## 1

## The Church's Constant Tradition

The Catholic Church has never felt that priestly or episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women. A few heretical sects in the first centuries, especially Gnostic ones, entrusted the exercise of the priestly ministry to women: this innovation was immediately noted and condemned by the Fathers, who considered it as unacceptable in the Church.<sup>7</sup> It is true that in the writings of the Fathers one will find the undeniable influence of prejudices unfavorable to women, but nevertheless, it should be noted that these prejudices had hardly any influence on their pastoral activity, and still less on their spiritual direction. But over and above considerations inspired by the spirit of the times, one finds expressed—especially in the canonical documents of the Antiochian and Egyptian traditions—this essential reason, namely, that by calling only men to the priestly Order and ministry in its true sense, the Church intends to remain faithful to the type of ordained ministry willed by the Lord Jesus Christ and carefully maintained by the Apostles.<sup>8</sup>

The same conviction animates medieval theology,<sup>9</sup> even if the Scholastic doctors, in their desire to clarify by reason the data of faith, often present arguments on this point that modern thought would have difficulty in admitting or would even rightly reject. Since that period and up to our own time, it can be said that the question has not been raised again, for the practice has enjoyed peaceful and universal acceptance.

The Church's tradition in the matter has thus been so firm in the course of the centuries that the Magisterium has not felt the need to intervene in order to formulate principle which was not

<sup>7</sup> Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I, 13, 2; PG 7, 580-581; ed Harvey, I, 114-122; Tertullian, *De Praescrip. Haeretic.* 41, 5; CCL 1, p. 221; Firmilian of Caesarea, in Saint Cyprian, *Epist.*, 75; CSEL 3, pp. 817-818; Origen, *Fragmentum in I Cor.* 74, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1909), pp. 41-42; Saint Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49, 2-3; 78, 23; 79, 2-4; vol. 2, GCS 31, pp. 243-244; vol. 3, GCS 37, pp. 473, 477-479.

<sup>8</sup> *Didascalia Apostolorum*, ch. 15, ed. R.H. Connolly, pp. 133 and 142; *Constitutiones Apostolicae*, bk. 3, ch. 6, nos. 1-2; ch. 9, nos. 3-4; ed F. H. Funk, pp 191,201; Saint John Chrysostom, *De Sacrodotio* 2, 2; PG 48, 633.



attacked, or to defend a law which was not challenged. But each time that this tradition had the occasion to manifest itself, it witnessed to the Church's desire to conform to the model left to her by the Lord.

The same tradition has been faithfully safeguarded by the Churches of the East. Their unanimity on this point is all the more remarkable since in many other questions their discipline admits of a great diversity. At the present time these same Churches refuse to associate themselves with requests directed towards securing the accession of women to priestly ordination.

## 2

### The Attitude of Christ

Jesus Christ did not call any woman to become part of the Twelve. If he acted in this way, it was not in order to conform to the customs of his time, for his attitude towards women was quite different from that of his milieu, and he deliberately and courageously broke with it.

For example to the great astonishment of his own disciples Jesus converses publicly with the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn. 4, 27); he takes no notice of the state of legal impurity of the woman who had suffered from haemorrhages (cf. Mt. 9:20-22), he allows a sinful woman to approach him in the house of Simon the Pharisee (cf. Lk. 7:37ff.); and by pardoning the woman taken in adultery, he means to show that one must not be more severe towards the fault of a woman than towards that of a man (cf. Jn. 8:11). He does not hesitate to depart from the Mosaic Law in order to affirm the equality of the rights and duties of men and women with regard to the marriage bond (cf. Mk. 10:2-11; Mt. 19:3-8).

In his itinerant ministry Jesus was accompanied not only by the Twelve but also by a group of women: "Mary, surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources" (Lk. 8:2-3). Contrary to the Jewish mentality, which did not accord great value to the testimony of women, as Jewish law attests, it was nevertheless

<sup>9</sup> Saint Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, Dist. 25. art. 2, q. 1, ed. Quaracchi, vol. 4, p. 649; Richard of Middleton, *In IV Sent.*, Dist. 25, art. 4, n. 1, ed. Venice, 1499 f. 177; John Duns Scotus, *In IV Sent.*, Dist. 25: *Opus Ozoniense*, ed. Vives, vol. 19, p. 140; *Reportata Parisiensis*, vol. 24, pp. 369-371; Durandus of Saint-Pourcain, *In IV Sent.*, Dist. 25, q. 2, ed. Venice, 1571, f. 364-v.

women who were the first to have the privilege of seeing the risen Lord, and it was they who were charged by Jesus to take the first paschal message to the Apostles themselves (cf. Mt. 28:7-10; Lk. 24:9-20; Jn. 20:11-18), in order to prepare the latter to become the official witnesses to the Resurrection.

It is true that these facts do not make the matter immediately obvious. This is no surprise, for the questions that the Word of God brings before us go beyond the obvious. In order to reach the ultimate meaning of the mission of Jesus and the ultimate meaning of Scripture, a purely historical exegesis of the texts cannot suffice. But it must be recognized that we have here a number of convergent indications that make all the more remarkable the fact that Jesus did not entrust the apostolic charge<sup>10</sup> to women. Even his Mother, who was so closely associated with the mystery of her Son, and whose incomparable role is emphasized by the Gospels of Luke and John, was not invested with the apostolic ministry. This fact was to lead the Fathers to present her as the example of Christ's will in this domain; as Pope Innocent III repeated later, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, "Although the Blessed Virgin Mary surpassed in dignity and in excellence all the Apostles, nevertheless it was not to her but to them that the Lord entrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven".<sup>11</sup>

## 3

## The Practice of the Apostles

The apostolic community remained faithful to the attitude of Jesus towards women. Although Mary occupied a privileged place in the little circle of those gathered in the Upper Room after the Lord's Ascension (cf. Acts 1:14), it was not she who was called to enter the College of the Twelve at the time of the election that

<sup>10</sup> Some have also wished to explain this fact by a symbolic intention of Jesus: the Twelve were to represent the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30). But in these texts it is only a question of their participation in the eschatological judgment. The essential meaning of the choice of the Twelve should rather be sought in the totality of their mission (cf. Mk. 3:14): they are to represent Jesus to the people and carry on his work.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Innocent III, *Epist.* (11 December 1210) to the Bishops of Palencia and Burgos, included in *Corpus Iuris, Decret. Lib. 5, tit. 38, De Paenit.*, ch. 10 *Nova*; ed. A. Friedberg, vol. 2, col. 886-887; cf. *Glossa in Decretal. Lib. 1, tit. 33, ch. 12 Dillecta, v. Iurisdictioni*. Cf. Saint Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, III. q. 27, a. 5 ad 3; Pseudo-Albert the Great, *Mariate*, quest. 42, ed. Bornet 37, 81.

resulted in the choice of Matthias: those who were put forward were two disciples whom the Gospels do not even mention.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled them all, men and women (cf. Acts 2:1; 1:14), yet the proclamation of the fulfillment of the prophecies in Jesus was made only by "Peter and the Eleven" (Acts 2:14).

When they and Paul went beyond the confines of the Jewish world, the preaching of the Gospel and the Christian life in the Greco-Roman civilization impelled them to break with Mosaic practices, sometimes regretfully. They could therefore have envisaged conferring ordination on women, if they had not been convinced of their duty of fidelity to the Lord on this point. In the Hellenistic world, the cult of a number of pagan divinities was entrusted to priestesses. In fact the Greeks did not share the ideas of the Jews; although their philosophers taught the inferiority of women, historians nevertheless emphasize the existence of a certain movement for the advancement of women during the Imperial period. In fact we know from the book of the Acts and from the Letters of Saint Paul that certain women worked with the Apostle for the Gospel (cf. Rom. 16:3-12; Phil. 4:3). Saint Paul lists their names with gratitude in the final salutations of the Letters. Some of them often exercised an important influence on conversions: Priscilla, Lydia and others; especially Priscilla, who took it on herself to complete the instruction of Apollos (cf. Acts 18:26); Phoebe, in the service of the Church of Cenchreae (cf. Rom. 16:1). All these facts manifest within the Apostolic Church a considerable evolution vis-a-vis the customs of Judaism. Nevertheless at no time was there a question of conferring ordination on these women.

In the Pauline Letters, exegetes of authority have noted a difference between two formulas used by the Apostle: he writes indiscriminately "my fellow workers" (Rom. 16:3; Phil. 4:2-3) when referring to men and women helping him in his apostolate in one way or another, but he reserves the title "God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9; cf. 1 Thess. 3-2) to Apollos, Timothy and himself, thus designated because they are directly set apart for the apostolic ministry and the preaching of the Word of God. In spite of the so important role played by women on the day of the Resurrection, their collaboration was not extended by Saint Paul to the official and public proclamation of the message, since this proclamation belongs exclusively to the apostolic mission.

**Permanent Value of the Attitude of Jesus and the Apostles**

Could the Church today depart from this attitude of Jesus and the Apostles, which has been considered as normative by the whole of tradition up to our own day? Various arguments have been put forward in favour of a positive reply to this question, and these must now be examined.

It has been claimed in particular that the attitude of Jesus and the Apostles is explained by the influence of their milieu and their times. It is said that, if Jesus did not entrust to women and not even to his Mother a ministry assimilating them to the Twelve, this was because historical circumstances did not permit him to do so. No one however has ever proved — and it is clearly impossible to prove — that this attitude is inspired only by social and cultural reasons. As we have seen, an examination of the Gospels shows on the contrary that Jesus broke with the prejudices of his time, by widely contravening the discriminations practiced with regard to women. One therefore cannot maintain that, by not calling women to enter the group of the Apostles, Jesus was simply letting himself be guided by reasons of expediency. For all the more reason, social and cultural conditioning did not hold back the Apostles working in the Greek milieu, where the same forms of discrimination did not exist.

Another objection is based upon the transitory character that one claims to see today in some of the prescriptions of Saint Paul concerning women, and upon the difficulties that some aspects of his teaching raise in this regard. But it must be noted that these ordinances, probably inspired by the customs of the period, concern scarcely more than disciplinary practices of minor importance such as the obligation imposed upon women to wear a veil on the head (1 Cor. 11:2-16); such requirements no longer have a normative value. However, the Apostle's forbidding of women "to speak" in the assemblies (cf. 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:12) is of a different nature, and exegetes define its meaning in this way: Paul in no way opposes the right, which he elsewhere recognizes as possessed by women, to prophesy in the assembly (cf. 1 Cor. 11:5); the prohibition solely concerns the official function of teaching in the Christian assembly. For Saint Paul this prescription is bound up with the divine plan of creation (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7; Gen. 2:18-24): it would be difficult to see in it the expression of a cultural fact. Nor should it be forgotten that we owe to Saint Paul one of the most vigorous texts in the New Testament on the fundamental equality of men and women, as children of God in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28).

Therefore there is no reason of accusing him of prejudices against women, when we note the trust that he shows towards them and the collaboration that he asks of them in his apostolate.

But over and above these objections taken from the history of apostolic times, those who support the legitimacy of change in the matter turn to the Church's practice in her sacramental discipline. It has been noted, in our day especially, to what extent the Church is conscious of possessing a certain power over the sacraments, even though they were instituted by Christ. She has used this power down the centuries in order to determine their signs and the conditions of their administration: recent decisions of Popes Pius XII and Paul VI are proof of this.<sup>12</sup> However, it must be emphasized that this power, which is a real one, has definite limits. As Pope Pius XII recalled: "The Church has no power over the substance of the sacraments, that is to say, over what Christ the Lord, as the sources of Revelation bear witness, determined should be maintained in the sacramental sign."<sup>13</sup> This was already the teaching of the Council of Trent, which declared: "In the Church there has always existed this power, that in the administration of the sacraments, provided that their substance remains unaltered, she can lay down or modify what she considers more fitting either for the benefit of those who receive them or for respect towards those same sacraments, according to varying circumstances, times or places".<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the sacramental signs are not conventional ones. Not only is it true that, in many respects, they are natural signs because they respond to the deep symbolism of actions and things, but they are more than this: they are principally meant to link the person of every period to the supreme Event of the history of salvation, in order to enable that person to understand, through all the Bible's wealth of pedagogy and symbolism, what grace they signify and produce. For example, the sacrament of the Eucharist is not only a fraternal meal, but at the same time the memorial which makes present and actual Christ's sacrifice and his offering by the Church. Again, the priestly ministry is not just a pastoral service; it ensures the

<sup>12</sup> Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*, 30 November 1947: AAS 40 (1948), pp. 5-7; Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Divinae Consortium Naturae*, 15 August 1971: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 657-664; Apostolic Constitution *Sacram Unctionem*, 30 November 1972: AAS 65 (1973), pp. 5-9.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*: *loc. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Session 21, chap. 2: Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1728.

continuity of the functions entrusted by Christ to the Apostles and the continuity of the powers related to those functions. Adaptation to civilizations and times therefore cannot abolish, on essential points, the sacramental reference to constitutive events of Christianity and to Christ himself.

In the final analysis it is the Church, through the voice of her Magisterium, that, in these various domains decides what can change and what must remain immutable. When she judges that she cannot accept certain changes, it is because she knows that she is bound by Christ's manner of acting. Her attitude, despite appearances, is therefore not one of archaism but of fidelity: it can be truly understood only in this light. The Church makes pronouncement in virtue of the Lord's promise and the presence of the Holy Spirit, in order to proclaim better the mystery of Christ and to safeguard and manifest the whole of its rich content.

This practice of the Church therefore has a normative character: in the fact of conferring priestly ordination only on men, it is a question of an unbroken tradition throughout the history of the Church, universal in the East and in the West, and alert to repress abuses immediately. This norm, based on Christ's example, has been and is still observed because it is considered to conform to God's plan for his Church.

## 5

### The Ministerial Priesthood in the Light of the Mystery of Christ

Having recalled the Church's norm and the basis thereof, it seems useful and opportune to illustrate this now by showing the profound fittingness that theological reflection discovers between the proper nature of the sacrament of Order with its specific reference to the mystery of Christ, and the fact that only men have been called to receive priestly ordination. It is not a question here of bringing forward a demonstrative argument, but of clarifying this teaching by the analogy of faith.

The Church's constant teaching, repeated and clarified by the Second Vatican Council and again recalled by the 1971 Synod of Bishops and by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its Declaration of 24 June 1973, declares that the bishop or the priest, in the exercise of his ministry, does not act in his own name, *in persona propria*: he represents Christ, who acts through him: "the priest truly acts in the place of Christ", as Saint

Cyprian already wrote in the third century.<sup>16</sup> It is this ability to represent Christ that Saint Paul considered as characteristic of his apostolic function (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20; Gal. 4:14). The supreme expression of this representation is found in the altogether special form it assumes in the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the source and centre of the Church's unity, the sacrificial meal in which the People of God are associated in the sacrifice of Christ: the priest, who alone has the power to perform it, then acts not only through the effective power conferred on him by Christ, but *in persona Christi*,<sup>16</sup> taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration.<sup>17</sup>

The Christian priesthood is therefore of a sacramental nature: the priest is a sign, the supernatural effectiveness of which comes from the ordination received, but a sign that must be perceptible<sup>18</sup> and which the faithful must be able to recognize with ease. The whole sacramental economy is in fact based upon natural signs, on symbols imprinted upon the human psychology: "Sacramental signs," say Saint Thomas, "represent what they signify by natural resemblance".<sup>19</sup> The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things: when Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this "natural resem-

<sup>16</sup> Saint Cyprian, Epist. 63, 14: PL 4, 397 B; ed. Hartel, vol. 3, p. 713.

<sup>16</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 33 (4 December 1963): "...by the priest who presides over the assembly in the person of Christ..."; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 10 (21 November 1964): "The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, moulds and rules the priestly people. Acting in the person of Christ, he brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people..."; 28: "By the powers of the sacrament of Order, and in the image of Christ the eternal High Priest... they exercise this sacred function of Christ above all in the Eucharistic liturgy or synaxis. There, acting in the person of Christ..."; Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2 (7 December 1965): "...priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are marked with a special character and are so configured to Christ the Priest that they can act in the person of Christ the Head"; 13: "As ministers of sacred realities, especially in the Sacrifice of the Mass, priests represent the person of Christ in a special way"; cf. 1971 Synod of Bishops, *De Sacerdotio ministeriali* 1, 4; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaratio circa catholicam doctrinam de Ecclesia*, 6 (24 June 1973).

<sup>17</sup> Saint Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 83, art. 1, ad 3: "It is to be said that (just as the celebration of this sacrament is the representative image of Christ's Cross: *ibid.* ad 2), for the same reason the priest also enacts the image of Christ, in whose person and by whose power he pronounces the words of consecration".

<sup>18</sup> "For since a sacrament is a sign, there is required in the things that are done in the sacraments not only the 'res' but the signification of the 'res'", recalls Saint Thomas, precisely in order to reject the ordination of women: *In IV Sent.*, dist. 25, q. 2, art. 1, *quaestiuncula* 1<sup>a</sup>, corp.

<sup>19</sup> Saint Thomas, *In IV Sent.*, dist. 25, q. 2, *quaestiuncula* 1<sup>a</sup> ad 4-um

blance" which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man.

Christ is of course the firstborn of all humanity, of women as well as men: the unity which he re-established after sin is such that there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all are one in Christ Jesus (cf. Gal. 3:28). Nevertheless, the Incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex: this is indeed a question of fact, and this fact, while not implying an alleged natural superiority of man over woman, cannot be disassociated from the economy of salvation: it is, indeed, in harmony with the entirety of God's plan as God himself has revealed it, and of which the mystery of the Covenant is the nucleus.

