

PRIESTLY HOLINESS

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PRIESTLY HOLINESS

BY

ARCHBISHOP MARCEL LEFEBVRE

TEXTS COMPILED BY

FR. PATRICK TROADEC

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“Your vocation is beautiful, my dear friends. Love your vocation, deepen your understanding of your vocation. May it be your whole life; may it be a transformation of your soul in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre,
Sermon, Flavigny, February 1, 1988

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BY FR. PATRICK TROADEC

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PREFACE

BY HIS EXCELLENCY BERNARD FELLAY
SUPERIOR GENERAL
OF THE PRIESTLY SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X

After the posthumous book of Archbishop Lefebvre, *The Mass of All Time*, we offer now its counterpart, *Priestly Holiness*. Indeed, the Mass gives honor to God and applies the merits of Jesus Christ to our souls, but there can be no Mass without the priesthood. The two terms *priest* and *sacrifice* are inseparable. There is no priest without a sacrifice, and no sacrifice without a priest. However, we need to go one step further. It is not enough that there be priests; those priests have to be holy! As St. Pius X said, “Sanctity alone makes us what our divine vocation demands, men crucified to the world and to whom the world has been crucified, in the words of St. Paul (*II Cor. 6:5 ff*); men who seek only heavenly things and strive by every means to lead others to them.”¹

No one understood this better than Archbishop Lefebvre when he declared, “What the Church needs, what the people long for, are priests of God: priests who express God by their whole being, by their whole attitude, by their whole manner of acting, by their every word. That is what the faithful need.”² Why did the Church spread the way She did? It was because

1 Exhortation *Hærent Animo*, 1908.

2 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

PREFACE

of the holiness of Her priests. You can see the joy of the parishioners or the villagers when they tell you, ‘Ah! We have a holy priest!’ That is all the apologetics they need. A holy priest really is the expression of Catholicism. He is the sign that God is there.”³

This same need for priestly holiness is what we call to mind every day in the prayer, “Lord, grant us priests; Lord, grant us holy priests; Lord, grant us many holy priests.”

This book draws out the profound meaning of such a prayer by placing before our eyes the greatness of the priestly vocation and also what it demands. The priestly apostolate consists in communicating grace to souls, which is an essentially supernatural action, so that by its very nature it requires union with God before contact with men. Archbishop Lefebvre constantly insisted on this point.

The passages brought together in this volume constitute a veritable *Summa* of the priesthood, independent of time and place, yet most of the texts do emerge from the painful context of the post-conciliar crisis. As early as the 1970’s, Archbishop Lefebvre was denouncing a new conception of the priesthood which was then spreading to every level of the Church, with the tragic consequences we can see all around us. Some of the circumstances have changed, but a good many of his remarks could have been uttered today. This book is an invitation to breathe in those ultimate principles which guided Archbishop Lefebvre so that we, too, might remain faithful to the path he traced out for us.

The last chapter, dedicated to the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, is a beautiful encouragement for all of its members to maintain their profound attachment. The Priestly Society of Saint Pius X is a work of the Church raised up by Providence as a beacon of Catholic Tradition; its mission both yesterday

3 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 26, 1976.

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and today is to defend and protect the priesthood and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in all their splendor and their doctrinal purity. We will only be convincing if we have the determination, continually renewed, to belong only to our Lord and to remain faithful to our statutes officially approved by the legitimate authorities of the Church.

This book is intended especially for priests and future priests of our Society, yet I wish that it might also receive a generous welcome from all of Tradition and spread likewise among the diocesan clergy. Catholic laymen as well may draw invaluable benefit from this book, Archbishop Lefebvre had such a gift for placing the divine within reach of all his listeners. There is a whole spirituality waiting here to be discovered, echoing that of *The Mass of All Time*.

I am happy that this work should appear for the one hundredth anniversary of the encyclical on the priesthood, *Hærent Animo*, by St. Pius X, the patron saint of our dear Society. Archbishop Lefebvre truly lived and breathed by the ideal of that holy pope, “*to restore all things in Christ.*” May this ideal become our own.

May our Lady, Queen of Apostles and of Confessors, deign to bless this work and make it an instrument of the grace of her divine Son, so that priests might always increase in number and in holiness, for the greater glory of God and of His Church.

FOREWORD

BY FR. PATRICK TROADEC

“Our first and chief concern is that all who are invested with the priestly ministry should be in every way fitted for the discharge of their responsibilities. For we are fully convinced that it is here that hope lies for the welfare and progress of religious life.”¹ This preoccupation of St. Pius X was likewise that of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. The prelate spent his life exhorting his priests and seminarians to holiness, and in his *Spiritual Journey* he admitted, “I have always been haunted by this desire to point out the paths of the true sanctification of the priest, based on the fundamental principles of Catholic doctrine on Christian and priestly holiness.”

After spending eleven years forming the French-speaking seminarians of the Society of Saint Pius X at Flavigny-sur-Ozerain (Côte d’Or), I wanted to gather in a single volume the greater part of what Archbishop Lefebvre had to say about the priesthood.

His words – retreats, sermons, conferences – are an inexhaustible source of meditation on the role of the priest and on the qualities which he must possess in order to fulfill his mission within the Church and in the world. They give

1 Pius X, *Hærent Animo*.

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at the same time the principles of a solid interior life – not merely built on a handful of pious exercises – as well as the basis of any action that is genuinely Catholic. Indeed, every soul that comes into this world has the vocation of becoming another Christ – not outwardly but inwardly, modeling our souls on His own. Any Catholic who wishes to grow in virtue is going to find in the present volume a veritable blueprint of the Christian life and the apostolate.

We have selected passages from four books, ten letters, 82 conferences, and 123 sermons of Archbishop Lefebvre, most of them previously unpublished. They were written or delivered between 1938 and 1991 and so express the fidelity of the prelate to the immutable doctrine of the Church. However, most of them date from the foundation of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X. These texts have been brought together and organized by theme and so express the clarity, limpidity and rigor of the prelate's thought.² They evoke St. Thomas Aquinas and the Council of Trent, but also the pontifical, the missal, the ritual, canon law, and the writings of the saints – so many sources which draw the reader into an atmosphere of piety and light. Brief introductions have been added in order to give context and offer greater ease of reading. In addition, extracts from papal encyclicals or writings of the Fathers, provided as footnotes, are designed to reinforce or give more detail to the remarks of Archbishop Lefebvre.

We have organized this selection of texts in three distinct parts, meant to flow naturally into one another.

The first part follows the seminarians from the beginning of their vocation all the way to their priestly ordination. It offers an insight into the nature of a vocation, into seminary life, and the different orders attained by the future

² Occasional repetitions in the various conferences or writings of Archbishop Lefebvre have been slightly modified for context.

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priests, presenting the Church's own pedagogy in guiding Her Levites toward the altar of sacrifice. We find a brief explanation of ceremonies followed by extremely profound spiritual considerations, expressed in very simple language. Archbishop Lefebvre truly lived and breathed the truths of the faith and he had the ability to place the very highest of them within our reach.

The second part treats of the priesthood itself. It forms the heart of the work. After defining what a priest is, Archbishop Lefebvre considers him in his relation with God and with men. Sent by God, he has to fortify his interior life by making the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass the sun and center of his day: "The priest is made for the sacrifice above all else, and that is why the new priests offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with the bishop, on the very day of their ordination."³ At the altar, the priest is another Christ: "Since he is another Christ, he should also have very precise qualities in his soul in order to receive the graces inherent to his vocation."⁴ This part explains in what those qualities or virtues consist. Priests will find there what the Church expects of them, whereas Catholic parents will discover what virtues they need to pass on to their children. Pope Pius XII affirmed, "Every Christian mother and father, whatever their social status, must pray to God to make them worthy to have at least one of their children called to His service."⁵ Yet parents have to foster certain virtues in their children if they want that grace to be effective.

All in giving the first place to the interior life, Archbishop Lefebvre does not forget the vast ministry which our Lord has confided to His priests: "God became man Himself and willed that it be men like us – priests, His apostles – who

3 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

4 Priestly ordination, Ecône, September 20, 1980.

5 Pius XII, Exhortation *Menti Nostræ*, September 23, 1950.

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should convert the whole world. The clergy is therefore responsible for the salvation of souls.”⁶ By his teaching, by the administering of the sacraments and by the governing of souls, the priest leads to eternal blessedness the faithful committed to his charge. Once more, this part of the book offers matter for reflection able to nourish our faith along with some very practical advice. Priests tempted by activism, presumption or discouragement will find in these lines both light and strength to resist.

This book would have ended there if a new kind of priest had not appeared in the 1970’s, a priest turned toward the world more than toward God, claiming to draw nearer to his fellow man yet gradually losing sight of his supernatural mission. Archbishop Lefebvre rose up to denounce this new model of the priesthood. This tragedy is described in the third part. The tone of the prelate changes. He is no longer the spiritual father nourishing the souls of his children, but the bishop who “*reproves, entreats, rebukes*” (*II Tim. 2:2*), putting us on our guard against a spirit of novelty totally foreign to the Church. A lapidary expression contains the essential thinking of the defender of the faith: “We may say in all truth that seminaries were committing suicide the day they broke the altar of sacrifice and replaced it with a supper table.”⁷ Archbishop Lefebvre was profoundly saddened but refused to be discouraged, as we can see by these words from the heart: “As for me, I will not accept defeat; I will not simply stand by and watch the agony of my Mother the Holy Church. We have to rebuild the fallen citadels, reconstruct the bastions of the faith.”⁸ That was his vision in founding the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X and he later declared, “We hope that the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X is

6 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1975.

7 Conference, archives of the seminary of Ecône.

8 *They Have Uncrowned Him*, p. 250, 251.

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willed by God so that priestly holiness might still remain in the world. May our Society be a light in the world so that, by the grace of God, all those who, at our side, have understood the necessity of living the precepts of the Gospel, might seek holiness through prayer, renouncement, self-denial, and the cross. My dear friends, that is our *raison d'être*. If we lose the path to holiness, we lose our *raison d'être*.”⁹ This last section will help those who do not know the Society of Saint Pius X, or who know it too little, to discover its beautiful ideal, the essential principles of its statutes and its role within the Church. It will show young men and women the meaning of the combat led by Archbishop Lefebvre. It will also enlighten the priests who, in increasing numbers, are starting to ask questions about the crisis in the priesthood, both its causes and its remedies. The witness of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre will give them points of reference and encourage them to draw abundantly on the treasure of Tradition in order to acquire that priestly holiness of which the world is so in need.

We hope that this book will be a guide and a consolation for priests, seminarians and their families, but also for all those who pray and offer themselves generously for priests. Finally, we hope that it will foster the development of many holy vocations.

9 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

INTRODUCTION

THE MAGNIFICENT HERITAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

The history of Creation and of the human race is the story of the charity of God. The *Credo* is none other than a hymn to the charity of God. And this charity of God toward men is tied very intimately to the priesthood. Who would deny it? Our proof is the whole history of man's Redemption.

In His immense charity, God willed that all the souls which He created might be united with Him in a way that is ineffable, a way truly divine, and that they might share in His life, His very divinity, for all eternity. First, however, He willed to sound the hearts of our first parents in order to see if they were truly docile to Him. Alas, our first parents disobeyed Him, turned away from Him, and they dragged down with them all of the generations to come.

When angels make a decision, it is forever; but man lives within time and so there was a hope of his recovery. He was capable of receiving the mercy of God. For if there is one thing even greater than charity, it is mercy. Mercy consists in reaching out to the sinner, to one suffering under sin, and bringing him back to God. So the Son of God decided to become incarnate and to offer Himself to God in order to redeem mankind from sin. He willed to shed His blood in order to give us back divine life: that extraordinary life

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meant for every one of us and made possible in us by grace.

A single word, a single act of love from our Lord Jesus Christ Incarnate would have been enough to redeem us all, but our Lord willed to prove His love in a more visible manner, by shedding His blood for us. And He did not will to do so for His own generation only. He came to save all of mankind and all of the generations to come.

In His charity for us, He decided to select certain men whom He would make like to Himself, to whom He would give that extraordinary power of being other Christs: offering themselves with Him in immolation on the cross and at the same time continuing His Calvary, continuing His sacrifice, offering His blood, giving His body as nourishment for the faithful.

That is how He thought of priests. We are before a great mystery of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, a mystery of our faith: truly the *Mysterium fidei*.¹ What a sublime idea for God to have had: to will to associate with Himself poor sinful creatures, redeemed by His blood, marking them with the character of the priesthood and allowing them to pronounce the words that would continue His Redemption. It is tremendous!²

The mystery of the Church is something extraordinary. It is a creation of God's charity, one more proof that God loves us and that He loves us infinitely; for God made the Church in order to give Himself, in order to continue Himself throughout the ages. He gave Himself to His Spouse, the Church, and He gave Himself in all reality: He gave His body, His blood, His soul and His divinity. He confided them to the Church to continue that work of Redemption: to continue His Calvary, His sacrifice.³

1 Words pronounced at the consecration of the precious blood.

2 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1984.

3 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

INTRODUCTION

“*Do this in memory of Me*” (Lk. 22:19), continue My sacrifice – that is what our Lord said to His apostles at the Last Supper. The apostles became priests at that moment, sharers in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The priesthood is the great legacy of Jesus Christ. Our Lord placed His own priesthood in the hands of the Church, that it might continue until the end of time.⁴

The priest is an extraordinary gift which our Lord Jesus Christ has given to mankind. If we did not have priests, we would not have Holy Communion – we would not be able to receive our Lord Jesus Christ; we would not be able to receive the Holy Ghost through the sacraments. The priest is the channel by which the graces of our Lord Jesus Christ flow down from Heaven to sanctify us.⁵

Over the course of their various ordinations, seminarians receive from the Church, who is divine, all of the graces of the Holy Ghost to transform them into God, into our Lord Jesus Christ: divinizing them by giving them that life of God which is flowing ever more abundantly in them. The life of God circulates in them to the extent that they cooperate with grace, giving their souls to God, opening their souls to Him, pure and beautiful, in the simplicity of their heart. It flows into the souls of the seminarians through our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Church, through the divine sacrifice, through the sacraments, through prayer, through meditation. These are all channels of the life of our Lord, flooding them with the Holy Ghost, with the spirit of charity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church gives them to share truly in the eternity of God and in the gifts of God, which are unailing.⁶

4 Sermon, Auxerre, July 8, 1978.

5 Sermon, Lausanne, July 9, 1978.

6 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

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You who are going to touch holy things, and in particular the Holy Eucharist: how great should be your holiness!⁷ You who are on the path toward the priesthood, *sacerdos*, therefore *sacer dans*, who are going to give holy things: how great should be your awareness that you yourselves are something holy, from the moment you enter the clerical state! So listen well to the counsels which the Church offers you and try with the grace of God, through prayer, through meditation, while you are in the seminary – upheld by the prayer of all the faithful around you, of all those who love you, of all those who are following you – try to receive all of the graces which you are going to need in order to become holy and to be worthy of the ordinations which you are receiving.⁸

7 “By Holy Orders a man is appointed to the most august ministry of serving Christ Himself in the Sacrament of the altar. For this requires a greater inward holiness than that which is requisite for the religious state” (II^a II^o q. 184, a. 8, c., translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Brothers, 1911). “If, however, your work is to be blessed by God and produce abundant fruit, it must be rooted in holiness of life. Sanctity, as We said above, is the chief and most important endowment of the Catholic priest. Without it other gifts will not go far; with it, even supposing other gifts be meager, the priest can work marvels” (Pius XI, Encyclical *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*, December 20, 1935). “Be holy because, as you know, your ministry is holy!” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

8 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 13, 1982.

BOOK ONE

THE CLIMB TOWARD THE PRIESTHOOD

My desire is to place those who aspire to holiness – and especially to priestly holiness – in the best conditions for reaching it, and so it seems to me indispensable to evoke the particular role which the Virgin Mary fulfills, by the will of God, in this effort to attain holiness. I do so even before considering the different aspects of sanctity or the essential steps for reaching it.

The Word Incarnate, who had absolutely no need of a mother in order to come among us and work the Redemption, willed that His divine Person might receive a body and a soul in Mary's womb and that, during thirty of His thirty-three years, He might remain subject to His mother and be formed by Mary, in a way. How could we imagine that we ourselves, poor sinful creatures, have no need of Mary's powerful help to form in us the Christian and the priest?¹

1 *Spiritual Journey*, p. xi.

PART I

ENTERING THE SANCTUARY

CHAPTER 1

THE VOCATION

1. The Call of the Apostles and of Seminarists

Our Lord willed to join to Himself certain men whom He had selected to share in the work which He came to accomplish on earth. He said to them, “*Henceforth, I will make you fishers of men.*” And the Gospel says, “*Leaving everything, they followed Him*” (cf. Mt. 4:19-21).¹

Farther on, still in St. Matthew, it is written, “*Having called His twelve apostles together, He gave them power over unclean spirits. (...) The names of the twelve apostles are these...*” (Mt. 10:1-2).

All of the reflections that follow in Matthew chapter 10 are beautiful – admirable. It would be good to read them.

In the Gospel of St. Mark, there is a little detail which is not in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “*Going up a mountain, He called to Him men of His own choosing, and they came to Him*” (Mk. 3:13). It is a curious little detail which the Gospel gives us here about our Lord on the mountain. It is very beautiful. You know that, in Scripture, the mountain means Christ. We go to “that mountain which is Christ” just as we

1 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 27, 1982.

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ascend to the altar, which is also like a mountain representing Christ.² We climb toward Christ. He, too, wished to go onto a mountain when He called His apostles, as a way of expressing that separation from the world which He expected of them. He was asking them to leave the world in order to be more united to Him.³

What a lesson for seminarians in this Gospel where our Lord calls the apostles! “*Leaving everything*” (Lk. 5:11). They, too, leave behind their home, their parents, their family. They abandon everything to follow our Lord Jesus Christ and they come to the seminary as the apostles went to the seminary of our Lord, where they spent three years listening to Him, watching Him act, admiring His teaching and His virtues.

In the same way, the seminarians meditate on the teaching of our Lord passed down by the Holy Church of all time; they meditate on the virtues of our Lord and they strive to imitate them.⁴

“Love Me a little more than the others; give yourself to Me entirely, for your whole life.” Young men hear this call and they say to themselves, “Why couldn’t I follow our Lord more fully, more entirely, in order to go up and offer the Holy Sacrifice at the altar, and to offer myself as a victim also, alongside the Victim who is offering Himself on the altar?”⁵

2 “You have drawn near to the mountain of Sion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (...) and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant” (Heb. 12:22-24). “O God, who on the top of Mount Sinai didst give the Law to Moses, and didst, by means of Thy holy Angels, wondrously convey thither the body of blessed Catherine, Thy Virgin and Martyr: grant, we beseech Thee, that, through her merits and intercession, we may be able to reach that mountain which is Christ” (Collect of the feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria, November 25).

3 Retreat for the tonsure, Ecône, February 1, 1984.

4 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 27, 1982.

5 “Obedience to this invitation to imitate the mystery of which you are the ministers, means not merely to celebrate the sacrifice itself piously, but also to unite to the offering of Jesus the absolute donation of our own life” (Dom Columba Marmion, OSB, *Christ – The Ideal of the*

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That is the vocation of the priest.⁶

A young man says to himself one day while he is serving Mass, "Oh! I want to go up to the altar and offer Mass like my parish priest, like that priest whose Mass I served; it is so beautiful. I feel as though I were watching something divine. I want to do what he does; I want to give Christ to others." His vocation is born, without his realizing it. And then one day he makes the decision: "I want to be a priest."⁷

He has been called by the Holy Ghost to fulfill his vocation as a cleric of the Holy Church. He thought that he might share in the work of Redemption in his own small way. Drawn by this ideal, he comes to offer himself generously, courageously, abandoning any other dreams which he may have had when he was young. From now on he will be an instrument of God.⁸

Wherever God is present, He stirs up vocations. Souls who come into contact with Heaven have a desire for Heaven. Souls who come into contact with eternity lose their attraction to time. They lose their attraction to creatures, and that is what stirs up in them the desire to give themselves entirely to God – that is the real source of vocations.⁹

I think it would be ungrateful not to mention the role of the Christian family in the priestly or religious vocation. Indeed, we certainly owe a great deal of our vocation to our dear parents. They are the ones who sowed the seeds of a vocation in our souls by their example and their advice, by their prayers, by their fervor.¹⁰

Priest, trans. by Dom Matthew Dillon, B. Herder Book Co., 1953, p. 56).

6 Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 5, 1974.

7 Spiritual conference, Ecône, May 30, 1971.

8 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

9 Sermon, Ecône, April 3, 1976.

10 "Most of the saintly bishops and priests whose 'praise the Church declares,' owe the beginning of their vocation and their holiness to the example and teaching of a father strong in faith and manly virtues, of a pure and devoted mother, and of a family in which the love of God

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We need to hope for many Christian families who are ready to foster the development of strong, holy vocations.¹¹

Only by supernatural grace can a young man hear this call of God. That is why it is impossible for the world to understand it.

People in the world say, “What can he possibly have been thinking, to go and put on a cassock and lock himself up in a seminary! To refuse the pleasures of the senses, turn his back on riches, choose to live in poverty, choose to live only for others and not for himself – it is unbelievable, absolutely unbelievable! He has lost his mind...” People who have the spirit of the world cannot understand the vocation; for them it is a big mystery.

And yet, by giving this example, we may perhaps open the eyes of those who are living selfishly, and make them say to themselves, “If there are people who love God enough to leave everything and give themselves to our Lord, then I guess He must really exist!”¹²

2. Chosen by Our Lord and Called by the Church

It really is a mystery, how our Lord makes that choice of souls. It is clearly stated in the Gospel passages describing the vocation of the apostles: our Lord “*called to Him men*

and neighbor, joined with simplicity of life, has reigned supreme. (...) In such a home it is scarcely possible that, while all seek to copy their parents' example, none of the sons should listen to and accept the invitation of the Divine Master: ‘*Come ye after Me, and I will make you to be fishers of men*’ (Mt. 4:19). Blessed are those Christian parents who are able to accept without fear the vocations of their sons, and see in them a signal honor for their family and a mark of the special love and providence of our Lord. Still more blessed, if, as was often the case in ages of greater faith, they make such divine visitations the object of their earnest prayer” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

11 Sermon, Ecône, February 11, 1979.

12 Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 5, 1974.

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of His own choosing” (Mk. 3:13), and He chose the twelve. Today, our Lord calls the future priests in the same way.¹³

St. Paul insists on the fact that those who are called do not choose themselves: “Neither does any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called” (Heb. 5:4). The seminarians are called, and this call is what makes their vocation. It is not so much their own desire. Their own desire is like a consequence of the call of God. They can think back over the history of their vocation and realize that it is God who was silently calling them.¹⁴

Our Lord said, “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you” (Jn. 15:16). He has chosen us... and yet, my dear friends, do we not sometimes have the feeling that we have chosen ourselves? That we made our own decision about our vocation and that we said, “I want to be a priest, and I choose the priesthood?”

What an illusion! We would be forgetting the almighty power of God, who is leading us much more than we lead ourselves. Our Lord led us to the seminary and He chose us for this priestly vocation. So we are very much chosen and sent into the world by Him. That is a consolation for us. Truly, when we consider this vocation, which goes beyond anything a human creature could even imagine, we have confidence that He has chosen us and therefore that His hand will uphold us in our activity and in our priestly sanctification. For a priest, that is very reassuring.¹⁵

On the day of their tonsure, the seminarians make the call of God official by the call of the Church. That is why the bishop calls their name on that day and they answer, “I am present.”¹⁶ Yes, I want to give myself to God; I want to cling

13 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

14 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1986.

15 Priestly ordination, Ecône, September 20, 1980.

16 *Adsum*.

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to our Lord Jesus Christ; I want to serve Him. This word, *adsum*, is a little like what the Blessed Virgin herself said when the angel asked her to become the Mother of God. She spoke her *fiat*. On the day of the tonsure, the seminarians come forward to speak their own *fiat*.¹⁷

The Church then names them and consecrates them as members of the hierarchy. From now on they are no longer laymen but clerics, “*servants of our Lord Jesus Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God*” (I Cor. 4:1). What a tremendous vocation! What a sublime vocation!¹⁸

A vocation consists essentially in the call of the Church, which confirms the desire as well as the necessary dispositions for collaborating in the work of the Redemption, willed and carried out by our Lord to give glory to God and to save souls.

This desire to offer one’s life, to place it at the disposal of our Lord to help complete in some way the work of Redemption, is one of the first signs of the call of God, provided that the qualities of mind, heart and body are present as well.¹⁹

17 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1986.

18 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

19 Ultimately there are two signs of a vocation, namely: aptitude and upright intention. Aptitude is twofold: negative and positive. Negative aptitude consists in the current absence of irregularities or impediments. From this point of view, he is apt who has no obstacle before him blocking the path to the priesthood or the religious life. Positive aptitude is made up of the various qualities of the candidate, corresponding to the state of life to which he aspires, qualities which allow one to assume that the candidate will be able to carry out his various duties in a fitting manner and sanctify himself in that state. From a natural point of view, aptitude includes qualities of body, soul and family: sufficient health, a character open to formation, sufficient intelligence, upright judgment, and a healthy and honorable family. From a supernatural point of view, this aptitude consists especially in solid and stable virtues, particularly as regards chastity and obedience, as well as a life consistently guided by a spirit of faith and by love of God and neighbor. This aptitude is then seconded by an upright intention. To see things more clearly, there is no substitute for a brief stay in the seminary.

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However, it is up to the Church, by Her bishops and superiors, to judge the authenticity of the call, which begins on the inside but must then become public and effective.²⁰

A vocation is not some unusual or miraculous call, but the fulfillment of a Christian soul adhering to its Creator and Savior Jesus Christ with an undivided love and sharing His thirst for the salvation of souls.²¹

The future priest says to himself, “One day, I will be sent to souls in order to convert them, to give them the light they need, and to guide them toward eternal life.” What a joy to be able to share in the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His priestly mission! Is there anything more beautiful here below? The priestly mission is like nothing else on earth. Rejoice and give thanks to God.²²

Your vocation is beautiful, my dear friends. Love your vocation, deepen your understanding of your vocation. May it be your whole life and not just a concept, not just a seeking for knowledge but a transformation of your soul in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ,²³ in the most Holy Trinity.²⁴

20 Clerics are recruited by the regular call of ecclesiastical superiors who are, for their subjects, the only ones ultimately able to make a judgment about the virtues, qualities or aptitudes necessary for the divine vocation to the priesthood (*cf. Codex Iuris Canonici [CIC]*, can. 109, 968, 973, English translations from *The 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law*, Dr. Edward N. Peters, Curator, Ignatius Press, 2001).

21 Letter, Albano, October 17, 1983.

22 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1985.

23 “Be careful not to intellectualize Christianity too much, because it certainly includes a philosophy and a theology, but it transcends both of these; it is a religion, a personal connection to a Person – the Person of the Incarnate Word” (Fr. Victor-Alain Berto, letter to a seminarian, February 28, 1963).

24 Sermon, Flavigny, February 1, 1988.

CHAPTER 2

THE SEMINARY

The formation to become a priest lasts six years in the Society of Saint Pius X. It begins with a year of what is called spirituality, followed by two years of studies in philosophy and three in theology. Archbishop Lefebvre describes the spirit which should animate the seminarians throughout their priestly formation.

1. The Goal of the Seminary

In the psalms chosen for the ceremony of the taking of the cassock, it says, “*Blessed the man who has not received his soul in vain*” (Ps. 23:4). What profound words – words that make you stop and think! When young men come to the seminary, they are responding to this invitation from God and saying, “No, I do not want to have received my soul in vain.”¹

Seminarians who have understood the nature of their vocation come to the seminary the way monks come to a monastery: in order to seek God. When a young aspirant to Benedictine life presents himself, the Father Abbot asks him,

1 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1980.

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“Why have you come” to the monastery?² He answers, “To seek God.” Then the Father Abbot continues, “If truly you seek God,” then come, enter the monastery.³ The seminary is the same thing! The seminarian should have continually at heart to draw near to God, to know God as may know Him a creature transformed by grace, and whose soul has truly become divine by participation. Can we ever really say that we know God enough? Of course, the seminarians believe in God. Usually, their parents have spoken to them of God from the very beginning of their lives. But it is one thing to know that God exists, and another thing truly to draw near to Him. So that is what they come to look for in the seminary and that is in fact what holiness means, and perfection and justice.⁴

We need to seek after God constantly. Of course, we are not “seeking” Him the way they mean today. We know God. We know where He is – we believe in His presence everywhere – but we need to draw closer to Him, and as we do so we start to know ourselves better. We draw closer to God by knowledge, by faith, but also by the love of God.

You are going to tell me that love is not a source of knowledge. But it is: through love there comes a kind of understanding.⁵ For example, someone who loves his mother very much can guess what she is thinking – and the mother who loves her child knows her child perhaps better than anyone, precisely on account of her maternal love. It is exactly the same thing with the soul and God. The love which the soul has for God gives an understanding by *connaturality*, making us know God in a much more perfect way than we can know Him in books. That is why there can sometimes be very simple souls with a knowledge of God which is more

2 Rule of Saint Benedict, Ch. 60.

3 Cf. the Rule of Saint Benedict, Ch. 58.

4 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

5 *Summa Theologica*, I^a q. 43, a. 5, ad 2; I^a q. 64, a. 1.

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perfect than that of the greatest philosophers or theologians, even though they never studied theology or philosophy. That love makes us realize the greatness of God. It makes us respect God the way He ought to be respected and puts everything in its place. God gives His graces of light. That is something very important for our perfection, for our holiness. A seminarian should constantly be asking himself, "Am I truly seeking God in the seminary?"⁶

It is very grave to resist the call of God when you are in the seminary. When a seminarian is only giving himself halfway and does not really want that detachment from himself, he is running the risk of turning into a mediocre priest. And a mediocre priest is a poor priest, a sad priest, because there remains in him a love for the world even though he is wanting the love of God at the same time. He is always torn between those two longings. He does not quite know which one he prefers, God or the world; his own satisfactions, or those of God. That makes for a poor priest, and he runs the risk of falling some day when temptations come along, when difficulties come along, as so many priests have done since Vatican II.⁷

We have to be men of desire. A person cannot refuse the call of God indefinitely without placing himself always on the brink of falling, on the brink of letting go. The salvation of many souls hangs upon the quality of our gift of self. Tell yourselves this: "If I do not give myself entirely to God, if I do not truly have the desire to know Him and to love Him, how many souls will not know Him either!"⁸

6 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

7 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1977.

8 "Therefore, Mother Church primarily and anxiously wishes that in seminaries solid foundations be laid for the holiness that the minister of God must develop and practice all his life" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

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God is not calling you for yourselves only. He is calling you for all of the souls for whom you will have to sacrifice yourselves, first by the renouncement of your own will, by your prayers – especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass – and then by your apostolate. If those souls are dealing with a priest who is not zealous, who would rather be spending his time doing what he likes than carrying out his apostolate, then those souls will be lost. As long as we have not made that firm decision to give ourselves completely to God, without limit, without measure, then we are responsible for all of the souls who will not convert, will not be attracted to God, as a result of our negligence. “The measure of loving God is to love Him without measure.”⁹ The theological virtues, the virtues of faith, hope and charity, have no measure, unlike the moral virtues. “Virtue observes a certain mean”¹⁰ is true for the moral virtues but not for the theological virtues.¹¹ There is no measure to faith, nor to hope, nor to charity.¹²

How does this charity manifest itself? How can we have some idea of its presence in us? St. Thomas,¹³ following St. Benedict, says that the readiness with which we open our hearts to God is what reveals that we love God, that we are ready to obey His will and to give ourselves to Him.

For St. Benedict, this readiness is clear in particular when it comes to obedience. He speaks of the spontaneity and rapidity with which the subject answers the voice of his superior. In his Rule,¹⁴ St. Benedict says that the subject

9 St. Bernard, *Treatise on the Love of God*, ch. 1.

10 “*In medio stat virtus*” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 2 ch. 6; *Summa Theologica*, I^a II^{ae} q. 64, a. 4)

11 “Never can we love God as much as He ought to be loved, nor believe and hope in Him as much as we should” (*Summa Theologica*, I^a II^{ae} q. 64, a. 4).

12 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1977.

13 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 82, a. 2, ad 1.

14 See the Rule of St. Benedict, ch. 5.

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obeys his superiors “with a ready step,” with a quick step, for the love of God.¹⁵ That is the proof of our charity.

St. Paul says the same thing: “*God loves a cheerful giver*” (II Cor. 9:7). It seems that God does not love one who gives with sadness, as though he regretted the gift of himself in exchange for receiving the Holy Ghost, for receiving in himself the love and the charity of God.

It is St. Paul again who says to the Corinthians, “*I speak to you as to my children: you, also, open wide your hearts to us*” (II Cor. 6:13). “*We are frank with you, O Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you*” (II Cor. 6:11). Do not have narrow hearts, selfish, closed up hearts, afraid of giving themselves to God.

So you have to broaden, widen, open up your hearts. That is how we need to be if the love of God is going to increase in us and make us receive the graces of the sacraments more abundantly, and so make us grow in union with God, in intimacy with God.¹⁶

It is my hope that during your years in the seminary you might attain such a love of God, such a nearness to God, that it gives you balance and peace, firmness and constancy in your attachment to God – so much so that all of the trials, all of the difficulties, all of the contradictions which may arise over the course of your life will never affect your love of God.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Allegro pede*. Pope Pius XII also insists on the importance of the virtue of obedience: “It is necessary that young men acquire the spirit of obedience by accustoming themselves to submit their own will sincerely to that of God manifested through the legitimate authority of the superiors. Nothing can be lamented more in the conduct of the future priest than that it is not in conformity with the Will of God. This obedience must always be inspired by the perfect model, the Divine Teacher Who on earth had but one single program: ‘to do Thy will, O God’ (Heb. 10:7)” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

¹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, April 7, 1984.

¹⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

2. The Year of Spirituality

During the year of spirituality, the candidate learns the principles of the interior life – the life of union with God – and the basic realities of the spiritual combat which it involves. If the seminarian lives this year conscientiously, he will feel its effects during the years that follow and even throughout all of his life as a priest.

Why Begin with a Year of Spirituality?

One of the reasons why seminarians have to take their spiritual life seriously is the very fact that they are wanting to become priests. They have a grave responsibility to seek after holiness, to seek after perfection.¹⁸ The souls awaiting them are counting on this preparation, counting on their taking it seriously, because seminarians do not just have their own soul to save. God expects them to save perhaps thousands and thousands of souls, by their sanctification and later by their apostolate, be it only by their offering, by their sacrifice, perhaps by sickness or persecution; He expects all of their priestly life to be united to the offering of our Lord. There again, they have a special reason to seek after their perfection, actively and profoundly.¹⁹

You wonder why so many have abandoned the priesthood. Maybe those priests did not know what prayer meant. They prayed superficially, out of habit, out of a certain social duty, in a way. They carried out this duty in the exercise of their functions, but they never actually prayed. They never learned who God is, nor what really makes up our union with our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁰

¹⁸ “The worthy exercise of Orders requires not any kind of goodness but excellent goodness, in order that as they who receive Orders are set above the people in the degree of Order, so may they be above them by the merit of holiness” (*Summa Theologica*, Suppl. q. 35, a. 1, ad. 3).

¹⁹ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 25, 1982.

²⁰ Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost 1974.

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That is why I think it is a very important thing for seminaries to have a year of spirituality.

Religious orders have always had a novitiate, but normally seminaries were only given spiritual conferences in the evening, like the ones we give here. Of course, the confessor and the spiritual director strove to give their seminarians the principles of the spiritual life, of spiritual development, but that did not seem to us to be enough.

When I was in the seminary myself, I remember that we were overloaded with classes (maybe you feel the same way!) and they offered us a class in spirituality at the Gregorian University taught by Fr. Guibert. We were strongly advised to attend the class, but it was not obligatory. Considering all the other classes we had to attend, practically nobody went. So we really cannot say that we received a profound spiritual formation, one that was a little bit “scientific,” so to speak. What is the spiritual life? What does it include? What is the interior life? What do those words mean for a Christian, for a seminarian, for a future priest? Those are things which are very important. They really are fundamental. They were running the risk of turning the seminary into a place of purely speculative studies. They were forming our brains, but not always our hearts – hearts made to love God and our neighbor. Do not forget that our hearts were created to rise to holiness, to live an intense interior life, a life in union with God, with our Lord, with all the saints of Heaven. That is why we have to strive for the virtues we need, which are going to make us more like our Lord and make us one with Him.

I am not saying that all those things were totally unknown to us, but really we were missing that year of prayer, of reflection, of study about what the interior life truly is: the life of perfection, the life of holiness.²¹

21 Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 3, 1980.

A School of the Interior Life

Throughout their year of spirituality, the seminarians are focusing on living the life of the soul. They are trying to find God, and God is a Spirit. Our Lord says so to the Samaritan woman: “*God is Spirit, and He seeks worshippers in spirit and in truth*” (Jn. 4:23-24). The spiritual world is the one which will abide. The material world comes from the spiritual world. It was created by the spirit and not the other way around. At the end of time, when the earth has been destroyed and the stars have fallen from the heavens, this world will disappear. There will then be a new earth which will be nearly spiritual, as our resurrected body will be a “*spiritual body*,” according to the expression of St. Paul (I Cor. 15:44), because the body will be subject to the powers of the soul. The body will no longer be an obstacle to spiritual functions. Right now, our soul is imprisoned in a way. To move our soul from one place to another, we need to move our body. By nature, the soul is subtle, it is rapid. It has only to wish to be in a place and there it is. Whereas here below it is a prisoner. The soul is dependent on the body. It is the same thing with knowledge. As St. Thomas says, “the principle of knowledge is in the senses.”²² That is what makes our knowledge so choppy and limited. Our intelligence moves forward by way of reasoning, drawing a given conclusion from what we have seen over here, another conclusion from something else that happened, and by linking together our reasoning, we end up with knowledge – but it is very complicated. That is why we lean so much on the thinking of past generations.

It is not the same for angels. By their very nature, angels have a knowledge infinitely greater than our own. When we die, the world of pure spirits is going to fill us with amazement.

22 *Summa Theologica* I^a q. 84, a. 6, s.c.

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We will surely be struck dumb at the sight of God – not from stupor or from terror, but from seeing the incredible place He holds. God is an infinite spirit; He is everywhere. We can try all we like to understand; we are in the presence of a mystery which entirely surpasses our imagination. As St. Paul says, “*in God we live and move and are*” (cf. Acts 17:28). It is true – God is here. We would not be here if God were not holding us in existence. Obviously we cannot see Him, which means it is hard for us quite to understand reality as it is.

That is why we live in a certain blindness, a certain continual illusion. If we truly lived in reality, if we could see God, then humanly speaking we would not be able to go on living. Think of those who have seen something of Heaven, for example, like little Bernadette. They were in ecstasy, they did not move an inch. People burned their fingers and they did not feel it; they were captivated by Heaven – and they only saw a very tiny light, just a little ray of Heaven. Look at the apostles on Mount Tabor: “*They fell on their faces and were exceedingly afraid*” before the splendor of our Lord (Mt. 17:6). And yet, God showed them only a tiny ray of His splendor.

Even though we cannot see God, we have to believe in Him, because our whole life now and our whole life to come really is to live with God! That is not just something we made up, we are not playing the mystic or imagining how we wish it were: it is absolutely real.

It is sad to think that we are always living in a kind of illusion – in a kind of darkness, the blindness it talks about in the prayer.²³ Yet, as we develop our interior life – our spiri-

23 “Let us pray to the Lord Jesus Christ for these His servants (...). May He bestow upon them the Holy Spirit, to preserve in them forever the spirit of piety and protect their hearts against the entanglements of the world and worldly ambition. And as they are changed in outward appearance, may His right hand grant them an increase of virtue, deliver

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tual life, our life with God, the life of Baptism – by trying to give our soul its rightful place in our life, a whole new world gradually opens up before us. This is the world which the seminarians discover, particularly in their year of spirituality, in begging often for the light of the Holy Ghost that they might truly live *spiritually*.²⁴

The goal of the year of spirituality is to teach the seminarians to pray, so that they might receive the graces of the Holy Ghost.

Prayer does not just mean vocal prayer. The seminarians do learn new prayers; they learn to meditate and to have a taste for the beautiful prayers of the breviary and of the liturgical offices. Yet, prayer is more than that. In prayer, the seminarians are mostly learning (I hope) to unite themselves to our Lord Jesus Christ. They are learning to contemplate our Lord Jesus Christ in their prayer: to contemplate God.

Contemplation is not reserved to certain souls specially privileged by God. Contemplation is offered to all those who open themselves up to God; who wish to know God; who wish to be aware of God's presence in them. Our Lord says, "*If you love Me, My Father and I will come to you and We will make Our abode with you*" (cf. *Jn.* 14:23). He says it to everyone but he says it especially to seminarians, who are preparing for the priesthood. God has come into us and He dwells in us. In a sense, that awareness of God's presence in us and in all things is the very definition of contemplation.

Unfortunately, we are so far from God! Our minds and our hearts are so attached to the things of this world! What we possess, everything we have, our reputation, what people think of us, what they say about us; all of those things occupy

their eyes from all blindness, spiritual and human, and bestow on them the light of everlasting grace" (Roman pontifical, first prayer of the tonsure).

24 Retreat for the tonsure, Ecône, February 1, 1984.

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our thoughts much more than God does. If we could only detach ourselves from all that!

There is perhaps the main effort of the seminarians during their year of spirituality: to become detached from the goods of this world, detached from honors, from reputation, from their own thoughts, their own desires, and to have only the desires of God from now on; to give themselves to God entirely, abandoning themselves into His hands, that they might have only the interests of our Lord Jesus Christ in their hearts and in their souls.

Then when they go into the chapel in front of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, their souls rise straight up to God, give themselves completely to God. But their souls would not be able to rise that way if they were still attached and bound to all of those fleeting goods, which are nothing next to God, next to the most Holy Trinity, to our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁵

In a word, the goal of the seminarians' spirituality is the imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The same is true of any spirituality, but all the more so for future priests. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ has to be the object of their knowledge, their study, their meditation, and their prayer.²⁶

A Source of Grace for the Whole Seminary

I think that this year of spirituality is very important for those who are in it, but also for the whole seminary. Wherever seminary training includes a year of spirituality, I believe it really does have an influence on the other years because it would be highly unlikely for anyone to spend this year of spirituality and then say, "Well, now that I am done

25 Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost 1974.

26 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 30, 1987.

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with my year of spirituality, I really have other things to do besides trying to practice the virtues. Now I have to study philosophy, theology, canon law, Holy Scripture, etc. I have enough things to study without having to keep worrying about spiritual questions.”

I actually have heard people talk that way. When I was superior of the seminary of philosophy at Mortain, I received the members of my congregation, the Holy Ghost Fathers, right after they had completed their novitiate. They spent two years with us and we used to hear this kind of comment fairly often: “Oh! we are not in the novitiate any more. Now we can relax a little. The novitiate is done – that’s over with! Now for something really serious; now for philosophy and theology.”

So, unfortunately, we saw a gradual diminishing of the desire for perfection, for the virtues, for piety – for any spiritual formation at all, in other words. So they were less spiritual when they moved on to the seminary of theology than when they came out of the novitiate!²⁷

Truly, the year of spirituality combined with the years of more speculative, more intellectual formation, does a great deal of good and reminds everyone of the goal of the seminary. Philosophy, theology, and everything else we study should all become nourishment for our spiritual life. Philosophy and theology are marvelous disciplines which ought to draw us toward contemplation, toward the praise of God and toward humility.²⁸

27 Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 3, 1980.

28 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1980.

Conclusion: A Year Spent Close to God

This year of spirituality helps the seminarians to draw closer to God. As St. Thomas Aquinas said in his famous expression, “the more we learn to know God, the more we realize how little we know Him.”²⁹ When we start to have even the slightest idea of God’s greatness, we suddenly realize how infinitely He is above us; the joy of our eternity is going to be contemplating Him face to face. We already have a certain knowledge of God here below, a certain vision of God, and yet God is much greater than we think He is or than we can imagine Him to be. So a good year of spirituality is going to change our whole life as a priest.³⁰

3. Philosophy and Theology

After developing his interior life during the year of spirituality, the seminary dedicates two years primarily to philosophy. Then three years of theology are meant to give him Catholic wisdom. Alongside the formation of his mind by this supernatural learning, the will of the young cleric is fortified by life in community, which is none other than a life of faith and charity.

Archbishop Lefebvre invites the seminarians to integrate all of their studies in a contemplative gaze upon our Lord and on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and to give our Lord His rightful place in their life by the imitation of His virtues.

29 “The more perfectly do we know God in this life, the more we understand that He surpasses all that the mind comprehends” (*Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 8, a. 7). “The most we can know of God during our present life is that He transcends everything that we can conceive of Him” (*De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 9, translation by Robert W. Mulligan, S.J., Henry Regnery Company, 1952).

30 Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost, 1974.

Our Lord: The Focus of All Our Studies

How can we describe the atmosphere of the seminary? A spirit of adoration, a spirit of dependence. A true seminary is a kind of reflection of Heaven, placing us in adoration before God, before our Lord Jesus Christ who is God. The atmosphere of the seminary leads us toward that obedience of mind, of will, of heart; to that docility which allows our minds to receive the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ.³¹

The seminarians spend six years studying our Lord Jesus Christ, “*the mystery of Christ*” that St. Paul is always speaking of, with the desire of passing it on.³² Whether it be philosophy, theology, canon law, or liturgy, everything brings us back to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the focus of everything we study at the seminary.³³

Their years in the seminary may seem to the seminarians to be a little long. Many of them perhaps wish the seminary were shorter so that they could be ordained faster. Yet, they need to realize that these years are going to be profoundly useful to them. They have to meditate on Holy Scripture. They have to know the Revelation made to the nations, “*the Light of Revelation to the Gentiles*” driving away their darkness, in the words of the old man Simeon (*Lk. 2:32*), and they have to deepen their understanding of the truths which Jesus came to teach us; six years is certainly not too much to prepare to preach our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁴

Throughout their whole seminary training, seminarians are pondering on eternity compared with time, on spirit compared with matter, and ultimately on God compared with the poor creatures that we are. As the great St. Catherine of

31 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1988.

32 See *Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9, 3:4; Col. 1:27.*

33 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985.

34 Homily, Ecône, February 2, 1976.

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Siena says so beautifully, they are pondering “Him who is everything and him who is nothing.”³⁵

Our Lord is our everything and we are nothing at all because we are only creatures, and sinful creatures at that. Seminarians contemplate the great love of our Lord Jesus Christ for them, that immense love which is preparing them to receive the gift of the priesthood thanks to His cross, thanks to His blood which redeemed them and which was given to them in Baptism, in all of the sacraments which they have received – such tremendous graces!

In the solitude of the seminary and even, I would say, in the midst of the world but separated from the world, they ponder all these things so that light might come down upon them. And what is this light if not our Lord Jesus Christ Himself? “*I am the Light of the world*” (Jn. 8:12), says our Lord Jesus Christ. He is “*the Light that enlightens every man who comes into the world*” (Jn. 1:9) – St. John says it in his prologue.

St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort says it in words that are very simple but rich in meaning: he who knows our Lord Jesus Christ knows all things, even if he knows nothing else. On the other hand, he says, “To presume to know everything and not to know Him is to know nothing at all.”³⁶ The seminarians are striving to know our Lord Jesus Christ, to love Him, to serve Him. That is their consolation, their happiness, their joy.³⁷

35 Raymond of Capua, *Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, ch. 10.

36 “*Qui scit Christum omnia scit etiam si cætera nescit. (...) Qui nescit Christum etiam si cætera scit nihil scit*” (cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions* bk. 5, ch. 4, § 7, *PL* 32, col. 708-709, quoted by St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, ch. 1, § 11).

37 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1980.

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St. Paul seeks after this “*knowledge of the mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” He even asks his faithful to pray for him: “*Pray for us also, that God may give us an opportunity for the word, to announce the mystery of Christ, that I may openly announce it as I ought to speak*” (Col. 4:3-4). St. Paul was definitely fascinated by this mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he had the advantage not only of having been converted by our Lord Himself, but also of having been taught directly by Him. He tells us so himself. During the years he spent in the desert, he “*received the Gospel by a revelation of Jesus Christ*” (Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3). That is why he had such a desire to communicate the mystery of Christ to others.

So we have to try to reach a better understanding of who our Lord is, and there is always the danger of thinking about Him above all as man and not thinking about Him as God. Jesus Christ is God. Consequently, to know the true God is to know our Lord Jesus Christ. We must not separate them. The Word of God took a body and a soul like ours, and He came among us, but there is no inequality among the divine Persons. Our Lord is therefore fully God. It is a great mystery, of course! And there is a danger in making that distinction between God and Jesus Christ. It is a mystery we have to study with piety and devotion, so that we might become more attached to our Lord Jesus Christ and understand what our relationship should be with Him, and the one He desires to have with us. That is what is most important. What does our Lord Jesus Christ expect of us? Ultimately, what does God want to make of us through our Lord Jesus Christ, since it is from Him that all graces come to us?³⁸

38 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 30, 1987.

A Teaching Under the Aegis of St. Thomas

All philosophy sings the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, who created the things of this world. Philosophy is really just a discovery of the marvels which God has worked in this world: in the material world, the spiritual world and the heavenly world, for the summit of philosophy is in fact theodicy, the study of God and the marvelous attributes of God.³⁹ Theodicy teaches us about the Creator, He who Is of Himself, whereas our existence is through Him.⁴⁰

The all of God and the nothing of man is a subject for meditation which the seminarians are going to have to continue all their lives and which they will have to express not only in their preaching but also in their behavior. Ultimately, philosophy is that light of the Word of God illuminating the seminarians over the course of their studies.

We need to study and meditate on the truths of philosophy in the light of the faith. Certain natural truths are in fact objects of faith.⁴¹ We can see it in the first words of the *Credo*, which are affirming truths of philosophy and therefore of natural reason: "I believe in God, Creator of Heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible." That is just a condensed little expression of philosophy. It all really comes back to theodicy.⁴²

39 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1985.

40 God is Being from itself and in itself, *ens a se*, subsistent Existence, the Being in whom essence and existence are one; He is the absolutely independent act of Being. Man is a creature and therefore he is an *ens ab alio*: he received his being and is only maintained in being by God.

41 The existence of God as well as His attributes, such as unity or simplicity, can be reached through reason alone but can also be contemplated in the light of the faith.

42 Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1986.

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Theology⁴³ comes after the study of philosophy and teaches us about the Holy Trinity, our Lord, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Church, the sacraments: ineffable realities which should constantly be penetrating deeper into us and always increasing our charity.⁴⁴

What beautiful things, what tremendous things these seminarians will be having to teach children and teach the faithful, throughout their whole life, once they have become priests. That greatness, that magnificence of the mercy of God, of the kindness of God toward us!

Seminarians who receive the traditional teaching should be thanking God for placing all of their studies under the aegis of St. Thomas Aquinas, that great doctor who is given as a model of knowledge and wisdom to anyone who is training for the priesthood.⁴⁵ When you know the state of studies in many seminaries today and even in the Catholic universities...

So they need to take full advantage of these years of study because it is going to be almost impossible for them to return to these books later on, once they are in the middle of their pastoral duties.⁴⁶

We can say that all of the seminary studies are giving the seminarians a better understanding of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God, and a better understanding of all of Redemption. All of theology is focused upon our Lord Jesus Christ, His Mass and His cross. In a sense, all of philosophy

43 "The aim of the whole theology of St. Thomas is to bring us into close living intimacy with God" (Pius XI, Encyclical *Studiorum Ducem*, June 29, 1923).

44 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1980.

45 Leo XIII, *Æterni Patris*, August 4, 1879; St. Pius X, *Pascendi*, September 8, 1907, and *Doctoris Angelici*, June 29, 1914; Pius XI, *Studiorum Ducem*: "the guide to be followed in the higher studies by young men training for the priesthood is Thomas Aquinas"; *CIC*, can. 1366.

46 Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1986.

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is the bedrock or the pedestal upon which the Sacrifice of the Mass is raised. Every subject is turned toward that end. The altar, the Sacrifice of the Mass, is really the centerpoint of the seminarians' formation, throughout all their years of study.⁴⁷

A Life with Our Lord and a School of Charity

During their years in the seminary, the seminarians have the ineffable grace of living under the same roof as our Lord Jesus Christ. They can therefore draw near to Him as Mary and Joseph did, in the silence, recollection and spirit of prayer which ought to reign in the seminary. In their prayer, in the music of the liturgy, in all of the ceremonies, they are always learning to know and to love Him a little bit more. They draw closer to Him especially by the sacraments which they receive, the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

They also have the advantage over the faithful in being able to spend more time studying Holy Scripture and all the teaching of the Church, so as better to understand the place that our Lord Jesus Christ should hold in their life.⁴⁸ They therefore ought to thank God who is giving them these graces and who has chosen them to become His intimate friends.⁴⁹

The reason they are drawing closer to our Lord Jesus Christ is so that they will be able to bring Him to the world. They are called to be missionaries by their very nature, by

⁴⁷ Spiritual conference, Ecône, May 30, 1971.

⁴⁸ "Let every care be given to the training of future clerics for the interior life which is the life of the spirit and according to the spirit. Let them do everything in the light of divine Faith and in union with Christ, convinced that there is no other kind of life possible for him who one day must receive the priestly character and represent the Divine Master in the Church. For seminarians, the interior life is the most efficacious means of acquiring the priestly virtues, of overcoming difficulties and carrying out salutary resolutions" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

⁴⁹ Sermon, Albano, March 25, 1980.

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their essence, because the priest brings Him who is the light of our mind, the warmth of our heart and the inspiration of our will.

First of all this light has to dwell in their understanding by the knowledge which they are acquiring in the seminary. However, what they have to acquire is not only knowledge and not only a profound faith in our Lord Jesus Christ – the only salvation of the world (*cf. Lk. 2:30-31*), as the old man Simeon declared – but they also have to warm their hearts by the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This charity is acquired by steadfast effort and by continual prayer to our Lord. We cannot hope to receive all of the graces which are going to transform us in the charity of our Lord if we do not pray and meditate and ask our Lord Jesus Christ for them.

That is why the seminarians love to come and spend time in the chapel before our Lord, asking Him for His graces and for all of those virtues which are the expression of charity.

That is how they will be the light of the world, not only by their words but also by their example. It says so in the prayers of the various ordinations which are bringing them little by little toward the priesthood.

They need to be the light of the world by their example. They need to radiate the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ and show them to the world. It is a long and sometimes painful and difficult road to reach that point. The seminarians need to remember the chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians singing the greatness of charity (*I Cor. 13*). They should know by heart those marks of charity listed by St. Paul: charity is patient, charity endures all, believes all, rejoices when one proclaims the truth. We need to have this charity in our hearts so as to truly represent what our Lord Jesus Christ came down to bring into the world.⁵⁰

50 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1976.

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The seminarians are in the seminary in order to prepare eternal life for themselves and for all those to whom they will be sent. This eternal life consists in knowing God and the one He sent, our Lord Jesus Christ (*Jn. 17:3*). That is why our Lord Jesus Christ is the object of all of their studies and of all of their efforts in the seminary. Everything comes back to that. Jesus Christ is our great revelation, a revelation which begins here below on earth by our catechism, by our sacraments, by prayer, and especially by the Holy Mass and Holy Communion. The fullness of Revelation is going to be seeing God in Heaven. We are preparing here below that vision which will be our beatitude for all eternity.⁵¹

51 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1985.

CHAPTER 3

THE TAKING OF THE CASSOCK

The first ceremony which marks the seminarians profoundly is the taking of the cassock.¹ On that day, they express the total gift of themselves to our Lord Jesus Christ by setting aside worldly clothing forever and taking on the clothing of the Church. This moving ceremony takes place on February 2nd in the seminaries of the Society of Saint Pius X in the northern hemisphere, that is to say, four months after entering the seminary.

1. February 2nd: A Providential Date

This liturgical feast of February 2nd is a feast which marks the life of our dear seminary of Econe in a very special manner. Not only is it a resplendent feast, by the meaning of this beautiful liturgy of the Purification of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, all resplendent in the light which our Lord Jesus Christ brings into the world by entering the Temple of

¹ “The cassock is none other than the ancient toga, abandoned by laymen in the 6th century in exchange for the shorter clothing of the barbarians. The clergy maintained it as more modest and more symbolic; it should be a constant reminder to the cleric of death to the world and death to oneself” (Fr. René Duboscq, P.S.S., *Les Étapes du Sacerdoce* [*The Steps to the Priesthood*], Desclée & Co., 6th edition, p. 4).

Jerusalem, but it seems to me that there is a special affinity between the meaning of this admirable feast and the taking of the cassock by those who wish to consecrate themselves to our Lord in the priesthood.²

The Feast of the Encounter

In the first centuries of the Church, the Purification was called the Feast of the Encounter. Why the Feast of the Encounter? Because Simeon and Anna, called by the Holy Ghost, had come forward to meet, to encounter our Lord and His parents in the Temple of Jerusalem (*Lk. 2:25-38*).

Well, today, my dear friends, you, too, are going forward to meet our Lord in a very special way. Yes, of course, you already encountered our Lord, when your parents prepared you for First Communion. That was your first intimate, personal encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. Many times since then, you have had this tremendous grace of uniting yourself with our Lord and of coming to know Him better. Perhaps there have been some clouds in this union with our Lord, over the course of your life, but here you are, drawn by the Holy Ghost, coming to the seminary in order to meet Him again – this time in a way that is going to be definitive and even more personal, more resolved, more loving, more perfect, more complete.³

The Feast of Witnesses

The Feast of the Purification is also the feast of witnesses. In a way it is the climax of all of the feasts punctuating this season of Christmas and Epiphany. If we wanted just

2 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1983.

3 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1975.

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one word to characterize this whole liturgical season, we could call it the season of *witnesses*: witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ, witnesses to that light “*which enlightens every man who comes into this world,*” as St. John expresses it so beautifully. Yes, “*He was the true light*” (Jn. 1:9). He said it Himself: “*I am the light of the world*” (Jn. 8:12). Our Lord is the light which brings clarity and truth into our minds, and at the same brings life into our hearts by the charity of the Holy Ghost.

There were many witnesses of our Lord. Already before His Nativity, the angel Gabriel bore witness to the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ when he announced the good news to the Virgin Mary (Lk. 1:26-33). Then it was the Virgin Mary herself in her *Magnificat* (Lk. 1:46-55), as well as Elizabeth (Lk. 1:41-45) and Zachary (Lk. 1:67-79). Even St. John the Baptist, in the womb of his mother, manifested the greatness of God who was come to visit him (Lk. 1:44). Then the shepherds of Bethlehem were invited in their turn by the angels of Heaven to sing the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (Lk. 2:9-14). Finally it was the three kings who came to humble themselves before this Child in the manger, acknowledging all of His prerogatives as a king (Mt. 2:1-11).

The Church is reminding us today that there were two privileged witnesses who welcomed Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus to the Temple. These are Simeon and the prophetess Anna, who, as the Gospel says, had been awaiting Jesus precisely in order to bear witness to the Messiah. Then the old man Simeon took the infant Jesus in his arms and sang his *Nunc Dimittis* (Lk. 2:29-32).

What a magnificent cloud of witnesses has gone before us in the testimony which we need to offer to the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Now you, too, are about to follow in the footsteps of all

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these witnesses whom I have just named; you, too, are going to be the witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ, here in this 20th century which no longer desires to receive our Lord Jesus Christ; in this world which considers itself adult and now refuses to bow down before our Lord Jesus Christ; it refuses to imitate the three kings who knelt down before this poor, helpless Child in the stable.⁴

Yes, if there is one word which really expresses what you are going to be from now on, that word is *witnesses*. You are going to be the witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ: “*You will be My witnesses even to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). That is what your cassock means, this ecclesiastical habit which you are about to receive. This habit invites you to be witnesses to the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ before the whole world. You have to place yourself on the level of the faith, on a supernatural level, on the level of the Revelation which our Lord Jesus Christ came to bring to us by becoming incarnate, by taking a flesh like to our own and by living in the midst of us. It is He whom you are going to represent; it is He whom you will preach; it is His example which you will be manifesting to the world; it is He of whom the world is so desperately in need.⁵

The Feast of Light

In this moving feast of the Purification, the Church uses the idea of light to represent the encounter of our Lord with the old man Simeon. She wants us to meditate very specially on our Lord as light of the Gentiles. She teaches us the same thing throughout the liturgy, not only on this feast of the Purification but over our whole life as Christians. Already, at our Baptism, She placed a lighted candle in our hands, through

4 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1981.

5 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1977.

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our godfather and godmother who were representing us. This candle symbolized the Holy Ghost who had just come to dwell in our souls. There are other ceremonies which use candles throughout the liturgical year. The Church asks the priest to bless the Paschal Candle on the night between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. The priest signs the candle in a very particular manner with five grains of incense arranged in the form of a cross. This candle remains with us as the light of our souls for several weeks until the Ascension. It is because our Lord Jesus Christ is truly the light of our souls. Likewise, the Church asks all those who are preparing for ordination to carry a lighted candle in their hand, to express their desire to be animated by the light of our Lord Jesus Christ and by His charity.⁶

Jesus is the light of the truth. He is God, and God is truth. In His holy soul, Jesus possessed the beatific vision. This beatific vision is what the Church receives. The Church triumphant shares in the beatific vision of the holy soul of Jesus. Here below we only have the faith. It is the Church who has received the mission from our Lord Jesus Christ to pass on that faith, to pass on the truth. That is Her most intimate, Her most profound, Her most necessary role. Without the faith, the Catholic Church is nothing. Without the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is no more Catholic Church. Jesus wills that the truths of the faith be passed on from generation to generation by the Church. So that is going to be your role, which is exactly what the apostles said: "*We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word*" (Acts 6:4). They ordained deacons so that they would be able to dedicate themselves entirely to prayer and to the ministry of preaching, to passing on the truth. That is the role of the apostles.⁷

6 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1978.

7 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1982.

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“You are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:14). If our Lord wants all of us to be the light of the world, then we have to resemble Him perfectly. We have to do so by our faith in particular, but also in our actions, by our charity, for our Lord goes on to say, *“Neither do men light a lamp and put it under the bushel. Even so let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good words and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:15-16).*

What a responsibility you bear! In a few moments you will no longer be the same as you were before. By the very fact of putting on the cassock, the world is going to expect you to be other Christs, to manifest the light of our Lord Jesus Christ in your words, your attitudes, your behavior, your actions. And the faithful are going to be right because you are supposed to be other Christs, you are supposed to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.⁸

Act in such a way that your studies and the whole atmosphere of the seminary might become for you this source of light and charity and truth. What a joy, what a grace to have been chosen by our Lord Jesus Christ to receive the light in this time of darkness!

You have just received in your hands the candle which is the sign and symbol of the light which is our Lord Jesus Christ. Guard this flame as something extremely precious; nourish that light of the truth in your souls.⁹

The Seminarian Presented in the Temple

Another resemblance between the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and this ceremony of your introduction into the Temple of God is the fact that your parents, who are here, are also coming to present you in the Temple.

8 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1979.

9 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1985.

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In the ceremonies of the Sacrament of Marriage, the parents lead their son or daughter up to the altar so that they might receive the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage. In the same way today, they are leading you to the foot of the altar for this mystical marriage of your souls with our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus crucified. For He is indeed the Spouse of your souls and will become so more and more if you are well disposed and if you truly offer Him your whole soul.¹⁰

As the Child Jesus was presented in the Temple, so the seminarians who are about to come before the altar and take up the clerical habit are also presenting themselves in the Temple. Our Lord, however, was presenting Himself in His own Temple. The seminarians are going to be presenting themselves humbly, as creatures of God chosen to pray to God and to honor God in His Temple.¹¹

You, too, are going to climb the steps of the Temple. You, too, are going to bear our Lord Jesus Christ. You, too, are destined to carry Him who is the light of the world. Like the Virgin Mary, may you one day bear our Lord Jesus Christ in your hands and in your arms with the same dispositions, the same faith, the same charity, and the same desire to give and to carry this light to the world. That is what we say in the prayers of the blessing of your cassocks.¹²

As Jesus and Mary presented themselves in the Temple, today you, too, are following Mary and Jesus to present yourselves in the Temple which is the Church. May you present yourselves with hearts as pure and dispositions as holy as those of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus. The Temple itself and the purification of Mary are not what made their hearts pure, but rather it was Jesus, the living God, who came to sanctify the Temple. Mary was all pure and did not

¹⁰ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

¹¹ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1977.

¹² Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1976.

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need purification, but the Holy Family wanted to obey the Law and show the importance of the Church.

You on the other hand are in need of purification and you are coming to the Church to ask Her for Her graces of Redemption. You are coming here to unite yourselves more fully to our Lord Jesus Christ.¹³

Present yourselves like Jesus in the Temple, with a pure heart, one that is detached, and ask Mary also to present you in the Temple as she did our Lord. You are her sons; you are her children. May she present you in the Temple so that you might be consecrated to God, to our Lord Jesus Christ. Ask this holy mother to place in your souls, in your hearts, the same dispositions she had when she was presenting her divine Son.¹⁴

That is the meaning of this beautiful day of February 2nd, when the light came into the Temple of Jerusalem and spread through this Temple out into the world “*as the light which is to enlighten the nations*” (*Lk. 2:32*), in the words of the old man Simeon. Yes, the light has truly spread throughout the world for all nations and not only for Israel. Our Lord is the glory of the people of Israel, of course, but most of all He revealed Himself for all nations.

So how thankful we should be for all of these magnificent ceremonies which the Church passes down to us and whose meaning is really admirable, ineffable; ceremonies which come down to us from Heaven and carry us back into Heaven again!¹⁵

13 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1982.

14 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

15 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1983.

2. The Advantages of the Cassock

Beyond its symbolism, the cassock is a protection for the one who wears it and at the same time a precious means of apostolate.

Just as the soldier putting on his uniform senses very well that he has a certain responsibility and that he has to be ready to go off to battle and shed his blood if necessary, if ever he is called upon to defend the families and cities of his country, his homeland; likewise the cleric who puts on the cassock senses that he has to be ready to serve our Lord Jesus Christ for the spreading of His reign in the world and in souls.¹⁶

We are not allowed to be anything but missionaries, we who have received the grace to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. You are going to be missionaries, my dear friends. You will be so already by your demeanor, by your clothing, and later on by your words and by the sacraments which you are going to administer, particularly the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. You are going to be missionaries.¹⁷

The Cassock: A Cloister

I am going to speak especially about the interior dispositions which you need to have if you are to receive the graces offered to you in the taking of the cassock, as represented in the prayers which the bishop is about to recite over you in the name of the Church. We could compare the cassock to a kind of cloister. Yes, you are going to enter the cloister, withdraw into a hermitage in a certain way. From now on

16 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1987.

17 Sermon, Econe, February 2, 1977.

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your soul is going to be separated from the world,¹⁸ as the prayers say, preserved “against the entanglements of the world and worldly ambition, (...) from all blindness, spiritual and human.”¹⁹ You are going to avoid a certain blindness, which is not only spiritual but even simply human and which is caused by the world of sin – the world insofar as it is subject to the influence of Satan. Holy Church uses the word *human* because we even lose common sense, the simple and straightforward understanding of reality and truth, when we lose the light of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why this separation from the world? So that you might reflect on the great gift which God has given you in giving you a soul capable of receiving the light. That is again what the bishop asks,²⁰ that you might receive the light of grace and of eternal life. You are going to receive even more of that light of eternal life precisely because you are going to be separated from the world by your cassock, which is a kind of cloister. That light of eternal life is really the light of eternal realities, of the truths of all time.²¹

As you put on our Lord Jesus Christ, you are also going to be putting on all of His doctrine, and if there is one doctrine which ought to be the light of our life and the rule of our conduct, it is the doctrine of the Beatitudes and of the Sermon on the Mount.

Yes, blessed are you because you will be manifesting your spirit of poverty by this cassock which you are about to put on. Our Lord says, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they*

18 “The cassock, which is a black garment, indicates the first disposition which the cleric should possess, and the first aspect of the religion of the holy clergy, which is to be dead to all love and all esteem of the world” (Fr. Olier, P.S.S., *Traité des Saints Ordres [Treatise on Holy Orders]*, Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1953, p. 113)

19 Roman pontifical, prayer before the tonsure.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1980.

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will have their eternal reward. Blessed are the meek, for they will possess the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice, after sanctity. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who suffer persecution for My Name's sake" (cf. Mt. 5:3-11).

So our Lord is laying out a whole program of life for you. By putting on the cassock, you are putting on our Lord, and therefore putting on His Law as well.²²

The Cassock: A Sign of Sacrifice

You who are about to take the cassock, remember the word which the bishop is going to pronounce in a few moments: "*Put on Christ.*"²³ It means that your cassock is the image of all of the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ in which you ought to be clothed: virtues of penance, austerity, simplicity, detachment from the things of this world, and at the same time attachment to our Lord Jesus Christ and to His cross.²⁴

You are going to carry your sufferings and your trials with our Lord, as the most Blessed Virgin Mary did. It will be your joy to do so and a source of great consolation. The cross is our hope.²⁵ Yes, the cross of our Lord is our hope. Why? Because the cross of Jesus Christ leads to the Resurrection and to eternal life. It contains everything our Lord came to teach us. He came to tell us that the true life is not here below; true life is in eternity!²⁶

22 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1979.

23 Roman pontifical, blessing of the cassock.

24 Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979.

25 *O crux ave, spes unica* (hymn *Vexilla Regis* from vespers in Passiointide).

26 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1975.

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The cassock which you are going to be wearing is a sign of sacrifice.²⁷ From now on, you will be preaching the sacrifice of our Lord by what you are wearing. You should not be afraid to show it. In fact, it is going to be your consolation and your joy, because the Sacrifice of the Mass is where you are going to find the strength to be true and holy priests.

When you walk through the streets of your villages and your cities, you will be preaching the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We need that preaching, today more than ever. Never before have people so rejected the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. They have destroyed the altar of sacrifice, they are destroying crosses, and no one knows any longer what the Sacrifice of the Mass even means.

Precisely because this idea of sacrifice is disappearing everywhere from the lives of men, you have to manifest it in yourselves. Men need this cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the cross is salvation. So you will be preaching the salvation of the human race by preaching the cross with what you are wearing.²⁸

Since it is the feast of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, let us turn toward our good Mother in Heaven. She was truly Christian in the full sense of the word. She followed our Lord even in His sufferings on the cross. She was co-redemptrix, she shared in the Passion of our Lord: our Lady of Compassion. So she is the example for us of that merciful charity, that charity in sacrifice.