For the salvation offered by God to men and women, the union with him to which they are called — in short, the Covenant — took on, from the Old Testament Prophets onwards, the privileged form of a nuptial mystery: for God the Chosen People is seen as his ardently loved spouse. Both Jewish and Christian tradition has discovered the depth of this intimacy of love by reading and re-reading the Song of Songs; the divine Bridegroom will remain faithful even when the Bride betrays his love, when Israel is unfaithful to God (cf. Hos. 1-3; Jer. 2). When the "fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4) comes, the Word, the Son of God, takes on flesh in order to establish and seal the new and eternal Covenant in his blood, which will be shed for many so that sins may be forgiven. His death will gather together again the scattered children of God; from his pierced side will be born the Church, as Eve was born from Adam's side. At that time there is fully and eternally accomplished the nuptial mystery proclaimed and hymned in the Old Testament: Christ is the Bridegroom; the Church is his bride, whom he loves because he has gained her by his blood and made her glorious, holy and without blemish, and henceforth he is inseparable from her. This nuptial theme, which developed from the Letters of Saint Paul onwards (cf. 2 Cor. 11-2; Eph. 5:22-23) to the writings of Saint John (cf. especially Jn. 3:29; Rev. 19:7, 9), is present also in the Synoptic Gospels: the Bridegroom's friends must not fast as long as he is with them (cf. Mk. 2:19); the Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding (cf. Mt. 22:1-14). It is through this Scriptural language, all interwoven with symbols, and which expresses and affects man and woman in their profound identity, that there is revealed to us the mystery of God and Christ, a mystery which of itself is unfathomable.



That is why we can never ignore the fact that Christ is a man. And therefore, unless one is to disregard the importance of this symbolism for the economy of Revelation, it must be admitted that, in actions which demand the character of ordination and in which Christ himself, the author of the Covenant, the Bridegroom and Head of the Church, is represented, exercising his ministry of salvation — which is in the highest degree the case of the Eucharist — his role (this is the original sense of the word *persona*) must be taken by a man. This does not stem from any personal superiority of the latter in the order of values, but only from a difference of fact on the level of functions and service.

Could one say that, since Christ is now in the heavenly condition, from now on it is a matter of indifference whether he be represented by a man or by a woman, since "at the resurrection men and women do not marry" (Mt. 22:30)? But this text does not mean that the distinction between man and woman, insofar as it determines the identity proper to the person, is suppressed in the glorified state; what holds for us holds also for Christ. It is indeed evident that in human beings the difference of sex exercises an important influence, much deeper than, for example, ethnic difference: the latter do not affect the human person as intimately as the difference of sex, which is directly ordained both for the communion of persons and for the generation of human beings. In biblical Revelation this difference is the effect of God's will from the beginning: "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

However, it will perhaps be further objected that the priest, especially when he presides at the liturgical and sacramental functions, equally represents the Church: he acts in her name with "the intention of doing what she does". In this sense, the theologians of the Middle Ages said that the minister also in *persona Ecclesiae*, that is to say, in the name of the whole Church and in order to represent her. And in fact, leaving aside the question of the participation of the faithful in a liturgical action, it is indeed in the name of the whole Church that the action is celebrated by the priest: he prays in the name of all, and in the Mass he offers the sacrifice of the whole Church. In the new Passover, the Church, under visible signs, immolates Christ through the mystery of the priest.<sup>20</sup> And so, it is asserted; since the priest also represents the Church, would it not be possible to think that this representation could be carried out by a woman, according to the symbolism already explained? It is true that the priest represents the Church, which is the Body of Christ. But if he does so, it is precisely because he

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Council of Trent, Session 22, chap. 1: *DS* 1741.

first represents Christ himself, who is the Head and Shepherd of the Church. The Second Vatican Council<sup>21</sup> used this phrase to make more precise and to complete the expression *in persona Christi*. It is in this quality that the priest presides over the Christian assembly and celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice "in which the whole Church offers and is herself wholly offered".<sup>22</sup>

If one does justice to these reflections, one will better understand how well-founded is the basis of the Church's practice; and one will conclude that the controversies raised in our days over the ordination of woman are for all Christians a pressing invitation to meditate on the mystery of the meaning of the episcopate and the priesthood, and to rediscover the real and pre-eminent place of the priest in the community of the baptized, of which he indeed forms part but from which he is distinguished because, in the actions that call for the character of ordination for the community he is—with all the effectiveness proper to the sacraments—the image and symbol of Christ himself who calls, forgives, and accomplishes the sacrifice of the Covenant.

## 6

### The Ministerial Priesthood Illustrated by the Mystery of the Church

It is opportune to recall that problems of sacramental theology, especially when they concern the ministerial priesthood, as is the case here, cannot be solved except in the light of Revelation. The human sciences, however valuable their contribution in their own domain, cannot suffice here, for they cannot grasp the realities of faith: the properly supernatural content of these realities is beyond their competence.

Thus one must note the extent to which the Church is a society different from other societies, original in her nature and in her structures. The pastoral charge in the Church is normally linked

<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 28: "Exercising within the limits of their authority the function of Christ as Shepherd and Head"; Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 2: "that they can act in the person of Christ the Head"; 6: "the office of Christ the Head and the Shepherd". Cf. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*: "the minister of the altar represents the person of Christ as the Head, offering in the name of all his members"; AAS 39 (1947), p. 556; 1971 Synod of Bishops, *De Sacerdotio Ministeriali*, I, 4: "(The priestly ministry) ... makes Christ, the Head of the community, present...".

<sup>22</sup> Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei*, 3 September 1965: AAS 57 (1965), p. 761.

to the sacrament of Order: it is not a simple government comparable to the modes of authority found in States. It is not granted by people's spontaneous choice: even when it involves designation through election, it is the laying on of hands and the prayer of the successors of the Apostles which guarantee God's choice; and it is the Holy Spirit, given by ordination who grants participation in the ruling power of the Supreme Pastor, Christ (cf. Acts 20:28.) It is a charge of service and love: "If you love me, feed my sheep" (cf. Jn. 21:15-17).

For this reason one cannot see how it is possible to propose the admission of women to the priesthood in virtue of the equality of rights of the human person, an equality which holds good also for Christians. To this end use is sometimes made of the text quoted above, from the Letter to the Galatians (3:28), which says that in Christ there is no longer any distinction between men and women. But this passage does not concern ministries: it only affirms the universal calling to divine filiation, which is the same for all. Moreover, and above all, to consider the ministerial priesthood as a human right would be to misjudge its nature completely: baptism does not confer any personal title to public ministry in the Church. The priesthood is not conferred for the honour or advantage of the recipient, but for the service of God and the Church; it is the object of a specific and totally gratuitous vocation: "You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you..." (Jn. 15:16; cf. Heb. 5:4).

It is sometimes said and written in books and periodicals that some women feel that they have a vocation to the priesthood. Such an attraction, however noble and understandable, still does not suffice for a genuine vocation. In fact a vocation cannot be reduced to a mere personal attraction, which can remain purely subjective. Since the priesthood is a particular ministry of which the Church has received the charge and the control, authentication by the Church is indispensable here and is a constitutive part of the vocation: Christ chose "those he wanted" (Mk. 3:13). On the other hand, there is a universal vocation of all the baptized to the exercise of the royal priesthood by offering their lives to God and by giving witness for his praise.

Women who express a desire for the ministerial priesthood are doubtless motivated by the desire to serve Christ and the Church. And it is not surprising that, at a time when they are becoming more aware of the discrimination to which they have been subject, they should desire the ministerial priesthood itself. But it must not be forgotten that the priesthood does not form part of the rights of the individual, but stems from the economy of the mystery

of Christ and the Church. The priestly office cannot become the goal of social advancement; no merely human progress of society or of the individual can of itself give access to it: it is of another order.

It therefore remains for us to meditate more deeply on the nature of the real equality of the baptized which is one of the great affirmations of Christianity: equality is in no way identity, for the Church is a differential body, in which each individual has his or her role. The roles are distinct, and must not be confused; they do not favour the superiority of some vis-a-vis the others, nor do they provide an excuse for jealousy; the only better gift, which can and must be desired, is love (cf. 1 Cor. 12-13). The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers but the saints.

The Church desires that Christian women should become fully aware of the greatness of their mission: today their role is of capital importance, both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the true face of the Church.

**His Holiness Pope Paul VI, during the audience granted to the undersigned Prefect of the Sacred Congregation on 15 October 1976, approved this Declaration confirmed it and ordered its publication:**

Given in Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 15 October 1976, the feast of Saint Teresa of Avila.

**FRANCO Cardinal SEPER**  
Prefect

✠ **Fr. JEROME HAMER, O.P.**  
Titular Archbishop of Lorium  
Secretary

## COMMENTARY

### ON THE DECLARATION OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH ON THE QUESTION OF THE ADMISSION OF WOMEN TO THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

#### Circumstances and origin of the Declaration.

The question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood seems to have arisen in a general way about 1958, after the decision by the Swedish Lutheran Church in September of that year to admit women to the pastoral office. This caused a sensation and occasioned numerous commentaries.<sup>1</sup> Even for the communities stemming from the sixteenth-century Reformation it was an innovation: one may recall, for example, how strongly the *Confessio Fidei Scotiae* of 1560 accused the Roman Church of making improper concessions to women in the field of ministry.<sup>2</sup> But the Swedish initiative gradually gained ground among the Reformed Churches, particularly in France, where various National Synods adopted similar decisions.

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In reality, the admission of women to the pastoral office seemed to raise no strictly theological problem, in that these communities had rejected the sacrament of Order at the time of their separation from the Roman Church. But a new and much more serious situation was created when ordinations of women were carried out within communities that considered that they preserved the apostolic succession of Order:<sup>3</sup> in 1971 and 1973 the Anglican Bishop

<sup>1</sup> Note especially: J. E. HAVEL, *La question du pastoral féminin en Suède*, in *Archives de sociologie des religions*, 4, 1959, pp. 207-249; F. R. REFOULE', *Le problème des femmes-prêtres en Suède*, in *Lumière et Vie*, 43, 1959, pp. 65-99.

<sup>2</sup> No. 22 (W. NISEL, *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen...*, München, 1939, p. 111): "quod... foeminis, quae Spiritus sanctus ne docere quidem in Ecclesia patitur, illi (papistae) permittunt ut etiam Baptismum administrarent:"

<sup>3</sup> The position of the Catholic Church on this point was made clear by Leo XIII in the Letter *Apostolicae Curae* of 13 September 1896 (*Leonis XIII Acta*, 16, 1897, pp. 258-275).

of Hong Kong ordained three women with the agreement of his Synod;<sup>4</sup> in July 1974 at Philadelphia there was the ordination in the Episcopal Church of eleven women — an ordination afterwards declared invalid by the House of Bishops. Later on in June 1975, the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Canada, meeting in Quebec, approved the principle of the accession of women to the priesthood; and this was followed in July by the General Synod of the Church of England: Dr. Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, frankly informed Pope Paul VI "of the slow but steady growth of a consensus of opinion within the Anglican Communion that there are no fundamental objections in principle to the ordination of women to the priesthood".<sup>5</sup> These are only general principles, but they might quickly be followed by practice, and this would bring a new and serious element into the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church on the nature of the ministry.<sup>6</sup> It has provoked a warning, first by the Archbishop for the Orthodox in Great Britain, Athenagoras of Thyateira,<sup>7</sup> and then, more recently, by Pope Paul VI himself in two letters to the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the ecumenical sectors brought the question to the notice of all the Christian denominations, forcing them to examine their positions of principle, especially on the occasion of the Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Nairobi in December 1975.<sup>9</sup>

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A completely different event has made the question even more topical: this was the organization under United Nations' auspices

<sup>4</sup> Earlier, in 1944, his predecessor Bishop Hall called a woman to the priesthood, but she had to refrain from exercising the ministry because of the energetic intervention of the Archbishops of York and Canterbury, who for ecumenical motives repudiated the action of the Bishop of Hong Kong.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 9 July 1975 to the Pope, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition), 2 September 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Cardinal Willebrands stated this to some United States Episcopal Bishop in September 1974, according to the account published in *Origins — NC Documentary Service*, 9 October 1975.

<sup>7</sup> Italian translation published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 16-17 June 1975.

<sup>8</sup> Letters of Paul VI to Dr. Coggan, 30 November 1975 and 10 February 1976: cf. *AAS* 68 (1976), pp. 599-601.

<sup>9</sup> At the WCC's Assembly in New Delhi in 1961, the Department on Faith and Order was asked to prepare, in collaboration with the Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society, a study on theological questions raised by the problem of women's ordination (cf. *Nouvelle-Delhi 1961*, Neuchâtel, 1962, pp. 166, 169). On the discussion of the problem at the Nairobi Assembly, see E. LANNE, *Points chauds de la V Assemblée mondiale du Conseil œcuménique des Eglises à Nairobi...*, in *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 7, 1976, pp. 197-199: *Les Femmes dans l'Eglise*.

of International Women's Year in 1975. The Holy See took part in it with a Committee for International Women's Year, which included some members of the Commission for the Study of the Role of Women in Society and in the Church, which had already been set up in 1973. Ensuring respect for and fostering the respective rights and duties of men and women leads to reflection on participation by women in the life of society on the one hand, and in the life and mission of the Church on the other. Now, the Second Vatican Council had already set forth the task: "Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate".<sup>10</sup> How far can this participation go?

It is understandable that these questions have aroused even in Catholic quarters intense studies, indeed passionate ones: doctoral theses, articles in reviews, even pamphlets, propounding or refuting in turn the biblical historical and canonical data and appealing to the human sciences of sociology,<sup>11</sup> psychology and the history of institutions and customs. Certain famous people have not hesitated to take sides boldly, judging that there was "no basic theological objection to the possibility of women priest".<sup>12</sup> A number of groups have been formed with a view to upholding this claim, and they have sometimes done this with insistence, as did the conference held in Detroit (U.S.A.) in November 1975 under the title "Women in Future: Priesthood Now, A Call for Action".

The Magisterium has thus been obliged to intervene in a question being posed in so lively a fashion within the Catholic Church and having important implications from the ecumenical point of view. Archbishop Bernardin of Cincinnati, President of the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops, declared on 7 October 1975 that he found himself "obliged to restate the Church's teaching that women are not to be ordained to the priesthood"; Church

<sup>10</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> This intrusion of sociology into hermeneutics and theology is perhaps one of the most important elements in the controversy. This has been rightly stressed by B. LAMBERT, *L'Eglise catholique peut-elle admettre des femmes à l'ordination sacerdotale*, in *Documentation Catholique* 73, 1976, p. 774: "en corrigeant dans l'interprétation de la Tradition et de l'Écriture ce qui était lié à des formes socio-culturelles, historiquement nécessaires et conditionnées, mais aujourd'hui dépassées, à la lumière de l'évolution de la société et de l'Église".

<sup>12</sup> The very phrase (reported in *Le Monde* of 19-20 September 1965) used by J. DANIELOU during the Council at a meeting of the Alliance Internationale Jeanne d'Arc. He returned to the subject, introducing perhaps more shades of meaning, in the interview he gave at the time of his promotion to Cardinal, *L'Espresso*, 936, 16-22 June 1969, pp. 122, 124: "Il faudrait examiner où sont les vraies raisons qui font que l'Église n'a jamais envisagé le sacerdoce des femmes."

leaders, he said, should "not seem to encourage unreasonable hopes and expectations, even by their silence".<sup>13</sup> Pope Paul VI himself had already recalled the same teaching. He did so at first in parenthetical fashion, especially in his address on 18 April 1975 to the members of the Study Commission on the Role of Women in Society and in the Church and the Committee for the Celebration of International Women's Year: "Although women do not receive the call to the apostolate of the Twelve and therefore to the ordained ministries, they are nonetheless invited to follow Christ as disciples and co-workers... We cannot change what our Lord did, nor his call to women".<sup>14</sup> Later he had to make an express pronouncement in his exchange of letters with Dr. Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury: "Your Grace is of course well aware of the Catholic Church's position on this question. She holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons".<sup>15</sup> It is at his order that the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has examined the question in its entirety. The question has been complicated by the fact that on the one hand arguments adduced in the past in favour of the traditional teaching are scarcely defensible today, and on the other hand the reasons given by those who demand the ordination of women must be evaluated.

To avoid the rather negative character that must mark the conclusions of such a study, one could have thought of inserting it into a more general presentation of the question of the advancement of women. But the time is not ripe for such a comprehensive exposition, because of the research and work in progress on all sides. It was difficult to leave unanswered any longer a precise question that is being posed nearly everywhere and which is polarizing attention to the detriment of more urgent endeavours that should be fostered. In fact, apart from its non-acceptance of the ordination of women, the document points to positive matters: a deeper understanding of the Church's teaching and of the ministerial priesthood, a call to spiritual progress, an invitation to take on the urgent apostolic tasks of today. The bishops, to whom the document is primarily addressed, have the mission of explaining it to their people with the pastoral feeling that is theirs and with the knowledge they have of the milieu in which they exercise their ministry.

<sup>13</sup> *Origins* — NC Documentary Service, 16 October 1975: "Honesty and concern for the Catholic community... require that Church leaders not seem to encourage unreasonable hopes and expectations, even by their silence. Therefore I am obliged to restate the Church's teaching that women are not to be ordained to the priesthood."

<sup>14</sup> AAS 67 (:975), p. 265.

<sup>15</sup> Letter for 30 November 1975: AAS 68 (1976), p. 599.



The Declaration begins by presenting the Church's teaching on the question. This in fact has to be the point of departure. We shall see later how necessary it is to follow faithfully the method of using *loci theologi*.

### Tradition

It is an undeniable fact, as the Declaration notes, that the constant tradition of the Catholic Church has excluded women from the episcopate and the priesthood. So constant has it been that there has been no need for an intervention by a solemn decision of the Magisterium.

"The same tradition", the document stresses, "has been faithfully safeguarded by the Churches of the East. Their unanimity on this point is all the more remarkable since in many other questions their discipline admits of a great diversity. At the present time these same Churches refuse to associate themselves with requests directed towards securing the accession of women to priestly ordination".<sup>16</sup>

Only within some heretical sects of the early centuries, principally Gnostic ones, do we find attempts to have the priestly ministry exercised by women. It must be further noted that these are very sporadic occurrences and are moreover associated with rather questionable practices. We know of them only through the severe disapproval with which they are noted by Saint Irenaeus in his *Adversus Haereses*,<sup>17</sup> Tertullian in *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*,<sup>18</sup> Firmilian of Caesarea in a letter to Saint Cyprian,<sup>19</sup> Origin in a commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians,<sup>20</sup> and especially by Saint Ephraim in his *Panarion*.<sup>21</sup>

How are we to interpret the constant and universal practice of the Church? A theologian is certain that what the Church does she can in fact do, since she has the assistance of the Holy Spirit. This is a classical argument found again and again in Saint Thomas

<sup>16</sup> Cf., for example, the theological conversations between Catholics and Russian Orthodox at Trent, 23-28 June 1975: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7-8 July 1975; *Documentation Catholique*, 71, 1975, p. 707.