Let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary, then, to keep helping us better understand the meaning of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁹

27 "The cassock (...) is the mark of religion here on earth, which consists in being humbled, in bearing one's cross, in sacrificing oneself unceasingly to God with Jesus Christ by a continual mortification" (Fr. Olier, P.S.S., *Traité des Saints Ordres*, p. 96).

28 Sermon, Weissbad, February 5, 1978.

29 Sermon, Econe, February 2, 1985.

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She was present at the foot of the cross because she wished to conquer the world alongside our Lord. The victory over the devil was definitive at the instant our Lord died on the cross. The most Blessed Virgin shared in our Lord's victory over the devil and over the powers of darkness and of this world. The most Blessed Virgin will help us also to conquer this world, the devil, and everything in ourselves which may be an obstacle to the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁰

The Cassock: A Sermon in Itself

You came to the seminary to meet our Lord and you wish that fact to be expressed today by an outward sign, marking from now on in the eyes of the world that you are attached to our Lord forever and that you desire to preach Him, to bear witness to Him. You wish to manifest your attachment to our Lord Jesus Christ and your faith in the Redemption of our Lord who came into this world. You are right, my dear friends. You are going to be the heralds of our Lord Jesus Christ; you are going to preach Him if only by what you are wearing, if only by your manner of being. That is going to be an excellent sermon for everyone you meet.³¹

They tell the story about the life of St. Francis of Assisi, that he used to bring Brother Leo with him whenever he would leave to preach in the towns and villages, and that one day he said to that brother, "Come, we are going to preach." Then St. Francis went out with Brother Leo and walked through the town of Assisi. He kept total silence – not a word fell from his lips. And then he went back to the convent. Brother Leo asked him, "But Brother Francis, you said we were going to preach and we didn't say a single word!" "Don't you see," answered Brother Francis, "we have preached by

30 Sermon, Econe, February 2, 1974.

31 Sermon, Econe, February 2, 1975.

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our habit. We were preaching the Gospel by walking through the village of Assisi in our habits.”³² My dear friends, that is what the Church is asking of you here: that you preach the Gospel simply by your habit, which is the very sign of your detachment from the things of this world in order to be attached to our Lord Jesus Christ.³³

The taking of the cassock is a big change in your life. It is not just an outward change but an inward one as well. You are going to have to be worthy of the habit you wear. Even the pagan world, which refuses God and fights against God, is expecting you to bear this witness; all the more so the Christians who have kept the faith and who today are feeling very lost. “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven*” (Mt. 6:10) – that is what our Lord taught to us and what you are going to be teaching the faithful. They need to know that our Lord Jesus Christ must reign, not only in Heaven but here below, in our hearts, in our souls, in families and in society. Everything belongs to our Lord; everything is His. We do not have the right to take from Him the slightest part of His kingdom.³⁴

You will also be a sign of hope. The world is dying of lost hope, of despair, because people are trying to enclose men in the here and now. They want to wall up their spiritual horizons and enclose them in this prison of mankind turning round upon itself; in this mass of humanity which no longer knows where it is going, what it is doing or even what it is thinking. They want to make men thirst for the goods of this world so that they will no longer think of God or of spiritual goods or of eternal life. But you are going to be the sign of

32 Cf. Fr. Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J., *The Practice of Christian Perfection*, volume 2, treatise 2, chapter 1, “On Modesty and Silence,” P. J. Kenedy, Excelsior Catholic Publishing House (no date given), pp. 86-7.

33 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 10, 1980.

34 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1981.

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that hope because your cassock is a sign of the abandonment of the things of this world in order to cling to the things of Heaven and to the things of the spirit. And what does hope mean but to fasten our gaze on goods that are eternal? You are walking with your eyes fixed on eternal life and people know it, people understand it. By doing so, you are doing them good, you are consoling them, you are showing them that genuine freedom does not mean living locked up in this world – on the contrary! That is the sign of slavery. Freedom means freeing oneself from the things of this world in order to cling to what is eternal. Every night at compline, you sing, “*Thou has settled me in hope*” (Ps. 4:10).³⁵ Yes, truly, God has given us a soul in need of things eternal. So we need to keep our eyes turned toward Heaven during our pilgrimage here below. You are going to be a sign of that hope.³⁶

The clerical habit shows forth the holiness of the Church in the face of the world, that is to say, your detachment from the things of this world and your consecration to our Lord Jesus Christ. What an example you are going to be giving of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world, of the presence of His priesthood! The world needs so badly to see that!

It is so sad to think that this ceremony which we are performing no longer exists today! Is there no longer a need to express our Lord Jesus Christ to the world? Is not that the principal role of the Church? A world without Jesus Christ is a world without God, a world that is lost, a world destined for hell. Jesus Christ alone is our salvation, our joy, our *raison d'être*.

So you are going to be expressing the fact that you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and in His priesthood, and in doing

35 Psalm from Sunday compline.

36 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1974.

so you will be rendering an invaluable service to souls and to Holy Church.³⁷

The Cassock: A Sign of Contradiction

When our Lord Jesus Christ came into His Temple, carried by the Virgin Mary, the old man Simeon turned to the Virgin Mary after his canticle *Nunc Dimittis* and added, “*The One you are carrying in your arms will be a sign of contradiction. He will be for the ruin or the resurrection of many among the people of Israel and among the nations*” (cf. *Lk. 2:34*). Our Lord Jesus Christ is therefore going to be a sign of contradiction. It seems to me that as he was speaking the old man Simeon must have seen the armies of Satan rising up around our Lord Jesus Christ, trying to destroy our Lord by massacring all of the children of Bethlehem. Here below, the devil follows our Lord Jesus Christ everywhere He goes. Wherever we find Jesus Christ, we find devils all around Him. The devils were all around Him as he traveled up and down the roads of Palestine and they would have liked to keep Him from speaking. Wherever there is light here below, there is the darkness also. We are going to have to wait for Heaven to have light without darkness.

You, too, will be a sign of contradiction and you will be revealing what is in the hearts of men. You will be like our Lord: you will be saving men by carrying your cross. For it is not in the happiness of this world that you are going to be carrying the Gospel and carrying the cross of our Lord. You are going to follow our Lord in carrying your cross as well; you are going to share in His trials, the same way it was said to the Virgin Mary, “*A sword will pierce your heart*” (*Lk. 2:35*), she who was so pure, who was without sin.

37 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 13, 1982.

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Do we, His disciples, imagine that we are going to share less in the trials of our Lord than the Virgin Mary did, we who deserve those pains for our sanctification? No, you have to understand today that as you put on the cassock, you are also going to be better carrying your cross, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; but you are going to carry it with joy, and peace, and serenity.³⁸

You are also going to be a sign of charity. You are going to be an expression of charity even in persecution and difficulties, under the insults people may throw at you. You are going to endure all that with confidence and courage. Lord, “*forgive them for they know not what they do*” (Lk. 23:34): that is what you are going to say. You are not going to lash out or answer insult for insult, but on the contrary you are going to bear all those difficulties courageously, the way our Lord bore the spitting, the comments, all of the sufferings He had to endure, asking God to forgive His torturers. You, too, must have a merciful heart, desiring to heal every kind of misery. And if someone who insulted you all of a sudden asks you to hear his confession, you are going to hear his confession and you are going to have mercy on him. If he asks you to do him a favor, you are going to do him that favor. You are not going to render evil for evil, but good for evil. That is what St. Paul says, “*overcome evil with good*” (Rom. 12:21). Your soul has to be charitable, humble, kind, gentle, always ready to render service, to do good to your neighbor, and especially ready to give them God, who is the true good, the eternal good.³⁹

As you put on the cassock, you are going to be putting on our Lord Jesus Christ in order to show Him, to manifest Him to the world. The world needs that expression of our Lord Jesus Christ now more than ever. The lower the world sinks

38 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1975.

39 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1974.

into the mud and the swamp of sin, into disorder and doubt and refusal of the truth, the more the souls of good men need light and charity and order. This cassock you wear is going to signify all those things in the eyes of the world. So of course that means you will be a sign of contradiction. Ah! you most certainly will be, just as our Lord was. People are going to love you or they are going to detest you. People are going to persecute you or they are going to wish you well. Noble souls are going to wish you well, but those who are possessed by the spirit of Satan are going to persecute you, just the way our Lord was persecuted.⁴⁰

Some will say that the wearing of the cassock is a provocation and does not attract souls but rather causes division. They are saying that our Lord should never have come into the world. They are saying that God should never have sent His Son, that the Father should never have sent His Son into this world, because God knew perfectly well that He was sending a sword into the world by having His Son come into this world in the form of a man like us, and that His Son would be immediately attacked, that He would be a “*sign of contradiction*” and that the world would be divided.⁴¹

3. Final Exhortation to Seminarians

Do not abandon what makes you a priest. Obviously you are not priests yet – you are taking a first step which expresses your desire to become one; but I hope with all my heart that you will reach the priesthood. The world will already judge you as a priest. Since you wear the cassock, the world is going to judge you from now on as though you were priests. So you have to strive to act as though you already were. By

40 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1973.

41 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1975.

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your example, by your bearing, by your attitude, by your charity, by your wisdom, already be of one those who bring solutions all around them. In that way the honor of God will be defended, the glory of God will be spread throughout the world and souls will be converted to our Lord Jesus Christ.

So be proud to wear your cassock, your habit, which manifests our Lord Jesus Christ to the world, and do not be afraid of anything: the good God, the holy angels, all of the saints in Heaven are with you, as well as all those who have worn this habit, who have been sanctified by it and have sanctified others.⁴²

Your habit will one day be transformed into a habit of glory, as the body of our Lord Jesus Christ became resplendent at the moment of His Resurrection and is so now forevermore, glorified for all eternity.⁴³

42 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1973.

43 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1985.

PART II

THE FIRST STEPS

CHAPTER 1

THE TONSURE

The Church, founded by Jesus Christ, is a perfect society, always living and fruitful, which recruits Her own new members and is ever being renewed. She is essentially one and hierarchical, composed of clerics and laymen, superiors and subordinates, governed by bishops, themselves subject to the supreme authority of the Roman pontiff.

The taking of the cassock is an important event for the seminarian, but the tonsure is even more so because it brings him into the clergy to prepare for Holy Orders.

1. What is a Cleric?

I think there is no better way to get a good idea of what the Church understands by the clerical state than to look at Church law, which tells us very precisely what She means by the term “cleric.”¹ Canon 107 states, “By divine institution there are in the Church *clerics* distinct from *laity*.” You know,

¹ The word “cleric” means “an object used in casting lots,” and then by extension “what falls to one’s lot,” or finally, “part, heritage, property.” The ministers of the new priesthood are named in this way in order to signify that they are the property of God in a very particular way, just as God wishes to be and ought to be very specially “their inheritance” and “their possession.”

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this code of canon law is marvelous; it was commanded by Pope Pius X and published in 1917, a marvel of concision and clarity in its wording, as everyone recognized, moreover, including lawyers among the laity. I have no idea what transformations they are going to start inflicting on it now.

There is not a word too many in this distinction. You see how short it is: “By divine institution there are in the Church *clerics* distinct from *laity*,” meaning it is by the will of God. It is not the Church who distinguished laymen from clerics – it is the divine institution.

Christ did not confer ecclesiastical powers on all of the faithful. That is sadly what the Protestants imagine, and now there are a great many theologians and even priests who think so, too. They would have all of the faithful be considered priests, with a few chosen out of that priestly throng to perform services. That is absolutely contrary to the doctrine of the Church. Christ did not confer ecclesiastical power on all of the faithful.²

The two principal families in Holy Church are therefore the faithful and the clerics, and among the faithful there are also two families: there are those who are destined to remain in the world and found Christian families, and those who consecrate themselves to God as religious, both men and women, and who obviously do not share in Holy Orders. They receive a religious habit, pronounce vows of religion, consecrate themselves totally to God or devote themselves to their neighbor in a very special manner, but they do not form a part of the clergy. Only those who have received the tonsure are clerics.³

Those who are tonsured are therefore members of the Church who have left the lay state to embrace that of the

2 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 30, 1982.

3 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

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cleric; that is to say, they are among those to whom our Lord already communicates a certain participation in His priesthood, by very special graces.

This first step is very important. Sadly, these beautiful ceremonies have disappeared today, to the point that you wonder whether there is even a difference between laymen and clerics in the modern Church. But the Church, in Her beautiful Tradition, in Her faith, believes that our Lord founded His Church on the priesthood and that He wanted to communicate the graces of participation in His priesthood to men whom He had chosen.⁴

2. The Mode of Access to the Clerical State

How does one become a cleric? You may be surprised, but canon 108 answers: “Those who are taken into divine ministries at least by the reception of first tonsure are called clerics.” Consequently, in the mind of the Church, it is the tonsure that makes the cleric.

You are going to tell me, “But tonsure is not an order.” Well, from the point of view of the Church, it may not be considered an order theologically, but it is one juridically.

Right after, in the second article of this same canon 108, it specifies, “Clerics are not all of the same rank, but among them there is a sacred hierarchy in which some are subordinated to others.” There is in fact a hierarchy of the different orders, from the man who has received the tonsure all the way up to the bishop and even to the pope.

Then the same canon continues, “In the Catholic Church, a hierarchy has (...) been instituted by divine ordinance, which consists of the bishops, priests, and ministers.”⁵ It

⁴ Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1986.

⁵ Council of Trent, 23rd Session, *Canons on the Sacrament of Order*, July 15, 1563, Canon 6, *DS* 1776; *DZ* 966, translations from *The*

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does not say *deacons* but *ministers*, which encompasses all the orders. That is a very interesting point. These are things which are fundamental in the Church.

Protestants, on the other hand, carry out elections, or “cooptations,” to determine who among the faithful will be responsible for worship, but for them there is no essential difference between the faithful and the priest.

Canon law is so clear, so precise, so straightforward! It leaves nothing up to speculation. It explains very clearly in what manner one enters the Catholic hierarchy and says that those who are a part of the hierarchy are not “coopted” by the people. The hierarchy does not start with the people. Nor does the secular power establish who is in the hierarchy. Nor can anyone say, “I want to be a cleric and I ask you to ordain me.” No, “they are constituted in the grades of the power of orders by sacred ordination.”⁶ It is neither your vocation, nor the public power, nor an election of the faithful which makes you clerics. Ordination is given by the bishop. It is therefore the Church who makes you clerics. That is important, and it shows that ordination is a grace which comes to us from above. It does not come to us from below, from the people, from the public power or from ourselves.

Certainly, it starts with a vocation. The Church makes a choice and therefore studies the vocation, but you cannot say, “I am receiving the tonsure because I willed it and because I had a vocation.” No, you should say, “I am a cleric because the Church willed it and gave me the tonsure.” That makes you much stronger. You are saying, “The Church has examined me and said to me, ‘Good. You wish to be a cleric and you may be. We are going to give you ordination.’ So it is truly from the Church that I receive my power.” Someone does not have a vocation because he has a brilliant mind, or

Sources of Catholic Dogma, Loreto Publications, 1955.

6 CIC, can. 109.

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a great deal of money, or nobility or anything of that kind. Unfortunately, at certain periods in history, there was some of that as well. Families pushed for it or there were different kinds of pressure... but ultimately, it was the Church who made the clerics.

So it is ordination which brings a person into the hierarchy of the Church. It says in canon 950, “In law the words: *to ordain, order, ordination, and sacred ordination* encompass (...) tonsure.” That does not mean that tonsure is a sacrament. It may be a sacramental,⁷ but the Church considers it as an ordination, juridically speaking, because it is by tonsure that one becomes a cleric.⁸

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ chose His apostles and called them (*Mk. 3:13*), so the Church calls those who receive the tonsure. This call of the Church which makes them clerics, members of the hierarchy, is therefore very important. When the archdeacon pronounces their names and calls them, they are then chosen by God to become members and participants of His priesthood.

St. John, in his Gospel, places these words on the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ: “*You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you*” (*Jn. 15:16*). It is therefore our Lord Jesus Christ who has chosen His ministers and that is what makes the vocation.⁹

3. The Ceremony of the Tonsure

The future cleric kneels down at the altar, in front of the bishop. The latter cuts five locks of hair as a sign of his detachment from the world, as they recite together this verse from

7 “Sacramentals are things or actions that the Church, in a certain imitation of the Sacraments, is wont to use to obtain, by Her imprecation, effects that are primarily spiritual” (*CIC*, can. 1144).

8 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 30, 1982.

9 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 13, 1982.

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Psalm 15: “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my chalice; it is Thou that will restore my inheritance to me.” *Then the bishop clothes the cleric in the surplice.*¹⁰

The first prayer of the ceremony of the tonsure is very beautiful: “Let us pray, dearly beloved brethren, to the Lord Jesus Christ for these His servants, who for the sake of His love hasten to offer the hair of their heads.” The one who receives the tonsure is abandoning his attachment to his hair in order to be all God’s.

The tonsure also signifies a distance from the world: “Let us pray, dearly beloved brethren, to the Lord Jesus Christ for these His servants (...). May He bestow upon them the Holy Spirit, to preserve in them forever the spirit of piety and protect their hearts against the entanglements of the world and worldly ambition. And as they are changed in outward appearance, may His right hand grant them an increase of virtue, open their eyes from all blindness, spiritual and human, and bestow on them the light of everlasting grace. Who livest with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God forever and ever.”

So the first prayer of the Church concerning the cleric is a prayer of petition. The Church is begging God to grant him the grace of holiness. For that to happen, the Church asks that the grace of the Holy Spirit keep far from the cleric both spiritual and human blindness. What does She mean by that? I believe it is one of the most important things of all, because what is the real reason so many men are not good Christians or not Christians at all? The reason is their blindness. They do not know who God is, they do not understand

¹⁰ The surplice is simply a shortened alb, whose sleeves were widened in cold countries so that one might carry it “over fur-lined clothing,” whence the name of *superpelliceum* which appears already in the 11th century (cf. Théophile Bernard, P.S.S., *Cours de Liturgie Romaine*, Berche et Tralin, Ed., 1884, vol. I, p. 399).

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God, they only judge by the eyes of the body. So they place much more importance on what is material and what they can sense than they do on spiritual realities. That is what is at the root of materialism. Spiritual realities are not something they can see, which means they are totally attached to the goods of the body, to money, pleasure, travel, social relations, honors, and everything external. They are not attracted by the interior life because they do not know it. The interior life means the spiritual life; it is the life of the soul. To live that life of the soul, you have to detach yourself a little bit from outside things. If you are always taken up by outside things, you are never going to be able to be recollected and discover the life of the soul – that soul which we cannot see and yet which is infinitely superior to anything material. Our Lord says, “*What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he comes to lose his soul?*” (Mt. 16:26) Our soul is infinitely more precious than all the goods of this world. A single soul is much more precious than all the material goods one can imagine and much higher in dignity. A single soul is much higher in power, dignity and capacity. A single act of true love, love according to God, is worth much more than anything material.¹¹ So the Church wishes Her cleric to be spared that blindness from which men suffer.¹²

Here are a few lines from the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* concerning the tonsure: “In the beginning should be explained first tonsure, and it should be shown that this is a sort of preparation for the reception of orders. As men

11 St. John of the Cross, speaking of prayer and meditation, writes, “A little of this pure love is more precious to God and the soul and more beneficial to the Church, even though it seems one is doing nothing, than all these other works put together” (*Spiritual Canticle*, explanation of stanza 29, from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., ICS Publications, 1991, p. 587).

12 Retreat for the tonsure, Ecône, February 1, 1984.

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are prepared for Baptism by exorcisms and for Matrimony by engagement, so to those who dedicate themselves to God by tonsure the way is opened that leads to the Sacrament of Orders; for by the cutting off of hair is signified the character and disposition of him who desires to devote himself to the sacred ministry. Regarding the name *cleric*, which is then given him for the first time, it is derived from the fact that he thereby begins to take the Lord for his lot and inheritance.”¹³

Those are the very the words which the seminarian recites in a voice loud enough for the bishop to hear him. As the bishop is cutting his hair in five different places, the seminarian repeats those words along with him, expressing the commitment he is making. As he repeats them he should be saying to himself, “*I take God for my heritage, I consecrate myself to God, I give myself to God.*”¹⁴ The words are very beautiful! “*The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my chalice; it is Thou that will restore my inheritance to me,*”¹⁵ a heavenly inheritance. It is magnificent! Next we sing the entire psalm (*Ps. 15*) from which this beautiful expression is taken.

Once the tonsure has taken place, there is the investiture with the surplice. The surplice consecrates the cleric to the worship of God.¹⁶ As the cleric puts on his surplice, the bishop says these words, “May the Lord clothe thee with the

13 *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, translated by John A. McHugh, O.P., and Charles J. Callan, O.P., TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1982, p. 324.

14 “If someone had something more than the Lord, his part would no longer be the Lord” (St. Jerome, *Ad Nepotianum*, Ep. 52).

15 *Dominus pars hereditatis meæ et calicis mei; tu es qui restitues hereditatem meam mihi.*

16 “The surplice is a figure of the religion of Heaven, which is a perfect religion, a consummate religion, a religion which consists in respect, love, praise, and perpetual thanksgiving; in a word, a religion which ought to be priest’s whole occupation” (Fr. Olier, P.S.S., *Traité des Saints Ordres*, Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1953, p. 96).

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new man, who is created according to God in justice and holiness of truth.”¹⁷

The prayer which you recite when you put on the surplice expresses very well that our Lord is your heritage: “Clothe me, Lord, in that habit which preserves me in the truth of Your holiness.”¹⁸ This new man whom you are putting on is our Lord Jesus Christ (*cf. Rom. 13:14*).¹⁹ So you will be proud to wear this habit. Not proud in the manner of people who consider things in a human way. Not at all! You will be proud by your spirit of faith, because you love our Lord Jesus Christ and because our Lord Jesus Christ has chosen you to spread His Name throughout the nations.²⁰

The ceremony of the tonsure ends with a brief exhortation. The Church places the following words on the lips of the bishop: “Dearly beloved sons, you should consider that today you have been placed under the jurisdiction of the Church”²¹ – that is to say among the clerics, in the hierarchy of the Church – “and have received the privileges of clerics. Take care, lest you forfeit them through your fault. Strive to be pleasing to God by modest dress, becoming demeanor, and good works. May He Himself grant you this by His Holy Spirit.” So it is very clear for the Church: before the tonsure, you are not a cleric; after the tonsure, you have become one.²²

17 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 31, 1982.

18 *Cf.* the Roman pontifical.

19 “The surplice (...) represents the new life of Jesus Christ established in us upon the death of sin; [it] also expresses His Resurrection and His divine life, made visible to the children of the Church by the innocence, the sanctity, and all the virtues which the clerics ought to radiate” (Fr. Olier, P.S.S., *Traité des Saints Ordres*, Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1953, p. 120).

20 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1977.

21 In Latin, *forum*, the place where one judges; by extension, the power to judge.

22 Retreat for the tonsure, Ecône, February 1, 1984.

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*It is the custom in the Society of Saint Pius X to give the seminarians a crucifix at the end of the ceremony of the tonsure. From now on this crucifix will be their greatest book.*²³

The cross is the most perfect image of the holiness which we ought to strive after every day of our life. All holiness really is lived and contained in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is holiness if not the hatred of sin and the love of God and neighbor? That is our whole life. We should detest error and sin, and attach ourselves to God and serve our neighbor for God. That horror of sin, that death of sin is exactly what our Lord Jesus Christ is showing us on His cross, as “*death is swallowed up in victory*” (I Cor. 15:54).²⁴ This death, which came into the world by sin, has died by the cross, by the death of our Lord. That is what our Lord is teaching us. It is by the cross that He conquered death, sin, the devil, and the world.

We, too, should detest sin, keep ourselves as far from it as possible and practice charity toward God and our neighbor. The cross is also the most beautiful expression of love for God – the greatest, most sublime, most divine act of that love. It is the Son of God Himself, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, offering Himself to His Father on the cross and undergoing death to save us, out of love for Him and because of our sins. And at the same time He was proving an infinite love of neighbor: our Lord said, “*Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends*” (Jn. 15:13). And He did it, He carried it out. That is why the cross is our book, the book of the Christian, and all the more so the book of the priest.²⁵

23 St. Philip Beniti called the crucifix “his book” (cf. the lessons of matins for August 23).

24 *Mors mortua tunc est.*

25 Sermon, Ecône, June 27, 1986.

4. Member of a New Family

What does the Church require of the one who receives the tonsure? She requires that he be part of a family in the Church.

Canon 111 says it clearly: “Every cleric whatsoever must be ascribed to a given diocese or religious institute.” You have to be ascribed, which in canonical terms is called being *incardinated*. And canon law continues: “Wandering clerics,” who are not attached to a diocese or to a religious society, “are in no way admitted” in the Church.²⁶

By the tonsure, clerics are incardinated, that is, attached to a family within the Church. It is in fact by tonsure that one receives incardination, and this incardination is likewise very important. Jurists who comment on canon law say that incardination is necessary because priestly ordination, for which the tonsure is a distant preparation, is not made for the subject himself but rather enlists him in the service of the Church.

As a result, from the day of their tonsure, seminarians of the Society of Saint Pius X, for example, can consider themselves attached to the Society of Saint Pius X in a public, official manner.²⁷ The Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, which was recognized by the Church publicly, by patent letters from the Congregation of the Clergy,²⁸ can incardinate within itself clerics who desire to become priests. Therefore, on the day of their tonsure, seminarians truly become members of a family recognized by the Church. Certainly, in the present

26 Spiritual Conference, Ecône, January 30, 1982.

27 On the day of the tonsure, the seminarians are already members of the Society of Saint Pius X, having made their commitment on the previous December 8th.

28 Letter of Cardinal Wright, Prefect of the Congregation of the Clergy, Prot. N. 133515/1 of 2/18/1971.

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circumstances, because of the penetration of modernists into the Church, the members of the Society are persecuted.²⁹ This title of recognition which Rome gave to the Society has supposedly been taken away. But when you know who it was that persecuted the Society and the way in which this persecution was carried out, it is obviously not the work of the spirit of God, but of a diabolical, demonic spirit, which absolutely wants to eliminate the Tradition of the Church and act as if the Church were born with Vatican II. But it cannot be so. Therefore the members of the Society are attached to the Church of all time by this recognition on the part of the Church. They should therefore have this intimate conviction of being part of a family.³⁰

Because of the difficult situation in the Church, I have received letters several times from people asking me to ordain them priests yet without asking to enter the Society. I always refuse. It was the case of a deacon who told me, "I have done all of my studies, I have completed my formation. Why won't you ordain me?" And he gave me letters of recommendation from various priests. I said no, that he had to be member of a religious society. If he wanted to become a member of the Society or of a group which would normally be recognized by the Church, then yes, but otherwise it is not possible. It is absolutely contrary to canon law. And I do not want to act against canon law.

In fact, it really was the Council of Trent that put a stop to the abuse of ordinations.³¹ Bishops used to ordain priests who then went all over the place. Since there were so many clerics, people did not worry too much about their

29 Cf. the section on the Society of Saint Pius X at the end of this volume.

30 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1986.

31 Council of Trent, 23rd Session, July 15, 1563, *Doctrine on the Sacrament of Order*, ch. 4, *DS* 1769; *DZ* 960.

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organization. The Church put an end to that disorder and said, "From now on it is over; no more clerics who are not members of a society."³²

Whoever receives the tonsure as a member of the Society of Saint Pius X is doubly committing himself: committing himself as a cleric and committing himself as a member of the Society.

The pontiff says it at the end of the ceremony of tonsure: "Henceforth you are a member of the clergy; you have the privileges but also the duties." Later on, those who receive minor orders are committing themselves to continuing along the road to the priesthood. Certainly, God may show them along the way that their vocation is not to the priesthood, which is an exception, but by the fact that they are accepting to receive Holy Orders, they are committing themselves to fulfill those duties. It is a first commitment. Each time the bishop begins the admonition, he says something like this: "Consider the order which you are about to receive." The bishop asks the cleric to reflect on the honor which is about to be done him, but also on the responsibility which he is going to receive.

In addition, those who are incardinated in the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X are attached to the Society in a truly profound manner, which means a second commitment. This commitment is made in a solemn manner before the faithful, before the Church. So you have to be faithful. You must not turn into traitors, after the example of those who, along the way or even after receiving the priesthood, abandon either the priesthood or else the family into which they have been ordained. That is being a traitor. When a man makes a commitment, he has to be faithful to it to the end. It is important to pray in particular to beg for this grace of fidelity.

32 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 30, 1982.

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We need this fidelity, my dear friends, because the good God wanted us to become a little flock of faithful Catholics, carrying on the Church. So for the honor of the Church and of the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us be faithful to our family, which God has raised up so providentially.

Let us thank God that we are a part of this family and let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Virgin most faithful, that we might imitate her. Mary was always faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, and the one who receives the tonsure says, “*God is the portion of my inheritance*” (Ps. 15:5). It is a call to be faithful to God, to be faithful to the heritage received.³³

How can we resist the attacks of the devil if we are not united? How can we resist if we have dissensions within our own Catholic family? More than ever we need that union around the cross of Jesus, with the most Blessed Virgin Mary, professing our faith in the universal kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ. “*Jesus Christ yesterday, today, and forever*” (Heb. 13:8).³⁴

5. The Rights and Privileges of Clerics

In canon law, after incardination comes the important title of the rights and privileges of the clergy,³⁵ but this chapter is much less important than the one on duties. Clerics have rights, of course, but they mostly have duties.

Canon 118 mentions that “only clerics can obtain powers, whether of orders or of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and benefices or ecclesiastical pensions.” Little by little, after the tonsure, with every new ordination, the clerics have a more and more important role to play in the Church with regard to the faithful. Laymen cannot have any power of order, nor power

33 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 16, 1986.

34 *Jesus Christus heri, hodie et in sæcula* (cf. the liturgy of the Easter Vigil). Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1986.

35 Canons 118 to 123.

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of jurisdiction, nor ecclesiastical benefits or pensions.

Canon 119: “All of the faithful should show reverence toward clerics according to the diversity of their grades and responsibilities” – all of the faithful! As a result, clerics likewise have to have respect for their brother clerics. Having respect for clerics is not confined to laymen.

Then the same canon specifies that anyone who offers injury, who wounds for example, or strikes a cleric, is by the very fact *sacrilegii delicto*: he commits a sacrilege. No small thing! If someone strikes a cleric out of hatred for religion, furious at seeing a cassock, he commits a sacrilege. Sacrilege consists in treating unworthily any person or thing consecrated to God. One could commit sacrilege against sacred vessels, with the things of the Church, and one could commit sacrilege in mistreating a person consecrated to God. And by tonsure the cleric is consecrated to God.³⁶

As soon as a member of the Church receives the tonsure, he is part of the inner court of the Church,³⁷ of the clergy of the Church. He is no longer subject to certain laws which are incumbent on Christians who are not clerics.³⁸

Thus, canon 120 speaks of the privileges of clerics as regards justice. In principle, a cleric should only be judged by ecclesiastical tribunals. That is how it used to be, when the Church was recognized by the different States. Clerics were only judged by ecclesiastical tribunals. But the Church also allows a cleric to be judged sometimes by civil tribunals, in questions of succession.

Canon 121: “All clerics are immune from military service.” That is not always true; States do not accept that. So we just have to put up with that situation. However, in a good concordat, clerics are exempted from military service. In any

³⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 30, 1982.

³⁷ “Today you have been placed under the jurisdiction (*de fore*) of the Church” (final admonition of the bishop after the tonsure).

³⁸ Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

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case, even if they are not exempt from some service, they are given an assignment that is purely spiritual or else an assignment in the infirmary; they do not bear arms. Clerics are in the service of God and of souls before being in the service of the homeland. Exemption from military service is therefore a privilege of clerics, which shows in what esteem the Church holds them, by reason of their sacred character.

Canon 123 states: “A cleric cannot renounce his privileges.” Do not think that a cleric could just say, “I renounce such and such a privilege,” under the pretext that they are privileges granted by the Church. For example: “The Church does not want me to perform my military service, but I would like to do it.” There have sometimes been seminarians who come to ask for my advice and tell me, “I could be exempted from military service. What do you advise me to do? Should I do it or shouldn’t I?” I always tell them, “If you can be exempted, you should not do your military service.” “Yes, but during my service, couldn’t I be doing good to souls, by that contact?” “Of course! That’s not what I’m saying; you could do a great deal of good. But the law of the Church is there. You have to respect the laws of the Church.”

All of these considerations on the rights of clerics show us the high esteem in which the Church holds them. Now people smile at those sorts of things: “Striking a cleric is a sacrilege? You can’t be serious!” But is a cleric truly, publicly consecrated to God or isn’t he? So if you strike him because he is a cleric, you are doing something against a consecrated person. It seems that it is easier today to explain to people that breaking a chalice or using it for something profane is really a sacrilege. People say, “Yes, that is really a sacrilege. But striking a cleric, a sacrilege?” It is because they do not have a notion of the cleric as someone consecrated.³⁹

39 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 30, 1982.

6. The Obligations of Clerics

Clerics could become prideful thinking of this sublime function which God is giving to them. What an exaltation, what sublimity, what greatness, to participate in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ! And so the Church reminds clerics what their obligations are.⁴⁰

The obligations of the cleric⁴¹ all come down to a necessity to tend toward perfection. For that, the Church asks of him piety, obedience, knowledge, chastity, and a manner of life proper to his state.

What is the obligation of the cleric as regards holiness, as regards the path to perfection? Is he more or less committed to the path to holiness than those who found a Christian family or who are in some form of religious life without becoming priests?

I think that this obligation to holiness is greater,⁴² by the simple fact that they are entering the clergy and that they desire to become priests.⁴³

After the privileges of clerics, canon law speaks of their obligations. It is very explicit and very precise. Here is the first canon, canon 124: "Clerics must lead an interior and exterior life holier than that of laity and should excel in rendering them an example of virtue and good deeds." It is very short, but in two lines the Church shows us how She understands the cleric. People think that because canon law

40 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 13, 1982.

41 Canons 124 to 144.

42 "Clerics so [ought to surpass] other Christians by the excellence and the merits of their virtue, as they are above them by the eminence and the dignity of their state" (St. John Chrysostom, Sermon 40, PG 30, col. 852, quoted by Fr. Olier, P.S.S., *Traité des Saints Ordres*, Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1953, p. 134).

43 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

is a juridical book it has nothing in it to lift up our souls, and that is absolutely not true! This canon could have been left out, but the Church intervenes, through Her law, to help the cleric to acquire holiness.⁴⁴

The Christian who does not enter the clerical state already has an obligation to pursue holiness, by virtue of his Baptism, by virtue of his Confirmation: “I renounce Satan, his scandals, and his sins, and I attach myself to Jesus Christ forevermore.” That is not a vain promise but something very serious! As the priest places the white veil on the child’s head and gives him the candle, through his godfather and godmother who represent him, he says, “Keep the commandments of God and you will have eternal life. Keep the purity of your soul intact like this white garment in which you are clothed.” That is the obligation which the Christian takes for all of his life, wherever he may go, even if he remains in what we call the world. He is in the world but he should not be of the world. He therefore has an obligation to come and offer himself at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but he does so through the mediation of the priests in their ministry.⁴⁵ He cannot go up to the altar himself to offer the sacrifice and make the oblation of his family and of all that he has. God willed that there be priests who would share in His priesthood and who would act as intermediaries between Himself and the faithful.

Religious, by their vows, commit themselves to being saints in an even more solemn manner than the simple faithful. Before God and before the Church they pronounce their vows of religion in order to attach themselves to holiness in a public and official manner by the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Yet, even though this is a

44 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 31, 1982.

45 *Summa Theologica* III^a q. 82, a. 1, ad 2.

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grave obligation which the religious assumes in pronouncing his vows, and something tremendous before the Church and before God, nonetheless he cannot go up to the altar and offer the sacrifice any more than a simple member of the faithful because he is not a cleric; he is not a priest. He does not participate in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas the cleric, who commits himself to participate in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, is committing himself to holiness by his very function. He does not simply commit himself by a promise before God, before the elect of Heaven, before the Church. His particular function is a holy function because he participates in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. To be a priest and not to seek for holiness is a contradiction in terms. The priest ought to be essentially holy by the order which he receives.⁴⁶

Fr. Emmanuel speaks of the Church and of holiness. He makes some very beautiful reflections on the power of holy souls. He quotes the words of St. Augustine: “He who can understand how God, Author of all creatures, governs them by the intercession of holy souls, whom He makes His ministers in Heaven and on earth (for it is He who makes them to be so, and they hold the first place in all creation); he who can understand this, let him understand, and let him thus enter into the joy of his Lord.”⁴⁷ By these magnificent words, the great doctor opens the door for us and introduces us himself into the joy of the Lord. (...) There is indeed a visible hierarchy in the Church; but this hierarchy is dependent upon the mysterious hierarchy of holy souls.”⁴⁸

By their state, bishops, priests and all those who are in orders ought to be the closest to God, but in fact, there are others, and these are the saints. God considers these souls

46 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

47 St. Augustine, *De Agone Christiano*.

48 Fr. Emmanuel, *La Sainte Église*, Clovis, 1997, p. 120-122.

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with love and mercy, and they become in a way the lightning rods of God's justice and the source of many graces given to the faithful, to the Church and to all souls.

But it is certainly very normal that those who are called to give graces by the sacraments, by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, should also attract the graces of God by their prayer and by their holiness.

The Church asks that Her priests seek to be holier than laymen, since they are always surrounded by holy things. The priest, *sacerdos*, is called to give sacred things, *sacramenta*, and to do sacred things, *sacrificium*. The priest is constantly dealing with what is sacred. What are these sacred things? They are divine things, things which bring near to God, which unite to God. The priest is always in that environment. Should he not have sacred virtues in himself? Should the virtues of God not radiate from him?

That is why the spirit of desacralization, of secularization, of profanation, which has appeared since the Council and was present even before the Council, is such a terrible thing. It really is God being abandoned by His priests, since priests have ceased to be men of God, sacred persons. It is very sad for the faithful. That is why now more than ever the priest has to understand his vocation to holiness.⁴⁹

What are the means which the Church asks clerics to employ in order to live a life more holy than laymen? The Church asks them for piety, obedience, knowledge, chastity, and a decent life in accordance with their state as clerics. Those are the five things which the Church mentions in Her law so that clerics might be truly worthy of receiving the functions which they are going to exercise. It has a considerable importance for the holiness of the Church.⁵⁰

49 Retreat for the tonsure, Ecône, February 1, 1984.

50 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 13, 1982.

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Canon 125: “Local ordinaries,”⁵¹ that is to say the bishops and those who are responsible for the clerics, “shall take care that all clerics wash the stains of conscience by frequent sacramental Penance.” “Frequent.” Some say every week, others consider monthly confession to be enough. I think that we could go with the middle and say at least every two weeks. Moreover, that is what is generally necessary for gaining indulgences in a regular way.

In addition, “Ordinaries shall take care that all clerics devote some part of every day to mental prayer.” What does this “some part” mean? The commentator says a half hour, “a half hour of mental prayer every day.” That is practically what we do.

“They should devote some part of every day to visitation of the most holy Sacrament.” If priests were to do nothing but observe canon law, they would certainly sanctify themselves and they would sanctify others, because there is nothing more edifying for the faithful of a parish than to see the pastor, the vicar, spending a certain time in prayer in the chapel, in the parish, even if he is alone. When the faithful see him, they say to themselves, “There at least is a priest who has the faith!” Whereas it is not normal if they only see the priest in his church for the different services (saying Mass, hearing confessions, administering Baptism, preaching...), a little bit like an office-worker going to his job. A priest whose rectory communicates directly with the church, as is often the case, and who never goes to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament or to spend some time in prayer is not obeying canon law: “Every day they should visit the Blessed Sacrament.”

The same canon continues: They should “...cultivate the Marian rosary of the Virgin Mother of God, and strict

⁵¹ The *ordinary* is generally the one who has ordinary jurisdiction in the external domain: the sovereign pontiff, the resident bishops, the vicar general, etc.

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examination of conscience.” All those things are in canon law.

Canon 126: “All secular priests,” and all the more so priests who, like you, are members of a clerical society and therefore have an even greater duty to holiness, “must, at least every three years, perform spiritual exercises,” meaning, follow a retreat. However, the frequency ought to be decided by the ordinary. So the bishop may ask his priests to make a retreat every year. That is sometimes a little bit difficult, so the bishop splits up his clergy for their retreats. This used to be very strictly observed, as a general rule.

“No one is exempt from this, except in particular cases, for a just cause and with the express permission of his Ordinary.” Later on, you will be invited to the priests’ retreat which takes place every year at Ecône, before the seminarians come back.

Canon 135: “Clerics constituted in major orders are bound by the obligation of reciting completely the canonical hours.” You know what the situation is now. I have looked through the new breviary. When you read the statements at the beginning of the new breviary, called the “Liturgy of the Hours” (all in the vernacular, of course), you notice that there is practically no more obligation under pain of grave sin and that a person can dispense himself from saying it for the slightest reason. That is absolutely contrary to canon law. Not much is left of the obligations of clerics.

Canon 127 stipulates that beyond the obligation which falls to all of the faithful, “All clerics, but especially priests, are bound by a special obligation to show reverence and obedience to their own Ordinary.”

Ordinaries include bishops, abbots of abbeys, for example, apostolic vicars, apostolic prefects in mission territory, and also superiors of exempted religious congregations, which

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means religious congregations which are approved by Rome.

Canon 128: “Whenever and as often as the necessity of the Church requires it, clerics are to take and faithfully fulfill the responsibilities that have been committed to them by the Bishop.” For example, a cleric cannot refuse to preach by saying, “I’m afraid of preaching, it’s impossible, I can’t do it...”

Canon 130: “The course of studies having been completed, all priests shall submit each year for at least three years to an examination in the various disciplines in the sacred sciences.” Canon law asks for it. Bishops are supposed to organize tests every year, for three years after priestly ordination, in the various disciplines of the sacred sciences, to oblige young priests to continue their studies. So a priest could not say, “Now it’s over, no more books for me. I have a beautiful library... but it is just collecting dust!”

Canon 132: “Clerics constituted in major orders are prohibited from marriage and are bound by the obligations of observing chastity, so that those sinning against this are sacrilegious.” You see how the cleric is considered. The Church speaks of sacrilege for sin against chastity because this sin is such an offence against the sacred character. The second paragraph specifies that clerics in the minor orders who marry lose by the very fact their status as cleric.

Canon 133 concerns relations with women, in a general manner, within the rectory: “Clerics should take care not to retain or in other ways to frequent women upon whom suspicion can fall.”

It continues much more precisely by saying that no women with dubious reputations or who would be less than exemplary should be staying in the rectory. Ultimately, clerics can only have in their houses those women who have a natural relation to them such that no evil whatsoever may

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be suspected, for example their mother, their sister, their aunt, or those women whose uprightness is known to all, or else who are advanced in age. Obviously, the judgment is reserved to the bishop, to know whether such and such a person may live in the rectory or not.

You see, canon law is severe. It says that if clerics live in the same house with women about whom there is a certain doubt and if they do not obey the commands of their bishop, they are presumed to be living in concubinage. The Church is protecting the virtue of the priest and the reputation of the Church.

Now, canon 134: “The custom of common life among clerics is praiseworthy and to be favored so that, where it exists,” in a diocese, “to the degree possible, it should be preserved.” Therefore the Church wishes Her priests to live in community. That has not always been possible, since so many parishes were being founded and most of the time priests were alone. It was not always a very good thing.

You see who the bishops were that tried to give their priests a community life. St. Augustine was one of the first to do so for his clergy. At first he had a sort of little community around himself, who were called the canons regular. Canons regular are those who follow a common rule. Canon, *canonicus* in Latin, comes from the Greek κανόνας, which means standard, or rule. So the canons regular of St. Augustine gave rise to congregations and later founded different collegiate churches. A collegiate church was a parish taken in charge by a college of canons who had a life in community under a rule, all in remaining secular clergy. Canons were not religious but secular priests. So for a long time that custom of St. Augustine for organizing his clerics was widespread in Europe. St. Francis de Sales did the same thing. He founded a sort of rule for his priests, secular priests living in community.

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A collegiate church was an important parish and the canons of the collegiate church served the surrounding villages. It is a little bit the way our priories are organized now. We have a priory where the priests pray together and can be together. We are repeating what bishops did in the first centuries of Christianity. For centuries, that is how things worked.

It is only over the course of time, because of the increase in the number of priests, that they ended up multiplying parishes and spreading the priests out.

Also, the bishops could not manage to maintain that structure because there were already canons who were asking for permission to have their own little house and were starting to have a certain independence. That is why you find streets called "Canon Road" in a number of old villages, because canons were already not living in community but in little individual houses, all lined up next to each other. So little by little the bonds between priests were weakening, enough for each one to want his own house to live in. That was not a good thing, and today we can see the results arising from that situation.

You notice how canon law encourages priests to have that community life.

So you see why we can be all the more insistent in recommending it for a society of clerics such as our own. In fact, one of the *raisons d'être* of the Society of Saint Pius X is to help secular priests who are not members of the Society to live their priesthood in a holy manner. That is why it is important to show them the example of a priestly life which is regular, where you pray together and live in community and where the life is fervent and at the same time has a spirit of poverty. Even if we do not make a vow of poverty, we are still making promises of poverty. I think that we should manifest

that virtue as well. And we desire that those priests who are close to us might come to our priories to make retreats and find the spiritual help which they need, since they are often so isolated.⁵²

7. Fidelity: A Source of Joy

As he receives the tonsure today, which is the sign of his abandoning the things of this world and the sign of his attachment to Jesus Christ, the seminarian should be renewing his resolution to pursue holiness with all his soul, with all his heart, with all his strength. Holiness is no small thing. It is not just a word! It is a reality which the cleric has to put into practice during and after the seminary.⁵³

This official step which the seminarians are taking as they receive the tonsure demands that they be faithful to their engagement, and that fidelity is going to be their joy, their consolation. It is such a beautiful thing to be faithful! One day they will hear, as our Lord has said it and as it is written in the breviary: "Blessed is the faithful servant! Because you have been faithful in small things, come and reign in heaven over great things!" (*cf. Mt. 25:23*).⁵⁴ There you have the greatest wish a person can offer to every one of the seminarians, for their happiness, their consolation and their sanctification, as well as for the good of all the faithful.⁵⁵

52 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 31, 1982.

53 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

54 Second antiphon of lauds and vespers for the common of a confessor not a pontiff.

55 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1986.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORDERS OF CHURCH HIERARCHY

Seminarians of the Society of Saint Pius X are clothed in the ecclesiastical habit during their first year in the seminary, then receive the tonsure in the second year. They gradually advance toward the altar, climbing its steps as it were, before reaching the priesthood.¹ In their third and fourth years they receive the four minor orders: porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte. Then come the three others, called major or sacred orders. The subdiaconate and the diaconate are received in the fifth year and the priesthood the year after.

The life of the seminarian is therefore punctuated by ordinations. Every ordination is preceded by a three-day retreat for minor orders and a six-day retreat for the major orders of subdiaconate, diaconate and priesthood.

Archbishop Lefebvre here explains the pedagogical aspect of the various ordinations. His words throw into relief the gaps that exist in the new liturgy. In fact, since the liturgical reform, the treasure of the Church has been almost entirely destroyed by the suppression of minor orders and of the subdiaconate, thereby also depriving clerics of the graces attached to these magnificent ceremonies and their corresponding functions.²

1 “Order should be observed in ascending to orders. For he seeks a fall who aspires to mount to the summit by overpassing the steps” (St. Gregory, quoted in the *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 189, a. 1, obj. 3).

2 “If these ceremonies be carefully studied, we cannot fail to

1. The Degrees of Participation in the Priesthood

The word *order* implies a hierarchy, whether among things or among persons. In its broadest sense it may be applied to the Church, for example. The Church is an order because the Church is essentially unequal in Her members. She is made up of clerics and laymen. So there is a hierarchy within the Church. That is an essential point, which unfortunately no longer appears in the definition of the Church, in the new code of canon law.

Order applies more particularly to the hierarchy of the priesthood. There is a gradation from the episcopacy down to the tonsure. The episcopacy, the priesthood, the diaconate, the subdiaconate, and the minor orders all form a genuine hierarchy.

In what precisely does this hierarchy consist? It consists in a participation in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ.³

St. Clement, successor of St. Peter, speaks of the harmony of the cosmos. The world is ordered; every creature is in its place in this providential order.⁴ St. Clement also compares the hierarchy to the order which exists in an army. There are

admire and prize highly the ancient formulae appointed by the Church for the devout and solemn administration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Wherefore should so elaborate a ceremonial be observed at the ordination of a Catholic priest? For this reason, that he may be sufficiently cleansed, sanctified, and made worthy to offer to the tremendous majesty of God the most pure, most holy, most adorable and divine sacrifice of the holy Mass" (Rev. Fr. Martin de Cochem, O.F.M., *Explanation of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, ch. 2, § 2, Benziger Brothers, New York, 1896, p. 35). "When the Church gradually and at long intervals promotes candidates to Orders, like a watchful parent She never fails to exhort them to sanctity" (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

3 Sermon, Econe, March 23, 1985.

4 St. Clement of Rome, Epistle to the Corinthians, ch. 20-21, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, p. 19-20.

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degrees among the military leaders and each one strives to fulfill his charge at his particular level.⁵ That is why the successor of St. Peter invites everyone who is ordained to perform his own service well without trying to perform actions which are not of his order.⁶

With every ordination, the seminarians receive another degree of participation in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. By meditating on the texts of the ordination over the course of the preparatory retreat and by the prayers which they offer up to God every day, the seminarians are continually coming to a better understanding of the greatness of this sacrament.

That is why they approach their ordinations with joy, certainly, but also with a certain fear and trembling. They are like Moses ascending Mount Sinai, fearing to approach the presence of God; they, too, are climbing that mountain where they are going to find God, where they are going to find our Lord Jesus Christ. “*Send forth Thy light and Thy truth; they have conducted me and brought me unto Thy holy hill, and into Thy tabernacles*” (Ps. 42:3).⁷ They are drawing a little nearer to our Lord Jesus Christ, whom the angels revere in Heaven and whom the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and all the saints of Heaven adore for all eternity.⁸

Every ordination marks a step in the seminary. These are the great graces of the seminary: slowly but surely drawing nearer to the holy altar of the Sacrifice of the Mass.⁹

5 St. Clement of Rome, St. Clement of Rome, Epistle to the Corinthians, ch. 37-38, *ibid.*, p. 29-30.

6 Sermon, Ecône, February 8, 1987.

7 Taken from the prayers at the foot of the altar.

8 Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1975.

9 Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979.

2. Ordinations: An Invitation to Detachment from the World

These ordinations are the *raison d'être* of the seminary. A seminary without ordinations would not be a seminary. The days of ordination are truly filled with the light and the charity of the Holy Ghost. The seminarians are working through their studies and praying every day in view of receiving the graces of ordination. The seminary is preparing priests, and these steps of ordination, coming at regular intervals, are constantly placing the ideal of the seminary before the eyes of the seminarians.¹⁰

It is obvious that you have to prepare yourself for many years in order to receive a grace like that of the priesthood. These stages, made up of the tonsure, the minor orders and the major orders, are so many occasions for the seminarians to take stock and to see if they are truly answering the call of the Church, moving away from the spirit of the world and attaching themselves to God. The Church Herself keeps telling them, "You see what a ministry is being entrusted to you; think of what is about to be given to you."

My dear friends who are about to receive orders and who have been chosen by God to draw near to Him, to serve Him, and to give Him to souls, you have to ask yourselves this question: "Is anything telling you that you are still too full of the spirit of the world; that you are still too attached to the creatures all around you and to your own self?" We are plunged in this world of sin; how could its influences not seep into us as well and have a profound effect on the state of our soul? So we have to do everything possible to detach ourselves from this spirit of the world, from our own will,

¹⁰ Sermon, Ecône, December 24, 1979.

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from our personal ideas, and from everything which belongs to us.¹¹

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* teaches us that those who are preparing for ordination should have a heart that is pure and detached from all things so that they might be truly attached to God and thus be a light helping the faithful to sanctify themselves.¹² That should be the state of mind of anyone receiving this exceptional grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.¹³

Every ordination is marked by sacrifice, renunciation, rejection of sin, rejection of diabolical influences, and at the same time by this drawing near, this closeness, this ever greater love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The tonsure is already a sign of renunciation of the things of this world, while the fact of putting on the surplice is a sign of the love and the light of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The porter should manifest his love for the temple of God and take care of the house of God. He holds the keys, and as it says in the pontifical, he should “shut the church to the devil” and at the same time allow those to enter who are truly worthy of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The lector is already drawing a little bit closer to the altar. He carries the light of the Gospel. He therefore ought to be even nearer to our Lord, more penetrated as it were with the light and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then comes the exorcist, whose mission is to keep the devil away, to chase him out. But in order to chase him out of others, he first has to chase him out of himself and show the example of the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, the acolyte comes even closer to the altar. He is the one who serves Mass. He brings the cruets to the altar, the

¹¹ Sermon, Ecône, March 12, 1983.

¹² See the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, ch. 26, § 9.

¹³ Sermon, Ecône, April 7, 1984.

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matter which is going to serve for the holy sacrifice. Already he is entering the intimacy of the mystery of the altar.

As for the subdeacon, he should be distancing himself from the world. He has to commit himself to perpetual chastity and therefore to a separation from the world. His heart should already be more pure and more attached to our Lord Jesus Christ, all filled with our Lord Jesus Christ. He has to be showing the world this attachment to our Lord Jesus Christ, the One whom all the world should love. What man has ever been more loved than our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the history of the Church? But what man also has ever been more hated than He has? So the subdeacon should be proving his love for our Lord Jesus Christ by drawing away from the world.

The deacon draws still nearer to the altar and to the holy mysteries, nearer to the tabernacle. He therefore must have an even deeper love of our Lord and ought to practice the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ in an even more perfect manner. He will be reading the Holy Scriptures, proclaiming them. He has to radiate even more the greatness and the sublimity of the mysteries in which he is already participating in a more intimate manner.

Think of St. Stephen, that deacon stoned by the Jews and whose face they said was *radiant* (Acts 6:15). The men who were stoning him became even more furious at the sight of his face, seeing it reflecting the splendor of Heaven. The deacon has to give that same reflection of Heaven because he, too, is drawing so near to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, the priesthood brings us all the way into the mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ. The priest is another Christ. He should no longer have any thought, any desire, any love except for our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴

14 Sermon, Ecône, October 30, 1977.

3. Ordinations: Sources of Grace

Each time ordinations are conferred, the Spirit of our Lord should be just a little more present in the seminary. As it says in the pontifical, may an atmosphere of sanctity, justice, and truth ever reign more fully in the seminary! May the splendor of God's truth shine out in this house which is so dear to you and which you are going to remember all of your life. Those who return to the seminary where they were formed and ordained priests find a real joy in coming back to a place where they once received so many graces.¹⁵

Ordination ceremonies are always a source of greater holiness, and they are an encouragement, as well. We rejoice with the Church and with the elect in Heaven at seeing you climb the steps toward the priesthood because there would be no Church if we did not have priests: without the priesthood, there would be no more sacrifice; without the sacrifice, there would be no more Church.¹⁶

The ordination ceremonies give us the occasion to meditate more deeply on the greatness of the Church and of Her priesthood, and we cannot help but feel the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His Holy Spirit in a very special manner.

At every ordination, the seminarians really do receive specific graces which prepare them to go up to the altar and to offer the sacrifice of our Lord; for that is indeed what the priesthood is, according to what the Fathers of the Church teach us, what the whole Church teaches, especially the Council of Trent. Our Lord instituted the priesthood because He desired to place His own sacrifice in our hands. That is the destiny of these future priests.

15 Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1981.

16 Sermon, Ecône, June 9, 1984.

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The ordinations bring the seminarian ever closer to the priesthood to which he aspires. He should look to them as the inspiration of his whole spiritual life and his apostolate. The Church is saying so Herself, very beautifully, in Her wisdom and Her maternal love for Her future priests.¹⁷

With every new ordination, the seminarians are receiving immense graces, graces of choice from the good God, from our Lord, from the Holy Ghost. May these graces bear fruit in their hearts that they might be true apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that they might follow the example of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, becoming co-redeemers as she herself was co-redemptrix!¹⁸

17 Sermon, Ecône, March 12, 1978.

18 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1975.

CHAPTER 3

MINOR ORDERS

1. The Minor Orders in General

The ordinations of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte are made up of three parts: an admonition or instruction on the functions which will fall to the ordinands, the conferring of the attributes of the order, and finally a special prayer for the newly ordained, asking God for the grace and the necessary virtues to acquit themselves in a holy manner of the functions of the order received.

Minor Orders According to St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas divides ordinations into two categories.¹ He combines the three first minor orders, saying that they concern particularly the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is to say, the faithful. The porter, the lector and the exorcist are preparing the faithful to come to the Eucharist, to come to our Lord Jesus Christ. However, he considered that the particular grace of the other orders, starting with the order of acolyte all the way to the priesthood, was to draw near to our Lord Jesus Christ by a certain power over the

1 *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 37, a. 2.

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physical body of our Lord and no longer just over His Mystical Body.²

Obviously, action over the physical body of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the more important. Action over the Mystical Body is dependent on the priest's action over our Lord's physical body. This action is the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, *re-actualizing*³ on the altar the sacrifice of the cross. That is the finality of the priesthood.⁴

Thus the acolytes are already marked by this character which orders them toward the priesthood, even if certain simply remain acolytes, as in the case of our dear Brothers, for example. They really are ordained for the altar and they have a function which orients their life toward the service of our Lord on the altar.⁵

It would seem – and this is the most common opinion among theologians – that the orders which were directly instituted by our Lord are the episcopacy, the priesthood and the diaconate. The other degrees were instituted by the Church. However, according to the Doctor of the Church St. Thomas Aquinas,⁶ our Lord instituted the Sacrament of Holy Orders explicitly in its three principal degrees – episcopacy, priesthood and diaconate – and constituted the other orders implicitly.⁷

Moreover, St. Thomas considers that the minor orders already participate in the priestly character.⁸ The Holy Ghost does mark those ordained in minor orders with a participation in the priestly character. That character is then gradually completed as one advances in the ordinations.⁹

2 Sermon, Ecône, March 19, 1988.

3 *Réactuant* in French: a making present in all its efficacy.

4 Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986.

5 Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1975.

6 *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 37, a. 2.

7 Sermon, Ecône, March 23, 1985.

8 *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 35, a. 2, and q. 37, a. 1, *ad 2 & 3*.

9 Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1975.

Their Importance

The so-called minor orders may appear minor in their object, but they are not so as regards God.¹⁰ They are minor compared with the major orders, because these last give a power over the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The major orders are therefore much more holy, much more important, much more divine. But the orders which are called minor are in fact major in the sense that they give a power of vigilance over what concerns God Himself, over our Lord Jesus Christ who is God.¹¹

The dignity and the nobility of the minor orders can be measured by the dignity of Him who is the object of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. To whose service are they devoted who receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders? It is indeed to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There is certainly nothing small, or petty, or insignificant in the service of our Lord. That is why, even if these ordinations may appear of little importance, it would be judging them very wrongly to deny that they possess a great nobility and that they demand a great holiness.¹²

The priest is responsible for the places of worship in his charge and therefore still exercises the function of porter. He takes care that the bells ring to announce the offices. He takes care that everything which is in the church, in the

10 "There is nothing small in the Church: all is august, all is majestic, and the things which are lowest in appearance hold in themselves secrets so sublime and so magnificent that one scarcely dares look upon them, so elevated and full of mystery are they. For example, the dignity of porter, which appears low in the eyes of the world, nonetheless contains very high mysteries: and our Lord would not have instituted an order specifically for that dignity, if it were not most excellent" (Fr. Olier, P.S.S., *Traité des Saints Ordres*, Éd. du Vieux Colombier, 1953, p. 150).

11 Sermon, Econe, March 26, 1977.

12 Sermon, Econe, April 4, 1981.

chapel, be worthy of the Guest who dwells there. The function of the porter is therefore very important for the good of the Church, for the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ. The priest also exercises the order of lector when he teaches catechism to the children, when he teaches the Gospel. He therefore continues to honor the grace which he received with the order of lector. Next, he prepares souls to receive our Lord Jesus Christ and consequently chases out devils. He thereby makes use of his order of exorcist. Finally, the priest is careful that all of the participants in the Sacrifice of the Mass are worthy and fulfill their functions well, particularly the acolytes, who have the honor of carrying to the altar the matter of the sacrifice. So you can see the importance of the minor orders.¹³

Ceremonies That Nourish Our Faith

We admire the wisdom, the devotion and the piety with which the Church teaches us and fosters our faith. Indeed, by the institution of our Lord Jesus Christ and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the Church has composed these ceremonies, has composed our liturgy in such a way that by our senses we might rise up to eternal truths, and by sensible things we might more fully live things spiritual and the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are going to see precisely how the Church teaches us the esteem we should have for the priesthood, through these ceremonies of ordination.¹⁴

All of the ceremonies of ordination, all of the words of the pontifical, which date from so far back we cannot even trace them, express the faith of the Church of all time. These words are going to tell you and retell you that you are bearing

13 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 16, 1986.

14 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 10, 1980.

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the light, that you yourselves are meant to be a light, and that your light is supposed to shine in the darkness. They are going to tell you, the acolytes, that you are going to carry the light; the exorcists, that you are going to fight against the devil, against that darkness which is still so powerful today; the lectors, that you are going to a higher ground to carry the word of God to those who do not know it; and the porters, that you are going to guard the temple of the Lord and so manifest the sanctity of that temple, a sanctity which comes from the presence of God Himself who dwells there: “*This is no other but the house of God and the gate of Heaven*” (Gen. 28:17).¹⁵

Moreover, you will notice that, before you receive the grace of the particular order, the Church has you touch the things, the objects, which you are going to need. These objects are the symbol of what you are supposed to do and what you are supposed to be performing in minor orders.¹⁶

2. The Porter

The first of the minor orders is that of porter. It confers the charge of opening and closing the church,¹⁷ of keeping from it any unworthy persons, and of guarding the sacred vessels, vestments, and so on. The special virtue which he requires is zeal for the house of God and for souls.

During the ordination ceremony, the porter receives the keys from the bishop, as the symbol of the house of God and of all which it contains, for he is the guardian of the house of God. He calls the faithful to it. That is his function in the Mystical Body.

15 Mass for the dedication of a church; sermon, Ecône, Feb. 2, 1981.

16 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 10, 1980.

17 “This dignity represents the quality of porter which is in the priest, and the executive and spiritual power, which he has received in his ordination, to open and close to men the gates of Heaven” (Fr. Olier, PSS, *Traité des Saints Ordres*, Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1953, p. 144).

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The porter is the one who guards the house of God and who has the responsibility of giving a sense of the presence of Him who dwells there in the Holy Eucharist. He ought to act in such a way that this place might be the least unworthy possible of Him who dwells there. It can never be truly worthy of the greatness, the sublimity, the perfection, the omnipotence of God. Yet, may all those who enter be able at least to sense that grandeur, that nobility, that presence of God. May they have the desire to kneel down, to adore God, to look upon Him with the gaze of faith in order to participate truly in the mystery of God. Consequently, the porter should take care that the house of God be always clean, always in order. In that way he will be giving a lesson to the faithful, a catechism in pictures.

The mystery of the Redemption by the cross of our Lord and the mystery of His presence in the Holy Eucharist are so great that the very house of God ought to speak to the faithful; may it be for them a sign of hope, the sign of the charity of God and a reason for them to love Him in return and to serve Him with all their heart.

May all of the statues which are in the church make the faithful think of the Church triumphant. May the objects which are there for the sacraments – the baptismal font, the confessionals, the pulpit – remind them that they are on the way to Heaven and that they should be purifying themselves in order to prepare to participate in the mystery of the altar. May all of these things call to mind the Church militant so that the faithful might be truly participating in the life of the Church whenever they enter these places of worship.¹⁸

Everything in the arrangement and the decoration of the church should allow those who pray there to feel closer to Heaven, to feel as though they were in the antechamber

18 Sermon, Ecône, March 30, 1974.

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of Heaven, in the midst of the saints, the elect, the souls in purgatory, alongside the angels, the Virgin Mary, in order to unite themselves with the Holy Trinity. The church ought to carry us toward those heavenly regions and make us forget a little bit the things of the earth. The porter is responsible for all of that, and it depends partly on the arrangement of the sacred objects in the church and the care he takes of them.¹⁹

A church is not first the house of the people of God, but the house of God Himself. “*This is the house of God*” (Gen. 28:17). What care should you have then for your churches, your chapels, for all that concerns the liturgical ceremonies! You should have a watchful eye, at all times, that the altars be worthy of Him who descends thereon. You need to have that love for your churches, that love for your chapels.²⁰

Take care that the temple of God be beautiful. Do not put up with neglect, with altar linens for example that are not worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. That betrays a lack of faith. May all of the vestments and everything that makes up the beauty of the temple of God be well maintained in order that your churches might invite the faithful to respect, to recollection, to silence, adoration, veneration of Him who dwells there.²¹

The porter ought to guard the temple not only materially, but guard it also in his heart. The priest says these words at the altar: “*My God, I love the beauty of Your house*” (Ps. 25:8). You who are going to receive the order of porter should therefore love the splendor of the house of God.²²

The bishop says to the porters, “So act, even as about to give an account to God of the things which are kept under

19 Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986.

20 Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979.

21 Sermon, Flavigny, February 1, 1988.

22 Sermon, Weissbad, February 5, 1978.

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these keys.”²³ Do you fully realize that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is in this temple, along with all of the things which serve for the adoration, for the worship of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass? That is why the Church is asking you to watch faithfully over all that is enclosed by the keys of the temple of God. It is no small thing to be responsible for the temple of God, where our Lord resides, the God of Heaven and earth, the One who created us and redeemed us.²⁴

In a few moments, you are going to place your hands on the keys which the pontiff gives you as he explains that you are responsible for the temple of God; by the symbol of the keys giving you responsibility over the house of God, you will also be receiving a certain responsibility over the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁵

The Church reminds the porter that he ought to accept the faithful and not accept the infidels.²⁶ The faithful are juridically members of the Church by Baptism, by valid Baptism, meaning Baptism of water.

One may be a part of the Mystical Body of the Church by Baptism of blood or by Baptism of desire, but those do not make a person juridically a part of the Church. That is what the Church teaches us. It is important for us to remember because it is what places us on the road to salvation.

23 “This expression [like those] of the ordination of lectors and exorcists are already present in the *Statuta [Ecclesiae Antiqua]*; which indicates that they were in use, at least in Arles, from the beginning of the 5th century” (Duchesne, *Les Origines du Culte Chrétien [The Origins of Christian Worship]*, A. Fontemoing, 1898, p. 350, note 2).

24 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1980.

25 Sermon, Flavigny, February 1, 1988.

26 “Take good care, therefore, lest anything in the church perish through your negligence. Open the house of God to the faithful at the appointed hours, and always shut it to unbelievers” (admonition to the ordinands). In practice, we do not exclude infidels who are well-disposed. However, they may not receive Holy Communion, which Archbishop Lefebvre points out in the following extract.

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Once again, God may certainly include souls in the Mystical Body of the Church by Baptism of desire, explicit or implicit, and these souls may be saved, but we must not form an inaccurate idea of the Church, a Church without borders, a Church of simple communion, a Church which would thereby cease to be a society and turn into a sort of indefinite, imprecise group, whose frontiers they will eventually say include all men. Then all men would more or less implicitly be a part of the Church. That is a grave error. It is truly a heresy! It would be leading into error those who ought to become Catholic, and it would be a lack of charity toward them, since they might imagine that it is not necessary to be baptized in order to be saved. The pontifical therefore asks the porter to receive the faithful and to avoid receiving infidels. The reflection is very short but of very great importance. It shows the esteem which the Church attaches to the Catholic faith.²⁷

You will therefore have the grace, as porters, to prepare those who come into these churches, into these chapels. You will turn away those who are unworthy of drawing near to our Lord, whether because they have not received Baptism or because they are public sinners. In fact, we may wonder whether that is not precisely the reason why this order has been suppressed for the moment. People today seem to be afraid to speak of such a thing as public sinners; they are afraid to speak of people who are not Christians, who have not received a Catholic Baptism. We are not trying to banish the unworthy forever; we are trying to make them realize the fact that they are far from our Lord.

It is out of an apostolic spirit, out of charity, that we have to make them understand that because they are far from our Lord Jesus Christ, they may not receive Him, they may not go to Communion. We desire that in realizing their situation, they might ask to receive Baptism; that they might ask to

²⁷ Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986.

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do penance, to receive the Sacrament of Penance; to change their attitude toward our Lord and obey His laws in order to approach Him again. That is the sense in which the Church has always understood this distinction between public sinners and those who are faithful to God; between those who are not Christian and those who are Christian. It is not out of disdain for those who do not have the grace of our Lord, but in order to make them realize that they need to receive the grace of our Lord in themselves and be sanctified by it if they want to be saved.²⁸

The porter rings the bells to call the faithful to gather in the house of God to pray there, to receive the graces of the Holy Ghost, to live the life of God or to recover the life of God if they have lost it. The bells also ring to chase away devils. The blessing of bells is really admirable. It shows their influence for chasing away devils. Yes, the devil flees at the call of consecrated bells because it is the voice of God calling the faithful.²⁹

The bells call down the graces of God on the lands which hear their sound. They are like the angels of the church protecting the entire parish. They ring for public events. In case of disasters, in case of war, people ring the bells to call down the graces of God, to chase away the misfortunes which may fall upon all of the faithful of the parish.³⁰

I strongly advise you to go back and read again the ritual of the benediction, the consecration of bells. You will find there a whole program for your priestly life. The bells participate in the whole life of a parish and draw all of the faithful into it, and even unbelievers. The bells ring at the liturgical ceremonies and at all of the great events of the parish. They speak; they express the sentiments of the clergy, of the

28 Sermon, Ecône, March 12, 1978.

29 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1984.

30 Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986.

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parish toward all that concerns parish life. The porter is also responsible for this link between the church, the temple of God, and the faithful.³¹

As it says in the prayers of the pontifical, not only ought the porter to open the house of God, but he also ought to strive to open the hearts of the faithful. How so? By the example of a holy life. He ought to open the hearts of the faithful, that is, to carry them toward our Lord, toward heavenly things, by the example of his charity and of his respect for holy things. Nothing is more edifying, when you enter a church, than to sense a profound respect for the Holy Eucharist in the people responsible for the church.