<sup>17</sup> 1, 13, 2: *PG* 7, col. 580-581; Harvey edition 1, 114-122.

<sup>18</sup> 41, 5: *CCL* 1, p. 221.

<sup>19</sup> In the Letters of Saint Cyprian, 75: *CSEL* 3, pp. 817-818.

<sup>20</sup> Fragments published in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 10 (1909), pp. 41-42 (No. 74).

<sup>21</sup> *Panarion*, 49, 2-3: *GCS* 31, pp. 243-244; — 78, 23 and 79, 2-4; *GSC* 37, pp. 473, 477-479.

with regard to the sacraments.<sup>22</sup> But what the Church has never done — is this any proof that she cannot do it in the future? Does the negative fact thus noted indicate a norm, or is it to be explained by historical and by social and cultural circumstances? In the present case, is an explanation to be found in the position of women in ancient and medieval society and in a certain idea of male superiority stemming from that society's culture?

It is because of this transitory cultural element that some arguments adduced on this subject in the past are scarcely defensible today. The most famous is the one summarized by Saint Thomas Aquinas: *quia mulier est in statu subiectionis*.<sup>23</sup> In Saint Thomas' thought, however, this assertion is not merely the expression of a philosophical concept, since he interprets it in the light of the accounts in the first chapters of Genesis and the teaching of the First Letter to Timothy (2:12-14). A similar formula is found earlier in the *Decretum* of Gratian,<sup>24</sup> but Gratian, who was quoting the Carolingian Capitularies and the false Decretals, was trying rather to justify with Old Testament prescriptions the prohibition — already formulated by the ancient Church<sup>25</sup> — of women from entering the sanctuary and serving at the altar.

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The polemical arguments of recent years have often recalled and commented on the texts that develop these arguments. They have also used them to accuse the Fathers of the Church of misogyny... It is true that we find in the Fathers' writings the undeniable influence of prejudices against women. But it must be carefully noted that these passages had very little influence on their pastoral activity, still less on their spiritual direction, as we can see by glancing through their correspondence that has come down to us. Above all it would be a serious mistake to think that such considerations provide the only or the most decisive reasons

<sup>22</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, 2 2, q. 10, a. 12; 3 pars. q. 66, a. 10; q. 72, a. 4 and a. 12; q. 73, a. 4; q. 78, a. 3 and a. 6; q. 80, a. 12; q. 82, a. 2; q. 83, a. 3 and a. 5; — cf. *In IV Sent. Dist. 20, q. 1, a. 4, q. 1 ff.*; *Dist. 23, q. 1, a. 4, q. 1, etc.*

<sup>23</sup> St. Thomas, *In IV Sent. Dist. 19, q. 1, a. 1, q. 3 ad 4-um*; *Dist. 25, q. 2, a. 1, q. 1*; cf. q. 2, a. 2, q. 1, ad 4; *Summa Theol.*, 2 2, q. 177, a. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Dictum Gratiani in Caus. 34, q. 5, c. 11*, ed. FRIEDBERG, t. 1, col. 1254; cf. R. METZ, *La femme en droit canonique médiéval*, in *Recueil de la société Jean Bodin*, 12, 1962, pp. 59-113.

<sup>25</sup> Canon 44 of the collection called after the Council of Laodicea: H.T. BRUNS, *Canones Apostolorum et Conciliorum...* t. 1, Bertolini, 1839, p. 78; St. Gelasius, *Epist. 14, ad universos episcopos per Lucaniam, Brutios et Siciliam constitutos*, 11 March 494, no. 26: A. THIEL, *Epistolae Romanorum pontificum...*, t. 1, Brunsbergae, 1868, p. 376.

against the ordination of women in the thought of the Fathers, of the medieval writers and of the theologians of the classical period. In the midst of and going beyond speculation, more and more clear expression was being given to the Church's awareness that in reserving priestly ordination and ministry to men she was obeying a tradition received from Christ and the Apostles and by which she felt herself bound.

This is what had been expressed in the form of an apocryphal literature by the ancient documents of Church discipline from Syria, such as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (middle of the third century)<sup>26</sup> and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century),<sup>27</sup> and by the Egyptian collection of twenty pseudo-apostolic canons that was included in the compilation of the *Alexandrian Synods* and translated into many languages.<sup>28</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, for his part, when commenting on chapter twenty-one of John, understood well that women's exclusion from the pastoral office entrusted to Peter was not based on any natural incapacity, since, as he remarks, "even the majority of men have been excluded by Jesus from this immense task".<sup>29</sup>

From the moment that the teaching on the sacraments is systematically presented in the schools of theology and canon law, writers begin to deal *ex professo* with the nature and value of the tradition that reserved ordination to men. The canonists base their case on the principle formulated by Pope Innocent III in a letter of 11 December 1210 to the Bishops of Palencia and Burgos, a letter that was included in the collection of *Decretals*: "Although the Blessed Virgin Mary was of higher dignity and excellence than all the Apostles, it was to them, not her, that the Lord entrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven".<sup>30</sup> This text became a *locus communis* for the glossators.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Chap. 15; ed. R. H. Connolly, pp. 133 and 142.

<sup>27</sup> Lib. 3, c. 6, nn. 1-2; c. 9, 3-4; ed. F. X. Funk, pp. 191, 201.

<sup>28</sup> Can. 24-28; Greek text in F. X. FUNK, *Doctrina Duodecim Apostolorum* Tübingen, 1887, p. 71; T. SCHERMANN, *Die allgemeine Kirchenordnung...*, t. 1, Paderborn, 1914, pp. 31-33; — Syriac text in *Oclateuque de Clément*, Lib. 3, c. 19-20; Latin text in the Verona ms., *Bibl. capit. LV*, ed. F. TIDNER, *Didascaliae Apostolorum, Canonum Ecclesiasticorum, Traditionis Apostolicae Versiones Latinae*. Berlin, 1965 (TU 75), pp. 111-113. The Coptic, Ethiopian and Arabic versions of the *Synodos* have been translated and published chiefly by G. HORNER, *The Statutes of the Apostles or Canones Ecclesiastici*, Oxford University Press, 1915 (= 1904).

<sup>29</sup> *De Sacerdotio* 2, 2: PG 48, 633.

<sup>30</sup> *Decretal. Lib. V. tit. 38, De paenit.*, can. 10 Nova A. FRIEDBERG, t. 2, col. 886-887: *Quia licet beatissima Virgo Maria dignior et excellentior fuerit Apostolis unversis, non tamen illi, sed istis Dominus claves regni caelorum commisit.*

<sup>31</sup> e.g., *Glossa in Decretal. Lib. I, tit. 33, c. 12 Dilecta, V. Iurisdictioni*,

As for the theologians, the following are some significant texts: Saint Bonaventure: "Our position is this: it is due not so much to a decision by the Church as to the fact that the sacrament of Order is not for them. In this sacrament the person ordained is a sign of Christ the mediator".<sup>32</sup> Richard of Middleton, a Franciscan of the second half of the thirteenth century: "The reason is that the power of the sacraments comes from their institution. But Christ instituted this sacrament for conferral on men only, not women".<sup>33</sup> John Duns Scotus: "It must not be considered to have been determined by the Church. It comes from Christ. The Church would not have presumed to deprive the female sex, for no fault of its own, of an act that might licitly have pertained to it".<sup>34</sup> Durandus of Saint-Pourcain: "...the male sex is of necessity for the sacrament. The principal cause of this is Christ's institution... not even his Mother... It must therefore be held that women cannot be ordained, because of Christ's institution".<sup>35</sup>

So it is no surprise that until the modern period the theologians and canonists who dealt with the question have been almost unanimous in considering this exclusion as absolute and having a divine origin. The theological notes they apply to the affirmation vary from "theologically certain" (*theologicæ certæ*) to, at times, "proximate to faith" (*fidei proxima*) or even "doctrine of the faith" (*doctrina fidei*).<sup>36</sup> Apparently, then, until recent decades no theo-

<sup>32</sup> In *IV Sent.*, *Dist.* 25, art. 2, q. 1; ed. Quaracchi, t. 4, p. 649: *Dicendum est quod hoc non venit tam ex institutione Ecclesiae, quam ex hoc quod eis non competit Ordinis sacramentum. In hoc sacramento persona quae ordinatur significat Christum mediatorem.*

<sup>33</sup> In *IV Sent.* *Dist.* 25, a. 4, n. 1; ed. Bocatelli, Venice, 1499 (PELLECHET-POLAIN, 10132/9920), f. 177-R: *Ratio est quod sacramenta vim habent ex sua institutione: Christus autem hoc sacramentum instituit conferri masculis tantum, non mulieribus.*

<sup>34</sup> In *IV Sent.*, *Dist.* 25, *Opus Ozoniense*, ed. Vivès, t. 19, p. 140; cf. *Reportata Parisiensis*, ed. Vives, t. 24, pp. 369-371, *Quod non est tenendum tamquam præcise per Ecclesiam determinatum, sed habetur a Christo: non enim Ecclesia præsumpsisset sexum muliebrem privasse sine culpa sua actu qui posset sibi licite competere.*

<sup>35</sup> In *IV Sent.*, *Dist.* 25, p. 2; ed. Venice, 1571, f. 364-v: *...sexus virilis est de necessitate sacramenti, cuius causa principalis est institutio Christi... Christus non ordinavit nisi viros... nec matrem suam... Tenendum est igitur quod mulieres non possunt ordinari ex institutione Christi.*

<sup>36</sup> Details of these theological notes can be found in E. DORONZO, *Traetatus Dogmaticus de Ordine*, t. 3, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1962, pp. 395-396; Cf. also F. HALLER, *De Sacris Electionibus*, 1636, quoted in J. P. MIGNE, *Theologiae Cursus Completus*, t. 24, col. 821-854; many present-day objections are surprisingly anticipated in this work, which goes so far as to qualify as *periculosa in fide* the opinion that would admit women's ordination in general, and as *haeretica* that which would admit them to the

logian or canonist considered that it was a matter of a simple law of the Church.

In some writers of the Middle Ages however there was a certain hesitancy, reported by Saint Bonaventure without adopting it himself<sup>37</sup> and noted also by Joannes Teutonicus in his gloss on Caus. 27, q. 1, c. 23.<sup>38</sup> This hesitancy stemmed from the knowledge that in the past there had been deaconesses: had they received true sacramental ordination? This problem has been brought up again very recently. It was by no means unknown to the seventeenth and eighteenth-century theologians, who had an excellent knowledge of the history of literature. In any case, it is a question that must be taken up fully by direct study of the texts, without preconceived ideas; hence the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has judged that it should be kept for the future and not touched upon in the present document.

### The attitude of Christ

In the light of tradition, then, it seems that the essential reason moving the Church to call only men to the sacrament of Order and to the strictly priestly ministry is her intention to remain faithful to the type of ordained ministry willed by the Lord Jesus Christ and carefully maintained by the Apostles. It is therefore no surprise that in the controversy there has been a careful examination of the facts and texts of the New Testament, in which tradition

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priesthood, col. 824; cf. also H. TOURNELY, *Praelectiones Theologicae de Sacramento Ordinis*, Parisii, 1729, p. 185, notes as an error *contra fidem* this assertion with regard to episcopate, priesthood and diaconate. Among canonists: X. WERNZ, *Ius Decret.*, t. 2, Romae, 1906, p. 124; *iure divino* (he quotes several writers): P. GASPARRI, *Tractatus Canonice de Sacra Ordinatione*, t. 1, Parisiis, 1893, p. 75; *Et quidem prohibentur sub poenae nullitatis: ita enim traditio et communis doctorum catholicorum doctrina interpretata est legem Apostoli: ed ideo Patres inter haeresees recensent doctrinam quae sacerdotatus dignitas et officium mulieribus tribuitur.*

<sup>37</sup> St. BONAVENTURE, in *IV Sent.*, Dist. 25, art. 2, q. 1, ed Quaracchi, t. 4 p. 650. *Omnes consentiunt quod promoveri non debent, sed utrum possint, dubium est* (the doubt arises from the case of the deaconesses); he concludes: *secundum saniozem opinionem et prudentiorum doctorum non solum non debent vel non possunt de iure, verum etiam non possunt de facto.*

<sup>38</sup> This canon deals with deaconesses. At the word *ordinari*, Johannes Teutonicus states: *Respondeo quod mulieres non recipiunt characterem, impediende sexu et constitutione Ecclesiae: unde nec officium ordinum exercere possunt... nec ordinatur haec: sed fundebatur super eam forte aliqua benedictio, ex qua consequeretur aliquod officium speciale, forte legendi homilias vel evangelium ad matutinas quod non licebat aliis. Alii dicunt quod si monialis ordinetur, bene recipit characterem, quia ordinari facti est et post baptismum quilibet potest ordinare.*

has seen an example establishing a norm. This brings us to a fundamental observation: we must not expect the New Testament on its own to resolve in a clear fashion the question of the possibility of women acceding to the priesthood, in the same way it does not on its own enable us to give an account of certain sacraments and especially of the structure of the sacrament of Order. Keeping to the sacred text alone and to the points of the history of Christian origins that can be obtained by analyzing that text by itself would be to go back four centuries and find oneself once more amid the controversies of the Reformation. We cannot omit the study of tradition: it is the Church that scrutinizes the Lord's thought by reading Scripture, and it is the Church that gives witness to the correctness of its interpretation.

It is tradition that has unceasingly set forth as an expression of Christ's will the fact that he chose only men to form the group of the Twelve. There is no disputing this fact, but can it be proved with absolute certainty that it was a question of a deliberate decision by Christ? It is understandable that the partisans of a change in discipline bring all their effort to bear against the significance of this fact. In particular they object that, if Christ did not bring women into the group of the Twelve, it was because the prejudices of his time did not allow him to; it would have been an imprudence that would have compromised his work irreparably. However, it has to be recognized that Jesus did not shrink from other "imprudences", which did in fact stir up the hostility of his fellow citizens against him, especially his freedom with regard to the rabbinical interpretations of the Sabbath. With regard to women his attitude was a complete innovation: all the commentators recognize that he went against many prejudices, and the facts that are noted add up to an impressive total.

For this reason greater stress is laid today on another objection: if Jesus chose only men to form the group of the Twelve, it was because he intended them to be a symbol representing the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel ("You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel": Mt. 19:28; cf. Lk. 22:30); and this special motive, it is added, obviously referred only to the Twelve and would be no proof that the apostolic ministry should thereafter always be reserved to men. It is not a convincing argument. We may note in the place how little importance was given to this symbolism: Mark and John do not mention it. And in Matthew and Luke this phrase of Jesus about the twelve tribes of Israel is not put in the context of the call of the Twelve (Mt. 10:14) but at a relatively late stage of Jesus' public life, when the Apostles have long since been given their "constitution": they have been called by Jesus, have worked

with him and been sent on missions. Furthermore, the symbolism of Mt. 19:28 and Lk. 22:30 is not as certain as is claimed: the number twelve could designate simply the whole of Israel. Finally, these two texts deal only with a particular aspect of the mission of the Twelve: Jesus is promising them that they will take part in the eschatological judgment.<sup>39</sup> Therefore the essential meaning of their being chosen is not to be sought in this symbolism but in the totality of the mission given them by Jesus: "he appointed twelve; they were to me his companions and to be sent out to preach" (Mk. 3:14). As Jesus before them, the Twelve were above all to preach the Good News (Mk. 3:14; 6:12). Their mission in Galilee (Mk. 6:7-13) was to become the model of the universal mission (Mk. 12:10; cf. Mt. 28:16-20). Within the messianic people the Twelve represent Jesus. That is the real reason why it is fitting that the Apostles should be men: they act in the name of Christ and must continue his work.

It has been described above how Pope Innocent III saw a witness to Christ's intentions in the fact that Christ did not communicate to his Mother, in spite of her eminent dignity, the powers which he gave to the Apostles. This is one of the arguments most frequently repeated by tradition: from as early as the third century the Fathers present Mary as the example of the will of Jesus in this matter.<sup>40</sup> It is an argument still particularly dear to Eastern Christians today. Nevertheless it is vigorously rejected by all those who plead in favour of the ordination of women. Mary's divine motherhood the manner in which she was associated with the redeeming work of her Son, they say, put her in an altogether exceptional and unique position; and it would not even be fair to her to compare her with the Apostles and to argue from the fact that she was not ranked among them. In point of fact these assertions do have the advantage of making us understand that there are different functions within the Church: the equality of Christian is in harmony with the complementary nature of their tasks and the sacramental ministry is not the only rank of greatness, nor is it necessarily the highest: it is a form of service of the Kingdom. The Virgin Mary does not need the increase in "dignity" that was once attributed to her by the authors of those speculations on the priesthood of Mary that formed a deviant tendency which was soon discredited.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J. DUPONT, *Le Logion des douze trônes*, in *Biblica*, 45, 1964, pp. 355-392.

<sup>40</sup> The documents cited in notes 26-28 above. Note also the curious *Mariale*, falsely attributed to Albert the Great, quaest. 42, ed. Borgnet, t. 37, pp. 80-81.