The fact of seeing them on their knees, praying, asking for silence in order to be better united to our Lord Jesus Christ is very edifying, as is the discreet, charitable, respectful welcome of the faithful. All those things are part of Christian virtue, of that grace of the Catholic Church, of that presence of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of those who are responsible for welcoming the faithful, receiving them, helping them to pray. That is the role of the porter.³²

3. The Lector

The second minor order is that of lector. The role of the lector is to read the holy books, particularly at the office of matins, and to teach the catechism. He may also bless bread and new fruits. His special virtues are the love and the study of Holy Scripture, as well as zeal for the sanctification of the faithful. A profound faith is necessary to fulfill his role in a holy manner. During ordination, the lector touches the book of divine readings as a sign of his new mission.

31 Sermon, Flavigny, February 1, 1988.

32 Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986.

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The lector should meditate on Holy Scripture. Why? Because it used to be Church custom to read passages from Holy Scripture or from the Fathers, when the priest was preaching, or even more so when the bishop was addressing the faithful.³³ The priest would ask the lector to read such and such a passage from Scripture and from the Fathers, and then the bishop or the priest would comment on it. That is what the lector did. Even though these things are no longer the custom today, it is no less true that the lector should delve into the reading of Holy Scripture, delve into the examples of our Lord in order to reproduce them in his own way of being.³⁴

For the Church, the lector is ultimately a catechist. He reads the holy books and dispenses doctrine to the Christian people. There is nothing so beautiful or so great as being a catechist! We ask parents to teach catechism to their children, but the lector receives a special grace to teach it. He ought to do so with the holiness of those priests who used to teach catechism, such as the holy Curé of Ars, for example, or Charles Borromeo. He should act in such a way that the Christian people might be sanctified by the doctrine he is teaching. It is not a question of teaching difficult things, complicated things, but things that are simple.³⁵

So the lector receives that particular grace of teaching our holy religion, and God knows he will have occasion to do so throughout his years as a priest. What a beautiful role: to teach Christian doctrine, with fidelity, according to Tradition, without changing anything, without adding

33 “Lectors appear toward the end of the 2nd century; they were also members of the clergy. (...) Roman documents refer to them very frequently. In the 4th century, [lector] was the order which marked the beginning of a period of probation” (Duchesne, *Les Origines du Culte Chrétien*, A. Fontemoing, 1989, p. 330, 333-34).

34 Sermon, Ecône, March 26, 1977.

35 Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979.

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anything, without modifying anything! To pass on the truth to souls who are in search of it. It tells you the importance of these ordinations.³⁶

The Church encourages the lector to practice virtue in a way which is very special because, as it is so well expressed in the prayers and in the counsel of the bishop at ordination, he ought to stand on a higher level so as to teach the faithful and pronounce the word of God clearly and distinctly. Just as he is on a higher level to spread the word of God, so also he ought to be higher himself, have a high degree of virtue. Once again, the Church is telling you so Herself: "Practice what you read with your lips."³⁷ Do not say it only by your words, do not simply preach virtue to the faithful, but strive to illustrate the behavior of a virtuous man by your own example.

That is what the Church asks of the lector, and if he does it, he will have "part in the reward," like those of the past who preached the word of God worthily before him. The bishop says it to the lector as he receives the book of lessons: "Yours will be the reward of those who have duly administered the word of God from the beginning."³⁸ That is what the Church is asking of him and what he is promising to do.³⁹

Once he is ordained, the lector should be aware that something has changed in him, that he has come a step farther, that God has given him a *strength* of the Holy Ghost so that his faith might be more vibrant. The more we are penetrated with the great realities of our faith, the more we are going to live them.⁴⁰

The lector may already bless the new crops and chase away devils by his prayers and benedictions. Chasing the

36 Sermon, Albano, March 29, 1981.

37 Roman pontifical, admonition to the ordinands.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1980.

40 Sermon, Ecône, March 30, 1974.

devil and coming into the light are an underlying theme in all of the prayers of the Church. The lector is the instrument which our Lord Jesus Christ has chosen for these things. It is something he is going to have to remember throughout his priestly life.⁴¹

4. The Exorcist

The third order is that of exorcist. It gives notably the power of chasing devils from the bodies of the possessed, but also the power of keeping the devil away from the faithful. His particular virtues are purity of heart and the mortification of the passions. The exorcist touches the book of exorcisms, symbol of his function.

We believe that the devil exists. Our Lord spoke of him throughout His Gospel. He was constantly expelling demons during His public life in Palestine. The Gospel mentions the triple temptation which He underwent (*Mt. 4:1-11*). The devil tried to turn Him from His purpose; he tried to make Him prideful.⁴²

The demon pursued our Lord Jesus Christ every place He went while He was on earth. We can see that devils were surrounding Him as He traveled the roads of Palestine and they would have liked to keep Him from speaking. So it is that everywhere here below, wherever there is light, there is also darkness. We have to wait for Heaven to have light without darkness. You, too, will have devils chasing after you, trying to silence you and make you abandon the truth; trying to transform your charity into egoism. You are going to have to refuse temptation and expel those demons by the grace of the sacraments.⁴³

41 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1976.

42 Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979.

43 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1976.

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Whoever starts compromising with the devil is not going to be able to chase him very easily. He is going to have to make efforts to acquire virtue so that devils will fear him and will fly from him as well as from the souls of those they are possessing.⁴⁴

It is obvious that exorcists are going to have to keep the devil far away from themselves and submit their soul fully to the Holy Ghost in order to exercise their function, as it says so well in the texts of the Church.⁴⁵

That is why you have to correct yourselves of your vices and acquire virtue so that the devil, whom you expel from others, might lose the rights which he would otherwise have over you and which would prevent you from fulfilling your mission.⁴⁶

The exorcist has the particular duty of expelling demons, not only from catechumens but from the faithful as well. This responsibility is something real and profoundly important. The devil is everywhere: it is even more obvious today; we can see it with tragic keenness. How many souls come to us asking to be freed from demonic influence! It seems as though the devil were all-powerful, today more than ever. So the role of the exorcist is certainly to chase the devil from the bodies of those who are possessed, but of course he also has to keep the souls of the faithful away from all demonic influence, so that they will be truly ready to receive the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the best possible conditions.⁴⁷

Clerics have to be able to expel demons. It is true that, when it comes to using this power in the case of individual possession, the Church in Her tradition asks that exorcisms

44 Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1975.

45 Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1981.

46 Sermon, Ecône, March 12, 1983.

47 Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1981.

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be performed by priests delegated by their bishop.⁴⁸ But outside of these particular cases of possession, the priest frequently uses his power as an exorcist. In fact, there are exorcisms in nearly all of the sacraments. Likewise there are exorcisms in several blessings in the ritual such as that used to make holy water, as well as in many prayers. One could say that the prayer *Sancte Michaël Archangele* is an exorcism: “May God command him.” It is an order given to the devil to return to hell. That is a real exorcism. Once a seminarian has received the order of exorcist, it is certainly possible that he will have to use that power, and that his power over the devil when he says those prayers is greater than the power of a simple member of the faithful.⁴⁹

That is why this order which you are going to receive is going to be truly necessary for you to be able to pronounce with real effect all of the exorcisms you are going to have to read and recite. When you baptize, you will be performing an exorcism. In general, in all blessings, there is first an exorcism and then the blessing of the object. Why? Because ever since original sin the devil is the prince of this world and in a certain way he holds all of the elements of this world under his dominion. That is why the Church frequently uses the prayers of exorcism, and not only for people who may be possessed by the devil. We truly believe that the devil is in this world, and that the very name which Jesus gave to Satan, “*Prince of this world*,” (*Jn. 14: 30*) is not simple imagination but a sad reality. You will therefore have a real need for the grace of the order of exorcist, and for yourselves as well, I would say, so as to keep far from you all that may in

48 Although the Church attaches this power of exorcist to one of the minor orders, the present discipline demands that one await the priesthood to use the power. What is more, the priest himself needs the express permission of his bishop to perform a solemn exorcism.

49 Sermon, Ecône, March 26, 1977.

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one manner or another place you under the influence of the devil. The priest has to belong entirely to God.⁵⁰

5. The Acolyte

The fourth minor order is that of acolyte.⁵¹ The acolyte already shares in the Sacrament of Holy Orders by serving the wine and the water to the sacred ministers at the altar. He should apply himself to living a chaste life. By the fact of touching the cruets, he receives a certain power over the offerings which are going to be placed upon the altar.

The particular grace given to the acolytes already has to do with the Eucharist itself. St. Thomas says that the last four orders – the priesthood, the diaconate, the subdiaconate, and the order of acolyte – are all turned toward our Lord in a particular manner because they touch the sacred things.⁵²

St. Thomas writes that there is nothing more divine than the object of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the object of the Sacrament of the Eucharist: our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The priest speaks the words of the consecration, touches the body of our Lord and gives Him to souls. The deacon can already draw near to the most Blessed Sacrament to the point of being allowed to touch the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The subdeacon has a particular care of the sacred vessels. These three orders are therefore called major, because those who receive them have power over consecrated things. They

50 Sermon, Econe, March 12, 1978.

51 “The existence of this order was already evident in Rome and in Carthage in the middle of the 3rd century. Furthermore, Pope St. Cornelius (251-253) and St. Cyprian [bishop of Carthage] (248-258), speak of it in their writings as an order of the clergy. It seems we could go even farther back and attribute the institution of the order of acolyte to Pope St. Fabian (236-250)” (Fr. René Duboscq, P.S.S., *Les Étapes du Sacerdoce*, Desclée & Co., 6th Edition, p. 70).

52 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk. IV, ch. 75.

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ought to have a degree of purity which is even greater than those who are in the other orders.

The function of the acolyte is to prepare that which will be the matter of the sacrament, the wine and the water which are going to be transformed into the substance of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The very words which are pronounced as the cruets are handed to the acolytes are already a reference to the sacrifice of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵³ That is why he, too, has a role which already touches indirectly the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Holy Eucharist.⁵⁴

By bringing the matter of the sacrament to the altar, the acolyte is already participating in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. We might say it is only a small participation but in fact there is no small participation in the Eucharist. The very fact of bringing to the altar that which is about to be transformed into the substance of the blood and of the body of our Lord is something extraordinary. Even though this participation in the Eucharist may seem minimal, it is still a grace that goes beyond our own possibilities, our own dignity, obviously.⁵⁵

What then should be the purity, the chastity of the acolyte, to approach the altar bringing what is about to become the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ!⁵⁶

During the ordination ceremony, the bishop invites the acolyte to touch the candlestick, expressing his role of carrying the candle during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The acolyte should be like the light on the candlestick.

53 "Receive the cruet, to minister wine and water for the Sacrifice of the Blood of Christ, in the name of the Lord" (Roman pontifical).

54 Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1981.

55 Sermon, Ecône, March 23, 1985.

56 Sermon, Ecône, March 12, 1983.

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The order of acolyte and the major orders confer powers over the physical body of our Lord Jesus Christ and they give a corresponding power over His Mystical Body at the same time. So the acolytes are also supposed to be a light, not just for themselves but for others. That is in fact what the ritual says, in the words which the bishop is going to pronounce over you in a few moments: “that you may enlighten yourselves and others and the Church of God.” That is why you carry the light: so that you yourselves and also the Church of Christ may be enlightened by the example of your virtues, by the example of your faith; so that you might be a light in the world.⁵⁷ The bishop keeps coming back to that idea about you in these different prayers. Keep that idea in your heart. Make the resolution to be truly a light which enlightens the world, a light of faith, a light of holiness, a light shedding the light of the Gospel wherever you go.⁵⁸

This light represents our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Himself said, “*I am the light of the world*” (*Jn. 8:12*). He likewise told His disciples, “*You are the light of the world*” (*Mt. 5:14*). The acolytes have to remember that they are bearing the light of Jesus Christ; they are bearing it to enlighten the faithful people and they are bearing it for themselves, that they themselves might be enlightened by our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

We do not put the light under a bushel, we do not cover it up; it is meant to spread everywhere. This means that the acolyte ought to manifest the light of our Lord Jesus Christ by his virtues, so that the people who meet him might give glory to God.⁶⁰

57 St. John Chrysostom, *In Matth.*, ch. 5, *PG* 31, col. 233.

58 Sermon, Ecône, March 23, 1985.

59 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 10, 1980.

60 Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979.

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The pontifical says that “the fruit of the light is in all goodness and justice and truth.”⁶¹ Those words mean quite simply everything that our Lord is for us. That is why the acolytes have to have an even greater resemblance to our Lord. They are carrying the light, so they ought to be the light of the world and show it by their manner of being. So they have to have a particular love of those virtues which are recommended to them and which are the fruits of the light: goodness, mercy, indulgence, charity, holiness. They need to imitate our Lord in His holiness and His truth; they need to have an even closer resemblance to God, to our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶²

61 Roman pontifical, admonition to the ordinands.

62 Sermon, Ecône, March 26, 1977.

PART III

THE STEPS OF THE ALTAR

CHAPTER 1

THE SUBDIACONATE

The role of the subdeacon is to present the paten and the chalice to the deacon at solemn high Mass, to pour the water into the chalice, and to sing the Epistle. He is also responsible for purifying the sacred linens.¹

The ceremonies of the subdiaconate take place as follows: after the admonition concerning their definitive commitment, the ordinands prostrate themselves on the ground, face to the earth, as a sign of humility and adoration, as the patriarchs and the prophets once did. Then in unison with all the elect of Heaven is sung the Litany of the Saints, that favorite prayer of the Church in which all of the meritorious titles and the works of the God-Man are presented to the Holy Trinity. This prostration and this litany precede the diaconate and the priesthood as well. Then the admonition to the ordinands lists out the functions of the subdeacon. There follow the tradition of the chalice and the paten, the prayer for the new subdeacons, and finally the imposition of the sacred vestments and the handing over of the book of Epistles.

¹ “The institution of the subdiaconate can very probably be traced to the 2nd century, since we already find subdeacons nearly everywhere toward the end of the 3rd century, both in the East and in the West” (Fr. R. Duboscq, PSS, *Les Étapes du Sacerdoce*, Desclée & Co., 6th Ed., p. 87).

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From the beginning of the ordination, the bishop warns the subdeacons that perpetual chastity is imposed upon them and that no one may be admitted to this order without the sincere will to accept celibacy (CIC, can. 132). In order to allow the subdeacons to raise their mind regularly to God, the Church commands them to recite the breviary (CIC, can. 135). Their new state demands of them a profound spirit of faith and the practice not only of purity of body but also of soul.

The bishop asks for the subdeacons the grace to fulfill their functions well, along with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, so that they might be the watchful guardians of the altar and of the holy Host during the sacrifice.

The ceremonial of the subdiaconate emphasizes the holiness of the priesthood, which is an inward holiness. It finds concrete expression in the decision to give oneself totally to Jesus Christ and to leave the world, to abandon all the cares of the world. As St. Paul says, he who is ordained “*does not entangle himself in worldly affairs*” (II Tim. 2:4). Of all the orders, the subdiaconate is certainly the one that most emphasizes this consecration.²

1. A Vibrant Call to Holiness³

The instruction which the bishop addresses to the subdeacons is a vibrant call to change their lives: “If up to now you have had a certain somnolence, a certain indifference in your piety, in your devotion, in the love of God, now you must be vigilant. If you have been intemperate, be sober. If you have been too free, be chaste.”⁴ If your faith has not been

2 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 14, 1987.

3 “The Holy Orders prerequisite holiness (...). Hence the burden of orders should be laid on the walls (*i.e.* men) when these are already seasoned with holiness (...) by drawing out the damp of vice” (*Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae}, q. 189, a. 1, ad 3).

4 Cf. the Roman pontifical, admonition to ordinands.

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very lively up until now, then from now on you are going to need to have a lively faith, the true Catholic faith.⁵

The Church insists on subdeacons' having the spirit of faith. She ends her admonition on that note. She takes up the extraordinary expression of the Apostle, "*All that is not of faith is sin*"⁶ (*Rom. 14:23*).⁷ What does the bishop mean when he speaks these words to them? He means that everything which is in the world draws toward sin. Only the faith gives the light which saves, gives the grace that washes us in the blood of Christ and gives eternal life, through the Sacrament of Baptism and through the other sacraments. All that is not tied to the faith ultimately is in the service of sin, even if there are natural lights which are still good in themselves; if they are not ordered toward the faith, if they are not purified by grace, they cannot produce acts which are meritorious for eternal life.⁸

God knows we need to hear these words today. How many people are losing the faith – alas! even among the clergy. How many people today are falling away from the faith! That is why it is more necessary than ever that this call be heard by the subdeacons, so that they might be truly the lights which enlighten the world. If up to that moment they have not been sufficiently aware of this necessity of putting Christ in the center of all things, in the center of their heart and soul, may they make that resolution now, at this point, of placing Jesus everywhere, for without Him we can do nothing. He said so Himself: "*Without Me, you can do nothing*" (*Jn. 15:5*).⁹

5 Sermon, Ecône, March 19, 1988.

6 *Omne quod non est ex fide, peccatum est.*

7 "Be such as to worthily assist at the Divine Sacrifice, and to serve the Church of God which is the Body of Christ. Be grounded in the true and Catholic faith; for as the Apostle says: All that is not of faith is sin, and schism, and outside the unity of the Church" (Roman pontifical).

8 Sermon, Ecône, May 21, 1983.

9 Sermon, Ecône, March 19, 1988.

2. Dispenser of the Mysteries of God

Before the magnificent assembly of future subdeacons clothed in the white alb for their ordination, the bishop is tempted to repeat the words of the Apocalypse where one of the elders asks the angel, “*These who are clothed in white robes, who are they? and whence have they come?*” And the angel replies to the elder, “*My lord, thou knowest. These are they who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and who serve the altars of the Lord*” (cf. *Apoc. 7: 13-15*).

This passage applies very well to ordinands to the subdiaconate. During their years of preparation for the priesthood, particularly in the seminary, these Levites have prepared their souls, they have washed them in the blood of the Lamb, and now they are ready to serve the altars of the Lord ever more fully and ever more perfectly.¹⁰

The subdeacons are going to receive the chalice and the paten, empty of course, but already the Church allows them to touch the sacred vessels. The Church asks them to care for the altar cloths with a particular attention, because those are the linens that surround the body of our Lord Jesus Christ; She reminds them that the altar itself is Christ,¹¹ and that the vestments which surround the altar and which adorn it represent the saints, the faithful, the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus the subdeacons, remembering the responsibility bestowed upon them, will also be watchful over this Mystical Body of our Lord and, as the Church so well expresses it, they will purify the souls which are going to approach the holy

¹⁰ Sermon, Econe, May 21, 1983.

¹¹ “The altar of Holy Church is Christ, as John testifies, who says in his Apocalypse that he saw Him as a golden altar standing before the throne. In Him and through Him the gifts of the faithful are offered to God the Father” (Roman pontifical, admonition to ordinands).

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altar and the Eucharistic sacrifice. They will purify them by heavenly doctrine, by the doctrine of the faith which our Lord Jesus Christ taught to us.

That is why they will also receive the power to read the Epistles for the living and the dead. They will touch this book of the Epistles and in so doing they will receive the particular grace of being able to convert souls by their word and by the reading of these Epistles. It is therefore an immense grace which God is granting to them.¹²

By the subdiaconate, they are going to participate in the great mystery of God in a manner even more effective and profound. They are going to be dispensers of the mysteries of God. The mystery of the altar, of this Sacrament of the Eucharistic sacrifice in which they are participating more fully, is indeed very great.¹³ Never can we have sufficient esteem for this mystery of our faith.¹⁴

3. The Outpouring of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost

The prelate addresses the seminarians who are going to receive the order of the subdiaconate.

My very dear friends, you will notice that all of the gifts of the Holy Ghost are listed out in this ceremony of the subdiaconate. As he names them, the pontiff asks each of these gifts for you, so that they might fill you entirely. That is another sign of the intention of the Church, that She is asking you to be open to receiving the graces of the Holy Ghost so that you might be perfectly sanctified.¹⁵

12 Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1979.

13 “Be such as to worthily assist at the Divine Sacrifice, and to serve the Church of God which is the Body of Christ” (Roman pontifical, admonition to ordinands).

14 Sermon, Ecône, May 21, 1983.

15 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 14, 1987.

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May you be truly filled with this Spirit of light, with this Spirit of strength, with this Spirit of wisdom, which you are going to need in order better to understand the great mystery of the faith, the great mystery of the Lord.

We are dealing here with supernatural mysteries which God willed from all eternity and which He carried out within time.

Man was created for the supernatural life, with the grace of God. The supernatural life builds upon nature, bringing man into the mystery of God and into the intimacy of the Holy Trinity. God prepared men for this supernatural life by His own will. As ministers of the altar, you have to be particularly aware of that fact and thank God for it.¹⁶

4. The Commitment to Celibacy

The dignity which you are going to acquire has certain demands and specifically, this very day, you are going to take a decisive step which holds a very particular meaning. It symbolizes your detachment from the things of this world and your total gift to our Lord Jesus Christ in a life of celibacy, in the consecration of your souls and of your bodies. Henceforth you will be able to say, "I belong entirely to Jesus in order to participate more intimately in His sacrifice, in order also to be more fully given to His interests, namely, the glory and praise of God and the sanctification of souls."¹⁷ I wish to be entirely given to pursuing the work of Redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁸

¹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, May 21, 1983.

¹⁷ "Truly an ordination ceremony, frequent though it be in the Catholic Church, never fails to touch the hearts of those present: how admirable a sight, these young ordinands, who before receiving the subdiaconate, before, that is, consecrating themselves utterly to the service and the worship of God, freely renounce the joys and the pleasures which might rightfully be theirs in another walk of life" (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

¹⁸ Sermon, Ecône, March 23, 1985.

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When the pontiff says to you, "Come forward," you are going to be taking a step. Do so in all the fervor of your soul, in all the love of your heart, in all the charity which you have toward our Lord in your souls, in order to be entirely His, in order to make a profound and perfect resolution today to be truly His disciple, to be truly His apostle.¹⁹

This is an important, definitive commitment, and the pontiff is going to tell you so in his admonitions. He is going to say to you, "Henceforth, if you come forward and if you are determined to take this step, you will belong definitively to God and it will no longer be a question for you to engage yourselves in the bonds of marriage."²⁰

That is why you must be stable and firm in your resolution. You are making a great promise today. As long as you were not subdeacons, you were not definitively committed. Now that you are subdeacons, you are committed before God, before the Church, before all of Christendom.

Normally, religious have to have made their perpetual vows before receiving the subdiaconate and, normally, in a society such as the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X, its members ought also to have made their definitive engagement. But the circumstances are such today that it seemed to us, at least for the Society, more prudent to wait until later for this definitive engagement.

However, my dear friends, make this definitive engagement in spirit; may your heart be given entirely to God; may there be no limit of time.

The more the world is shaken in its faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the more the world finds it hard to follow our Lord, the more you have to manifest your resolution to attach yourselves to Him, and manifest it everywhere.²¹

19 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 14, 1987.

20 Cf. the pontifical. Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 13, 1988.

21 Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1986.

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It seems at first sight that the requirement of celibacy goes against nature. Was not man created to found a family? Yes, indeed, before our Lord Jesus Christ, even the Levites founded families and served the altars; but our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who became man wished to give the example of celibacy. He did not engage Himself in the bonds of marriage and He wished that those closest to Him also be persons maintaining celibacy, virginity: the most Blessed Virgin Mary, His Mother; St. Joseph, St. John; these were the closest to our Lord. In that way, our Lord showed us the importance He attaches to celibacy, to virginity.²²

Jesus chose Mary to be His Mother. Jesus chose Joseph to be His foster father, the one whom everyone considered to be His father. Among the apostles, Jesus chose St. John to be His beloved disciple. What did He ask of these people? What did He ask of these people whom He had chosen in a particular manner to be with Him and near Him during His earthly life? Virginity. Mary was always a virgin. She is called “Queen of Virgins.” In his litany, Joseph is called “Guardian of Virgins.” St. John was also chosen by Jesus in an extraordinary manner to receive His Mother. Why? Because he was a virgin, also. He was the guardian of the Virgin Mary and of her virginity. That is what Jesus teaches us by His choice of the souls who were to surround Him.

The Church also asks the subdeacons to be virgins and to keep celibacy, to keep the beautiful virtue of chastity, because they, too, are chosen to draw near to our Lord Jesus Christ like the Virgin Mary, like St. Joseph, like St. John. Why? Because they are called to live with our Lord Jesus Christ in a very intimate manner, and especially because they are called to the most sublime, the most divine function that may be imagined here below, that of ascending the altar

22 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 13, 1988.

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to pronounce the words of the consecration, and making Jesus descend on the altar in His body, His blood, His soul, His divinity; that of touching the body of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, and giving Him to souls. Could any role be greater or more beautiful? How is it that God has given such power to His creatures and that He should obey the words of His own priests?²³

Just as God chose those who were to be near Him and asked them to remain virgins, so the Church asks virginity of those to whom She confides what is most dear to Her, most beautiful, most sacred. So you see, that is the ultimate reason for the celibacy of the priesthood.

We sometimes hear people justifying priestly celibacy by saying that it is normal for the priest to remain unmarried because his responsibility keeps him so occupied that he could not take care of a family and at the same time fulfill the responsibilities of his priestly role. In that case, the country doctor should also be at the constant disposal of his sick patients, of the victims of an accident. He is no longer master of his time, either. Night and day he has to be able to answer anyone who calls. He would not have the time to take care of his family, either. So that is not the right reason.²⁴

The profound reason for consecrated priestly celibacy is the same reason for which the most Blessed Virgin herself remained a virgin. It was just and fitting that she remain a virgin because she had carried our Lord in her womb. The priest also brings God to earth by the words which he pronounces at the consecration. He has such a closeness to God, who is a spiritual Being, a Spirit above all, that it is good

23 “May your obedience be therefore prompt like that of the angel when God calls him; like that of Jesus when the priest consecrates Him” (St. Peter-Julian Eymard, *La Divine Eucharistie*, “4th series, *L’Eucharistie et la Perfection Chrétienne*,” Librairie Poussielgue Frères, 1880, p. 477).

24 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 14, 1982.

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and just and eminently fitting that the priest be a virgin and remain celibate. That is the fundamental reason. It is because the priest has received the character which allows him to pronounce the words of the consecration and to bring our Lord upon the earth to give Him to others; that is the reason for his virginity.²⁵

That is why, starting with the New Testament – since the proximity between God and His ministers is infinitely greater than His nearness to those who served the Tables of the Old Testament, the Tables of the Law – it is just that God and the Church ask priests to remain celibate and to devote themselves to Him entirely.²⁶

The Church has advocated the celibacy of priests from the earliest centuries.²⁷ It is a magnificent honor for the Church, an honor which we have to guard like a treasure. No other religion asks such a thing of its ministers, and you notice that of all those who have left the Church – all of the heretics, the schismatics – all or most of them have entered into the bonds of marriage. It is the honor of the Church to have maintained celibacy for Her priests, for what other priests can say that they carry in their hands the body, the blood, the soul and the divinity of Jesus Christ? That they carry God in their hands? That by their lips and their words,

25 Conference, Rennes, 1973.

26 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 13, 1988.

27 “The law of ecclesiastical celibacy, whose first written traces pre-suppose a still earlier unwritten practice, dates back to a canon of the Council of Elvira, at the beginning of the fourth century, when persecution still raged. This law only makes obligatory what might in any case almost be termed a moral exigency that springs from the Gospel and the Apostolic preaching” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*). “St. Epiphanius at the end of the fourth century tells us that celibacy applied even to the subdiaconate” (*ibid.*). “[T]he discipline of celibacy-continenence in major Orders ‘has been observed by the whole Church and always kept’, and on this basis it can effectively be regarded as an unwritten tradition of apostolic origin” (Fr. Christian Cochini, S.J., *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, Ignatius Press, 1990, p. 249).

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they make God come down on the altars? Only the Catholic religion has this honor of being so close to God, of being so united to God, of giving God to its faithful in the Holy Eucharist. Is it surprising then that the Church would ask Her priests not to share their heart, not to have any other love than our Lord Jesus Christ?²⁸

My dear subdeacons, celibacy is like a ray of the greatness, the sublimity of our Lord reflecting on you. By this total attachment of your being to our Lord Jesus Christ, without holding anything back, you are desiring to belong to Him completely and without limit. In so doing you are manifesting the greatness, the omnipotence, the virtue of our Lord Jesus Christ and the holiness of the Church. Nothing manifests the holiness of the Church like this commitment. Therefore, be that example, my dear friends; attach yourselves to this very special virtue which God is asking of you.²⁹

The celibacy and the chastity of the priest are moreover an extraordinary means of apostolate, an example that really convinces. How many pagans, how many of those who have left the Church come back because of the holiness of the priest or the example also of the vows of chastity of monks and nuns! The fact of giving all one's life, all one's being to God is a great example which draws souls after it. When I was a missionary in Africa, I often heard young people say that they could not believe in the celibacy of priests. I even remember the one who is today the Archbishop of Yaouné, Archbishop Zoa. He told us that he could not believe in the celibacy of priests when he was young, nor in the vows of the religious. But when he saw the practice of these virtues by priests and religious, he said, "That religion is the religion of God. God is there, the truth is there." I think that happens

28 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 13, 1988.

29 Sermon, Econe, March 15, 1986.

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more often than we realize. So remember that celibacy, preciously, publicly guarded, is a source of graces not only for your personal sanctification but also for the fruitfulness of your apostolate.³⁰

What an example for married people to see the priest practice the virtue of chastity, of virginity! It is an example Christians need in order to help them practice this virtue of chastity in their own marriage.³¹ We could define marriage as a school of continence, the apprenticeship of the virtue of chastity. The practice of this virtue is not always easy in marriage. Consequently, the faithful need this example of priestly virginity and chastity, manifested by priests in their life, their attitude, their relations, their piety. It is an absolutely indispensable element in the Church. To the extent that the virginity of priests disappears, it is obvious that the virtue of chastity is also going to disappear in Christian homes. That is why the subdiaconate is so important for the priest, because it reminds us of this virtue.³²

So we need to take the means in order to guard this celibacy like a treasure. The general atmosphere today is contrary to the chastity of the priest. In our priories and in our ministry, we need to hold to what is prescribed in our statutes. In the pastoral work we have to do, let us be prudent, let us be discreet. We have to realize that we, too, are weak: "*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*"³³ (Mk. 14:38).

30 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 13, 1988.

31 "Let Thy precepts shine forth in their lives so that by the example of their chastity, the faithful may be aroused to holy imitation" (preface to the ordination to the diaconate).

32 Sermon, Econe, March 15, 1975.

33 "The flesh, an Hebraic expression, signifies human nature with the vicious instincts which it still has in it, even after its Baptism. The spirit does not signify the spiritual soul by reason of which man occupies his superior rank in nature, but that immaterial soul insofar as it is vivified by the Holy Spirit. The combat between the flesh and the spirit is this conflict between nature and grace, the difficulties and the

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We therefore have to take the necessary precautions. There should be cloisters in our priories which people of the world may not cross. Moreover, you know that men and women work side by side today in various domains, which is something the popes never used to approve. It is something that has been gradually increasing. That is also a danger for our priests. We have to avoid too much familiarity with the women who help us and who are certainly very devoted to God, because there is still a real danger! We need to be careful. So let us make our resolutions against these dangers, not just in theory but in practice.³⁴

In making before God the vow of chastity, the subdeacon is imitating his good Mother in Heaven. He has to ask her to grant him special graces in order to observe this vow perfectly. She is immaculate, which means without sin. May he, too, be without stain in the observation of this promise of chastity made for the service of our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁵

In Heaven, there is nothing but Jesus and souls – souls united to their glorious bodies, of course, but, as the Lord says, there will be no more marriage in Heaven (*cf. Mt. 22:30*). There is nothing but the union of the Mystical Body with our Lord Jesus Christ and of all souls with our Lord. Well, God is asking you already here below to resemble what you will be in Heaven later on. Promise our Lord Jesus Christ from the bottom of your heart to try to imitate our good Mother in Heaven by your chastity, by your purity, and so to be also a light and a support for those who are in the bonds of marriage. In difficult circumstances, the model which the priest gives helps them to understand that they also have to know

glorious issue of which the author of *The Imitation of Christ* describes so admirably (*cf. book III, ch. 54-55*)” (Cardinal Mercier, *La Vie Intérieure [The Interior Life]*, Éditions Warny, 1950, p. 41-42).

34 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 13, 1988.

35 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 14, 1987.

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how to do penance, how to sacrifice themselves to fulfill the law of God and to imitate our good Mother in Heaven.³⁶

The Church is asking you for chastity and purity of body, but She is also asking you for purity of heart, which first supposes purity of the intelligence. She is asking you to be attached to the truth, to seek it and to cling to it, to strive to keep your mind from attaching itself to error or falsehood. The truth is our Lord Jesus Christ: "*I am the Truth*" (Jn. 14:6). Ask our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost that you might be always attached to the truth, which is particularly expressed in the Catholic faith. May it be for you the object of an ever more profound attachment. All of the martyrs died because they were attached to the truth; they gave their blood because they believed. They proved their faith; they shed their blood to defend the faith. Now may you, too, be attached above all to keeping the faith, to defending the faith.

Then, after the purity of your intelligence, join to it the purity of your will. Be without stain, in the image of the Immaculate. Act in such a way that your will might be attached to nothing which could draw you away from our Lord Jesus Christ. In the prayers before Holy Communion, the priest utters the following words: "Lord, never allow me to be separated from You." May this be your resolution today, for the purity of your will, for the purity of your heart. "My God, may I never separate myself from You": that is what you should be asking God, asking the Holy Ghost, in a very special manner, through the intercession of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.³⁷

36 Sermon, Ecône, March 25, 1985.

37 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 14, 1987.

5. The Recitation of the Breviary

The subdeacon receives the grace of keeping celibate, of being pure in order to give himself entirely to God, and he also receives the grace to pray, for from this moment on he is obliged to recite the divine office. The priest is God's religious; he is a man of prayer. He ought to have a soul which prays all throughout the day. That is why this divine office recited throughout the day makes us pray and offer our heart, our soul and all the Church to God, and unites us to the prayer of all Christians. So, from today onward, you are going to carry the prayer of the whole Church through your breviary, and you are going to pray every day, until the end of your life, to ask God to spread His graces over the holy Church. This is a necessity for Her; She needs the prayer of the priest.³⁸

You now have the satisfaction – I would say the consolation – of saying your breviary. Take advantage of these years which you still have in the seminary to say it peacefully and tranquilly, taking your time. You are not rushed by an urgent apostolate or one which is constantly distracting your thoughts. Strive to understand it well and to meditate all of the wealth it holds, for that will also help you in your meditation and your contemplation. I hope that this desire, this spirit of prayer, this spirit of meditation in our priories will be one of the marks of the Society of Saint Pius X. I thank the good God when I see that the exercises of meditation and prayer are very regularly observed in the priories of the Society. I think that is something absolutely indispensable for really holding to the grace of the priesthood.³⁹

38 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

39 Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

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How beautiful it is to see the priest before the Blessed Sacrament in a little country chapel, reciting his office, praying for his parishioners and for all of the faithful, loving to be there beside our Lord Jesus Christ! There, you will love having your *prie-dieu* next to the Blessed Sacrament. Show people your spirit of prayer. Let the faithful see you praying. There is nothing sadder for the faithful than to realize that their priest is not a man of prayer, that their priest fulfills his role like an office worker, going up to the altar, coming back down and quickly leaving the church. Oh! You will not be one of those priests. You will be one of those who love prayer and love to show it. When you are with your brother priests, even if there are only two of you, recite your prayers together. Recite them publicly so that the faithful people might see priests who pray, priests who love to unite themselves to God, who have the faith, who believe in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, who love their church. All of these beautiful churches in the hearts of our villages, built for prayer. In manifesting your spirit of prayer, you will be rejoicing the Church; you will be rejoicing the hearts of the faithful.⁴⁰

40 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

CHAPTER 2

THE DIACONATE

The deacon is above all the minister of the bishop or the priest at the altar. He sings the Gospel and may be authorized to preach. In certain cases, he is the extraordinary minister of Baptism and Communion.