### The Practice of the Apostles

The text of the Declaration stresses the fact that, in spite of the privileged place Mary had in the Upper Room after the Ascension, she was not designated for entry into the College of the Twelve at the time of the election of Matthias. The same holds for Mary Magdalen and the other women who nevertheless had been the first to bring news of the Resurrection. It is true that the Jewish mentality did not accord great value to the witness of women as is shown by Jewish law. But one must also note that the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Saint Paul stress the role of women in evangelization and in instructing individual converts. The Apostles were led to take a revolutionary decision when they had to go beyond the circle of a Jewish community and undertake the evangelization of the Gentiles. The break with Mosaic observances was not made without discor. Paul had no scruples about choosing one of his collaborators, Titus, from among the Gentile converts (Gal. 2:3). The most spectacular expression of the change which the Good News made on the mentality of the first Christians is to be found precisely in the Letter to the Galatians: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28). In spite of this, the Apostles did not entrust to women the strictly apostolic ministry, although Hellenistic civilization did not have the same prejudices against them as did Judaism. It is rather a ministry which is of another order, as may perhaps also be gathered from Paul's vocabulary, in which a difference seems to be implied between "my fellow workers" (*synergoi mou*) and "God's fellow workers" (*Theou synergoi*).<sup>41</sup>

It must be repeated that the texts of the New Testament, even on such important points as the sacraments, do not always give all the light that one would wish to find in them. Unless the value of unwritten traditions is admitted, it is sometimes difficult to discover in Scripture entirely explicit indications of Christ's will. But in view of the attitude of Jesus and the practice of the Apostles as seen in the Gospels, the Acts and the Letters, the Church has not held that she is authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.

<sup>41</sup> I. DE LA POTTERIE, *Titres missionnaires du chrétien dans le Nouveau Testament* (Rapports de la XXXIème semaine de Missiologie, Louvain, 1966), Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1966, p. 29-46, cf. pp. 44-45.



### Permanent value of this practice

It is the permanency of this negative decision that objected to by those who would have the legitimacy of ordaining women admitted. These objections employ arguments of great variety.

The most classic ones seek a basis in historical circumstances. We have already seen what is to be thought of the view that Jesus' attitude was inspired solely by prudence, because he did not want to risk compromising his work by going against social prejudices. It is claimed that the same prudence was forced upon the Apostles. On this point too it is clear from the history of the apostolic period that there is no foundation for this explanation. However, in the case of the Apostles, should one not take into account the way in which they themselves shared these prejudices? Thus Saint Paul has been accused of misogyny and in his Letters are found texts on the inferiority of women that are the subject of controversy among exegetes and theologians today.

It can be questioned whether two of Paul's most famous texts on women are authentic or should rather be seen as interpolations, perhaps even relatively late ones. The first is 1 Cor. 14:34-35: "The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as even the Law says". These two verses, apart from being missing in some important manuscripts and not being found quoted before the end of the second century, present stylistic peculiarities foreign to Paul. The other text is 1 Tim. 2:11-14: "I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over men". The Pauline authenticity of this text is often questioned, although the arguments are weaker.

However, it is of little importance whether these texts are authentic or not: theologians have made abundant use of them to explain that women cannot receive either the power of magisterium or that of jurisdiction. It was especially the text of 1 Timothy that provided Saint Thomas with the proof that woman is in a state of submission or service, since (as the text explains) woman was created after man and was the person first responsible for original sin. But there are other Pauline texts of unquestioned authenticity that affirm that "the head of the woman is the man" (1 Cor. 11:3; cf. 8-12; Eph. 5:2, 24). It may be asked whether this view of man, which is in line with that of the books of the Old Testament, is not at the basis of Paul's conviction and the Church's tradition that women cannot receive the ministry. Now this is a view that modern society rejects absolutely, and many present-day theologians would shrink from adopting it without qualifying it. We may note however that Paul does not take his stand on a

philosophical level but on that of biblical history: when he describes, in relation to marriage, the symbolism of love, he does not see man's superiority as domination but as a gift demanding sacrifice, in the image of Christ

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On the other hand there are prescriptions in Paul's writings which are unanimously admitted to have been transitory, such as the obligation he imposed on women to wear a veil (1 Cor. 11:2-16). It is true that these are obviously disciplinary practices of minor importance, perhaps inspired by the customs of the time. But then there arises the more basic question: since the Church has later been able to abandon prescriptions contained in the New Testament, why should it not be the same with the exclusion of women from ordination? Here we meet once again the essential principle that it is the Church herself that, in the different sectors of her life, ensures discernment between what can change and what must remain immutable. As the Declaration specifies, "When she judges that she cannot accept certain changes, it is because she knows that she is bound by Christ's manner of acting. Her attitude, despite appearances, is therefore not one of archaism but of fidelity: it can be truly understood only in this light. The Church makes pronouncements in virtue of the Lord's promise and the presence of the Holy Spirit, in order to proclaim better the mystery of Christ and to safeguard and manifest the whole of its rich content."

Many of the questions confronting the Church as a result of the numerous arguments put forward in favour of the ordination of women must be considered in the light of this principle. An example is the following question dealt with by the Declaration: why will the Church not change her disciplines, since she is aware of having a certain power over the sacraments, even though they were instituted by Christ, in order to determined the sign or to fix the conditions for their administration? This faculty remains limited, as was recalled by Pius XII, echoing the Council of Trent: the Church has no power over the substance of the sacraments.<sup>42</sup> It is the Church herself that must distinguish what forms part of the "substance of the sacraments" and what she can determine or modify if circumstances should so suggest.

On this point, furthermore, we must remember, as the Declaration reminds us, that the sacraments and the Church herself are closely tied to history, since Christianity is the result of an event:

<sup>42</sup> Council of Trent, sess. 21, c. 2 and Pius XII, Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*, 30 November 1947, quoted in the Declaration.

the coming of the Son of God into time and to a country, and his death on the Cross under Pontius Pilate outside the walls of Jerusalem. The sacraments are a memorial of saving events. For this reason their signs are linked to those very events. They are relative to one civilization, one culture, although destined to be reproduced everywhere until the end of time. Hence historical choices have taken place by which the Church is bound, even if speaking absolutely and on a speculative level other choices could be imagined. This, for instance, is the case with bread and wine as matter for the Eucharist, for the Mass is not just a fraternal meal but the renewal of the Lord's Supper and the memorial of his Passion and thus linked with something done in history.<sup>43</sup>

It has likewise been remarked that in the course of time the Church has agreed to confer on women certain truly ministerial functions that antiquity refused to give them in the very name of the example and will of Christ. The functions spoken of are above all the administration of baptism, teaching and certain forms of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

As regards baptism, however, not even deaconesses in the Syriac-speaking East were permitted to administer it, and its solemn administration is still a hierarchical act reserved to bishop, priest and, in accessory fashion, deacon. When urgently required, baptism can be conferred not only by Christians but even by unbaptized people whether men or women. Its validity therefore does not require the baptismal character, still less that of ordination. This point is affirmed by practice and by theologians. It is an example of this necessary discernment in the Church's teaching and practice, a discernment whose only guarantee is the Church herself.

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As regards teaching, a classical distinction has to be made, from Paul's Letters onwards. There are forms of teaching or edification that lay people can carry out and in this case Saint Paul expressly mentions women. These forms include the charisms of "prophecy" (1 Cor. 11:15). In this sense there was no obstacle to giving the title of Doctor to Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena, as it was given to illustrious teachers such as Albert the Great or Saint Laurence of Brindisi. Quite a different matter is the official and hierarchical function of teaching the revealed message, a function that presupposes the mission received from Christ by the Apostles and transmitted by them to their successors.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ph. DELHAYE, *Rétrospective et prospective des ministères féminins dans l'Église*, in *Revue théologique de Louvain* 3, 1972, pp. 74-75.

Examples of participation by women in ecclesiastical jurisdiction are found in the Middle Ages: some abbesses (not abbesses in general, as is sometimes said in popularizing articles) performed acts normally reserved to bishops, such as the nomination of parish priests or confessors. These customs have been more or less reprobated by Holy See at different periods: the letter of Pope Innocent III quoted earlier was intended as a reprimand to the Abbess of Las Huelgas. But we must not forget that feudal lords arrogated to themselves similar rights. Canonists also admitted the possibility of separating jurisdiction from Order. The Second Vatican Council has tried to determine better the relationship between the two; the Council's doctrinal vision will doubtless have effects on discipline.

In a more general way, attempts are being made, especially in Anglican circles, to broaden the debate in the following way: is the Church perhaps bound to Scripture and tradition as an absolute, when the Church is a people making its pilgrim way and should listen to what the Spirit is saying? Or else a distinction is made between essential points on which unanimity is needed and questions of discipline admitting of diversity: and if the conclusion reached is that the ordination of women belongs to these secondary matters, it would not harm progress towards the union of the Churches. Here again it is the Church that decides by her practice and Magisterium what requires unanimity, and distinguishes it from acceptable or desirable pluralism. The question of the ordination of women impinges too directly on the nature of the ministerial priesthood for one to agree that it should be resolved within the framework of legitimate pluralism between Churches. That is the whole meaning of the letter of Pope Paul VI to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

#### **The ministerial priesthood in the light of the mystery of Christ**

In the Declaration a very clear distinction will be seen between the document's affirmation of the datum (the teaching it proposes with authority in the preceding paragraphs) and the theological reflection that then follows. By this reflection the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith endeavours "to illustrate this norm by showing the profound fittingness" to be found "between the proper nature of the sacrament of Order, with its specific reference to the mystery of Christ, and the fact that only men have been called to receive priestly ordination". In itself such a quest is not without risk. However, it does not involve the Magisterium. It is well known that in solemn teaching infallibility affects the doctrinal affirmation, not the arguments intended to

explain it. Thus the doctrinal chapters of the Council of Trent contain certain processes of reasoning that today no longer seem to hold. But this risk has never stopped the Magisterium from endeavouring at all times to clarify doctrine by analogies of faith. Today especially, and more than ever, it is impossible to be content with making statements, with appealing to the intellectual docility of Christians: faith seeks understanding, and tries to distinguish the grounds for and the coherence of what it is taught.

We have already discarded a fair number of explanations given by medieval theologians. The defect common to these explanations is that they claimed to find their basis in an inferiority of women vis-a-vis men; they deduced from the teaching of Scripture that woman was "in a state of submission", of subjection, and was incapable of exercising functions of government.

It is very enlightening to note that the communities springing from the Reformation which have had no difficulty in giving women access to the pastoral office are first and foremost those that have rejected the Catholic doctrine on the sacrament of Order and profess that the pastor is only one baptized person among others, even if the charge given has been the object of a consecration. The Declaration therefore suggests that it is by analyzing the nature of Order and its character that we will find the explanation of the exclusive call of men to the priesthood and episcopate. This analysis can be outlined in three propositions: 1) in administering the sacraments that demand the character of ordination the priest does not act in his own name (*in persona propria*), but in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*): 2) this formula, as understood by tradition, implies that the priest is a sign in the sense in which this term is understood in sacramental theology; 3) it is precisely because the priest is a sign of Christ the Saviour that he must be a man and not a woman.

That the priest performs the Eucharist and reconciles sinners in the name and place of Christ is affirmed repeatedly by the Magisterium and constantly taught by Fathers and theologians. It would not appear to serve any useful purpose to give a multitude of quotations to show this. It is the totality of the priestly ministry that Saint Paul says is exercised in the place of Christ: "We are acting as ambassadors on behalf of Christ, God, as it were, appealing through us" — in fact this text 2 Corinthians has in mind the ministry of reconciliation (5:18-20) — "you have received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14). Similarly Saint Cyprian echoes Saint Paul: "The priest truly acts in the place

of Christ".<sup>44</sup> But theological reflection and the Church's life have been led to distinguish the more or less close links between the various acts in the exercise of the ministry and the character of ordination and to specify which require this character for validity:

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Saying "In the name and place of Christ" is not however enough to express completely the nature of the bond between the minister and Christ as understood by tradition. The formula in *persona Christi* in fact suggests a meaning that brings it close to the Greek expression *mimēma Christou*.<sup>45</sup> The word *person* means a part played in the ancient theatre, a part identified by a particular mask. The priest takes, the part of Christ, lending him his voice and gestures. Saint Thomas expresses this concept exactly: "The priest enacts the image of Christ, in whose person and by whose power he pronounces the words of consecration".<sup>46</sup> The priest is thus truly a sign in the sacramental sense of the word. It would be a very elementary view of the sacraments if the notion of sign were kept only for material elements. Each sacrament fulfils the notion in a different way. The text of Saint Bonaventure already mentioned affirms this very clearly: "the person ordained is a sign of Christ the mediator".<sup>47</sup> Although Saint Thomas gave as the reason for excluding women the much discussed one of the state of subjection (*status subiectionis*), he nevertheless took as his starting point the principle that "sacramental signs present what they signify by a natural resemblance",<sup>48</sup> in other words the need for that "natural resemblance" between Christ and the person who is his sign. And, still on the same point, Saint Thomas recalls: "Since a sacrament is a sign, what is done in the sacrament requires not only the reality but also a sign of the reality".<sup>49</sup>

It would not accord with "natural resemblance", with that obvious "meaningfulness", if the memorial of the Supper were to be carried out by a woman; for it is not just the recitation involving

<sup>44</sup> *Epist.* 63, 14; ed. Hartel, CSEL t. 3, p. 713: *sacerdos vice Christi vere fungitur.*

<sup>45</sup> *St. Theodore the Studite, Adversus Iconomachos* cap. 4; PG 99, 593; *Epist. lib. 1*, 11; PG 99, 945.

<sup>46</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3-um.

<sup>47</sup> Above, note 32: *persona quae ordinatur significat Christum mediatorem.*

<sup>48</sup> *In IV Sent., Dist. 25*, q. 2, a. 2, q. 1, ad 4-um: *signa sacramentalia ex naturali similitudine repraesentet.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid. in corp. quaestiuiculae: Quia cum sacramentum sit signum, in eis quae in sacramento aguntur requiritur non solum res, sed significatio rei.*

the gestures and words of Christ, but an action, and the sign is efficacious because Christ is present in the minister who consecrates the Eucharist, as is taught by the Second Vatican Council, following the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*.<sup>50</sup>

It is understandable that those favouring the ordination of women have made various attempts to deny the value of this reasoning. It has obviously been impossible and even unnecessary for the Declaration to consider in detail all the difficulties that could be raised in this regard. Some of them however are of interest in that they occasion a deeper theological understanding of traditional principles. Let us look at the objection sometimes raised that it is ordination — the character — not maleness, that makes the priest Christ's representative. Obviously it is the character, received by ordination, that enables the priest to consecrate the Eucharist and reconcile penitents. But the character is spiritual and invisible (*res et sacramentum*). On the level of the sign (*sacramentum tantum*) the priest must both have received the laying on of hands and take the part of Christ. It is here that Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure require that the sign should have natural meaningfulness.

In various fairly recent publications attempts have been made to reduce the importance of the formula *in persona Christi* by insisting rather on the formula *in persona Ecclesiae*. For it is another great principle of the theology of the sacraments and liturgy that the priest presides over the liturgy in the name of the Church, and must have the intention of "doing what the Church does". Could one say that the priest does not represent Christ, because he first represents the Church by the fact of his ordination? The Declaration's reply to this objection is that, quite on the contrary, the priest represents the Church precisely because he first represents Christ himself who is the Head and Shepherd of the Church. It indicates several texts of the Second Vatican Council that clearly express this teaching. Here there may well be in fact one of the crucial points of the question, one of the important aspects of the theology of the Church and the priesthood underlying the debate on the ordination of women. When the priest presides over the assembly, it is not the assembly that has chosen or designated him for this role. The Church is not a spontaneous gathering. As its name of *ecclesia* indicates, it is an assembly that is convoked. It is Christ who calls it together. He is the head of the Church, and the priest presides "in the person of Christ the Head" (*in persona*

<sup>50</sup> II Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum* on the Liturgy, no. 7; Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947, *AAS* 39 (1947), p. 528.

**Christi capitis**). That is why the Declaration rightly concludes "that the controversies raised in our days over the ordination of women are for all Christians a pressing invitation to meditate on the mystery of the Church, study in greater detail the meaning of the episcopate and the priesthood, and to rediscover the real and pre-eminent place of the priest in the community of the baptized, of which he indeed forms part but from which he is distinguished because, in the actions that call for the character of ordination, for the community he is — with all the effectiveness proper to the sacraments — the image and symbol of Christ himself who calls, forgives, and accomplishes the sacrifice of the Covenant."

However, the objectors continue: it would indeed be important that Christ should be represented by a man if the maleness of Christ played an essential part in the economy of salvation. But, they say, one cannot accord gender a special place in the hypostatic union: what is essential is the human nature — no more — assumed by the Word, not the incidental characteristics such as the sex or even the race which he assumed. If the Church admits that men of all races can validly represent Christ, why should she deny women this ability to represent him? We must first of all reply, in the words of the Declaration, that ethnic differences "do not affect the human person as intimately as the difference of sex". On this point biblical teaching agrees with modern psychology. The difference between the sexes however is something willed by God from the beginning, according to the account in Genesis (which is also quoted in the Gospel), and is directed both to communion between persons and to the begetting of human beings. And it must be affirmed first and foremost that the fact that Christ is a man and not a woman is neither incidental nor unimportant in relation to the economy of salvation. In what sense? Not of course in the material sense, as has sometimes been suggested in polemics in order to discredit it, but because the whole economy of salvation has been revealed to us through essential symbols from which it cannot be separated, and without which we would be unable to understand God's design. Christ is the new Adam. God's covenant with men is presented in the Old Testament as a nuptial mystery, the definitive reality of which is Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. The Declaration briefly presents the stages marking the progressive development of this biblical theme, the subject of many exegetical and theological studies. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church, whom he won for himself with his blood, and the salvation brought by him is the New Covenant: by using this language, Revelation shows why the Incarnation took place according to the male gender, and makes it impossible to ignore this historical reality. For this reason, only a man can take the part of



Christ, be a sign of his presence, in a word "represent" him (that is, be an effective sign of his presence) in the essential acts of the Covenant.

Could one do without this biblical symbolism when transmitting the message, in contemplating the mystery and in liturgical life? To ask this, as has been done in certain recent studies, is to call into question the whole structure of Revelation and to reject the value of Scripture. It will be said, for example, that "in every period the ecclesial community appeals to the authority it has received from its founder in order to choose the images enabling it to receive God's revelation". This is perhaps to fail even more profoundly to appreciate the human value of the nuptial theme in the revelation of God's love.