The ordination ceremony for the diaconate follows nearly the same order as that of the subdiaconate. After the litany of the saints there is an admonition to the ordinands, followed by the preface which contains the words of ordination with the imposition of the right hand of the bishop on the head of each one. Whereas the matter of the sacrament is this imposition of the hand, the essential words of the form are, "Send forth upon them, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the Holy Ghost that they may be strengthened by Him, through the gift of Thy sevenfold grace, unto the faithful discharge of Thy service." Finally, the bishop imposes the sacred vestments, he gives them the book of Gospels to touch and then ends the ceremony by the prayer for the new deacons.

The deacon should apply himself to leading a pure life and preaching as much by his example as by his words. May he be a worthy minister of the altar and please God by his virtues, like St. Stephen and St. Lawrence.

1. Consecrated to the Service of the Altar

There are many things in the long admonition which the bishop addresses to the ordinands at the beginning of the ceremony of ordination to the diaconate, but there is no doubt that the essential element is the service of the altar.

This admonition is magnificent. Really everything is, in these ceremonies of ordination. We truly sense the spirit of the Church, a living Church. The advice given to the ordinands is absolutely remarkable.

“Dearly beloved sons, about to be promoted to the Order of Levites, consider well to what an exalted rank in the Church you ascend. The office of the deacon is to assist at the altar.” We can relate this passage to what is said farther down in the same admonition: “Be clean and undefiled, pure and chaste, as it behooves ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God.” The Church uses the term of dispensers of the mysteries of God. Without a doubt She is alluding not only to the dispensers of the Eucharist but also to the dispensers of preaching, because the role of the deacon is likewise to preach.

A little farther down he says as well, “You are co-ministers and cooperate in the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of the Lord.” Once again we have a very clear, very definite reference to the Eucharist.

Later, during the second prayer, the bishop asks the faithful who are present to unite with him that God might confirm the acts of his ministry. This admonition includes the following passage: “Dearly beloved brethren, let us beseech God, the Father Almighty (...). May He graciously hear our prayers and by His loving assistance bring to perfection what we shall administer” – it is the bishop who is asking this – “and may He by His blessing sanctify and strengthen them,

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whom according to our knowledge, we consider worthy to be assigned to the celebration of the sacred mysteries.” You see here once again that the principal object of this prayer is to consecrate deacons to the altar.¹

The deacon therefore draws even closer to the mystery of the Eucharist and participates in it in an even more real and profound manner, an even more perfect manner than the subdeacon. Certainly, he cannot pronounce the words of consecration, but he is nonetheless marked by the character of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He therefore has a certain power over the Eucharist. That is the characteristic of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, this power over the Eucharist and, by the Eucharist, a power over the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.²

St. Thomas considers that it is not the proper function of the deacon to touch the Blessed Sacrament or to distribute it. He says that he can only do that in particular circumstances, by delegation as it were. That ought to be reserved to the priest whose hands are consecrated. St. Thomas goes on to say that distributing the Holy Eucharist is reserved to the one who also consecrates it.³

On the other hand, when Communion used to be given very commonly under both species, it was the deacon who would carry the chalice with the blood of our Lord. Thus, the deacon may carry the ciborium filled with the Eucharist, and he may expose the Blessed Sacrament. What a joy for the deacon to be able in this way to approach our Lord Jesus Christ, to be able already to carry Him, to be thus in closer communion with our Lord, and to serve the priest in a more intimate manner in the holy mysteries!⁴

1 Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 14, 1978.

2 Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, May 12, 1989.

3 *Summa Theologica*, III^a q. 82, a. 3, body of the article and *ad* 1.

4 Sermon, Ecône, March 15, 1975.

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You who are going to receive the diaconate, this Sacrament of Holy Orders is going to bring you closer to the altar. You are going to be even closer to the priest who is offering the holy sacrifice. Your role is going to be to serve him more closely and therefore to draw even nearer to our Lord Jesus Christ. What a grace for a human creature thus to draw near to the Sacrament of the Eucharist in such an intimate manner! And if you have such a proximity to the Eucharist, you also have greater, more serious obligations to fulfill. You are to make this Sacrament known, to make it loved, to make it appreciated by all Christians. You are to attract souls to Him whom you adore, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to act in such a way that they, too, might serve Him and love Him.⁵

2. Singer and Preacher of the Gospel

As a consecrated person draws ever nearer to our Lord Jesus Christ, from the tonsure all the way to the diaconate, and finally attains the priesthood, he has an ever more important power over the Eucharist and also over the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the Church already grants the deacon a certain number of powers. By the very fact that they are authorized to give the Eucharist to souls, they have the duty to prepare souls to receive the Holy Eucharist well, and that is what they do by their preaching. Preaching is therefore something very important.⁶

Deacons have the particular responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel to the world, which means the very words of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is indeed the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the author of Holy Scripture. Consequently, by announcing the Gospel, deacons become the spokesmen of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is an

5 Sermon, Weissbad, October 11, 1975.

6 Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, May 12, 1989.

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important responsibility if there ever was one, because the reason God willed to speak to mankind was to bring them the truth, to bring light to their minds and to convert them to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷

The bishop entrusts the deacons with the holy Gospels. That is perhaps what is most characteristic of the order of the diaconate. St. Stephen, model of deacons, was a martyr for having preached our Lord Jesus Christ. Still today, the bishop confides the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to deacons on the day of their ordination.

The Gospel brought into the world by our Lord Jesus Christ is a real promise of the resurrection of souls, of their sanctification and their glorification in Heaven. With this work are the deacons associated, and it becomes their responsibility in receiving the Gospel. Deacons are called to be heralds of the Gospel. They continue the work which our Lord Jesus Christ began here below. What a responsibility!

St. Stephen was martyred because he was a witness of the Gospel. You, too, are called to be witnesses and perhaps even martyrs one day, who knows? We cannot know, God alone knows, but you will be witnesses in any case. Be witnesses to the full; be witnesses entirely. Do not be witnesses only halfway. Do not waver as to the truth of the Gospel, the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ, of His message, as to the necessity of passing through our Lord to get to Heaven. That would be failing in the mission which has been entrusted to you. It would be failing in charity toward those to whom you are being sent. They expect you to give them the truth. They expect you to be messengers of the truth and not messengers of error, and the Gospel is where you are going to find that truth. Thank God for giving you such a role and ask Him to give you the capacities for it and the virtues.⁸

7 Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1979.

8 Sermon, Ecône, May 17, 1986.

3. A Battle Cry

The tone of the prayers of the Church for the ordination of deacons rings out like a battle cry. You are entering the battle in which the Church is engaged. You are going to present yourselves to the world, in the name of God, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and you are going to preach the faith. You are also going to show the example of the virtues of chastity, of purity, and for that you will need the gift of fortitude from the Holy Ghost.

The bishop is going to utter that prayer as he extends his hand over your head, asking the Holy Ghost to give you the gift of fortitude against temptations, against the spirit of the world, against the spirit of sin which is the spirit of the world. As the bishop will also say, quoting the words of St. Paul, “*Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and Powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places*” (Eph. 6:12),⁹ spirits who strive to fight against the Gospel, to fight against God. And to enter this combat, you are going to need an abundance of graces. That is why the bishop is going to sing this magnificent preface which is asking that you might be filled with the Holy Ghost, but also that you might have in particular this gift of fortitude.¹⁰

So you must not expect to have peace. The nearer we come to our Lord, obviously the more we are going to be opposed as He was – it is absolutely normal! The more we become like our Lord, which is what happens by the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we cannot imagine not having to fight. It is impossible.¹¹

9 Roman pontifical, admonition to the ordinands.

10 Sermon, Ecône, May 21, 1983.

11 Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

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You will certainly be subject to attack in this wicked world where you are soon going to be preaching the Gospel. You are going to be supported by the faithful who are also filled with the grace of the Lord, but on the other hand you are sometimes going to find people imbued with the spirit of the devil, of the demon, and they are going to persecute you, they are going to oppose you, they are going to try to divide you, draw you away from the Church, lead you into sin, into schism. By the grace of the Lord, you will resist. You will not fall into heresy or into schism and you will remain Catholic, faithful to the faith of all time, faithful to the Church, to the principles which have been taught to you here in this seminary; then, filled with the grace of the Lord, filled with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, you will preach the Gospel with force, just like the apostles, who were also subject to the attacks of the world and were thrown into prison as soon as they began to preach the Gospel. They were told “*not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus,*” and they answered, “*We cannot but speak*” (Acts 4:18-20), we must speak, it is our duty, and we will continue to preach Jesus Christ. You will do the same thing, my dear deacons: you will preach our Lord Jesus Christ, and God will fill you with His graces, in the face of your attackers.¹²

The Church is therefore calling you to a veritable crusade by giving you this Holy Spirit, by giving you the Spirit of strength, of combat against all of the subversive forces which are in the world and particularly the forces of error.¹³

You are going to have to lead a spiritual, supernatural combat, and you have to be aware of the nature of that combat. It is no longer the same combat as you led when you were at the university or when you were in school, because you may not have understood at that time that the combat

12 Sermon, Ecône, May 21, 1983.

13 Sermon, Ecône, May 17, 1986.

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was above all supernatural, a combat against the devil and the evil spirits. Our combat is not against men, as St. Paul says, but against heavenly powers.

It sounds like a combat of giants, doesn't it? It is not a combat of theoretical discussions, of dialogues and intellectual jousting. It is much worse than that. You should realize it by now by your own reflection, by your meditation on the lives of the saints.

You are now entering the history of the Church. You are much more one with the Church, so to speak, than you were before you entered the seminary. You used to be members of the faithful and you counted at least a little on your priests to come to your help, to defend the good fight; but here you are now in the army of the Church, as future priests, and so the combat is going to be much more difficult, much harder to wage. People attack seminarians as soon as they are wearing the cassock, much more than they do simple students.

It is indeed an enormous combat which is taking place on a supernatural level and therefore on the level of divine grace. If we approach it simply on a natural level, we are completely outside the truth.

So how are we to fight? We cannot fight if we are not armed both on the natural level by a good philosophical formation and on the supernatural level by a renewal of nature through grace. You have to understand the nature which God gave you and work to make it more healthy, and you also have to remember that grace is what is going to touch souls more than anything.

You used to have the impression that when you were in a discussion with someone, you were going to be able to convince him because you were so certain of possessing the truth. You had the impression that you would make him bend, that you would make him accept the truth. And then

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you often realized that you could not do it, or only with great difficulty. Why? Because truly to convert souls to the Catholic faith or to bring them from a lukewarm faith to a living faith, an ardent faith, it takes the grace of God, which you will only obtain by prayer, by sacrifice, by mortification, by a life of holiness.

We cannot consider this combat, this apostolic life which you are going to have to lead, simply as a pure combat against error, against difficulties, against what keeps the Church from spreading. Certainly we also have to fight against errors, but we cannot be first and foremost anti-reformers; our primary and principal objective cannot be the counter-revolution, anti-liberalism, anti-communism. To chase away the darkness we have to be in the light, and that comes from the grace of God.

Grace will illumine you, enlighten you, fortify you, and will also be manifest to the eyes of others. It is very difficult to convert others if we ourselves appear in everyday life as somebody weak. For example, it is not by insulting or despising one's interlocutor, or loading him with injuries, that we are going to manage to convince him. Obviously!

If, on the other hand, he perceives in you a true, sincere, supernatural charity toward him, without self-seeking, then he will start to be attentive, because he will have the very clear impression: "The one who is speaking to me is not speaking in order to have the pleasure of winning the debate or convincing me, but he truly wants to communicate to me a truth which does not belong to him." So it is very important for you to have that attitude.

The saints converted many more people by their example, by their prayer, by their mortification, than they did by their words. Of course words are necessary; discussion is necessary. We have to convince, we have to preach, obviously!

But if the saints convinced people by their preaching, it is indeed because they were saints. People need that holiness. There is something we have to remember and have constantly before our eyes.¹⁴

4. The Deacon Filled with the Holy Ghost

The Church speaks to you of the Holy Ghost whom you are going to receive. For you, deacons, you will hear it in the very form of the sacrament which you are receiving: “Receive the Holy Ghost, unto power” to fight against the devil and against all of the temptations of this world. That is the very form of the Sacrament of the diaconate. That is why the work which is going to be accomplished in you in a few moments is going to be the work of the Holy Ghost.¹⁵

More than ever, those who wish to be in the service of souls have to be filled with the Holy Ghost. In fact it seems that this absence of a supernatural spirit, this absence of faith so typical of our age, also makes it so that nobody wants to mention the Holy Ghost any more. Yet our Lord Himself said, “*If I do not go to My Father, you will not receive the Holy Ghost*” (cf. *Jn. 16:7*). It is because our Lord considered that after His departure, the work which He had just begun and which was going to continue would be the work of the Holy Ghost. That is why the Christian age, stretching from our Lord to the end of time, is especially the work of sanctification and redemption realized in souls by the very Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All of the graces which the Church mentions in these admirable prayers which She has chosen for ordination to the diaconate ought to encourage you, my dear friends, to

14 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 26, 1976.

15 Sermon, Ecône, June 2, 1979.

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receive the Holy Ghost in abundance. They ought to help you to have a particular devotion for the Holy Ghost, who is going to be your companion, your inspiration, your guide during your preparation for the priesthood and then all throughout your priesthood. Pray often to the Holy Ghost. As you have learned in theology, the grace which the Holy Ghost gives is that sanctifying grace which communicates to us the very life of God. This grace has two particular aspects: it heals our souls and it raises us up. The medicinal aspect will no longer exist in Heaven. In Heaven will remain that elevation of our souls, enabling us to see the glory of the Holy Trinity. Already here below, God gives us that same grace which raises us up by His Holy Spirit. It is the reason why we already have here below that same union with God, with the Holy Trinity, through faith, hope and charity.

However, we cannot forget that we are sinners, that we are sick and that we need a grace which is going to heal us, support us, and help us to detach ourselves from the things of the earth. *“Seek the things that are above, that which is in Heaven. Do not attach yourselves to the things of the earth”* (cf. Col. 3:1-2), that is what St. Paul tells us.¹⁶

So, my dear friends, you who are going to receive the diaconate, may you also be filled with the Holy Ghost. I will conclude by saying that you have to be a living proof of hidden realities, for if *“the faith is the evidence of things that are not seen”* (Heb. 11:1), then you, as persons consecrated to God, filled with the Holy Ghost, you are henceforth going to preach the Gospel and manifest our Lord Jesus Christ to men. You too, therefore, have to be this evidence of things unseen in order that when people see you, they will think that there is in fact something more than what appears to our senses. You have to be a source of faith for others, not

¹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, May 29, 1982.

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only in your words but in all your behavior, your attitude, your prayer, in the conviction with which you speak, in the holiness of your life. People who see you have to be drawn to believe that there is something beyond what we see and that something is God – God who is everything. May their faith and their love of God grow by contact with you. May that be your desire, your ideal. Then your life will be beautiful; it will be what you yourselves certainly long for.¹⁷

“Persevere, firm and steadfast in Christ” is what the bishop tells you. As the admonition to ordinands makes clear, you will be at the service of the Church. In order to serve the Church, you are going to need that virtue of strength against all of the diabolical powers surrounding you. As the tribe of Levi was chosen for the service of the Temple, so you have been chosen for the service of the Church.¹⁸ That ought to be your honor and your pride. To be in the service of the Catholic Church, of the Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the faith and the virtues which our Lord Jesus Christ gave to Her and continues to give to Her: that is what the Church expects of you.

Show yourselves worthy, then, as the bishop will also say at the end of the preface: show yourselves firm and persevering, immovable in Christ.¹⁹

5. The Imposition of the Sacred Vestments

You are going to receive the stole, which signifies your power of ministry. You will henceforth have a very particular ministry to fulfill for the priest who is offering the sacrifice at the altar.

17 Sermon, May 29, 1971.

18 The diaconate has been called “the Levitical order” because the Levites of the Old Testament were the figure of our deacons.

19 Sermon, Ecône, December 24, 1979.

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You are going to receive the dalmatic²⁰ as well, which is for you like an armor which you put on: “the dalmatic of justice.” Yes, clothe yourselves in holiness. “*You have put on Christ*” (Gal. 3:27). Clothe yourselves in our Lord Jesus Christ, and henceforth may you show the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ in you, by your behavior, by your attitude toward those to whom you will be sent to preach the Gospel.²¹

6. Two Models of Deacons

Two holy martyrs from the first centuries are held up to us as models of deacons: St. Stephen and St. Lawrence. Both were remarkable for their faith, for their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, for the grace of God which animated them to the very shedding their blood. They were also remarkable in the fulfillment of their duties. They were charged with the goods of the Church. They managed these goods for the poor, for those who were in want, in need, with devotion, detachment, prodigality, generosity.²²

Under slightly different aspects, these two models of deacons are surprisingly alike. What appears in them is a soul that has been completely conquered by our Lord Jesus Christ. They gave their life in very difficult circumstances, in painful circumstances, since one was stoned and the other was burned alive. They did not hesitate. They gave their life for our Lord Jesus Christ.²³

²⁰ “The dalmatic is (...) a robe [which] originated in Dalmatia, whence its name; it was probably introduced into Rome in the second century (...). Emperors even have worn this vestment. As a sacred vestment, the dalmatic was originally reserved to Bishops. St. Sylvester, in the fourth century, gave it to the deacons of Rome, and by degrees it became universally the vestment proper to deacons” (Dom E. Vandeur, *The Holy Mass Popularly Explained*, translated by Rev. Vincent Gilbertson, O.S.B., Washbourne, Ltd, 1916, p. 11-12).

²¹ Sermon, Econe, May 17, 1986.

²² Sermon, Econe, June 9, 1984.

²³ Sermon, Econe, May 21, 1988.

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The pontifical contains these words: “Be pure (...); keep yourselves proof against every allurement of the flesh, as the Scripture says: ‘*Be ye clean, you that carry the vessels of the Lord*’ (Is. 52:11). Remember that Blessed Stephen was elected by the Apostles for this office because of his eminent chastity.”²⁴

The Church insists a great deal upon the chastity which the deacon has to practice. One might think that the Church would insist on this more at the subdiaconate, since that is when one makes the promise of chastity; but the Church means to insist here again for the deacons: “You, dearly beloved sons, who receive your name from an office of paternal inheritance, be lifted up above the desires of the flesh and earthly passions which war against the soul.” This passage is a clear reminder of the words of St. John, affirming that “*all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (I Jn. 2:16). So the Church asks the deacons to combat against themselves as well, against everything in them which is contrary to God. “Be clean and undefiled, pure and chaste, as it behooves ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God, that you may worthily be added to the number of those who have ecclesiastical rank.”²⁵ Considering the intimacy of the deacon with our Lord, his attachment, his love for Him ought to keep him far from all that which, in his mind, in his heart, in his body, might sadden our Lord. What we should have is that spirit of habitual contrition for our faults which is called compunction. It is what makes us deplore our sins out of love of our Lord. We are not perfect, we always have weaknesses, but as far as we possibly can, we have to be so attached to our Lord that we immediately flee from anything which could at all tarnish that love.²⁶

24 Sermon, Ecône, May 21, 1988.

25 Roman pontifical, admonition to the ordinands.

26 Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

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It is true that there are many temptations in this world, whose desire is for goods of the flesh and goods that are passing. So we have to preserve ourselves, and Jesus gives us this advice: “*Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation*” (Mt. 26:41). Watch, in order to flee any occasion of sin. If we allow ourselves to be drawn into occasions of sin, how can we expect not to fall? We have to flee the occasions of sin. Holy Scripture tells us again, “*Be sober and watchful*” (I Pet. 5:8). This sobriety, this spirit of penance will help keep temptation away from us.²⁷

St. Stephen was the first martyr and along with an example of purity he offers us an example of fortitude, which is particularly the gift which the Church wishes to give deacons on the day of their ordination. So what is this gift, this virtue of fortitude? St. Thomas tells us that fortitude fights against the obstacles which the world places before our will to do the good.²⁸ The world is opposed to the moral good, the spiritual good which man ought to seek. So fortitude ought to remove these obstacles, either by enduring the combat with patience or else positively, by waging a firm battle against them. For the two principal acts of this virtue of fortitude are, as St. Thomas says, *sustinere et aggredi*: *sustinere*, to sustain the combat in a permanent, constant, strong, firm manner in patience and perseverance; *aggredi*, to seek the good in spite of obstacles, that good which is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.²⁹

We need to have the virtue of fortitude, the gift of fortitude, and have no fear of men here below. You see what Stephen said to those who were accusing him and who were jealous that he possessed the Holy Ghost. He was in the middle of these priests, these scribes and these Pharisees who were

27 Sermon for the Vigil of Pentecost, Eccone, June 9, 1984.

28 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 123, a. 1.

29 Sermon, Eccone, December 24, 1971; cf. *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 123, a. 3-6, and q. 128, a. 1..

attacking him, like our Lord in the Temple at the age of twelve or thirteen, in the midst of the doctors. And those who heard St. Stephen were stupefied at his answers, like the doctors in the time of our Lord. It is the same Holy Ghost whom our Lord and St. Stephen both possessed, although St. Stephen had only a very weak participation compared to our Lord. Our Lord possessed Him as God possesses Him, since the Holy Ghost is God and so is our Lord; but our Lord allowed St. Stephen to be filled with the Holy Ghost, also. And you see how those people still did not believe in him, even though they realized the power of Stephen since they were unable to answer him. It is even written in the *Acts of the Apostles* that at one point they saw the face of Stephen “*as though it were the face of an angel*” (Acts 6:15). They were therefore witnesses of the Holy Ghost dwelling in him.³⁰

In spite of it, you see the hatred which the devil and those among men who are the servants of Satan can have for those who love our Lord and who devote themselves to His service. At that moment, they should have stepped back and abandoned their trial and said, “Look at his face. We cannot condemn a man like that; the Holy Spirit is shining through him.” Not at all; on the contrary, it only encouraged them in their condemnation.³¹

They did not want to believe him, and that is precisely what St. Stephen was reproaching them with: “Although witnesses have shown you over the course of history that Christ was God, that the Holy Spirit was in our Lord, that the Holy Spirit was in the prophets, you persecuted the prophets, you persecuted our Lord Jesus Christ” – “*you always oppose the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 7:51). And they could not forgive Stephen for these words.³²

30 Sermon, Ecône, May 29, 1971.

31 Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

32 Sermon, Ecône, May 29, 1971.

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After the vehement discourse, full of zeal and charity, which St. Stephen addressed to his opponents and his murderers, the *Acts of the Apostles* says, “*They were cut to the heart*” (Acts 7:54) seeing St. Stephen filled with the Holy Spirit and “*gnashed their teeth*” in anger at hearing St. Stephen speak. They were stupefied and could not do anything in front of this strength of the Holy Ghost which was animating him, and then all of a sudden St. Stephen sees the glory of God and says, “*Behold, I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*” (cf. Acts 7:55). Then they could no longer contain themselves and, taking up rocks, they stoned him. My dear friends, there you have an example to remember. Like St. Stephen, you, too, will see the glory of God and our Lord at the right hand of His Father, present in the Holy Eucharist. So you must be attached with all your soul to your function as a deacon and later to your priestly function. You will be giving God to souls. You will be giving eternity to those who are in time, yet who are made for eternity. That has to be your aspiration.³³

33 Sermon, Ecône, April 3, 1976.

CHAPTER 3

PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Those who are clothed in the priesthood are called by the name of presbyters, which means elders in Greek. This name shows what ought to be their knowledge, their prudence, and the probity of their morals.

The ceremony of priestly ordination in its broad lines is like that of the other sacred orders, although more moving and solemn.

During the first admonition, the prelate describes the function of the priest and invites the ordinands to practice the virtues necessary to their new state.

Then there takes place the imposition of the hands of the bishop on the head of each ordinand, which constitutes the matter of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. All of the priests attending then repeat the same gesture. The pontiff recites the prayer and the consecrating preface. This preface contains the essential words of the form of the sacrament: “We beseech Thee, Almighty Father, invest these Thy servants with the dignity of the priesthood. Do Thou renew in their hearts the spirit of holiness, that they may hold the office, the second as to importance, which they have received from Thee, O Lord, and by the example of their lives point out a norm of conduct.”

He then imposes the sacred vestments, the stole and the chasuble, and continues with a prayer. Then there takes place

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the consecration of the hands of the ordinands, by an anointing in the form of a cross with the oil of catechumens. After that, each ordinand touches a chalice containing wine and water, covered with the paten holding an unconsecrated host. The bishop then explicitly declares to the new priests that they henceforth have the power to celebrate the Holy Mass for the living and the dead.

Then begins the sacrificial part of the Mass, with the new priests offering the sacrifice at the same time as the bishop. The pontiff alone performs the ceremonies and he pronounces all of the words in a voice sufficiently audible to be heard by the new priests who are concelebrating with him. After Communion, he gives them the power to confess, using the very words of the Savior.

Then there follow a few words of advice and the bishop completes the ordination by a consecrating blessing, confirming the young priests in the high dignity of their functions.¹

The ceremony of priestly ordination is one of the most sublime moments in the life of the Church. It especially brings us back to the Last Supper, when our Lord Jesus Christ made priests of His apostles. It also reminds us of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the day of Pentecost. So the Church continues, the Holy Ghost continues to pour Himself forth by the hand of the successors of the apostles.²

The traditional rite of priestly ordination, which has been in use for centuries, very well expresses what the priest is. The principal rite of priestly ordination is actually the imposition of hands on the head of the deacons, followed by the formula pronounced during the sung preface, words

¹ The priesthood is called by the holy Fathers “the highest of all dignities” (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epist. ad Smyrnæos*). “Most sublime, then, Venerable Brethren, is the dignity of the priesthood. Even the falling away of the few unworthy in the priesthood, however deplorable and distressing it may be, cannot dim the splendor of so lofty a dignity.” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

² Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1981.

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which Pope Pius XII asked to be read in a spoken voice so that they would be more striking. At that moment, the deacons are ordained priests. The rite therefore consists essentially in the imposition of hands and in the reciting of the sacramental formula.

The rite of consecration of hands also takes place during this ceremony, in order to show clearly that priests are consecrated and have their hands consecrated in order to give sacred things to the faithful. The term *sacerdos* itself means *sacra dans*,³ he who gives sacred things. Consequently, it is just that the hands of the priest be consecrated in order that what they give might be truly sacred and what they bless might become sacred, also.

There follows the tradition of the chalice and the paten, the chalice in which are wine and water, the paten on which is the host. The Church asks us to perform this gesture to make explicit what priestly ordination means.

Finally, another important rite in this ceremony is that of the imposition of hands at the end of the Mass. The bishop says the words which our Lord said in order to confer the power of the Sacrament of Penance, so that the priests might absolve penitents of their sins.

These are the principal rites of this priestly ordination as the Church has always conferred it.

Moreover, the rite of priestly ordination takes place during a concelebration. Once they have been ordained, once they have received the priestly grace, the young priests concelebrate with the bishop. This is the Church's way of having the bishop transmit, as it were, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to these young men, who from now on are going to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass, which is the principal *raison d'être* of the priest.

3 *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 36, a. 3, ad 1.

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That is something we should never forget: the principal *raison d'être* of the priest is to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And because the priest has an extraordinary power over the body, the blood, the soul, and the very divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, a power over God Himself,⁴ he also has a power over the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

Thus over the course of the ceremony of priestly ordination, the liturgy of the Church expresses these two aspects: the power to offer this sacrifice of propitiation for our sins which is the Sacrifice of the Mass – to sing the praises of God – and also the power over the Mystical Body of our Lord, by the fact that the priest has the grace to give the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance to souls.⁶

4 “What tongue, human or angelic, may ever describe a power so immeasurable as that exercised by the simplest priest at Mass? And who could ever have imagined that the voice of a man, which by nature hath not the power even to raise a straw from the ground, should obtain through grace a power so stupendous as to bring from heaven to earth the Son of God? It is a greater power than that which would be required to change the place of mountains, to dry up seas, and to turn round the heavens; it even emulates, in a certain manner, that first *fiat* with which God brought all things out of nothing, and in some sort would seem to surpass that other *fiat* with which the sweet Virgin drew down into her bosom the Eternal Word. She did nothing else than supply matter for the body of Christ – made indeed *from* her and her most pure blood, but not *by* her, in the sense of her own potential act. But altogether different, and most marvelous, is the sacramental manner in which the voice of the priest, operating as the instrument of Christ, reproduces Him, and does so as often as he consecrates” (St. Leonard of Port-Maurice, *The Hidden Treasure: Holy Mass*, TAN Books, 1970, p. 26).

5 “Besides this power over the real Body of Christ, the priest has received other powers, august and sublime, over His Mystical Body of Christ” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*). Cf. the doctrine of the Mystical Body in St. Paul: *I Cor.* 12:27; *Eph.* 4:25; 5:26. By analogy with the natural body, the Mystical Body is in the strict sense the total of the faithful who participate in the grace of Christ, its head, and who are thus supernaturally bound to Him.

6 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 27, 1981.

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As the apostles in the Cenacle, gathered around the Virgin Mary, received graces by the mediation of the Mother of God, so the priests, also, receive the Holy Spirit by the imposition of the hands of the bishop and by the words of the Sacrament of ordination, and they receive Him through their good Mother in Heaven, the most Blessed Virgin Mary. So they have to stay united to the Virgin, just as the apostles gathered around her in the Cenacle.⁷

7 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1981.

BOOK TWO

THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST

PART I

THE DIGNITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

What is the priesthood? Is it not the participation of a man, chosen by God, in the great mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ? And if the priesthood truly is this union of a human creature with the mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ, how could there be any limit to our reflections on the priesthood? For indeed, we could never exhaust all that there is to say of the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ – divine mysteries which are entirely beyond our comprehension.¹ That is why, the more we delve into this mystery of the priesthood, the more it seems we would have to say and the farther to search into its most profound realities.²

1 The holy Curé of Ars often used to say, “The priest will only be understood in Heaven. If he were understood on earth, people would die, not of fear, but of love” (Fr. A. Monnin, *L'Esprit du Curé d'Ars* [*The Spirit of the Curé of Ars*], Librairie Téqui, 1975, p. 85; Fr. Monnin was the first biographer of the Curé of Ars; as a helper in his works, he was the confidant of many of his reflections and one of the witnesses of his death).

2 Priestly ordination, Ecône, September 20, 1980.

CHAPTER 1

THE PRIESTHOOD IN THE PLAN OF GOD

The priesthood is a sublime prerogative granted to the priest by the Father, in the same way He bestowed it on His Son. It is the greatest likeness which man may have with the Incarnate Word.

1. The Incarnation and the Redemption Continued

It is our belief that, to know what a priest is, we have only to open the Gospel. We have only to know who is Jesus Christ, the High Priest, the priest *par excellence*, to know what priests are today.

Our Lord expressed it very simply and very briefly: “*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you*” (Jn. 20:21).

If we just reflect a few moments on the first part of this expression, “*As the Father has sent Me,*” we can see that our Lord is speaking of His eternal mission in the Holy Trinity. The Son is always sent by the Father because He comes from the Father, because He is engendered by the Father in eternity, and that is what makes Him the Word of God. Likewise, the Holy Ghost is sent by the Father and the Son, and that is what makes Him the Holy Ghost.

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This eternal mission of our Lord Jesus Christ continues in His temporal mission, which is the end of all creation. The entire world around us, the marvels of nature, the stars and everything that exists, ourselves, the angels and the elect in Heaven: everything was created for the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything was created so that one day our Lord Jesus Christ might come into the world and sing there the glory of God in the name of all the universe.

That is the mission of our Lord: to sing the glory of His Father in His body and in His human soul, and so encompass in His divinity all that is great, all that is beautiful, all that is sublime here below.

At what point in His existence here on earth did our Lord express that glory, that infinite charity which He had for His Father? He told us Himself: He expressed them in His sublime hour on the cross. Our Lord rendered the greatest glory to His Father as He breathed out His last breath. He said, "*It is consummated*" (Jn. 19:30), and He added, "*Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit*" (Lk. 23:46).

That was the greatest act of charity which could ever be possible. All of our acts of charity are nothing next to that of our Lord. God the Father found His glory in this Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and in His death. By His death, life returned to the world, the path to Heaven was opened, the path to salvation was opened to us all.¹

The reason our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament of Holy Orders was that He might continue His Incarnation and His Redemption here among us.

The principal work which the Most Holy Trinity had in view from all eternity was to make us participate in the Incarnation and the Redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ by union with His blood, His soul and His divinity. The

1 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1978.

THE PRIESTHOOD IN THE PLAN OF GOD

Sacrament of Holy Orders is so important in the Church because it allows our Lord to continue His Incarnation. Do you not see that the way our Lord Jesus Christ continues His Incarnation is precisely by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass? We cannot say that our Lord is *in* the Holy Eucharist the way He is *in* His mortal flesh, as though we were saying that He is in some way made bread. The Eucharist is a change of substance, a transubstantiation. Our Lord is therefore most certainly in the Eucharist in His substance and it is precisely there that He continues His Incarnation. He continues it by His real presence.

What our Lord wants is to be incarnated in us, in a certain manner, so that He might transform us, poor sinful creatures that we are; so that He might redeem us, purify us by His blood, unite us to Himself, and so prepare us for eternal life. That is how our Lord prepares souls, pilgrims here below, for eternal life.

That is why the Sacrament of Holy Orders is so beautiful and so great. Nothing draws us close to God, nothing makes us understand God, like the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. That is why the priesthood is so important.²

We are not the ones who created the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ; we are not the ones who created the Sacrament of Holy Orders. So we can only really know what the priesthood is by referring back to what our Lord Jesus Christ did and to what the Church has always taught. Everything flows from there. All of the virtues, the priestly character,³ all of the powers of the priest, flow from that definition. The priest is made first and foremost for the sacrifice and that is why, on the very day of their ordination, the new priests offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with

2 Sermon, Ecône, March 30, 1974.

3 A *character* is an indelible spiritual mark imprinted on the soul.

the bishop. He teaches them to murmur, in a way, for the first time, these mysterious and sublime words of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which the faithful need more than they need anything else.⁴

That is the road on which priests are invited to advance. “*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you*”; I send you to continue My mission, and since I closed it with an act of infinite love on Calvary, there is the road you have to follow. You must ascend to the altar, offer the sacrifice, continue to offer this act of infinite love which I offered to My Father. That is what you are going to do.

What a grace! Are you worthy, are we worthy to be priests? Are we worthy to ascend to the altar? Certainly, if we consider ourselves, we cannot have any pretension to such a sublimity, such a glory, such a participation in Him who is the Priest for eternity, the High Priest. But by the grace of God, by the grace received on the day of priestly ordination, yes, the priest is worthy before God and before the angels to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; to make the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ descend on souls by absolution in order to take away their sins; to make the water of Baptism flow over the foreheads of children, that they might be baptized and resurrected in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those are the powers which the bishop gives to the priest on the day of his priestly ordination. In this way the mission of our Lord is continued throughout time.⁵

2. The Priest: One Sent by God

Happy are we, Catholic priests, who are certain of our vocation, certain of our mission. We have not the shadow of

4 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

5 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1978.

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a doubt. The Church chose us and sends us as our Lord sent the apostles, and our bishops really are the successors of the apostles. There is no gap in the chain, no break. We have indeed been sent.

We are not usurpers. It is not we who send ourselves, who confide a mission to ourselves; it is the Church, the faithful guardian of the powers confided to our Lord. We are therefore neither Protestants nor schismatics, but authentic priests, the true envoys of the Heavenly Father.

Let us never minimize our vocation, make little or no account of the authenticity of our mission. Far from us the thought of esteeming the Protestant minister, the imam or the schismatic as highly as the Catholic priest, or to put them all on the same footing. Certainly, it is not a source of pride, of pettiness toward infidels, but we firmly believe that we are the sole representatives of Jesus Christ, the sole dispensers of the mysteries of God (*I Cor.* 4:1).

We see how much our Lord esteemed His mission, and His apostles after Him. You see how much He holds to His title of one who is sent. All the value of His preaching depends upon His having been sent. Our Lord clearly affirms that He is the Messiah, *Messias, Missus*.⁶ He states explicitly, “*I have come down from Heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*” (*Jn.* 6:38); “*I have not come of Myself, but He is true who has sent Me, whom you do not know. I know Him because I am from Him, and He has sent Me*” (*Jn.* 7:28-29), “*for from God I came forth and have come; for neither have I come of Myself, but He sent Me*” (*Jn.* 8:42).

The humble yet strong, energetic, unwavering defense of His mission in face of the Pharisees who were insulting Him by refusing to believe in His mission, is one of the most sublime aspects of the Gospel. What serenity! What calm!

6 *Missus*, in Latin, means *sent*.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

What a full possession of the truth shines forth in our Lord! It disarms all of His enemies: “*How long dost Thou keep us in suspense? If Thou art the Christ, tell us openly. I tell you and you do not believe. The works that I do in the name of My Father, these bear witness to Me*” (Jn. 10:24-25).

Jesus passes on this mission like a priceless treasure to His apostles and to His disciples who believe in His mission: “*The men whom You have taken from the world and given to Me have received the words which You have given Me, and they have known truly that it is by You that I have come, and they have believed that it is You who sent Me*” (cf. Jn. 17:6-8). And Jesus asks His Father to do for them what He did for Him: “*Sanctify them in the truth. Thy word is truth. Even as Thou hast sent Me into the world, so I also have sent them into the world*” (Jn. 17:17-18). Witnesses of Christ: that is indeed what we are; that is what you are going to be. St. Peter was the first to proclaim it: “*This Jesus God raised up and we are witnesses of it*” (Acts 2:32). St. John preaches Christ: We announce to you “*what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life*” (I Jn. 1:1-2). St. Paul expresses the same thing: “*We preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord*” (II Cor. 4:5).⁷

7 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

CHAPTER 2

THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLE

We cannot define the priest except by the sacrifice, nor the sacrifice except by the priest. The two are essentially connected. The priest is made for the sacrifice,¹ and there can be no sacrifice without a priest. That is why we have to reflect on what the sacrifice is in order to know exactly what the priest is. The sacrifice is something mysterious, profound, divine. It is a treasure upon which you can meditate all of your priestly life and at the moment of your death you will still not have exhausted it. We will only really understand in the next life what is this sacrifice of our Lord which we renew every day upon the altar.²

Already in the Old Testament, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year and, as St. Paul says (*Heb.* 9:7-11), he did not enter without the blood of victims. That was an image of what the sacrifice of our Lord was going to be in the future. He, the true Holy One, would not enter, either, without His own precious blood, into the tabernacle not built by the hand of man.³

1 *Summa Theologica* III^a q. 63, a. 6; III, q. 82, a. 1.

2 Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1987.

3 “Our God and Lord [offered Himself] once to God the Father

That is what the priest does today: he reproduces the sacrifice of our Lord by making the blood of our Lord descend upon the altar, the blood of expiation, the blood of reparation, the blood of Redemption. The sacrifice which the priests offer today is so much greater, so much more effective, so much more sublime, so much more divine, than the sacrifice which the high priest used to offer once a year, when he entered into the Holy of Holies.⁴

1. The Priesthood of Christ

Perhaps the most beautiful, the most complete definition of the priesthood of Christ is in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews. The entire first part of the Epistle to the Hebrews is meant to make known what is the priesthood of our Lord. It is truly admirable. St. Paul was certainly inspired when he wrote these pages.

St. Paul first shows that Jesus is superior to the angels (*Heb.* 1:4-14, and 2). Then he shows that Jesus is superior to Moses, the greatest of the prophets (*Heb.* 3). Whereas Moses struggled to pronounce the Name of God, Jesus is the substantial Word, the eternal Utterance, come down to us in order to save us. The secrets of hearts are open before His eyes. He is therefore quite different from anything Moses could have been. Thirdly, Jesus is incomparably superior to the high priest of the old Law.

The priesthood of Christ is indeed the most perfect that can be imagined.⁵ Where does this perfection come from?

upon the altar of the Cross by the mediation of death, so that He might accomplish an eternal Redemption for [us]" (Council of Trent, 22nd Session, September 17, 1562, *Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, ch. 1, *DS* 1740; *DZ* 938).

4 Sermon, Ecône, September 27, 1986.

5 *Summa Theologica*, III^a q. 22, a. 1 and 4; q. 48, a. 3. See also St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* bk. 4, ch. 14; and St. Albert the Great, *De*

THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLE

We can see it easily by considering the triple union of the priest with God, with the victim which he offers and with the people for whom he offers it. The more the priest is united to God, the more his sacrifice is perfect; the more he is united to the victim, the more perfect his sacrifice, also. Finally, the more he is united with the people for whom he offers it, the more his sacrifice is going to be perfect.

Therefore, the more the priest is united to God, the more the priesthood will be perfect, since the priest by his sanctity ought to make up for what is imperfect in the adoration, the gratitude, the expiation, and the supplication of the people, as St. Thomas explains.

The more the victim is pure, precious, and entirely consumed in honor of God, the more perfect will be the sacrifice. The holocaust was the most perfect sacrifice of the old Law because the entire victim was consumed in honor of God, to signify that man is supposed to offer himself entirely. Likewise, the more the priest and victim are united, the more the sacrifice will be perfect, since the exterior oblation and immolation of the victim are only the sign of the interior oblation and immolation of the heart of the priest, who thus accomplishes the greatest act of the virtue of religion.

Finally, the more the priest and the people are united, the more the priesthood will be perfect, since the priest ought to reunite all of the adoration, thanksgiving, prayer and reparation of the faithful in a single elevation toward God.

We have only to apply these principles to the priesthood of our Lord to conclude immediately that it is the greatest anyone could possibly conceive. Indeed, Jesus Christ the Priest is not only pure of all original or personal sin and of all imperfection, but He is Holiness itself. We cannot imagine a priest more united to God. He is God Himself by His

Eucharistia, dist. V, ch. 3, Éditions Borgnet, 1899, t. 38, p. 387.

hypostatic union.⁶ Consequently, by His union with God, He cannot but be the most perfect priest.

There could not be more perfect unity between our Lord, Priest, and His victim. He is Himself the Victim (*Eph. 5:2*) and we cannot imagine a more perfect victim than our Lord. There too, is absolute perfection, which surpasses all that we could imagine. Nor could the union of priest and victim be more intimate, the bond of sacrifice exterior and sacrifice interior be any tighter, since it is the priest Himself who is victim,⁷ not only in His body, but also in His heart and His soul. His sharpest pain was in His very charity at the sight of the immense evil which it was His mission to efface. This union of priest and victim appeared more and more clearly at the Last Supper, on Calvary, and after the Resurrection. The Eucharist, in the Cenacle, was the beginning of the Passion; it is likewise the consequence of the Passion. Therefore, priest and victim could not be more perfectly united than in our Lord immolated for us.

Finally, the union of priest and faithful people could not be greater than in our Lord, for He is the head of the Mystical Body. There cannot be a greater union than between the members and the head of the Mystical Body because we are united to Him in the Mystical Body by a participation in His grace. It is therefore Jesus, extended in a way to the Mystical Body, who is offering the sacrifice.⁸

2. Our Priesthood

St. Paul and therefore the Spirit of God, who dictated these words to him, declares, "*Every high priest taken from*

6 *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 2, a. 6. The hypostatic union is the substantial union of the divine nature and the human nature in a single person, the very Person of the Word, second Person of the Holy Trinity.

7 *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 22, a. 2.

8 Retreat, Ecône, September 22, 1978.

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among men is appointed for men" (Heb. 5:1). Let us be careful as to this first part, which could be taken to justify the new orientation which some are giving to the priest today: a man simply for mankind. But what does St. Paul say next? He makes it clear: "...for men, in the things pertaining to God" (Heb. 5:1). He is established for men, certainly, but in the things which are of God, in order to lead them to God. That is the finality of the priesthood.⁹

St. Paul continues, "...that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5:1). And he even adds, "He is able to have compassion on the ignorant and erring, because he himself is also beset with weakness" (Heb. 5:2). There is the whole secret of the Sacrament of Penance.

The priest is therefore made for the offering of the Holy Sacrifice and for spreading the graces of that sacrifice, particularly by the Sacrament of Penance, as He reaches out with compassion to those who are in error and ignorance. Since he is himself a sinner, he needs to offer the Holy Sacrifice for his own sins and not only for the sins of the people of God.

You see that in a few lines, St. Paul has given a summary of what makes the very essence of the priest. So it is important that all those who are called to ascend to the altar to receive an ordination which prepares them to offer these holy mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ meditate on these words of St. Paul. They must know that they too are weak, and yet God has chosen them. It is again St. Paul who says it: "No man takes the honor to himself; he takes it who is called by God, as Aaron was" (Heb. 5:4), as the Levites were, to offer the true sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰

9 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

10 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1980.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

What a mystery, that God should deign to choose human beings for the sanctification of men, and consecrate them for the continuation of His work of Redemption by confiding to them His own sacrifice. It is a great mystery of love, of charity for us and for all those who are to receive the graces of sanctification through the priesthood, throughout the ages.¹¹

11 Sermon, Ecône, April 16, 1987.

CHAPTER 3

THE PRIEST: ANOTHER CHRIST

1. The Priestly Character

The priestly character is a participation in the priesthood of Christ.¹ Having become an instrument of Christ, the priest transmits divine things to others. The dignity of the priest comes from this indelible seal imprinted on his soul on the day of his ordination.

On the day of their priestly ordination, priests receive a character which places them above the people of God.² From that day forward, they can never again say: “We are men like the others.” It is not true. They are no longer men like the others, but men of God.

I would almost say that their priestly character makes them participate in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.³ Our Lord Jesus Christ is a priest for eternity according to the order of Melchisedech, because the divinity of the Word of God was infused into the humanity which He assumed. Jesus

1 *Summa Theologica*, III^a q. 63, a. 3.

2 *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 34, a. 2.

3 “Let us learn, my brothers, that the dignity of the priesthood is great, multiple, surpassing all things and infinite” (St. Ephrem, “Sermon on the Priesthood,” in *La Vie Spirituelle*, May 1921, p. 136, 140-41).

became a priest in the instant of assuming that humanity in the womb of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.

The grace in which priests participate is this same grace of union, that is to say, of hypostatic union: the union in our Lord of His humanity and His divinity. It is not sanctifying grace, in which our Lord Jesus Christ makes us participate by the grace of Baptism. It is the grace of union, that grace by which our Lord Jesus Christ became a priest, by which our Lord Jesus Christ is King, by which He is Judge, and in reason of which He ought to be adored by all men.⁴

This grace is so sublime that no being here below could ever have received it. It is the grace of divinity itself descending into the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, anointing it in a way, as the oil which descends upon the head consecrates the one who receives it. The humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ was penetrated by the divinity of the Word of God and thus was He made a priest, that is to say, mediator between God and man. That is the grace in which priests have a share.⁵

The priest, by his priestly character, is like to the angels. I believe it is St. Augustine who says that if he were to meet an angel and a priest, he would first bow to the priest, before bowing to the angel.⁶ Why? Because the priest is marked by the priestly character of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷

4 The theological thesis according to which Christ is formally constituted priest by the substantial grace of union to the Word is that of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, following his teacher, Fr. Hugon. It is the position of the French school, generally speaking (cf. "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Priesthood," *Revue Thomiste*, January-March 1999, p. 282).

5 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1976.

6 In fact, the example is from St. Francis de Sales (Msgr. Trochu, *Saint François de Sales*, II, ch. 1, Librairie Catholique Emmanuel Vitte, 1942, p. 21).

7 "It might be asked: how is it possible for a man who is in every way inferior to angels to receive such an extraordinary grace? Theologians reply that, just as the eagle is superior to man in possessing wings and a

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Consequently, he draws near to our Lord Jesus Christ in such a way that he should henceforth be concerned only with the things of God, only with the salvation of souls.

That is why it is normal, it is just, it is good that the priest remain a virgin, that he remain celibate, in order to be entirely given to the things of God and to communicate divine life and spiritual life to souls.⁸

After the maternity of the Virgin Mary, after St. Joseph who was the guardian of the Child Jesus here below, priests are those who ought to participate the most in the work of Redemption, by their very function. No one is destined to enter more fully than the priest into the great mystery of the Redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. The priest receives that fuller participation from the character with which he is marked by the Sacrament of Holy Orders and from the priestly functions which he is called to exercise.

There are no functions here below which bring us so close to the ideal of holiness held out by our Lord. What our Lord came to earth to do cannot be carried out without priests. That is why the Church cannot survive without priests.⁹

2. “*In Persona Christi*”

Sacerdos alter Christus: the priest is another Christ.¹⁰
So let us ask ourselves who Jesus Christ is.

keener vision, although man himself is of a higher nature, so also the priest is superior to the angel in virtue of his power to consecrate and absolve” (Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Priest in Union with Christ*, TAN Books, 2002, Part II, ch. 8).

8 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

9 Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979.

10 “The priest, as is said with good reason, is indeed ‘another Christ’; for, in some way, he is himself a continuation of Christ” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*). “The priest is the image and the living form of Christ” (St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Oratione in Spiritu et Veritate*, PG 68, col. 882).

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

Our Lord Jesus Christ is a mediator.¹¹ Men had broken with God, but God did not want this break to be definitive. He did not want all those whom He had created for His glory and their happiness to be definitively separated from Him. That is why He decided, in His immense charity, in His infinite mercy, to become our mediator.

No man could have been a mediator. We were all that *massa damnata*, as St. Augustine says: that mass of humanity condemned by our own fault (*Rom. 5:12*).¹² We could no longer have found the path which led to God. Only God Himself could have led us there. And He realized this inconceivable mystery, which is for us a cause for unending thanks but a scandal for those who do not wish to believe: God becoming man. The angel said to Mary, “*thou shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus*” (*Lk. 1:31*), that is to say, Savior, which means, Mediator, a bridge between humanity and God. Our Lord is therefore, by His very essence, the Mediator. There can be no others because He unites human nature and divine nature in a single Person.

And He willed to manifest that mediation in a very particular manner in His holy sacrifice of Calvary, offering Himself as a victim to His Father for the redemption of souls.

And behold the priest, *alter Christus*, participates in the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is not a mediator by essence, but he participates in the mediation of our Lord by virtue of the priestly character. He too is a pontiff, forming a bridge between humanity and God, but purely as a minister of our Lord. He is the ordinary channel, the normal way which Jesus willed for communicating salvation to souls. That is why the priest has to have confidence in the grace of the Redemption obtained by our Lord Jesus Christ, a grace

¹¹ *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 22, a. 1.

¹² St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, bk. XXI, § 12; *Contra Julianum*, bk. III, § 35.

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which is transforming souls today by communicating the divine life to them.¹³

You will believe and you will proclaim that you are priests, but purely as ministers of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only Priest. When you ascend the altar and offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, it is again our Lord Jesus Christ who offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.¹⁴ You are only the ministers. You are participating in His priesthood.¹⁵

Priests are like an additional humanity¹⁶ for our Lord Jesus Christ. He is made again incarnate in His priests, and this is so true that, when they ascend to the altar and pronounce the words of consecration which continue the grace of Redemption and draw the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ onto our altars, priests are no longer themselves.

They are no longer Father This or Father That, they are other Christs. They pronounce the words of the consecration under the influence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord uses their mind to infuse in it this thought of doing what He wished. He uses their lips, their words. It is “in the person of Christ”¹⁷ that they pronounce these words. Priests are therefore truly privileged members of our Lord Jesus Christ.

13 Sermon, Ecône, December 4, 1988.

14 “When you see, at the altar, the sacred minister raising the holy offering toward Heaven, do not believe that this man is the real priest, but bringing your thoughts above what strikes the senses, consider the hand of Jesus Christ invisibly extended” (St. John Chrysostom, Sermon 60 to the people of Antioch).

15 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1977.

16 “Our priesthood (...) is ministerial and instrumental. As priests, we are only ‘additional humanities’ of the Son of God, supplementary organs which He takes to himself to perpetuate His priesthood” (Fr. Victor-Alain Berto, *Principes de la Direction Spirituelle [Principles of Spiritual Direction]*, Éditions du Cèdre, 1951, p. 94). “Our Lord Jesus Christ, when about to ascend from earth to heaven, left behind Him priests as His own vicars” (Council of Trent, 14th Session, November 25, 1551, *Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance*, ch. 5, DS 1679; DZ 899).

17 *In persona Christi*.

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That is what makes all their dignity: our Lord Jesus Christ uses them in order to accomplish acts which only our Lord Jesus Christ is able to do. He alone is able to realize the tremendous miracle of transubstantiation, of His presence in the host, in the Eucharist, and He does it by using His priests. He could have done it without any intermediaries. He wished to use intelligent instruments to realize this miracle, to continue His Redemption. And so the priest himself steps into eternity, in a way. He is so taken up by our Lord that he, too, becomes in a way eternal. The act which he performs is an act of eternity.

When the priest ascends the altar, he ascends as to Mount Tabor and he is there, on the mountain, with our Lord Jesus Christ, who is going to use him to come down again in the midst of us and give Himself to souls that they, too, might participate in the Redemption of our Lord and in His divine life, thus preparing their life of glory in Heaven.

All this is so immense! All this is so beautiful! All this is so far above us! We have such an imperfect idea of what God is, of what our Lord Jesus Christ is...¹⁸

You will be other Christs. In offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, you are no longer yourselves; you are acting “in the person of Christ.” By your words, you are opening Heaven as it were and you are drawing down the most marvelous, the most extraordinary gifts. You are drawing down God Himself. You are holding the most Holy Trinity in your hands. You alone are able to do that. The faithful can say the words of consecration all they like; bread and wine are all there is on the altar. If the monk who is not ordained a priest says the words of consecration, there is nothing more on the altar than there was before. But once you become priests, you are going to say the words of consecration and God is going to

18 Sermon, Montalenghe, August 22, 1982.

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descend, God is going to come down and take the place of the substance of bread and wine, and then you will be able to give God to the faithful.¹⁹ That is the priest!²⁰

Since the priest participates in so intimate, so profound a manner in the mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can well understand why it is said of him that he is another Christ. So if he is another Christ, he should also have very precise qualities in his soul in order to receive the graces inherent to his vocation.²¹

Ah, my dear friends, your vocation is so sublime, so beautiful! To communicate the divine life of Jesus to souls, to communicate Jesus Himself to souls and to make of them temples of our Lord Jesus Christ, by transforming them in the divine life of our Lord Jesus Christ, by communicating to them the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ and surely one day leading them to share the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven. Is there anywhere on earth a more beautiful, a more sublime vocation than the Catholic priesthood?²²

19 “Oh, how high and honourable is the office of priests, to whom is given power to consecrate with sacred words the Lord of majesty, to bless Him with their lips, to hold Him in their hands, to receive Him in their mouths, and to communicate Him to others” (*The Imitation of Christ*, bk. IV, ch. 11, § 6, translated by Leo Sherley-Price, Penguin, 1952).

20 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

21 Priestly ordination, Econe, September 20, 1980. “If the priest is called ‘another Christ’ and is truly such by reason of his sharing in Christ’s power, should he not also become and be recognized as another Christ through imitation of Christ’s deeds?” (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

22 “This lofty dignity demands from priests that they react to their exalted office with the strictest fidelity. Since they are destined to promote the glory of God on earth and to cherish and increase the Mystical Body of Christ, they must be outstanding by the sanctity of their lives in order that through them the ‘fragrance of Christ’ (*II Cor.* 2:15) may be spread everywhere” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*). “Those who are dedicated to the divine ministries obtain a royal dignity and ought to be perfect in virtue” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *IV Sent.* d. 24, q. 3, a. 1; *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 45, a. 1).

PART II

THE PRIEST: MAN OF GOD

What the Church needs, what the people long for, are priests of God: priests who express God by their whole being, by their whole attitude, by their whole manner of acting, by their every word. That is what the faithful need.¹

1 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

CHAPTER 1

THE PRIEST: GOD'S RELIGIOUS

All the care of our Lord Jesus Christ is for the glory of His Father and the salvation of souls. You, too, therefore, must strive to seek the glory of the Eternal Father by prayer, by praise, by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and you must seek the salvation of souls.¹

Your priesthood is firstly one of prayer, of praise, and of adoration.

Secondly, yours is a priesthood for the sanctification of your own soul² and the soul of your neighbor, in particular the souls of those to whom you are sent.

Consequently, your priesthood is one of immolation, of sacrifice of yourselves.³

1 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1979.

2 "It must be recalled that, even though the increasing needs of Christian society today more urgently demand personal holiness in priests, they are already obliged by the very nature of the high ministry confided to them by God to work unceasingly for their own sanctification always and everywhere" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

3 Letter to his brother priests, La Croix-Valmer, October 26, 1958.

**1. The Sacrifice of the Mass:
The Heart of the Priestly Life**

The priest ascends the altar every morning to celebrate the holy mysteries. The Mass is the center of his priestly life. It is the ultimate prayer and the source of his apostolate. Our Lord then applies to souls the merits acquired on Calvary and engages the priest to unite his sufferings to His own, in order to continue the work of Redemption.

The Great Prayer of the Church

The reason our Lord uses faith to give truth to the Church, is that He wants Her to be a Church of prayer, for our Lord Himself prayed always. During His earthly life and even now in Heaven, He is forever there praying for us (*Heb. 7:25*). Jesus is the great example of prayer. So the Church also, in His image, ought to pray always. A faith which does not lead to prayer would be a dead faith. What is this prayer which Jesus handed down to His Church? Obviously it is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, just as Calvary was the great prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴ It was on the cross that He prayed most intensely, and now the Sacrifice of the Mass is the great prayer of the Church: a prayer into which the Church wishes all of the faithful to enter most intimately, most profoundly, adoring God, adoring our Lord Jesus Christ, adoring our Creator, adoring our Redeemer.⁵ What a magnificent prayer for Jesus to have given His Church! Not only that, but He wished us to participate in His body, His blood, His soul, and His divinity in the very heart of that prayer, that we might begin to pray as He does. May all our life be a prayer,

4 “The Mass is the very highest work of contemplation” (St. Vincent Ferrer, *Sermon for Lent*).

5 “A single Mass glorifies God more than the praise of all the angels and the martyrdom of all men could possibly do; the martyrdom of all men and the adoration of all the angels is something finite – a Mass is infinity” (Fr. Charles de Foucauld, *Entretien Dix-Septième*).

THE PRIEST: GOD'S RELIGIOUS

an offering, a hymn, a canticle of thanksgiving. That is what Jesus handed down to His Church and what you, my dear friends, will be called to accomplish.⁶

The one great prayer is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is going to be the heart of your apostolate. You will never understand your apostolate if you do not understand the Sacrifice of the Mass, because the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the great prayer of our Lord. Calvary was the great prayer of our Lord. It was there that He truly offered Himself to God His Father, and it is there also that you will find the source of all your apostolate and the zeal which you are going to need in order to go out and preach to souls. You are going to attract souls to our Lord Jesus Christ; you are going to attract them to the altar. That is going to be your role.⁷

The Finality of the Priesthood

The words which the priest pronounces over the Holy Eucharist contain both a *re-actualizing*⁸ of the sacrifice of our Lord, and at the same time this extraordinary, admirable, mysterious divine Sacrament of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, to be given to us for our nourishment.

There, ultimately, is the heart, the essence, the very goal of ordination: the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. That is the teaching of the Council of Trent. The goal of the priesthood is to consecrate, to offer, to administer: to consecrate the Eucharist and make Jesus, who is God, come down on our altars; to offer Him anew to God His Father for the salvation of souls and then to give Him to souls.⁹ What a tremendous thing, so simple and so sublime!¹⁰

6 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1982.

7 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1977.

8 *Réactualisation* in French: a making present in all its efficacy.

9 *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, ch. 26, § 1, 8 and 10.

10 Sermon, Ecône, March 23, 1985.

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When he pronounces the words of consecration, the priest makes our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, descend onto the altar. Poor creature, little insignificant creature, he has the power by his words to bring down to the altar Him who is the Creator of all things, the Redeemer of the universe, our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Blessed Virgin by her *fiat* was able to bring the Son of God into her womb, so the priest, every time he pronounces the words of consecration, brings down upon our altars our Lord Jesus Christ in His body, His blood, His soul, and His divinity. That is the power of a priest, an incredible, inconceivable power. That our Lord should have given this power to creatures is an act of His omnipotence and of His great charity toward us, in order that His Redemption might be applied to us.¹¹

The Great Means of Sanctification of the Priest

It is St. Andrew who said as he advanced toward martyrdom, “Every day I offer to God almighty a living sacrifice, not the smoke of incense, not the blood of goats, not the flesh of lowing bulls; but I offer to God on the altar of the cross the Lamb without stain whose flesh serves as nourishment and whose blood serves as drink to the people who have faith in Christ.”¹² You see that the apostles were already offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass daily. Certainly, it is not an obligation under pain of grave sin to say Mass every day, but it is a tradition and a counsel of the Church, for if there is one act which sanctifies and elevates souls and brings them nearer to our Lord, it is indeed the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.¹³

11 Sermon, Châtelperon, August 25, 1977.

12 Benedictine Fathers, “Les Actes de Saint André, Apôtre,” *Les Actes des Martyrs*, Julien, Lanier et Co., 1856, I, p. 38-39.

13 Sermon, Ecône, July 4, 1982.

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Holiness depends on our degree of participation in the Redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. The holiest people are those who associate themselves most closely with our Lord Jesus Christ, the Victim, for the Redemption of the world and so become co-redeemers, in a way.¹⁴

That is why the holiest person after our Lord Jesus Christ, the person who participated the most in the Redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the most Blessed Virgin Mary. That is why she is the queen of all saints. She is greater, higher, more holy, more worthy than all the souls ever created because she received the privilege of an exceptional participation in the work of Redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise the saints, both men and women, even those who were not priests, were truly united to our Lord Jesus Christ because they participated in the Redemption of our Lord. They participated in His Redemption by offering themselves as victims with Him on the wood of the cross, as well as by their apostolate.¹⁵ Therefore, in the Catholic Church, the veritable sign of holiness is that union as a victim with our Lord Jesus Christ, participating with Him in the Redemption of all mankind.¹⁶

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is therefore our means of sanctification, and it very clearly has to be the reason and the path of sanctification for the priest. The mission

14 "The priest should, therefore, study to reproduce in his own soul the things that are effected upon the Altar. As Jesus Christ immolates Himself, so His minister should be immolated with Him; as Jesus expiates the sins of men, so he, by following the hard road of Christian asceticism, should labor at the purification of himself and of others" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

15 "The exhortation of the Apostle, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,' (*Phil. 2:5*) requires that (...) all undergo with Christ a mystical death on the cross so that we can apply to ourselves the words of St. Paul, 'With Christ I am nailed to the cross' (*Gal. 2:19*)" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

16 Sermon, Munich, March 14, 1979.

of the priest is to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the continuation of the sacrifice of the cross, and there he will find the fundamental, essential, continual reason for his sanctification, as well as the means of sanctifying the faithful, because the path of holiness for the faithful is no different from that of the priest; they, too, have to follow the cross.¹⁷

*Stat crux dum volvitur orbis.*¹⁸ The cross remains, the cross is immovable before the vicissitudes of the world. The nearer you draw to the cross, the more you are going to participate in the divine immutability, the immutability of eternity. You stop changing once you have been fastened to the cross forever. Look at all the saints and how they carried the cross. Nearly all of them are pictured with a cross in their hands. Look at St. Pius V, with the cross in his hands. Why? Because they fixed it in their heart and because they wished to imitate and to receive all the virtues of the cross.¹⁹

You are going to need the graces of our Lord Jesus Christ to be transformed into victims in union with Him. There is no better way than by Holy Mass, by the Holy Eucharist. Mass and Holy Communion are where you are going to be transformed into victims to save souls, first your own and then the souls of those in the world.²⁰ What a beautiful ideal

17 Sermon, Econe, November 1, 1980.

18 “The cross stands immobile as the world turns round” (a cross atop a globe is the emblem of the Carthusians).

19 Sermon, Econe, December 8, 1987.

20 “It is particularly as the ministers of Jesus Christ in the great sacrifice which is constantly renewed with abiding power for the salvation of the world, that we have the duty of conforming our minds to that spirit in which [Christ] offered Himself as an unspotted victim to God on the altar of the Cross” (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*). “No one can truly draw near to the great God, to Him who is our pontiff and our victim, if he is not himself a living and holy victim; if he does not offer himself in a perpetual sacrifice. It is a sacrifice which is asked by Him who gave Himself entirely for us (...). Without that, I would not dare to bear the name and the vestment of a priest” (St. Gregory of Nazianzen, 2nd discourse, § 95). “The Lord Himself is the host which priests offer (...).

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our Lord has left to us! What a beautiful mission of holiness God wishes us to realize here below, during the few years we spend on earth!²¹

A Pattern for the Priestly Life

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offers a model, a kind of blueprint, of the stages the priest is going to have to pass through in order to reach holiness. A soul which is climbing toward God begins with the purgative life, continues with the illuminative life, and finally reaches the unitive life. These are the steps which the spiritual authors describe in the transformation of our souls in order to reach union with God. The Mass is a perfect expression of these three stages.

The first part of the Mass is the Mass of the catechumens. It is the Mass of those who are purifying themselves in order to become detached from the things of this world, so that God might accept their prayer. It represents the purgative life.

Then we reach the summit of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at the moment of the consecration. This part corresponds to the illuminative life. We contemplate God in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus is there, present in our hands, with His body, His blood, His soul, His divinity, in His glory, surrounded by all the saints and all the holy angels of Heaven. He is there in the hands of the priest by virtue of the words he has just pronounced. This presence of our Lord on the altar is a true object of contemplation for the priest.

Then the Mass goes on and we come to union with Jesus in Holy Communion. This last part of the Mass corresponds to the unitive life. It flows into a life of love, union, attachment,

Priests ought to make hosts of themselves for Him, in their turn," (St. Paulinus of Nola, *Epist.* 11, *PL* 61, col. 196).

²¹ Sermon, Munich, March 4, 1979.

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total devotion to our Lord. The priest then has only one desire: no longer to belong to himself but to belong entirely to our Lord; to be His apostle as perfectly as possible, in order to give Jesus to souls. That is what the Holy Mass expresses and what it accomplishes at the same time. In this way the Mass traces out the whole life of the priest.²²

The Catholic Mass has been, still is and will forever remain the great priestly model, the great pattern of the Christian life. If we modify the Mass, we are going to be modifying the priestly ideal and the ideal of the Catholic. It is because Holy Mass is a continuation of the cross of Jesus, before anything else. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the Temple was torn asunder. The Old Testament disappeared and gave way to the New. Did everything change? Yes and no. Doubtless, all the rites of the old Law and a certain conception of the Law of God did change, but what was essential in the Law of the Old Testament was transformed into a living vision of the Law of love.

What are the Ten Commandments, except to love God and to love one's neighbor? Our Lord Jesus Christ told us so Himself (*Mt. 22:40*). From now on, this Law of love is no longer inscribed in stone. It is inscribed in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Law of love and He proves it on His cross. What more beautiful expression could our Lord have given of this Law of love, this Law of charity, than by dying on the cross for the glory of His Father and for the salvation of our souls?

This Law of love is what Jesus preaches to us from the cross and what He preaches to us every day during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

This Law of love has been placed in your hearts, my very dear friends, in your souls, by the grace of Baptism. The grace

22 Sermon, Ecône, July 4, 1982.

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of Baptism has indeed transformed you and united you profoundly to our Lord Jesus Christ that you might be a living expression of His Law of love, His Law of charity.

And the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which you are going to celebrate every day of your life is going to foster that grace of your Baptism. Your godfather and godmother said that they attached themselves to our Lord Jesus Christ and that they rejected all of the temptations of the world, and that is what you are going to repeat every day: "O Jesus, my God, I cling to You forever. I want to be Your priest, I want to preach Your Law of love by example and by word. Keep far from me all the influences of this world, which is in the service of Satan." Then your souls will take all their strength from the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, from His blood and His body, which you are going to have in front of you on the altar and which you are going to bring down upon the altar by the words of consecration.

What a sublime mystery! God obeying men in order to offer and to continue His own sacrifice! That is going to form the whole enterprise of your priestly life: to penetrate the souls who participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with these sentiments of love for God, of love for neighbor even to sacrifice of self.²³

The priest ought to approach the altar every day the same way he approached it on the day of his first Mass. Every day has to be for him like the day of his first Mass.²⁴ To love the

²³ Sermon, Econe, June 29, 1987.

²⁴ In the priest, "the sacramental grace given for an increasingly holy offering of the Mass and absolving from sin can increase together with sanctifying grace of which it is a special determination. It develops as a feature of the priest's spiritual character and entitles him to receive further and more excellent actual graces, so that he may carry out his priestly functions with ever-growing sanctity until the day of his death. And thus, normally speaking, the priest's final Mass will be celebrated in a higher degree of holiness than was his first. Even though his sensible devotion may be weaker, his virtues of faith, hope, charity, and religion,

altar, to pray before the altar, to live and breathe by the altar, and to make the faithful live by the altar: that is the whole life of the priest. What a beautiful life it is; how sublime!²⁵

My very dear friends, try to approach the altar every time the way you approached it for the first time, with the same ardor, with the same zeal, with the same humility, with the same gratitude, the same sentiment of contrition for your sins, for your own negligence. “‘For all my sins, offences and negligence,’²⁶ yes, Lord, have pity on me. I am not worthy to go up to the altar but, by Your grace, I will draw near in order to offer Your divine sacrifice.” Each day, God gives you this grace to offer the Holy Sacrifice for all the sins of the world and for all those who are around you when you are celebrating Mass. Thank God for giving you this extraordinary mission and act in such a way as to be faithful to it.²⁷

2. The Divine Office: The Prayer of the Priest

*Perfect holiness demands a continual communication with God. In order that this intimate contact which the priestly soul ought to establish with God might never be interrupted throughout the succession of days and hours, the Church has imposed on priests the obligation to recite the canonical hours, or the divine office. This prayer is a source of holiness if it is recited with devotion.*²⁸

aided by the seven gifts, will have grown stronger; and the sacramental grace as a mode of sanctifying grace will be exerting a greater influence on those virtues” (Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Priest in Union with Christ*, TAN, 2002, part I, ch. 2).