#### The ministerial priesthood in the mystery of the Church

It is also striking to note the extent to which the questions raised in the controversy over the ordination of women are bound up with a certain theology of the Church. We do not of course mean to dwell on the excessive formulas which nonetheless sometimes find a place in theological review. An example is the supposition that the primitive Church was based on the charisms possessed by both women and men.<sup>51</sup> Another is the claim that "the Gospels also present women as ministers of unction".<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, we have already come across the question of the pluralism that can be admitted in unity and seen what its limits are.

The proposal that women should be admitted to the priesthood because they have gained leadership in many fields of modern life today seems to ignore the fact that the Church is not a society like the rest. In the Church, authority or power is of a very different nature, linked as it normally is with the sacrament, as is underlined in the Declaration. Disregard of this fact is indeed a temptation that has threatened ecclesiological research at all periods: every time that an attempt is made to solve the Church's

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Concilium* 111, 1976, *La femme dans l'Eglise*, French edition, pp. 19, 20, especially 23: "Au temps de Paul, les fonctions de direction étaient réparties et reposaient sur l'autorité charismatique".

<sup>52</sup> *Theological Studies* 36, 1975, p. 667.

problems by comparison with those of States, or to define the Church's structure by political categories, the inevitable result is an impasse.

The Declaration also points out the defect in the argument that seeks to base the demand that the priesthood be conferred on women on the text Galatians 3:28, which states that in Christ there is no longer any distinction between man and woman. For Saint Paul this is the effect of baptism. The baptismal catechesis of the Fathers often stressed it. But absolute equality in baptismal life is quite a different thing from the structure of the ordained ministry. This latter is the object of a vocation within the Church, not a right inherent in the person.

A vocation within the Church does not consist solely or primarily in the fact that one manifests the desire for a mission or feels attracted by an inner compulsion. Even if this spontaneous step is made and even if one believes one has heard as it were a call in the depths of one's soul, the vocation is authentic only from the moment that it is authenticated by the external call of the Church. The Holy Office<sup>53</sup> recalled this truth in its 1912 letter to the Bishop of Aire to put an end to the Lahitton controversy.<sup>54</sup> Christ chose "those he wanted" (Mk. 3:13).

Since the ministerial priesthood is something to which the Lord calls expressly and gratuitously, it cannot be claimed as a right, any more by men than by women. Archbishop Benardin's declaration of October 1975 contained the sound judgment: "It would be a mistake... to reduce the question of the ordination of women to one of injustice, as is done at times. It would be correct to do this only if ordination were a God-given right of every individual; only if somehow one's human potential could not be fulfilled without it. In fact, however, no one, male or female, can claim a 'right' to ordination. And, since the episcopal and priestly office is basically a ministry of service, ordination in no way 'completes' one's humanity".<sup>54</sup>

The Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ends by suggesting that efforts in two directions should be fostered, efforts from which the pastors and faithful of the

<sup>53</sup> AAS 4, 1912, p. 485.

<sup>54</sup> In *Origins* — NC Documentary Service, 16 October 1975.

Church would perhaps be distracted if this controversy over women's ordination were prolonged. One direction is in the doctrinal and spiritual order: awareness of the diversity of roles in the Church, in which equality is not identity, should lead us — as Saint Paul exhorts us — to strive after the one gift that can and should be striven after, namely love (1 Cor. 12-13). "The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers but the saints", says the Declaration. This expression deserves to be taken as a motto.

The other direction for our efforts is in the apostolic and social order. We have a long way to go before people become fully aware of the greatness of women's mission in the Church and society, "both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the true countenance of the Church". Unfortunately we also still have a long way to go before all the inequalities of which women are still the victims are eliminated, not only in the field of public, professional and intellectual life, but even within the family.

# WOMEN PRIESTS

by

Father Louis Bouyer

We are generally told that the refusal to ordain women for the priestly ministry (that of bishop or of priest of the second rank) arises just from an outdated conception of the inequality of the sexes, and of the invincible inferiority of woman compared with man.

We are then assured that if Christ himself, and the apostles after him, called and ordained only men, it was because the prejudices of their age did not allow them to do otherwise, whether they did not think it possible to oppose them successfully, or whether they themselves were incapable of freeing themselves from them.

We are told finally that if Christ did not call women to the apostolate, that has no more lasting significance for the Church than the fact that he called only Jews to it. Just as, once it emerged from the Jewish world, Christianity conferred the priesthood on non-Jews as a matter of course, so nowadays, having at last emerged from a society in which the male was exaggeratedly predominant, it has, they say, no good reason to refuse it to women.

For those who, like too many of our contemporaries, are completely ignorant of the history of customs and ideas, these reasons may seem irrefutable, indeed even evident. But it is enough to inquire more exactly about the facts and to reflect on the motivations they reveal to judge how flimsy, not to say completely unsubstantial, these apparently certain reasons are.

## *Female priests in early times*

Let us take first of all the second of these statements: the contemporary society of Christ, in particular, and of antiquity in general, we are told, could not accept women priests.

One thinks one is dreaming when one hears people who consider themselves enlightened and unprejudiced, calmly come out with such a gross blunder.

In fact, the ancient world, in particular but not exclusively, far from it, the Mediterranean world, had always known, from the most ancient civilizations of the fertile crescent to Greece and Rome at the time of the origins of Christianity, female priests alongside male priests and not at all in a condition of inferiority in relation to the latter. And if there was a particular tendency in this connection, at the time of Christ and the apostles, it was rather towards the crediting than the discrediting of female priests.

In religions based on mysteries, which begin to spread at the same time as Christianity or very shortly afterwards, and which will turn out to be its last and most formidable competitors in the 3rd century, just before its victory, there is actually a recrudescence in the development of female priesthoods, in connection with the cults of mother-goddesses, divinities of the fertility of the soil changing into deities of future life, which are one of the most outstanding religious characteristics of the era.

If, therefore, new-born Christianity, in spite of all the ways in which its practices differed from Judaism, owing to the generosity of its opening to the pagan world, abided by the traditionally Jewish and biblical idea: that the priesthood is the exclusive reserve of males, it was not at all a surrender to the environment, to the current prejudices of the milieu in which it was spreading. It was, on the contrary, in decided opposition to what this environment, generally speaking, considered as a matter of course.

And, it must be added at once, if Judaism itself, in the wake of the old Hebrew religion, had adopted and maintained this position, it was already in opposition, if anything even more flagrantly, to the unanimous practice of the religious of the peoples among which biblical inspiration intervened, ... precisely to form a people whose religion was quite different!

The fact is so obvious that those who are not completely ignorant of the comparative history of religions, in the ancient Semitic East especially, are obliged to find another explanation.

We are then told that if, originally, the Mosaic religion rejected the priesthood of women, that can be explained by the fact that the female priesthoods, connected as they actually were with the naturist fertility religions and their Bacchanalian rites, involved inadmissible practices, such as ritual prostitution.

#### *Practices rule out prejudice*

This explanation, unfortunately, either explains nothing or else proves far too much. These practices, in fact, including ritual prostitution, were not reserved or limited to the female priesthoods in

these religions. They applied equally and to the same extent to the male priesthoods. If, then, they could explain the refusal on the part of the Hebrews to accept a female priesthood tainted with these defects, it is not clear how they could have admitted, under these conditions, a male priesthood which, at the time and in the environment in which they lived, was equally tainted.

It is necessary, therefore, to recognize without beating about the bush what is an obvious fact: when we study, in their historical and cultural context, the developments of the Hebrew, then Jewish, and finally Christian religion, it is plain that it was not out of unthinking adherence to the practices or prejudices of their contemporaries that the Christians, following the Jews, themselves the heirs to the Mosaic traditions, were constant in their refusal to accept women priests. It was, on the contrary, in constant opposition to what, in practice, the whole of antiquity considered normal.

In the Jewish and Christian tradition, it is not a question, as some people would like us to believe, of the effect of being carried along by customs accepted uncritically. It is rather the result of a very deliberate and singularly persistent "no".

Even if the theory has not been worked out, it is not the fruit of an absence of principles. It is the result, on the contrary, of an extraordinarily constant fidelity, in spite of all the pressure of customs and environment, to a tenaciously held principle.

To this, of course, it will be replied: but if it is a question of principle, what can this principle be but the idea of woman's inequality, her invincible inferiority, with regard to man?

#### *Woman equal but different*

But, here the improbability of the reasoning is again apparent, and perhaps more glaringly than ever. The religion of the Bible, then Judaism, and even more clearly Christianity following in their footsteps, even if they did not constitute the only tradition in ancient human history in which the fundamental equality of woman and man was proclaimed, maintained and defended, above all on the religious plane but also on the whole plane of created existence, nevertheless they unquestionably constitute the firmest and clearest tradition on this point.

And if, finally, that seems something to be taken for granted today, no serious historian will dream of questioning that, that is a result of Christian preaching, for which the whole of Judaism, the whole Bible which it quotes as an authority, had prepared.

Certainly, it is no less an essential part of Christianity, as of the whole biblical tradition, to uphold that woman, though the equal of man, must nevertheless remain different from him. In other words, this equality is not that of pure and simple identity, but the far more positive and fruitful equality of complementarity.

And, as we will soon see, it is precisely this safeguarding of a necessary complementarity, without which woman's claimed equity would be nothing but the annihilation of her originality and of her own identity, that motivates the exclusive attribution of the priestly ministry to man, to the male.

But, for the moment, let us just stress the absurdity of a position which explains the exclusively male character of the Hebrew or Christian priesthood as the result of an inferior conception of woman, when it is, on the contrary, the Bible and the Gospel alone which have caused the certainty of her equality to triumph in a world in which, nevertheless, the priesthood had never been reserved for man anywhere, as it has always been in the Church as well as in Israel.

This is accentuated by the fact that in Israel, where the role of prophetism was not less, and can even be said to have been far more decisive than that of the priesthood, the prophetic function does not seem to have been reserved to man. Though relatively few women were recognized as having this gift, there is no trace of any opposition to them when they seemed to have it.

But, in a more general way, the traces detected in the Bible or in ancient Judaism of an apparent discrediting of woman, of female sexuality in particular, when examined thoroughly, reveal the very opposite.

### *Misrepresentations*

What is the meaning of the "purification" to which women are subjected, on the fourth day after the birth of a male child, or which men themselves will have to undergo, after sexual contact with a woman, before being able to take part in worship again?<sup>1</sup> Is there really, as we are told over and over again, any idea of a fundamental impurity of the female or a contamination contracted by the male when he approaches her?

From the viewpoint of a scientific religious phenomenology such interpretations are not only ridiculously naive, they are a clear case of misinterpretation.

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus, 12, 26, and the whole of chap. 15.

To show this, let us recall in the first place that, in the same way, according to the most ancient Jewish tradition, mere contact with the scrolls of the Torah, or any inspired book, "solls the hands". In the same archaic sense, traditional Christian liturgy speaks of "purifying" the sacred vessels, when it is actually a question of eliminating all traces of the consecrated elements.

This is the key to these prescriptions concerning sexuality, and precisely the woman's part. It is not that they are, either of them, impure. It is, on the contrary that which is sacred in them, since one is the creative manifestation of life in the creature itself, while the other is the instrument of this shared creativity.

Hence a suspicion, a presumption of possible sin in every contact with them on the part of fallen man, just as in his contact with the very signs of the divine presence: is he not always tempted by lack of faith in the divine word, unfaithfulness to the divine plan which it proclaims and promotes?

In both cases, if there is a suspicion of corruption here, it is and it is only this *corruptio optimi*, which is evidently *corruptio pessima*.<sup>2</sup>

What conclusions have not been drawn, likewise, from the blessing that the rabbis taught men to utter: of having been "made men and not women"? What is forgotten in this case, above all, are the same prescriptions to women, in the same way, to bless God for having made them what they are.<sup>3</sup>

What is the meaning in fact, of both these blessings? It is, as these same rabbis have explained unceasingly, that the whole yoke of the Torah, and in particular the priestly functions, *Abodah*, the sacrificial service, has been imposed on man only, who is only too tempted to jib at the extra demands it involves. Hence the necessity of inculcating in him that these demands, however burdensome they may be, must be accepted by him as an honour. Conversely, woman, towards whom God manifests even more the liberality of his mercy than the severity of his justice, has only to render God pure thanksgiving for the vocation that is hers.

#### *Her family role*

This, however, does not mean in the slightest that woman is excluded from worship. It is just that the responsibility for public worship does not pertain to her, although she belongs there on

<sup>2</sup> *Corruptio optimi*: corruption of the best. *Corruptio pessima*: the worst corruption (Ed.'s note).

<sup>3</sup> See the text of these blessings and the commentary on them in the *Berakoth* treatises of *Mischnah* and *Tosefta*.



an equal footing with man. But it is because she has the responsibility for this fundamental cell of the people of God, the family, which, for Israel, remains the first and ultimate sanctuary.

In this capacity, it falls to her to prepare the paschal meal which is the biblical sacrifice, and indeed every sacred meal, although she does not preside over it, just as it is she who lights the Sabbath lamp, every Saturday.

This is more than enough to show us that the differentiation, already present in the Old Testament, does not imply inferiority but an indispensable complementarity, which even implies a far more immediate, and a far more constant intimacy with the sacred than in the case of man.

That is why, although God is always spoken of in the Bible, in Jewish and later in Christian liturgy, as a male. Wisdom, which, however, will come to mean the closest association that can be conceived of humanity with divine thought and life, will always be represented by Israel as female.

What is, if possible, even more remarkable: the immanent presence of God, not only with man but in him, will always be described by the rabbis under the female features of *Schekinah*.<sup>4</sup>

But what beats all, it must be added, is that what we call in English the "Spirit" of God, that is, the communication of divine vitality and energy to man, by initiation, as it were, into his specific life and activity, is designated in Hebrew (as in the other Semitic languages) by a feminine, not a masculine noun: *Rouach Adonai*.

### *Arguments invalid*

When we have observed these historical data which are, as it were, the coordinates for the reservation of the priesthood to men from the Old Testament and throughout the history of the Church up to our days, we can no longer believe that it is a fortuitous phenomenon, to be explained in terms of transitory contingencies, but not corresponding to any really essential necessity of the subjects in question.

It is true that today a number of theologians and even Scripture scholars tell us that, if the fact is undeniable, throughout the whole Bible and tradition, it is not possible, however, to find any theological justification for it.

<sup>4</sup> We devoted a study to this notion in *Bible et vie chrétienne*, Dec. 1957, pp. 7 ff. In Jewish thought, *Schekinah* "is the special presence of God with his people, localized in a certain way in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple."

Under these conditions, they tell us, we are in the presence of one of these questions of discipline, matters of opportuneness, not of principle, and, if the Church should come to believe that it might be a good thing, under changed circumstances, to give the priesthood to women, as it may have been a good thing not to do so in the past, nothing can prevent her from doing so.

This line of reasoning is extraordinarily without substance. The perseverance of the Church, following upon everything that we have in the Bible, in maintaining, contrary to all the customs of mankind, a certain way of acting, were it not supported by a fundamental principle, even if it had remained more or less implicit up to now, would be incomprehensible, and what is more unjustifiable.

Actually, it is certainly a theological principle that motivates the reservation of the priesthood to men, and a principle made explicit, if not completely in any case unquestionably, from the beginning of revelation, although not yet defined exactly.

Those who seem incapable of seeing it, acting as they do today, would have said likewise before the Nicene Council that the authentically divine sonship of Jesus could not be considered a theological principle, since precisely this council was necessary to define it through the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. With this kind of reasoning, these people would have declared the divinity of the Spirit not justifiable theologically before the Council of Constantinople, or the unity of the person of Christ before the Council of Ephesus, or the whole reality of his two natures, the human and the divine, before the Council of Chalcedon, etc.

### *Sluggish view*

Behind their affirmation, there is a view of theology that must be called sluggish, because it is completely static, the result of a narrowly literalistic view of revelation. This is what makes all narrow-minded conservatives the involuntary, but alas, the most effective allies of all inertia of a thoughtlessness which regards itself as pious.

In the case that interests us, it does not seem to us exaggerated to say that, whereas there do not exist a text or argument the production of which would be sufficient to refute our contradictors, such texts and arguments did not exist either — as the length and the difficulties of the Arian controversy clearly showed — even in the case of the divinity of Christ, which the first ecumenical Council had to define for this very reason.

But, in the present case, as well, the massive *consensus fidelium* (over twenty centuries!) is based on a superabundance, in reality, of biblical teaching and Christian spiritual experience which can be overlooked only by a short-sighted view of the texts and facts.

It is this that makes quite certain the final decision that the Church should take, the definition of her faith with which she should support it, if her authorities found themselves driven into a corner by the opponents of tradition.

Let us add that, in the present case, behind the Christian and biblical sense, there is a natural, spontaneous presentiment of healthy humanity, which a simple anthropological reflection, really well-founded and developed scientifically, has no difficulty in formulating and justifying.

### *Equality versus identity*

The present demand for the ordination of women, in fact, with a view to ensuring the equality of woman and man, supposes that this equality can be obtained only by as radical an elimination as possible of the differences between man and woman. But for more experienced psychologists and sociologists, that is a characteristic which reveals the unfavourable conditions in which this problem of the equality of the sexes is raised in modern times.

Follow this path, what we wish to promote, runs the risk of being ruined beforehand, because the problem is raised, without it being realized in unrealistic, self-defeating terms. The apparent victory that would be won under similar circumstances, far from ensuring what we have set our heart on, would be its masked defeat.

In this case we find ourselves, actually, in the presence of a form of feminism which, however well meant, cannot but be ruinous for a real liberation of woman. For an equality that is confused with sheer identity with another, when he is certainly your equal but without being completely identical for that reason, can only be a delusion. It cannot but lead in the end, for the one who claims it, to loss of identity.

### *Situation of blacks*

This has been clearly seen recently, in connection with a quite different but similar discussion: that of racial equality in the United States. The most intelligent and realistic black leaders have realized

it in time, and the approach to the problem has been completely changed in a few years. Whites of good will, followed at first by the more ingenuous blacks, had thought they were offering them perfect equality with them by proposing to them pure and simple integration in their own society, that is, a society made completely by whites, according to their own tastes. But the more perspicacious blacks, on thinking things over, did not take long to realize that such an integration far, from signifying the hoped-for liberation, could not but lead to the sheer liquidation of what they are, and what they intend to remain, and rightly. Even supposing it could ever succeed, it would not at all make blacks, as, blacks, the equals of whites, but blacks ashamed of themselves, concealing their blackness behind a screen of pseudo-whiteness which could not deceive anyone. Hence the reaction, apparently paradoxical, but fundamentally very realistic and deeply healthy of the black leaders who, in America today, do not hesitate to say that an integration of blacks in white society such as had been conceived to begin with, would actually be worse for them than apartheid in South Africa. In fact, even if the latter implies their inferiority, or in any case their perpetual status as minors, it begins at least by recognizing their identity. Integration such as was proposed, on the other hand, claiming to ignore the latter purely and simply, if it were attempted to put it into practice, could only aim at abolishing it. Systematically applied and pursued, it would lead to the most radical of genocides.

*Mutatis mutandis*, as the great Dutch psychologist Buijtendijk<sup>5</sup> showed perfectly, it is the same for all over-simplified feminism, which sees no other means of making woman equal with man than by making her mannish. But that is tantamount to wiping her out as a woman. If this kind of feminism were to triumph, it would be only a Pyrrhic victory for women. It would mean, in fact the definitive consecration of the most uncomprehending masculinity, of the most absurd masculinism.

### *Self-defeating feminism*

This is the aim, willy-nilly, we think, of the present supposition that the equality of woman and man could be affirmed and consolidated by the ordination of women to the priesthood. Far from producing this effect, it would only be a particularly unreasonable

<sup>5</sup> Buijtendijk's book has been translated into French: *La Femme*.

manifestation of this kind of essentially self-defeating feminism. For it is possible to cherish the dream of an ordination of women only by refusing to admit this mystery of woman which is inherent in her own identity, and repudiation of which would amount to depriving her of her dignity, and, when pushed to extremes, to denying her the right to existence.

It is no mere chance, let us be quite convinced, that the very age in which it is claimed to make woman the equal of man by giving her the priesthood, is an age in which we see her, more than ever before, perhaps, reduced to a mere object of pleasure for man, for the idle male. In both cases, in fact, it is agreed to deny woman all that is specifically hers, recognizing her as having only a borrowed value, either in complete dependency on the male, or in complete confusion with him.

In opposition to both, an analysis of this mystery of woman, which underlies the Scriptures and the whole of Christian tradition, while taking care not to crush her femininity by conferring, on her a ministry which is not suitable for her, will enable us to discover, or rediscover, the ministries for which she is fitted, and which it is certainly important, for the Church and the world today, to attribute to her at last or quite simply to restore to her.

What has just been said should make it quite clear that it is not by diminishing, far less in order to diminish, woman, her role in the Church and in the world, but on the contrary to recognize the indispensable grandeur of this role, the unique beauty of her femininity, that it is important to rediscover, or to discover, perhaps, better than ever, the mystery of woman. One of the keys to the crisis with which both the Church and the world are struggling today, and paradoxically the Church even more, perhaps, than the world, is precisely ignorance of this mystery today, an ignorance which, despite superficial appearances, is deeper, perhaps, than ever. In the whole of the Bible and in ecclesiastical tradition, in fact, the mystery of woman is seen as the final mystery of creation, and especially of creation redeemed, saved, divinized by the incarnation of God, in the flesh that He took from woman.\*

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\* In spite of innumerable vulgarizations of Freudian sexology, most of which are hasty and superficial, it is surprising that there are so few serious theological works which deal with this question. Mention can be made, however, of Derrick Sherwin Bailey's fine study. *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought*, London, 1959.

# THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN ACCORDING TO THE CHURCH

by

Raimondo Splazzi, O.P.

The theological nature of the "Declaration on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood", issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by order of the Sovereign Pontiff, does not exclude but presupposes and involves consideration of the contemporary socio-cultural context. Within this context the entry of women into all areas and all levels of public life, is one of the characterizing phenomena. John XXIII recognized this, in fact, in a page of the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (AAS 55, 1963, pp. 267-268), from which the new document starts.

This great innovation of our century, which matured gradually among the ideological and social ferments of the nineteenth century, has certainly brought about a change in living conditions, outlook and behaviour. This change has exercised a determinant influence on the relations between man and woman, on the conception, the constitution and the life of the family, and on the organization of society, giving rise to new demands and creating problems unknown before.

Careful and responsible reflection on the new reality, on the part of the Church, prompted in her pastors and teachers certain reserves. And these reserves still hold good when faced with the excesses of feminist movements and the risks of easy illusions and confusion that could alter the meaning of things (that is, of femininity, of the family and of society), with harmful consequences on the moral, civil and religious plane. But it also led to a new ecclesial awareness of the role of woman and her rights and duties in regard to active and responsible participation in the life of the civil and ecclesial community.

**THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH  
AND WOMEN'S NEW PROBLEMS**

Pius XII particularly dedicated his attention and exercised his magisterium to clarify this crucial problem of contemporary society. He did this in the post-war period just when all the ideological and passionate charges that had accumulated in the hearts of human beings in decades of experiences, tensions and struggles, exploded in the political field. It is enough to glance through the analytical index of his *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi* to realize how he insisted on this matter in his interventions. They were all characterized, certainly, by concern to safeguard the originality of woman's nature, and her specific functions and personal dignity, in the new condition of society. But they were also marked by recognition of the aspirations and possibilities opened to woman by the evolution of the last half century and by the call to active commitment both in social and political life and in the apostolate of the Church. These pages constitute — also on this point — a milestone in the development of the social and pastoral doctrine of the Church. They are still relevant today, even if so many new aspirations for woman's advancement have emerged in the last twenty years, in a situation of culture and work that is deeply changed.

In fact there has come to the fore more and more a central problem concerning woman's status, formulated, according to current fashion, in terms of **struggle of liberation**. It is the demand to be liberated from the institutionalized egoisms, as one could call them, which in certain places, classes and environments lead to the subjugation and exploitation of women. Interest in this problem has become generalized, with the result that, on the hand, demands for radical changes have emerged, sometimes giving rise to disorderly and demagogic demonstrations. On the other hand, a juridico-political evolution has emerged which has recognized women as having many rights and has offered them many possibilities of achievement on the civil plane.

Perhaps feminist irredentism has neglected the interior aspect of the problem. The liberation from psychisms, frustrations and complexes, unleashed under strong pressure of external factors and especially pressure of propaganda exploiting the occasion, can lead

to extreme aberrations, the effect and sign of a dreadful degradation cultural even more than moral. In this direction it is painful, for example, to see women and especially girls being recruited and joining marches to demand at the top of their voices the new "rights": sexual freedom, free management of their own body, the faculty of freely having an abortion and at the expense of the State, etc. It is indeed a disheartening sight. Fortunately, it is a question of agitated and whipped up minorities, but still they represent a pathological phenomenon which must be taken into account and for which a remedy must be found, especially by creating conditions of social life in which another more fundamental problem of woman's advancement can be solved: that of her positive elevation on the cultural, civil and spiritual planes. This inevitably involves also an adequate formation, corresponding to the requirements of femininity.

In the last few years the magisterium of the Church has pointed out several times the paths to take — and the criteria to adopt — for woman's real advancement, beyond all those mystifications and blunders which end up by leading them to loss of their own authenticity and, all things considered, to new forms of slavery.

#### PAUL VI's INTERVENTIONS

Paul VI's interventions, on this matter, are countless. Mention should be made here particularly of the address delivered on 6 December 1976 to participants in the National Congress of the Italian Women's Centre (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, English-language edition, 16 December 1976). In it the Pope stresses forcefully the principles according to which it is necessary to work for women's advancement according to the model proposed by the Church.

This advancement, for Paul VI, is beyond dispute, just as it is certain that it is far from being implemented. "We are fully convinced," he declares "that the participation of women at the various levels of social life must be not only recognized, but also fostered and above all warmly appreciated; and certainly there is still a long way to go in this direction". But as the Second Vatican Council taught, women ought "to play their part fully according to their own particular nature" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 60), which, the Pope adds, must not be renounced.



From a biblical and Christian point of view, it is necessary to recognize in woman the same "image and likeness" of God (Gen. 1, 26, 27), which "she has in common with man and which makes her fully his equal"; but this image "is realized in her in a particular way, which differentiates woman from man, no more, however, than man is differentiated from woman: not in dignity of nature, but in diversity of functions". So Paul VI adds at once the wise warning that "it is necessary to beware of a cunning form of belittlement of women's status, in which it is possible to fall today, by refusing to recognize those diversifying features stamped by nature on both human beings. It belongs on the contrary to the order of creation that woman should fulfill herself as a woman, certainly not in a competition of mutual oppression with man, but in harmonious and fruitful integration, based on respectful recognition of the roles peculiar to each. It is therefore highly desirable that in the various fields of social life in which she has her place, woman should bring that unmistakably human stamp of sensitiveness and solicitude, which is characteristic of her".

In the allocution to members of the "Study Commission on woman's functions in society and in the Church" and to members of the "Committee for Women's International Year", on 18 April 1975, Paul VI had already spoken of the different riches and dynamisms characteristic of man and woman, which must lead to a world that is not leveled and uniform, but harmonious and unified (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, English-language edition, 1 May, 1975). For the Church, therefore, the equality of the sexes is not identity. The juridical parity recognized in the most recent constitutions and legislations does not mean confusion of roles and cancellation of original characteristics. Advancement cannot have as its purpose oppression or the conquest of hegemony, but must aim at the harmonization of functions and implementation of the complementarity on the psychologico-affective, operational, spiritual and structural plane (in the family and in society). This, according to the Bible, is willed by the Creator. It is also obvious from an objective examination of the human reality of the two sexes.



With these indispensable clarifications and, where necessary, reserves in judgment on ideologies, laws and methods of action of our times, the Church gives her full and sincere support and

encouragement to all initiatives that wish to implement the justice often lacking in women's status. The Pope says so, referring to the Council: "The whole Church follows with great interest and trepidation the various women's movements which aim at reaching 'parity with men in fact as well as of rights' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 9). In Christianity, in fact, more than in any other religion, woman has had right from the beginning a special status of dignity... And after summing up the testimonies of the New Testament on the new importance given to women by Jesus, the Apostles and the first communities, the Pope points out that from these texts "It is clearly evident that woman is given a place in the living and operating structure of Christianity, such an important place that perhaps all its virtualities have not yet been clarified...". And here is the conclusion, of great topical interest: "Like the Church of origins, so also the Church of today cannot but be on the side of woman, especially where the latter, from being an active and responsible subject, is put in the humiliating position of a passive and insignificant object: as in certain environments of work and in certain of the lower forms of instrumentalization of the mass media, in social relations and in the family. One would think that for some people woman represents today the easiest instrument to give expression to their tendencies to violence and tyranny. In this way the harsh attitude of even vehement retaliation characteristic of some women's movements, can be explained and, in part, understood...".



"On the side of woman", therefore: for her liberation and true advancement; for overcoming discriminations contrary to God's plan, and in the first place discrimination based on sex (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 29): this is the position of the Church emphasized by Paul VI and recalled from the first page of the new Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

But at this point one may ask the question: if things are so, how can one explain the negative solution that the Declaration itself gives to the question of woman's admission to the ministerial priesthood? What is the reasoning, in relation to the premises on liberation and advancement, that leads the Declaration to conclude by reaffirming and strengthening discrimination based on the difference of sex?

Well, a dispassionate and calm reading of the Declaration makes it possible to draw from the authentic sources of Catholic doctrine and discipline — that is Holy Scripture and Christian tradition and practice going back to the apostles and to the first communities, and therefore to Jesus — the reasons for the attitude of the Church, never modified in two thousand years of historical experience. As will be explained in subsequent articles, the Declaration connects these reasons with the mystery of God's eternal plan regarding the organization of the means of salvation in the economy of grace carried out in the world by Christ. But in clarifying this doctrine with theological reasons, albeit not demonstrative but connected with other certain points of revelation (analogy of faith), the Document lists some arguments which — beyond the theological sphere of the question dealt with — can give strength and at the same time balance to the whole religious and civil project for the advancement of woman.

In the first place the value of a "sign", which is inherent in the sacraments is extended to the person of the minister. It makes it possible to see in the priest the reflection of the image of Christ, who "was and remains a man". But it also makes it possible to connect the relationship between the man-priest and the community of the faithful in the logic of the union or Covenant between God and mankind, which is presented in the Old and in the New Testament as a nuptial mystery. The man-priest, by virtue of his Ordination, operates in the name, in the place of and by virtue of Christ: *in persona Christi*, as St. Thomas says (cf. III, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3), and the Council confirms (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 33; *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 10, 28; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* nn. 2, 13 etc.). The Declaration clarifies and completes this traditional doctrine, explaining that it is a question of a reflection of Christ as "author of the Covenant, bridegroom and head of the Church", the eternal Word who, to carry out God's plan historically, became incarnate in our human nature according to the male sex, certainly not to affirm a natural superiority of man over woman, but raising to the summit of creation — where the mystery of Incarnation is placed — the duality, complementarity and correlativity of the sexes.

The symbolism of this mystery, which pervades the historical fact of the existence of Jesus-the man, in requiring that the priesthood should be conferred on persons of the male sex, does not

mortify the figure of woman, but stresses, if anything, the importance of the sexual difference, which "in human beings... has an important influence, much deeper, for example, than ethnical differences: the latter do not affect the human person as intimately as the difference of sex, which is directly ordained both to the communion of persons and to the generation of human beings." This adds up to a reaffirmation of the intrinsic value, the dignity, the relative autonomy, the originality of function, the necessity of intervention also of the female sex. This means that woman, in the bride-Church of which she bears the image in herself, and by extension of point of view and application of principles, also in the world, is worthy of respect and of advancement, as a woman and not according to other considerations.

This conclusion can be reached without straining the meaning, it seems to us, starting just from the thesis emphasized by the Declaration.

#### MANY MANSIONS IN THE CHURCH

The Document prompts another consideration. Before concluding, it points out that in the Church no one, either male or female, can claim the right to priestly Ordination. This applies even when it is claimed on account of a deep feeling that one is called to the priesthood, or that one can reach the fullness of his character as a Christian, or even of his own human condition, only within the priesthood. Actually, the priesthood "is not part of the rights of the person", but is a gift and a power that is conferred by means of the Church on those whom the Church herself judges suitable — thus confirming the vocation with her objective judgment — according to the requirements of God's plan and Christ's institution.

But right from the beginning the Declaration recalls and singles out for praise women who, as history shows, "have played a decisive role in the life of the Church and carried out tasks of considerable value." The Declaration mentions the Foundresses of great religious families, the outstanding teachers of doctrine and spiritual life, those who provided works of assistance and charity, the women apostles in mission countries, "as well as those Christian wives who exercised a deep influence on their families and, in particular, transmitted the faith to their sons". It could be added that there is hardly a country, a community, in which there do not exist the signs of the

incalculable benefits received from some of these outstanding women: whether they be the great accomplishers of works of charity or apostolate, or humble, silent collaborators — Sisters and lay women — of the Church and of the groups of which she is made up, in doing good in all its forms. Which of us does not remember some of these marvellous creatures, to whom perhaps he owes a lot of the good received and accumulated from childhood? Who does not meet them continually at every cross-roads along the ways of the Church?

It can be deduced from this daily reality that there are "many mansions" in the Church and that there is room for a great wealth of ministries and charisms, without any need that they should be reduced, so to speak, to the priestly condition. The priesthood is one of many ministries. It implies a sacramental character of its own and charisms of its own, its own "professional graces," which are certainly of superior level. But it is not the only form or the only source of the apostolate. It is just this non-exclusiveness of the priesthood that emphasizes the greatness that can be reached by men and women outside the hierarchical line but always in the communion of the Church. This is proved by the innumerable doers of good whom we can find in history. Already in the time of the Apostolic Communities so many noble figures of women-apostles stand out. There are, for example, Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe, recalled with gratitude and affection by St. Paul, and above all there is the Virgin Mary. And these figures remain throughout history right up to the Church of today, in which women are called to new roles at the level both of the parish and of the diocese, and even in various organisms of the Holy See, as the Declaration recalls.

#### **"THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ARE THE SAINTS"**

This Document, if read well — that is, seriously and serenely — can serve to give new impetus to the initiatives of the laity and especially of women in the apostolate, helping them all, and the latter particularly, to avoid the danger of "clericalization" that is latent under certain demands for the priesthood. It will be a question, for everyone, of recalling that the Virgin Mary, as Innocent III wrote, although superior in dignity and excellence to all the Apostles, did not receive, like them, the keys of the Kingdom (cf. *Corpus Iuris*, Decret. lib. 5, tit. 38, *De Poenit* c. 10 Nova: quoted

by the Declaration). The late Cardinal Journet, when asked one day what he thought of the possible admission of women to the priesthood, replied simply as follows: "In the Church there is the greatness of hierarchy and the greatness of charity: the Blessed Virgin was placed at the summit of the latter greatness."

The Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also follows this line. After saying that "the Church is a differentiated body, in which each one has his function; the tasks are distinct and must not be confused. They do not give rise to the superiority of some over others; they do not furnish any pretext for jealousy; the only superior charism, which can and must be desired, is charity (cf. 1 Cor. 12-12)," concludes with the following memorable words: "The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers, but the saints".

This is the context of faith and spirituality that the Church considers the advancement of woman. For the Church the thread of the subject cannot but be this. But it may take us very far, as can be seen from the final wish of the Declaration: "The Church desires that Christian women should become fully aware of the greatness of their mission: today their role is of capital importance, both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the true face of the Church". How could we renounce saying, at this point, that if the ministerial priesthood reflects the image of Christ, the head and bridegroom, the Christian woman is called to reflect in herself and reveal the identity of the bride-Church, the supreme figure and type of which is a woman whose name is Mary? The principle of the "eternal feminine" in Christianity did not clothe itself in myths but became history in the Mary-Christ pair. The latter instills in the Church and expands all over the world the redeeming dynamism which aims at "making all things new" and especially at re-establishing in every man and every woman, as in new Adams and new Eves, participating in the 'new life' of Christ and Mary, the original harmony of nature noble, intact and fresh, as it had come from God's hands.

## WITH POPE PAUL THROUGH THE YEAR

"We are all responsible for Peace; we are all called to collaborate for Peace making our personal contribution to the building-up of a society based on love, in our environment, our profession, and in our daily relations."

**New Year Address**  
1 January 1976



"Consecrated chastity is not selfishness, but immolation of oneself for that kingdom of God which is entirely an extolling of ecclesial charity, positive and universal."

**To Men and Women Religious**  
2 February 1976



"It is not possible to be a real Christian without being strong. It is not possible to be strong, even spiritually without being athletes, that is, without difficult and prolonged exercises."

**Ash Wednesday Address**  
3 March 1976



"Today the Resurrection of Christ is reflected in hope; tomorrow it will be reflected in a changed reality!"

**Easter "Urbi et Orbi" Message**  
18 April 1976



"Blessed are we if we have learned to seek the deep usefulness of sorrow, to trust in Christ's love for us..."

**Pope's General Audience**  
12 May 1976



"We thank the Lord who never abandons his Church, but strengthens her ever more in the perennial youth he has given her. His assistance guides us 'with a strong and an extended arm'; it

is to him we commit ourselves as we renew together our public and solemn act of faith."

**Pope's address to new Cardinals  
at the public Consistory  
24 May 1976**



"The measure of your love will be the measure of your effectiveness and the measures of your joy!"

**To newly-ordained priest from  
the North American College  
9 June 1976**



"How humble and how great we are made by the prayer of the 'Our Father', which was taught to us by the supreme and sole Master, who is Christ."

**General Audience  
23 June 1976**



"...to confirm in the hearts of artists the conviction that the Catholic Church still and always esteems them, supports them and protects them... that she awaits the flourishing of a new spring of post-conciliar religious Art!"

**To Seminar on "The influence  
of religious inspiration in  
American Art"  
21 July 1976**



"Admittedly not everyone can personally become a missionary. But all of us must experience the strength of the example of the missionaries. All of us must feel ourselves linked in solidarity with these heroic heralds of the faith and civilization through our faith, our offering, our prayer."

**General Audience  
25 August 1976**



"Parents, arouse the conscience of your children, in search of what is First in our life, and give your children at once the secret to interpret our life and to make it a happy one..."

**General Audience  
23 September 1976**



## WITH POPE PAUL THROUGH THE YEAR 191

"Your blessed evangelists of Christ's Word, you teachers of Christian wisdom, you models of the virtues of prayer and sacrifice, defend the silence of your conventual retreats; and then come out again to greet and convert the world."

**Radio Message to Franciscans  
on 750th anniversary of the  
death of St. Francis  
29 September 1976**



"At a canonization joy so prevails in the hearts of the faithful that every other sentiment grows dim and every other consideration seems unnecessary for our spiritual joy."

**At the Canonization of John Ogilvie  
17 October 1976**



"It is necessary to go on prudently, but without hesitating, moved by a love strong enough to bear witness to the whole truth, holding firmly the anchor of our hope—and docile to the Holy Spirit who guides us unceasingly towards the whole truth..."

**To Secretariat for the Union  
of Christians  
12 November 1976**



"Let not Christmas pass without carrying out some good work, dictated by the sense of humanity."

**Angelus Message  
19 December 1976**

# HOMILETICS

by

Bernard J. LeFrois, S.V.D.

## I. BIBLICAL NOTES FOR HOMILIES

### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

(May 1, 1977)

**First Reading:** Acts 13: 14.43-52

**Second Reading:** Revelation 7: 9.14b-17

**Gospel Reading:** Jn. 10: 27-30

**First Reading:** Paul and Barnabas, on their first missionary journey in Asia Minor, experience at first great success in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. Both Jew and Gentile (pagans) listen eagerly. So great is the following of the pagan world, that it arouses the jealousy of the Jews, who soon violently oppose the missionaries, and eventually drive them away. This same procedure repeats itself in the following towns, and it becomes the occasion of Paul's turning more and more to the Gentile world, which in time became his universal mission. In obedience to the Master's injunction (Mt. 10:14), they shake off the dust from their feet, a symbolic gesture disavowing any further responsibility in the conversion of those in question. Luke contrasts the eagerness of the pagans to receive the Good News with the machinations of the Jews to oppose it.

**Gospel Reading:** A short passage but one replete with deep theological content: 1) Those who belong to Christ gladly listen to his voice and follow him, that is, conform their lives to his. 2) He in turn knows them, that is, he lovingly cares for all their needs that they reach their goal. 3) The pasture land to which he is leading them is not merely a temporal one, but life that never ends, with death and all its concomitants completely conquered. 4) No one can oppose him in this, not even all the powers of hell, for the flock is the Father's gift to him, and no one can take them from his "hand" (care), which is identical with that of the Father, because 5) he and the Father are one, not only in mind and will and action, but in the very Oneness of divine Being.

**Second Reading:** In content, this passage resembles that of today's gospel, but already fulfilled. The Shepherd is now the victorious Lamb, and the flock is now the huge crowd of redeemed humanity, portrayed as victors around the Lamb and the throne (of the Father). They have conquered all evil by continually purifying themselves in the Lamb's Blood (his sacrificial death) that is, by means of their continued sharing in his Paschal Mystery. Now they enjoy the eternal loving care of the Father, and the Lamb shares with them all the blessing of his Spirit (the springs of Living Water). Earth's miseries are over. Divine life is now theirs forever.

### FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

(May 8, 1977)

**First Reading:** Acts 14: 20b-26 (Gr. 21-27)

**Second Reading:** Revelation 21: 1-5a

**Gospel Reading:** Jn. 13: 31-33a. 34-35

**First Reading:** On their return trip of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas visited the communities they had founded, and made it very clear that in the plan of God, suffering and trials were part of their Christian calling. They also set up in each community a definite organized body, by appointing religious leaders. Since the Eucharist with liturgical prayer was the backbone of the Christian community from the very outset (see 2:42), it is only reasonable to suppose that these religious leaders were ordained ministers to preside over those functions. Any wise organizer would do the same. (To state that Luke is here anticipating a later institution is a gratuitous assertion). On returning to the mother church, they report their great success in the Gentile (pagan) world, with humble recognition of the divine source of their success.

**Gospel Reading:** At the last supper, once Judas is no longer present, Jesus unbosoms his inmost sentiments: 1) the theme of glory: God's glory is a manifestation of his Being. For God's People of old, it was chiefly in his power and majesty. But in Jesus it is chiefly God's immense love. The love of Christ is most forcefully manifested by his sufferings and death for mankind, which simultaneously manifests the love of the Father. In turn, the Father will manifest his love for the Son by the far-reaching effects of the resurrection and the exaltation at the Father's right, mighty and godlike beyond all estimation. 2) the theme of separation: made necessary for a while by his death. Jesus announces it most tenderly, using the term "children" (teknia), an expression found

in John's Gospel only here. 3) The theme of fraternal love: it returns over and over again in these farewell discourses, a last will and testament, as it were. The disciples are to imitate to the full his own love for them, heroic to the extreme, coming to expression by his life of utter service and total self-sacrifice. Such love would reveal the genuine disciple, as it revealed on the part of Jesus the true Being of God. Though love was enjoined on God's People of old, it is now new, both in its ideal (Jesus) and in its extent (universal).

**Second Reading:** God's end-kingdom in its glorious fulfillment. Entire creation is transformed, befitting regenerated humanity. All hostile forces (symbolized by the violent and raging waters of the sea) are put out of the way. New Jerusalem, the glorified People of God, shining bright in holiness, is now the Bride of Christ forever. In Christ, God and man are united in an everlasting nuptial bliss. All the evils of this mortal life have completely vanished forever. Joy, peace and the love of the Spirit reign for endless ages.

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (May 15, 1977)

**First Reading:** Acts 15: 1-2, 22-29  
**Second Reading:** Revelation 21: 10-14, 22-23  
**Gospel Reading:** Jn. 14: 23-29

**First Reading:** Paul was convinced that Christ's sacrifice of himself was all-sufficient for man's salvation, be they Jew or pagan. While the moral Law was perfected by his Coming (Mt. 5:17), the many laws regarding ceremonial worship, food restrictions, circumcision and a host of other legalities were meant to prepare men for his Coming (Gal. 4:23f), but were abrogated by his death and resurrection (Col. 2:16f; Hb. 8:10; 9:10). But some convert Jews began insisting on circumcision as a requisite for the convert pagan's salvation. Paul and Barnabas strenuously opposed this, and the matter was relayed to Jerusalem. There, the authorities in the Christian community decided the matter and an apostolic letter was sent to Antioch. Notice how the Apostles are fully convinced they act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas are fully vindicated in their views. Christ's salvific work is all sufficient for salvation, provided it is accepted by the individual. However, the pagan converts were requested to abstain from certain usages which were offensive to Jewish sensi-

tivity, living as they were in a mixed community. Three of the points regard abstinence from certain foods, and the last pertains to sexual unions within certain degrees of kinship, which was quite prevalent among the pagans. It was a local ordinance intended for the provinces of Asia Minor mentioned in the letter.

**Gospel Reading:** A passage full of theological import: 1) While awaiting Christ's glorious return, sincere lovers of him will observe his instructions, and thus be blessed with the stupendous gift of the divine indwelling involving a most intimate enjoyment of the Blessed Trinity, the Father giving them his Love (the Spirit), who together with Father and Son come to take up permanent abode in the heart. For lack of faith and obedience to Christ's message, worldlings will not enjoy it. 2) Christ's message of Good News is the Father's will for all men. Nothing more beneficial can be imagined. 3) Though Christ's mission is about to end, he promises the gift of the Paraclete, the Helper, who is sent in his name, that is, he will make known who Jesus really is (the name) and the fullness of his revealed message. 4) Shalom-peace is not merely the parting Oriental farewell phrase, but it is transformed by Jesus into a parting gift of himself (for he is our Peace: Eph. 2:14), a gift fraught with all possible blessings of peace, harmony and love. 5) If their love for Jesus is selfless, they will not grieve over his departure, but rejoice with him, for his mission is about to climax in glorification and exaltation. 6) Although Father and Son are one in Being (10:30), the Father is the supreme goal of Jesus life, and the source from which he proceeded. To do his will in the work of salvation is his whole ambition. His whole being is a going to the Father. In this sense the Father is greater. 7) Fulfillment of his words will corroborate his divine knowledge and be an added proof of his mission.

**Second Reading:** A dazzling vision of the glorified People of God, the New Jerusalem, transfigured by the very glory of God, glittering like diamonds as was the throne of God in 4:3. Square is the Greek symbol of perfection as is the number twelve for the Semite, hence representing both the Greek and the Jewish world. Those who dwell in the New Jerusalem are symbolized by the representative names of Israel's twelve tribes and the Lamb's twelve apostles, thus combining into one the entire regenerated humanity of old and new covenants. Angelic guardians complete the picture. The temple which indicated God's presence to the People of old, gives way to the Reality and the Presence of God himself and the Lamb, in the glory of the beatific vision. Created light is now superfluous, for God is Light itself, beamed through the Triumphant Lamb of God. What hope this vision inspires!

**SOLEMNITY OF THE LORD'S ASCENSION****(May 22, 1977)**

**First Reading:** Acts 1: 1-11  
**Second Reading:** Ephesians 1: 17-23  
**Gospel Reading:** Luke 24: 46-53

**First Reading:** The period after the resurrection was of great importance for the chosen band. Jesus continued to give them proofs of his being alive, so that they would be staunch witnesses of that fact. He also concentrated on the special preparation needed for their role in the believing community where God would reign. Furthermore, he impressed upon them the importance of the Spirit, the promised Gift of the Father, in which they would be invested (baptized). "Forty days" is a symbolic number used by Luke as often in the Old Testament for a definite period of preparation for a specific work, as, for example, Moses receiving divine instructions on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:18).

Jesus also corrects their idea of a temporal kingdom and an imminent Parousia. At first there lay before them the gigantic task of bearing witness to all nations on the earth, something they could only perform properly when endowed with the Spirit. In describing the Ascension, Luke is emphasizing the parting of the Lord's visible presence. His manner of describing it belongs to his literary techniques as author, to drive home his point. Both Luke and John in their gospel accounts give the impression that Easter and Ascension took place on the same day, but that is a theological perspective. Here in the Acts, Luke's perspective is symbolic and may be connected with the end of the forty days when Moses received the Law, while the forty days after the resurrection are in preparation for the New Law of Love which is the gift of the Spirit.

**Gospel Reading:** In giving his last injunction to his chosen ones, the Lord 1) reminds them that his passion and death were foretold, and thus were in the plan of God for man's salvation, 2) he sends them out in his name and authority, with a message of reconciliation coupled with a call for penance for sin. 3) He orders them to begin with the chosen people at Jerusalem, but not before they were invested with the Father's Promise, the mighty Spirit, by whom they would be enabled to be his staunch witnesses.

The Lord's last gesture was one of priestly blessing (see Sir. 50:20). Then he was taken from them visibly. Luke projects all this on the day of the resurrection from his theological perspective, so

that he can end his gospel in Jerusalem where it began, namely, in the temple, where God dwelt with men. Only now it is the spiritual Temple, the Lord Jesus, in whom all continue to praise the Father. Their final act is one of adoration of him in whom they now believe, and of joy, in accordance with the word of Jesus in Jn. 14:28, and in acceptance of their noble mission.

**Second Reading:** Paul's prayer for his Christians is intimately bound up with the Father, the Son and the gifts of the Spirit. Its object is that they clearly know God (wisdom) and appreciate his work in them (insight). Such insight involves a better understanding of their calling, a fuller appreciation of the riches of their inheritance, and a deeper grasp of God's power working within them. That power is identical with the power at work in Christ's resurrection, his exaltation at God's right hand, making him superior to every possible created being, giving him universal dominion, and thus supremely exalted, constituting him Head of the Church. Thus the future of the Christian is inconceivably great.

The Church is both the Body of Christ and his fullness. The word "fullness" in all five passages where it occurs in the captivity letters is used to signify with great emphasis the concentration of the sanctifying power of God (Cerfaux). This has been concentrated in Christ, God's primordial sacrament for man's salvation, and he in turn concentrated it in his Body-person, the Church, which as his extension on earth is likewise the fundamental sacrament which communicates Christ to men (by various sacramental rites). God is the fullness which lives in Christ, and eventually will replenish regenerated redeemed humanity (Rev. 21:22-24).

## PENTECOST SUNDAY

(May 29, 1977)

**First Reading:** Acts 2: 1-11

**Second Reading:** First Corinthians 12: 3b-7.12-13

**Gospel Reading:** John 20: 19-23

**First Reading:** Pentecost in Israel was a harvest festival (Ex. 23:16). Thus it symbolized fulfillment, and from that aspect St. Luke depicts the outpouring of the Spirit, for it is the fulfillment of the salvific work of Jesus. It was celebrated seven weeks or fifty days after Passover, and hence was called pentecosté, the Greek word for fifty. Fifty was the sacred number of the jubilee year, which signalled the remission of all debts and a new start

for the People of God (Lev. 25:6). It is these theological dimensions of Pentecost that Luke is presenting rather than any stress on chronology, for Pentecost, the fulfillment of Christ's Paschal Mystery, is when the believing community came alive with the life of the Spirit of Christ.

The Promised Gift is that of the invisible Spirit of God himself (v. 4) who is communicated to all present. Clearly to be distinguished from this divine Gift is the visible and ostensible manifestation of his Presence in the charism of tongues poured out on those present. In this scene, the object of the charism of tongues is the public praise and the extolling of God for his marvelous deeds (v. 11), above all for the Paschal Mystery of the Savior, the fruit of which is the gift of the Spirit. Luke is also possibly giving us an idealized picture of the Early Church, comprising events that happened over a longer period of time. The essential message is that the Spirit of God is the great Gift of the Father and the Son for the final age.

By the power of this Spirit, the Apostles are endowed from on high to proclaim everywhere (with tongues of fire!) to all nations the mighty salvific work of God. Luke's "table of nations" is a selection of peoples of the then known Mediterranean world, symbolizing all nations united in the one community of Christ by and in his Spirit, the Bond of union and love. Thus the events at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) are reversed. Salvation is universal, for all nations, but gained by belonging to the New People of God.

Wind, fire, tongues (for speech) all symbolize the Spirit. In both Hebrew and Greek, spirit and wind are identical terms (*ruach*, *pneuma*), though Luke uses a slightly different word here, yet from the same root. John the Baptizer foretold that Jesus would immerse his followers in Spirit and fire (Lk. 3:16). Tongues, coming from a central source, indicate that one and the same divine Spirit is imparted to all, to speak the new language of the Spirit to the world, the message of love concerning Christ and his universal salvific work, to which the Spirit bears witness.

**Gospel Reading:** Since the outpouring of the Spirit climaxes the entire salvific work of Jesus or his Paschal Mystery, John wishes to portray this close connection between the giving of the Spirit and the resurrection-event before bringing his gospel-account to a close (originally ch. 20). It is not the time element that John is indicating but a theological dimension (which differs from Luke's in Acts ch. 2). In order that the Apostles (that is, those sent, from the Greek word "apostello", to send) carry out the identical mission that Jesus received from the Father, he breathes into them the Spirit (symbolized by the breath of Jesus), so that they in turn as



other Christs continue his work of transforming the world by cleansing it from sin, and re-creating it in the Spirit (see Gen. 2:1). Since the mandate of Christ is both to forgive and to retain sin, the duty incumbent on the ministers of Christ is to judge the sins of the believers. But one cannot judge without the believers making known their sins, or confessing them.

**Second Reading:** A passage rich in content. Paul writes to the Corinthian community which experienced the abundance of the Spirit's charismatic outpouring. Yet he makes that the primary activity of the indwelling Spirit is to enable the Christian to confess the divinity and sovereignty of Jesus (12:3). Only then does he mention the gifts of the Spirit (which include here various ministries and functions). Moreover, it is the same identical Spirit at work in everyone, imparting his gifts to the individual members as he pleases, but all for the benefit of the whole body (v. 7). Comparing the Body of Christ with the human body, Paul shows the necessity of variety of functions. That all should have the same function is against the very notion of an organized body. So also in the Body of Christ, each member contributes in his own way and by means of his particular gift to the good of the whole community. What one member accomplishes affects all the others.

The reality of our incorporation into the Body-Person of Christ is clearly asserted by authors today. "Baptism incorporates the Christian into the risen, glorified Body of Christ, so that the Church is the manifestation and extension of the Lord's Body in this world. Its members share in the life of the Risen Lord" (Jerome Bibl. Comm.). Paul can speak of "drinking of the Spirit" since Jesus referred to the Spirit as the "Living Water" (Jn. 4:10; 7:38f).

## II. HOMILIES

### FLORES DE MAYO (For the month of May)

It is a beautiful and meaningful custom to bring flowers to the shrine of our Blessed Mother during the month of May which is devoted to her special honor. What may seem puerile to the sophisticated is a custom of deep significance and worthy of every child of God. What son is not pleased when honor is done to his mother? And is the Son of Mary less pleased when his brothers and sisters honor their Mother and his?

In the gift of flowers, the giver intends to give joy to her who is the loving Mother of all God's children. Flowers are the beautiful objects of God's creation, and they mirror the loveliness of the heavenly Father. Mary's children come to offer these beauties of God's creation to show their love by a humble act of homage. Our Lady is not particular about the costliness of the flowers. It is just the fact that her children take the trouble to gather them out of love to bring them to her shrine that gives her joy.

But there is a deeper significance. The giver wishes to give himself along with the gift of flowers. It is a renewal of a pledge to be the faithful children of her who gave us Jesus, Son of God, Savior and Redeemer. In the flowers we offer ourselves with confidence that in accepting our gifts, Mary will keep us safe from all the harm and all the wiles of the Evil One. Moreover, we trust that Mary will win for us all the graces we need, provided we offer our flowers and our hearts with good intention, pure minds, free of all hatred of neighbor. To lack these dispositions in offering our flowers would not please the Mother of God at all.

Even the flowers are symbolic, for many of them call to mind some virtue that is eminent in Mary and ought to be our aim and striving also. The rose stands for love, love of God and genuine love of one's neighbor, for its fragrance spreads in all directions. The lily and those flowers that resemble it stand for purity, that virtue so dear to the Immaculate One. The humble daisies and the asters signify simplicity and humility, virtues so prominent in Mary's life. The buoganvillas remind us of Mary's generosity and fidelity. Even the colors of the flowers symbolize various virtues in the minds of the faithful.

In offering our flowers, then, we are pledging to practice those virtues which they symbolize. Mary's life was a magnificent bouquet of virtues that delighted the heart of her divine Son, and rose up as a fragrant offering to the most Blessed Trinity. Children offering these flowers can represent their parents and brothers and sisters, and thus commend the entire family to Mary's care, pledging that they will endeavor to live those virtues which made Mary's life so pleasing to God.

(Note: Topics for homilies on these occasions could be some thoughts on the individual meaning of the flowers; again, one could take various invocations of the Litany of the Bl. Virgin especially the last twelve. Or again, a different scene of Mary's life could be reflected in different flowers, for succeeding occasions).

**SECURE IN THE HANDS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

**May 1, 1977: Fourth Sunday of Easter.**

**The Human Situation:** Everyone seeks security. That is why the laborer allows part of his salary to be deducted each month, so that he can eventually enjoy Social Security in an emergency. That is why people pay a monthly premium when taking out various insurance policies, so that they have the assurance to meet unexpected situations such as sickness or accident, should they arise. That is why the employee keeps faithfully at his job for long years, so as to be able to retire with a suitable pension when the time comes. All that gives a man a feeling of security for this life. What will give security for the life to come?

**The Good News:** The Christian enjoys the greatest security for this life and the life to come in the knowledge that the Good Shepherd knows him and that he is in his hands. The Good Shepherd knows his every need and longing, and has the keenest interest in each and every individual for which he died. This is the message of today's gospel when Jesus says: I know my sheep, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. In the hands of the Good Shepherd we are entirely safe, for they are the hands of the Omnipotent and all-knowing God. Jesus and the Father are caring for us.

But this care is not merely for this short and fleeting life, although here too his love manifests itself daily in countless ways. Yet, life on earth is a testing ground and it will have its ups and downs, its trials and sufferings. Yet, the Good Shepherd will always be there to turn to. In all these trials he is the anchor of hope, the source of strength. But the main purpose of the Good Shepherd goes far beyond helping one in this life's troubles. His aim is to impart life without any alloy of sorrow or pain, with no further fear of accident, sickness or death, life that is not fleeting or passing, life that has no end. This life that the Good Shepherd wishes to impart is the only life worthy of the name. That is why he gave himself up to death, in order to conquer death and impart life eternal to his sheep, by rising from the dead glorious and immortal, to give them a share of that immortal and glorious life which he possesses in fullest measure.

However, there is a condition, and that condition is that we hear his voice and follow him. To hear his voice, it is necessary to be willing to listen carefully amid all the noise and confusing clamor of the world, in order to be able to recognize the genuine

voice of Christ. He speaks clearly to us in his Gospel. He speaks clearly to us through those whom he has placed as shepherds over his flock, for he said: He who hears you, hears me (Jn. 13: 20). Then, after recognizing the voice of Christ it is necessary to follow the way he has laid out for us, for only then will we be secure. No one can steal a sheep from the all-watchful eyes of Christ. It is only the passions and the evil in a man that make him wander off for forbidden pastures that take him away from Christ. And even then, the Good Shepherd never ceases to search out the lost sheep to bring it back to himself and let it experience once more the security and the peace of being again in the embrace of Christ.

Christ found no better image to depict his continued care for us than that of the good shepherd. All the great figures of old whom God gave the care of his people to were shepherds: Abraham, Moses and David. A shepherd is not merely a leader, but one who cares for each little lamb of his flock with almost a mother's tenderness, protecting it that no hostile power carry it off. That is why Jesus entrusted his flock to Peter under the figure of a shepherd, and Paul calls those placed over the faithful by the same name (Acts 20:28). Through each of them Christ himself feeds and cares for his flock.

Father and Son are one in their love for man, in their continued concern for each one whom they have created according to their image and likeness. Father and Son are one in their great love for each human heart, to draw it to themselves in eternal love. Father and Son are one in letting no stone unturned to manifest that love all during life's journey. Father and Son are one in the infinite Spirit of Love which they wish to communicate in full to man, so that he shares with them their community of love.

**Our Response:** It is not always easy to listen to the voice of Christ. Our own will and spirit often pull in the opposite direction, like sheep are drawn toward poisonous pastures, so inviting and so promising. It will mean a determined conquering of passions and inordinate desires. It will mean the breaking of a will accustomed to sinful ways. Yet, the following of Christ is the only guarantee of happiness and security both in this life and in eternity. If we are willing to give up so much to have the benefits of social security and insurance policies, what folly it is not to be willing to give up what can only ruin our eternal security and well-being that never ends.

## UNSUNG HEROES

**May 8, 1977: Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**The Human Situation:** The world always celebrates its heroes and rightly so. Who does not feel inspired by the extraordinary efforts exerted by the men at Corregedor to hold the fort against all odds? Who does not admire the incredible endurance of the men who suffer as did the men on the Death March to Tariac? Every country has its heroes. They are the inspiration that goads on the youth to follow in their footsteps to accomplish great things.

**The Good News:** But there are also many unsung heroes known only to God. They are carrying out Jesus' commandment of love "to love one another as he has loved them", and this they endeavor to do to the utmost, cost what may. They may never make the headlines of the newspapers, nor Newswatch of the TV. The stage need not be the battlefield nor an olympic meet. It can be an ordinary home where a mother struggles against all odds to raise her family when the husband has been permanently disabled through sickness or accident. It can be many one of the many hospital staffs where doctors and nurses work round the clock for days on end, when an epidemic hits the place and there is great lack of proper help. It can be a selfless man or woman who risks life itself to save someone in extreme danger. It can be a lonely missionary at his station where the care of thousands of scattered Christians claims his endless attention as a true shepherd of his flock. Heroism does not depend on the place. It depends on a man's heart and mind and determination. Love is the driving power in each of these instances and countless others. To love one's fellowman as Christ loved us means nothing less than to love even unto death.

To care for an aged parent who has become feeble-minded and burdensome demands love that may reach heroic heights. To remain faithful to a wife whose incurable disease renders her helpless to be the counterpart in life that every husband needs, will call for great supernatural love, because man's nature alone could not bear it. The news media abound in reports of accidents, fires, violence, hold-ups, but seldom do they display the men and women who could inspire the rest of their fellowmen by their lives of heroic love. And this is what the world needs, not news of violence and hatred. The news media in heaven will give us one surprise after another of noble men and women who took to heart the last will and testament of a loving Savior: Love one another as I have loved you.

In July 1941 in a Nazi concentration camp, a prisoner had escaped from Block 14. The camp commander announced that if the prisoner were not back in 24 hours, ten of the six hundred men of that Block, selected at random, would be executed in reprisal. From morning till evening the entire Block was made to stand in the burning heat of the sun and many collapsed during the day. At six in the evening the Colonel in charge began to pick the ten men at random. One of them who had been singled out cried out in agony: "My wife! My poor children"! At that moment Franciscan Father Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward, offering to take the place of the agonizing husband. The entire Block was stunned at such selfless heroism. Glaring at the priest, the Colonel muttered: "Are you crazy?" "No," replied the priest, "but I am alone in the world and this man has a family to live for." The Colonel's gaze faltered. "Accepted" he muttered, and turned away. Father Kolbe strode up beaming with joy, and took the place of the amazed father and husband. He gave his life for him. He love him as Christ had loved in the first place.

**Our Response:** Such opportunities do not come to everyone, but the all-seeing eye of God is well aware of the thousand and one opportunities to do one's duty well, day after day and week after week. Even in the little things of life, love can manifest itself to a very high degree. Love is inventive. It finds ways and means to give itself to others to come to their aid.

## THE CHRISTIAN'S HIDDEN TREASURE

May 15, 1977: Sixth Sunday of Easter

**The Human Situation:** Some years ago, a shepherd lad, searching along the shores of the Dead Sea in Palestine for a stray goat that had scurried up a steep cliff, followed the goat only to see it disappear into a cave. Entering the cave, the lad found large jars, some broken, others still intact, containing rolled up scrolls with Hebrew writing on them. Unaware of their identity and value, the lad stuffed as many as he could into the long pockets of his flowing garment, and later sold them for a very meager price in Bethlehem to a dealer. Those documents proved to be the famous Dead Sea Scrolls which have caused such a sensation in recent years, and they eventually sold for the equivalent of over two million pesos. The lad had no idea of the treasure he was carrying.

**The Good News:** Many Christians are totally unaware of the priceless treasure they are carrying with them. Nobody would believe it if the Lord himself had not said so in plain words in today's

Gospel: "Any one who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him always". This is the stupendous mystery of the divine Indwelling of the Father and the Son who are always united with their Spirit of Love, the Indwelling of the most blessed Trinity in the heart of little man. The sensual man is little affected by this word of the Lord, and the carnal man even less so, for their thoughts and desires lie in a different direction. But to the sincere follower of Christ, the divine Indwelling is an overwhelming reality, great in its potential for each individual Christian. It is his greatest Treasure.

This Treasure is not appreciated by most Christians because many do not take the trouble to ponder on it. If we do not ponder on this marvellous reality, this Treasure we carry within us, it will evidently not be valued as it ought to be, just like the shepherd lad who was unaware of the real value of the treasure he carried with him. Even the majority of Christians think of God usually as enthroned in heaven above, far away, surrounded by the heavenly court. Yet our Lord tells us in today's gospel, that for those who truly love him and endeavor to live his gospel-message, the infinite God, holy and triune, Father, Son and Spirit, have taken up a permanent abode right within them. This is not something we can conger up in our imagination. It is a reality to be accepted on divine faith, relying solely on the word of Jesus who revealed in plainest terms that it is really so. And the Scripture tells us that "the just man lives by faith". It is this faith in the divine Indwelling that ought to be fostered and increased. It is not a matter of feeling God's presence; it is a matter of believing it with our whole heart, and appreciating it. Those who do so will experience the effects of his Presence by the joy of spirit and the peace of heart which is theirs.

There are various ways to foster awareness of this heavenly Treasure. We can remind ourselves of it when making the sign of the cross attentively and deliberately. By becoming more aware of the indwelling holy Trinity one become more aware of his own Christian dignity to be the dwelling place of Father, Son and Spirit, the community of love. That growing awareness will urge him on to avoid offending such a holy and loving divine Guest, by turning away from anything in words or deeds that offend the good God. Then again, the peace and joy that he experiences in the awareness of his divine Treasure will manifest itself to others around him, so that they will see his good works and glorify God whom he bears within him.

An example of what youths aware of their Christian dignity can do is what took place in June 1976. Youth leaders represent-

ing over one hundred Kabataan Barangay units of four metropolitan cities and thirteen municipalities petitioned the government to enforce strictly all laws regarding beer gardens, cocktail lounges, saunas and massage clinics in the vicinity of schools, churches and similar institutions, since they realized they were a vicious threat to the morals of youth and people in general. This concentrated effort and outspoken petition made with courage and righteous indignation had a decided effect. It was one of the most important causes for the improvement of existing conditions in those places.

**Our Response:** Why does God desire to be so close to the heart of little man? Because he loves him immensely. He died for him to save him from eternal frustration. He does not merely live enthroned high above, but is enthroned deep in the heart of man as a community of Love: Father, Son, and Spirit, awaiting our response of love. Ought not the heart of man respond to such love of his God?

## **ALL GLORY AND HONOR BE TO CHRIST, SAVIOR OF THE WORLD**

**May 22, 1977: Solemnity of the Lord's Ascension.**

The glorious feast of the Ascension closes the cycle of Christ's visible life on earth. From now on he will live unseen in the midst of the believing community, but dynamically active through his Spirit, and ever present in the most holy Sacrament of the altar. Two themes stand out in the celebration of today's feast: the Father's full acceptance of his Son's life of sacrifice, and the powerful activity of the glorified Christ at the Father's right hand.

Acceptance by the Father marks the summit of all his earthly endeavors. His own people in their leaders had dubbed him a malefactor and false pretender, condemned him as a criminal and handed him over to the pagan authorities. Roman justice in cowardice failed to change the verdict, and Pilate sent him to the horrible death on the cross. Earth rejected its only salvation, but all heaven vindicated the incarnate Son of God, Savior and King of the universe. In his glorious ascension he is exalted above all the choirs of angels and above the entire universe of created intelligences, acknowledged by all heaven as the victorious Lamb of God worthy of all adoration, praise and glory.



Now his tears of childhood days win tears of repentance for countless sinners the world over, who reflect in deep compunction on the humiliation of him who, though in the form of God, deigned to become a slave for love of them. Now his youthful victory over himself and his noble continence win the victory for youth in every situation and temptation, so that they find ways and means to lead a life worthy of the sons of God. Now his labors for long years at the carpenter's bench obtain courage and endurance for men in every walk of life who labor and toil to make a decent living for themselves and their families, and thus come to their heavenly reward. Now his long hours of healing the sick and preaching the word of God give energy and zeal to his ministers and countless witnesses over the globe, so that they can continue to spread the kingdom which he inaugurated, and thus offer men the means of salvation. Now his awful sufferings and cruel death on the wood of the cross win perseverance for mortal man in all his sufferings, and give him hope in the throes of death, so that they too may share in the glory he has received from the Father, as a reward for his life of love and submission to the will of God. Now Christ is vindicated, and lives forever in the glory of the Father.

At the throne of God Christ is now the great High Priest. Having been lifted up in glory, he is drawing all to himself to form one glorious community of love, modelled on the supreme community of love of the most Blessed Trinity. Continually he is interceding for his brothers and sisters still in the pilgrimage of earth's journey. Continually he stays the hand of the Father from severely chastising men who utterly forget the law of love, and sin fearfully against one another. Continually he obtains mercy for man by offering himself as a perpetual fragrant sacrifice, while on earth countless priests are making the identical offering of him day after day to glorify the Father through the Lamb's clean oblation. From the Father he receives the supreme Gift and Promise of the Father: the Spirit, in order to pour him out on all who accept his gospel message and put it into practice in their lives. Through his Spirit he himself continues to live in the Church, guiding and leading it to its destined goal, for he promised to be with her all times even to the consummation of the world.

Today, the entire Church triumphant sings a mighty hymn of praise to him to whom they owe all that they have in the realm

above. Today the company of faithful departed lifts up their voices in joyful expectation, to share the glory that is his and which he won for them who remained faithful to him throughout life, despite the weaknesses of human frailty. Today the militant Church on earth celebrates its Savior who deigned to live a humble life here below in order to teach all mankind true and lasting values, and the only way to lasting happiness. Today all creation joins in one powerful hymn of love and thanksgiving, resounding throughout the universe: All glory to Jesus, Incarnate Son of God, Son of the Virgin Mary, our Savior, our Brother and our God. To him with the Father and the Holy Spirit be everlasting glory and honor. Amen.

### **PENTECOST SUNDAY**

**(May 29, 1977)**

The pointers given in the biblical notes of all three readings for this Sunday offer ample material for homilies.

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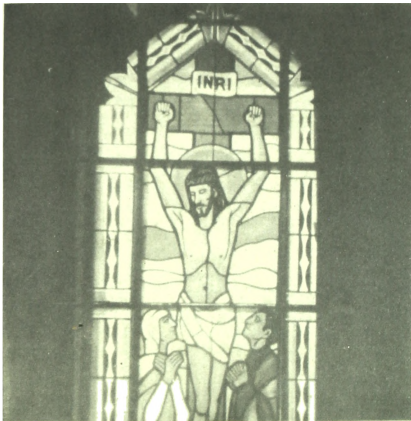
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