25 Sermon, Châtelperron, August 25, 1977.

26 Prayer for the offering of the host at the offertory.

27 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985.

28 “Moreover, the Divine Office is a most efficacious means of sanctification. Certainly it is not a mere recitation of formularies or of artistically executed chants; (...) it is above all a matter of elevating the mind and heart to God, in unison with the blessed spirits, who eternally sing praises to God” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

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Unceasing Praise of God

The presence of God in us is expressed in a very living and very real manner in our divine offices and particularly in the psalms. The psalms are a continual conversation of the soul with God. There are not many prayers in which we continually address ourselves so directly to God. They maintain us in permanent contact with God.²⁹

Fr. Emmanuel writes, "Our Lord teaches us that we must '*pray always*' (Lk. 18:1). The accomplishment of this precept, taken rigorously according to the letter, would be impossible for us: that is why the holy Fathers explained it in the sense that we must pray often enough for the soul to be continually under the action, under the protection of the prayer which has just been said. To this end, the Holy Ghost inspired the Church to determine hours for prayer, and we consider to be praying always those who are faithful to praying at the specified times (...). The tradition of the Church is constant on this most important point of the prayer [of the divine office] at the canonical hours. The examples of the saints are consistent throughout the centuries and we see all of them, always, making the prayer of the canonical hours their first duty."³⁰

Certainly, we are not monks. So we cannot have a regularity of canonical prayers the way monks do. Obviously, this regularity was easier for Fr. Emmanuel, who was in a set place and had several brother priests with him. He was able to recite the canonical hours at the specified times. For us, that would be practically impossible. But let us at least observe the hours determined in our rule.³¹

29 Spiritual conference, Econe, February 27, 1989.

30 Fr. Emmanuel, *Les Enseignements du Père Emmanuel: Traité du Ministère Ecclésiastique (The Teachings of Fr. Emmanuel: Treatise on the Church Ministry)*, vol. I, ch. 5, Les Ateliers du Bec, 1963, p. 18-20.

31 Spiritual conference, Econe, February 9, 1991. The prayers of prime, sext and compline are recited in common in the houses of the

The Glorification of God

The virtues of humility and religion are nourished throughout the divine office by the psalms which sing the greatness, the omnipotence, the knowledge, the omnipresence of God, as well as by the prayer of the Gloria Patri.

The word *glory* which we evoke in the *Gloria Patri* summarizes all that the Church believes of the eternity of Heaven, of the Holy Trinity. In what does this glory consist exactly? It is difficult to define because it expresses something eternal, something proper to God, and the Divinity is a great mystery for us. This glory, this splendor, this honor comes from the richness of the divine Being who is the Author of all things and who encompasses all things. It is the expression of the almighty power of God, which is eternal, which emanates from an infinite Intelligence, from an infinite Spirit who is the Creator and the Master of all things.³²

Men think they can do without God, but they are under a total illusion. God is in us, He maintains us in existence. Psalm 138 expresses this admirably.

“Lord, Thou hast proved me, and known me; Thou hast known my sitting down, and my rising up. Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off: my path and my line Thou hast searched out. And Thou hast foreseen all my ways, for there is no speech in my tongue. Behold, O Lord, Thou hast known all things, the last and those of old: Thou hast formed me, and hast laid Thy hand upon me. Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me: it is high, and I cannot reach to it. Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into Heaven, thou art there: if I descend

Society of Saint Pius X, along with the rosary. Its statutes also provide for a time of meditation.

32 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 9, 1978.

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into hell,³³ Thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea: even there also shall Thy hand lead me: and Thy right hand shall hold me. And I said: Perhaps darkness shall cover me: and night shall be my light in my pleasures. But darkness shall not be dark to Thee, and night shall be light as the day: the darkness thereof, and the light thereof are alike to Thee. For Thou hast possessed my reins: Thou hast protected me from my mother's womb. I will praise Thee, for Thou art fearfully magnified: wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knoweth right well. My bone is not hidden from Thee, which Thou hast made in secret: and my substance in the lower parts of the earth. Thy eyes did see my imperfect being, and in Thy book all shall be written: days shall be formed, and no one in them. But to me Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honourable: their principality is exceedingly strengthened. I will number them, and they shall be multiplied above the sand" (Ps. 138:1-18).

That is what God is. We can do whatever we want, go wherever we like, think whatever we want to think, God is still there. He understands everything. He knows all things. He is carrying us!³⁴

We belong to Him totally and at every moment. That is why we do not have the right to treat ourselves however we like, but we have to be entirely in His hands. For that, it would be good to place ourselves in the mindset of that magnificent Psalm 118, which priests recite during the little hours on Sunday. The entire preoccupation of the psalmist is to be fully subject to the will of God, to be docile to His commands.³⁵

33 *Scheol* is the dwelling place of the dead, in the Old Testament.

34 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 22, 1982.

35 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 29, 1976.

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If we are continually praising God, continually placing before our eyes His greatness, His omnipotence, His goodness, His mercy, then little by little we set ourselves in our proper place as well, namely, in humility, which simply means in the truth. Humility is what leads us to reverence for God and for everything that comes from Him.³⁶

When you bow at the *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto*, for example, you are expressing your adoration. That is perhaps one of the most beautiful prayers there is, after the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria*. The *Gloria Patri* is the summary of all prayer. In the psalms, we are singing the glory of God, who is indefinable, ineffable for us, and in the *Gloria Patri* at the end of each psalm, we are summarizing all the sentiments which we have had over the course of the psalms. It is very beautiful and very encouraging. Thus, a liturgy which has been celebrated well with all the bowing, all the acts of reverence, helps us develop our virtue of religion. We are not performing these gestures so it looks like the Church has beautiful theatricals but so we might nourish our spirit of adoration.³⁷

A Model of Fidelity

The prayers of prime are beautiful for helping us remain faithful to God. The office of prime is remarkable because it places us totally in the hands of our Lord. Each morning we start again, we say the same things again. We are begging our Lord to help us to be totally under His influence, totally dependent upon Him. But in order to do that we have to possess ourselves: if we do not possess ourselves we cannot give ourselves to our Lord.

36 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

37 Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1975.

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The hymn of prime is really admirable! We beg God to protect us throughout the day from all that could harm us, and the Church goes into detail.

“May fear of Him restrain our tongues, lest discord stain our unguarded speech.” We are praying that there arise no dispute, no division, no violent opposition, for the tongue is often the instrument of all those things. It is easy to become angry during a conversation; we lose our self-control and we say things we may regret later, but which set off that dispute, that opposition between souls, between hearts.

“May His favoring care guard our eyes lest they feed upon the vanity of this world,” because vanities turn us away from our Lord Jesus Christ. Honor, glory, money, material goods, a good reputation, what have you; all these vanities of the world can turn us away from our Lord.

“May every heart be deeply pure, and never weaken before temptation.”

“May a wise moderation in food and drink subdue our proud flesh.” How many sins in our poor flesh! How many souls go to hell for those sins of the flesh, the abandon of all discipline, all mortification, all penance!

Imagine that the Church places all this on our lips every morning, at the hour of prime! The Church is a Mother who knows us well, who knows us better than we know ourselves. She knows our weaknesses very well, and our failures, which keep us from being subject to our Lord Jesus Christ and keep Him from being our King. All because we let ourselves be dragged along by so many weaknesses, so many evil tendencies.

Finally, the hymn ends with these words: “That when the day is gone, and night follows in its due course, we may sing the glory of God, having kept ourselves from the cares of the world.” It is so beautiful, this wish that we make in the

morning to keep ourselves free from the things of this world, whose prince is Satan!

Ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary to place you in these good dispositions, that you might advance ever more eagerly on the paths of perfection.³⁸

The Various Accents of Prayer

The liturgy, this magnificent liturgy of the Church, which is truly a product of the Holy Ghost, expresses all the sentiments we ought to have toward God: be they sentiments of contrition, or of hope, or of affection and love, or else of praise. Over the course of the divine office the Church brings us through different sentiments depending on the various prayers, and they are all helping to unite us to God.³⁹

Sanctifying grace has two aspects⁴⁰ which we find in all of the liturgical prayers. You have the psalms, like the psalm *Miserere* which is the cry of the soul under the influence of grace, making reparation for the evil it has done. The soul presents itself to God knowing it is full of sin. So on the one hand we are sinners but on the other we are sons of God, which allows us to sing the praises of God, moved by the grace that raises us up.

There are always these two aspects in the liturgy but they are magnificently balanced. The Church does not content Herself with asking us to have contrition, to weep over our sins, to do penance. At certain times, She insists on that aspect, particularly during periods like Advent or Lent. At other times, in the hymns and in many psalms, She multiplies the acts of praise and thanksgiving; She makes us sing

38 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 29, 1976.

39 Retreat, St. Joseph Carmel, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984.

40 *Gratia sanans*, or grace which heals, and *gratia elevans*, or grace which raises up.

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the greatness of God and His benefits; She makes us live in God; She makes us participate already a little bit in the eternal canticle which the saints are singing in Heaven: *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus...*⁴¹

A Cry for Mercy

Contrition for our sins is fostered throughout the divine office by prayers exalting the mercy of God.

The mercy of God is constantly referred to in the psalms. You have one psalm in particular which never ceases invoke it (Ps. 135):

“Praise the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever. Praise ye the God of gods: for His mercy endureth for ever.”

And it keeps repeating, *“for His mercy endureth for ever.”* The psalm lists out God's acts of goodness, His mercy toward his people.

“Praise ye the Lord of lords: for His mercy endureth for ever.

“Who alone doth great wonders: for His mercy endureth for ever.

“Who made the heavens in understanding: for His mercy endureth for ever.

“Who established the earth above the waters: for His mercy endureth for ever.”

It keeps coming back like a refrain. It is a magnificent psalm.

You see, those are the most common truths. At every moment we are meeting the word *mercy* because all men, since original sin, know that they are full of misery. Men who

41 Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 18, 1980.

believe in God can feel that misery always pursuing them, because of sin and the consequences of sin: physical misery, moral misery, spiritual misery. So the soul calls out for God's mercy, turning toward Him almost instinctively: "Lord, have pity on us. Be merciful toward us, we need Your mercy. Come to our help, heal us, save us." That is the whole spirituality of the Church. These words are constantly coming to our lips in the liturgy.

Three times during the office of prime we say, "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me." It is a constant appeal. We have to place our souls in harmony with these prayers, with these sentiments. It is excellent for acquiring virtue and especially humility. It places us in a constant humility because we have that conviction, that profound sentiment of our weakness, of our state as sinners, and consequently that desire to submit ourselves to the doctor of our souls who is our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴²

Holy Desire

The virtue of hope is nourished by the psalms of holy desire.

Holy Scripture often speaks to us of this desire to progress, this desire of union with God.⁴³ "*As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God*" (Ps. 41:2). "*For Thee my soul hath thirsted*" (Ps. 62:2). We read it regularly when we recite the psalms. It is also written in the book of Proverbs: "*For if thou shalt call for wisdom, and incline thy heart to prudence: if thou shalt seek her as money, and shalt dig for her as a treasure: then*

⁴² Retreat for the Sisters of the Society of Saint Pius X, Saint-Michel-en-Brenne, Quasimodo Sunday, 1989.

⁴³ "Your very desire is your prayer" (St. Augustine, *Enarr. super Ps. 37*, § 14, *PL* 36, col. 404).

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shalt thou find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3-5). "Seek ye the Lord: seek His face evermore" (Ps. 104:4). The words *quærere Deum* express this desire of the holy soul seeking after God.⁴⁴

At prime, you have an extraordinary psalm about those who seek God (Ps. 52): "The fool said in his heart: There is no God. They are corrupted, and become abominable in iniquities: there is none that doth good. God looked down from Heaven on the children of men: to see if there were any that did understand, or did seek God." Alas! All have gone astray, all have been corrupted, "there is none that doth good." It is obviously spoken in an exaggerated manner. Otherwise we could base ourselves on expressions like that to say that there are scarcely any elect. That would be an exaggeration, certainly. God says those things to shake the torpor of men who are preoccupied with their material goods, with their earthly activities, to the point of no longer seeking God, of no longer thinking of Him.

Sadly, even now, after two thousand years of Christianity, could we really say that most men are seeking God? God alone knows the answer; we cannot see their hearts. But if we judged by appearances, we would have a hard time saying that the majority of men are seeking God. That is not the impression we have. Yet God sees from the heights of Heaven whether or not it is true. Our duty is to contradict these words by constantly seeking God ourselves.⁴⁵

In the breviary, you recite these beautiful words of the *Venite adoremus, venite exsultemus*.⁴⁶ In this psalm, our Lord is the one speaking: "Today if you shall hear My voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 94).⁴⁷

44 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 26, 1982.

45 Retreat to the Sisters of the Society of Saint Pius X, Saint-Michel en Brenne, September 1984.

46 This psalm is recited every day at the beginning of matins.

47 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 19, 1983.

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The word *justitia* is constantly coming back in the psalms. Justice consists in rendering to each one his due. This word justice is a synonym of holiness. We have to seek the knowledge of God, but mostly we have to seek after holiness.⁴⁸

3. Meditation: The Great Means of Union with God

A priest's apostolate will be fruitful in proportion to his degree of union with God. This intimate union has to be nourished by the contemplation of eternal truths. Without that contemplation, it is practically impossible for him to carry out his liturgical functions in a suitable way, just as it is practically impossible for him to avoid falling into routine.⁴⁹ That is why the priest needs to be a man of contemplation. The contemplation of the great supernatural realities is where he fosters his love of God and draws his apostolic zeal.

What is Meditation?

Our little catechisms teach us that prayer is a lifting up of the soul toward God. Vocal prayer is not the only form of prayer. Certainly, vocal prayer helps us lift our souls toward God, particularly the beautiful chants, like Gregorian chant. But prayer has to be mostly interior, the way it will be in Heaven. This lifting of our souls toward God makes our soul more detached from itself and from all temporal preoccupation and makes it to be entirely God's.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

⁴⁹ "Despite the high dignity of the various functions of the priestly office and the veneration which they deserve, frequent exercise of these functions may lead those who discharge them to treat them with less respect than is their due. From a gradual decline in fervor it is an easy step to carelessness and even to distaste for the most sacred things. (...) It is evident, therefore, that there is a grave and urgent need for the priest to turn daily to the contemplation of the eternal truths, so that his mind and will may gain new strength to stand firm against every enticement to evil" (Pope St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

⁵⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1983.

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St. Thomas writes, "By praying man surrenders his mind to God, since he subjects it to Him with reverence and, so to speak, presents it to Him."⁵¹ What a beautiful expression! That is why prayer surpasses all other religious acts which merely concern the body or some external good which we use in the service of God. To pray is to place oneself before God in an attitude of subjection; it is to testify to Him that we can do nothing without Him, the Author of all good. This interior prayer ought to be simple since it arises from the contemplation of God's acts of kindness toward us, of His great goodness and our misery. Those are two subjects that place us before God as children before their Father, who is all things for them.

In order to pray, in order to meditate, it is not necessary to multiply our thoughts, multiply our ideas, our reading. On the contrary, it is something simple. It is about expressing the love which we have for Him who has given us everything. We know that He is there, present in us, beside us; we know that He is everywhere. So it pleases us to be with God, to dwell with Him.⁵² Prayer is love. It is the same as when a child is happy next to his mother. When he is with her, he is calm. If someone takes him away from his mother, then he cries. When he is near her, he just stays there and he doesn't say anything. And yet he is certainly united to his mother. The proof is that he cries when someone separates him from her. That is the way we ought to be with the good God. If someone were to separate us from God, we should not accept it. And we can be with God everywhere.

⁵¹ *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 83, a. 3, ad 3.

⁵² Cf. the peasant of Ars who fixed his gaze on the tabernacle every evening without speaking a word. To the Curé of Ars who asked him what he was doing, he answered, "I look at the good God and He looks at me" (Msgr. Trochu, *The Curé of Ars*, Part II, ch. 8, translated by Dom Ernest Graf, O.S.B., TAN Books, 1977, p. 184).

So let us not complicate our prayer, not wrack our brains for complicated ways. Read *The Way of Perfection* by St. Teresa of Avila. In that book, it is so simple: she speaks of prayer and she says it is just a simple gaze, a simple affection toward God.⁵³

The Desire for Contemplation

The priest ought to live continually in the presence of God which means having the spirit of adoration, because the first act of religion is adoration. Adoration is not necessarily exterior. It is not expressed only by prayers, by genuflections, by inclinations. All those things also count as the expression of interior adoration, but that interior adoration is obviously what counts most of all. Our Lord told the Samaritan woman that from now on, the true adorers would adore God “*in spirit and in truth*” (*Jn.* 4:23). That is what counts, especially for priests, and the faithful should sense it when they approach a priest. They should feel that they are in the presence of a man of religion, a man who thinks of God, who tries to act as God asks him to do, who is filled with the presence of God, filled with His thought, and who adores God inwardly.⁵⁴

The apostles were contemplatives. All apostles ought to be contemplatives.⁵⁵ The Curé of Ars, Padre Pio, St. John Bosco, who were all very active, were certainly men of great contemplation as well. They passed easily from the active life to a life of prayer; during their activity they were longing to go spend a few days of retreat or spiritual exercises so as to

53 Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984.

54 Spiritual conference, Econe, December 2, 1975.

55 “[Sacred] teaching and preaching flow” from the “fullness of contemplation” (*Summa Theologica*, II^a II^e q. 188, a. 6). “By their ordination, priests are given a fuller capacity for contemplation and the knowledge of holy things” (*cf.* Dionysius, *The Hierarchy of the Church*, ch. 5, part 2, § 8).

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think more of our Lord and to live with Him.

I would say that is a little bit the test of the contemplative spirit of an apostle: Do we have a desire to spend days of retreat in silence, in contemplation, in prayer, in union with our Lord? Or else, on the contrary, do those things not interest us in the least? Do we think that we are wasting our time and that we would do better to keep forging ahead in our apostolate? We tell ourselves that there is plenty to be done in the parish, in the mission. It is clear that we always have enough to keep us busy in the ministry, if we want to keep busy. So we can do it as a test to see if we are so caught up in our activities that we are no longer capable of entering into ourselves, of remaining silent for a few days and seeking a true spiritual life.

Remember the Curé of Ars who kept trying to run away from his parish and disappear into a Trappist monastery. The true apostle has that desire for contemplation even as he gives himself over entirely to the good of souls. Our action would be absolutely sterile if we were pure office-workers in the apostolate, so to speak. If we do not have the spirit of love, of union with our Lord upholding the apostolate, then our apostolate is going to be sterile because, left to ourselves, we are incapable of touching souls. The apostolate is not just a series of recipes and methods for converting souls. Certainly, there are initiatives which can be fruitful, but they are going to be so only to the extent that they are undertaken in a supernatural spirit, a spirit of prayer, of union with our Lord, of humility toward our Lord, who wants us to lean upon His grace alone in converting souls.

It is in this sense that we absolutely have to have that contemplative spirit, and it is why the spiritual life and the spirit of piety are so important.⁵⁶

56 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 24, 1975.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

It is absolutely vital that we maintain all our life a thirst for prayer, a thirst to live with God. As long as the desire is there, you are able to make exceptions and you are going to be obliged to do so. If those occasions are a real deprivation for you and you really suffer from it, saying to yourself, “I missed my meditation this morning!” then you have no need to worry. On the other hand, you had better not start saying to yourselves, “After all, I can certainly skip my meditation this morning.” On the contrary, you absolutely have to be trying to place it at another time, if you can; and that is the way it has to be all your life.⁵⁷

57 Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 29, 1984.

CHAPTER 2

THE VIRTUES OF THE PRIEST

In speaking of the interior life of the priest, we have emphasized the virtues of faith, hope, charity, humility, religion, and penance. The following section looks more deeply at certain of these virtues on account of the essential role which they play in the acquiring of priestly holiness.¹

We add a few considerations on the religious virtues as well as on prudence, queen of the moral virtues.

¹ “As friends of Jesus Christ, we are bound to have that mind in us which was in Jesus Christ who is ‘holy, innocent, undefiled’ (*Heb. 7:26*)” (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*). “The worthy exercise of Orders requires not any kind of goodness but excellent goodness, in order that as they who receive Orders are set above the people in the degree of Order, so may they be above them by the merit of holiness” (*Summa Theologica*, Suppl. q. 35, a. 1, ad. 3). “One cannot be surprised at the complete unanimity of the Fathers and Doctors on this matter; it might indeed be thought that they are guilty of exaggeration (...). Their teaching can be summarized thus: there should be as much difference between the priest and any other upright man as there is between heaven and earth; consequently, the priest must see to it that his life is free not merely from grave faults but even from the slightest faults. (...) Now more than ever the clergy need to be men of more than ordinary virtue, virtue that is a shining example, eager, active, ever ready to do great things for Christ and to suffer much” (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

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Our Lord was tracing out the whole life of the priest when He said, “*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its strength, what shall it be salted with?*” (Mt. 5:13). The salt will be of no use at all, good for nothing but being trampled underfoot. Today, the principles of holiness are being called into question. Holiness itself is disappearing in the world because the salt of the earth no longer has any taste to it. So many monks and nuns have abandoned their religious habit, abandoned the spirit of their founder. Those are so many sources of holiness from which the faithful may no longer benefit, although they have a great need for those models, for that leaven of holiness, in order to be holy themselves and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the priest has to manifest his virtue and communicate it to everyone around him, so that he will be that ferment of holiness which the world so dearly needs, today more than ever.²

You have studied; you have delved into the books which are at the basis of the doctrine of the Church: books of philosophy, books of theology. You have asked your professors questions. You have been enlightening your minds. You have been increasing your faith and you feel a profound attachment to the Church, to the sovereign pontiff, to all the bishops insofar as they remain Catholic, and to all the Church. You feel an attachment to all those fundamental values which have made the beauty of the Church for twenty centuries and now you wish to pass them on. As St. Pius X so well expressed it, every Catholic is a traditionalist because the Church is a tradition.³ So you are going to hand on that tradition to all the souls who come to you. But my dear friends, you will be nothing without holiness. You may well have a

2 Sermon, Econe, February 2, 1979.

3 “The true friends of the people are neither revolutionaries, nor innovators: they are traditionalists” (St. Pius X, *Our Apostolic Mandate*, “Letter on the Sillon,” August 25, 1910).

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very bright mind, an extraordinary knowledge of philosophy, of theology, of Holy Scripture, of canon law... you will accomplish nothing if you are not holy.⁴

Much is demanded of priests not only by God but also by the faithful. God wants His priests to be holy, to be pure, to be chaste. He wants His priests to have faith, hope and charity; but the faithful want that as well. The faithful have a right to expect these virtues of you so that they, too, might penetrate the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption. The mystery of God is the mystery of our whole life. It is going to be the mystery of all eternity.

The fruits of holiness which the Church produces are a perpetual miracle, and that is what touches the hearts of unbelievers and pagans the most. The holiness of the Church is the strongest argument to truly touch hearts. The priest converts souls in showing them the holiness of the Church through his own virtues.⁵

Why did the Church spread the way She did? It was because of the holiness of Her priests.⁶ You can see the joy when the parishioners or the villagers tell you, "Ah! We have a holy priest!" That is all the apologetics they need. A holy priest really is the expression of Catholicism. He is the sign that God is there.⁷

1. The Virtue of Religion

In the collect of the Mass for perseverance in the priestly vocation, the priest implores God to pour the spirit of piety and

4 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1981.

5 Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 13, 1975.

6 "The priest cannot be good or bad for himself alone; his conduct and way of life have far-reaching consequences for the people. A truly good priest is an immense gift wherever he may be" (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

7 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 26, 1976.

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*strength upon the ministers of the altar. Piety is indeed one of the essential qualities which the priest ought to have in order to maintain his soul on the summits where he is called to dwell.*⁸
He fosters that piety by the exercise of the virtue of religion.

Could we not call our Lord, God's own religious? For if anyone practiced the virtue of religion, if anyone was entirely bound to God – the word *religare* means *to bind* – it is indeed our Lord Jesus Christ. He became our bond with the most Holy Trinity, with God Himself, for He was God. You, too, are going to be God's religious; you are going to bind souls to God. But to bind them, you first are going to have to be truly God's religious. If all the souls who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, all the souls who have the Catholic faith, ought to be religious souls, you in particular, priests of our Lord Jesus Christ, you ought to have a religious soul.⁹

What Is the Virtue of Religion?

Religion is a virtue attached to the virtue of justice. It is the virtue that makes us render to God the honor and worship which are His due. Why do we say it is a virtue *attached* to the virtue of justice and not an *integral part* of justice? St. Thomas says it is because in the virtue of justice, there is something due between two persons, but also an equality be-

8 “All Christian virtues should flourish in the soul of the priest. Yet there are some virtues which in a very particular manner attach themselves to the priest as most befitting and necessary to him. Of these the first is piety, or godliness, according to the exhortation of the Apostle to his beloved Timothy: *Exerce ... teipsum ad pietatem*, ‘exercise thyself unto godliness’ (I *Tim.* 4:8). Indeed the priest's relations with God are so intimate, so delicate and so frequent, that clearly they should ever be graced by the sweet odor of piety; if ‘godliness is profitable to all things’ (I *Tim.* 4:8), it is especially profitable to a right exercise of the priestly charge” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

9 Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1983.

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tween them.¹⁰ In fact there is no equality between God and us, but rather an infinite distance. We have duties toward God, but God has no duties toward us. However, we speak of religion as a virtue attached to justice because there is a question of something being due to another. It is a duty for us, as creatures, and all the more so as beings redeemed by our Lord, to render to God the honor and the worship which are due to Him. Therefore it is part of the virtue of justice. It is good to know this connection between the virtue of religion and the virtue of justice because we have to get it into our heads that religion is a duty. We are not free to have religion or not to have it. All spiritual creatures ought to possess the virtue of religion. From earliest childhood, as soon as the soul realizes it is dependent on God, that it is a creature of God, then it is meant to rise up quite naturally toward God, toward Him who created it, who maintains it in existence; toward Him who saved it and who shed His blood for it. That ought to be something which is very natural to us.

How is the virtue of religion expressed? It is expressed in actions, both inward and outward. The outward acts of religion ought simply to be the expression of the inward virtue.¹¹

Devotion

What are the interior acts of religion? The interior acts of religion are devotion and prayer,¹² says St. Thomas. “Devotion is derived from *devote*; wherefore those persons are said to be *devout* who, in a way, devote themselves to God, so as to subject themselves wholly to Him. (...) Hence devotion is apparently nothing else but the will to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God. Wherefore it is

10 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 58, a. 11.

11 Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984.

12 *Devotio et oratio*.

written that ‘*the multitude of the children of Israel offered their firstfruits to the Lord with a most ready and devout mind*’ (Ex. 35:20-21).¹³ Devotion is at the basis of sacrifice. The exterior action which is sacrifice, the total gift of self to God, has at its source that spirit of sacrifice which consists in devoting oneself, in offering oneself, in giving oneself completely to God. Therefore, devotion is what is most intimate and profound in the virtue of religion.

St. Thomas asks himself “whether contemplation or meditation is the cause of devotion.” And he answers, “The extrinsic and chief cause of devotion is God (...). But the intrinsic cause on our part must needs be meditation or contemplation.”¹⁴ In fact, when we contemplate God, we cannot help but give ourselves entirely to Him. Contemplation arouses in us that act of the will, that act of charity toward God which is devotion.

Next, St. Thomas specifies which are the subjects of contemplation and meditation that raise our soul toward God. He reduces them to two types of considerations, those taken from the divine goodness and His acts of kindness, and those drawn from the sight of our deficiencies: “*I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me: my help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth*” (Ps. 120:1-2).

So God’s acts of kindness and His goodness inspire us to devote ourselves, and at the same time the feeling of our own deficiency, our littleness, our defects, our miseries, also encourages us to lean on God and to give ourselves totally to Him, trusting in Him.

In this contemplation, the divinity of Christ is in itself the strongest incentive of devotion, but His humanity also draws

13 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 82, a. 1. *Devote* is from the Latin *devovere*, to vow.

14 II^a II^{ae} q. 82, a. 3.

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us to devotion, “leading us thither as a guiding hand.”¹⁵ Far from drawing us away from God, the humanity of our Lord is in fact our way to Heaven. So His humanity is not something that is going to turn us away from devotion. That is why we should not be afraid of considering the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ at every stage of His life: Jesus as a child in Nazareth; in the Temple, with Mary and Joseph; Jesus in His public life; and particularly Jesus in His Passion and on His cross. The more our eyes are lifted toward our Lord, the more our devotion is going to increase and the more our spirit of religion and our virtue of religion are going to increase. The humanity of our Lord cannot be an obstacle to our devotion because the very reason He took that humanity was to raise us up to Heaven, to lead us into eternity. It is the path to eternity. We must not forget that our Lord Himself is there in Heaven. We also have to love contemplating the qualities of the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ, all of His knowledge, His beatific vision and all of His charity. We cannot forget that there is not just divinity in our Lord but humanity as well, and a soul like ours.

When we contemplate His soul, we should be asking Him to give us one of His virtues, so that our soul might become more like His.

St. Thomas then explains that the effect of devotion is spiritual joy.¹⁶ So there you have the inward act of religion which raises us up toward God. We have to foster that spirit of devotion to God.

The more we contemplate God and the more we come to know our Lord as God, as Creator, as Redeemer, the more the virtues of humility and religion are going to develop in us, practically of themselves. The more we esteem God, the

15 II^a II^{ae} q. 82, a. 3, *ad 2*.

16 II^a II^{ae} q. 82, a. 4.

more we see that God is great and infinite, infinitely good, infinitely perfect, and the more we adore Him, the more we are going to submit ourselves to Him and the more we are going to want to give ourselves to Him.

If our parents are truly virtuous then we love them, we have respect and veneration for them. But what are our parents compared to God? Nothing at all. So, imagine God with all His perfections, all the marvels that are in Him: His virtue, His goodness, His mercy toward us. If already we have a veneration for our parents, what will be our veneration for God? All we can do is say to God, "Take me, I am Yours. You have given me everything, and all that I have to give You is myself; all that I am able to give You back is the love which You have placed in me. Everything that You have given me is Yours, it belongs to You. Take it. I give it to You. I offer it to You entirely." That is devotion.¹⁷

Prayer

We say that God is holiness itself and we sing of our Lord that He alone is holy, *Tu solus sanctus*, because God is the source of all holiness and because we will be saints to the extent that we are united with God and with our Lord.

But how does this union with God become a reality? Under the influence of the grace of the Holy Ghost. This union has a name: prayer, *oratio*.¹⁸

Prayer is in fact the second interior act of the virtue of religion. Vocal prayer is necessary in order for prayer to be public.¹⁹ When we are called to offer our homage to God

17 Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984.

18 *Spiritual Journey*, p. 26. Cf. St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*: "There is, in fact, such a necessary link between holiness and prayer that the one cannot exist without the other."

19 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^e q. 83, a. 12.

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publicly, we need to express that prayer by words, and that vocal prayer, both public and individual, then moves us to interior devotion. So it has a reason. The body itself also shares in this devotion by its movements, its gestures of adoration, genuflection, bowing. This whole magnificent liturgy which is truly a product of the Holy Ghost is all made up of vocal prayer. The liturgy expresses what our attitude should be toward God, whether it be sentiments of contrition, or of hope, or of love and affection, or sentiments of praise. The Church brings us through all of these sentiments over the course of Her different prayers and in that way She helps us to unite ourselves to God.²⁰

Vocal prayer, which includes all liturgical prayer, instituted by God Himself and by God Incarnate and fashioned by the Holy Ghost, especially in the Roman Liturgy, is the most sublime source and expression of mental prayer and spiritual prayer.

The place of this prayer in the life of the priest is considerable. To neglect it, to limit it, to render it superficial, would be to ruin the essential prayer, the spiritual prayer, to which vocal prayer is ordered by the Holy Ghost.²¹

At one time, there was a different focus in many novitiates and really in all formation of religious. They were told, "You will not be able to do good unless you fulfill your exercises of piety, unless you are precise in reciting your rosary, in doing your spiritual reading, and unless you remain so over the whole course of your apostolic life." But they may have had too much of a tendency to insist on what I would call the materiality of going through these exercises of piety, and not enough on the spirit which we ought to bring to those exercises: a supernatural spirit, a spirit of prayer. It is not enough

20 Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984.

21 *Spiritual Journey*, p. 26-27.

to go to the chapel and say to yourself, "All right then, I have obeyed my rule, I have done what was asked of me as a religious: I have always made my visit to the Blessed Sacrament; I have always accomplished my morning prayer, my evening prayer; I have been as consistent as possible." That is still not enough. We should not be doing those things purely by a spirit of obedience, for example, or by a certain fear of falling into laxity. It is true that God gives graces to those who are consistent, but if the spirit is not there, one day or another we run the risk of dropping all those exercises of piety.

It will be fine as long as we are living in community, but the day we find ourselves alone in a mission, if we have to go off alone to start a foundation, our exercises of piety are going to disappear because we will not have formed that spirit of piety in ourselves. It is the spirit of piety which makes us say, "If I do not pray, if I do not spend a part of my day in union, profound union with our Lord, I am going to become spiritually empty and I will no longer have anything to give to others."²²

St. Thomas asks himself if attention is useful to prayer.²³ He answers that yes, it is useful. Is it necessary and indispensable? For merit and obtaining merit, no, it is not, provided that the initial intention is there. You have to have the intention to pray and the intention to render homage to God. As for attention, it is necessary for spiritual nourishment even if it is not necessary for merit. Here again, St. Thomas says there is a distinction to be made between attention to the words so as not to make a mistake, attention to the meaning of the words and finally attention to God, the end of prayer and the object of the request. He says, "That last kind of attention is most necessary, and even the very weak-minded

22 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 24, 1975.

23 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^æ q. 83, a. 13.

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are capable of it. Moreover this attention, whereby the mind is fixed on God, is sometimes so strong that the mind forgets all other things.” We cannot ask people without an intellectual formation to pay attention to all of the words and to all of the meaning of the words, because those poor people would no longer be able to pray! Yet there are those among the unlearned who do make a very good prayer, perhaps even more beautiful than those who are paying attention to the words and the meanings of words.

Next, St. Thomas continues, “the human mind is unable to remain aloft for long on account of the weakness of nature, because human weakness weighs down the soul to the level of inferior things: and hence it is that when, while praying, the mind ascends to God by contemplation, all of a sudden it wanders off through weakness.” You see what St. Thomas himself says. His comment is perfectly true! He knows our weakness, too. The essential is to have your spirit united to God.

However, “purposely to allow one’s mind to wander in prayer is sinful and hinders the prayer from having fruit.”

So let us have that desire to unite our souls to God in devotion, in meditation, and to offer ourselves entirely to Him by those prayers which we recite and which the Church teaches us over the course of our beautiful liturgy.²⁴

May we be able to live this ardent prayer of the will and of the heart in a constant manner even in our absorbing apostolic activities, which should never absorb us to the point of hindering our wills and our hearts from belonging to God! May our apostolate even be a sustenance for this offering to God.

This profound attitude of our soul, which is so fitting both to the nature of the soul and to grace, is going to give us

24 Retreat, Carmel of St. Joseph, Brilon Wald, October 18, 1984.

a desire for silence and contemplation which will find fulfillment in the common and the private exercises of piety. Our spiritual life will find there its unity, its constancy and its truly Christian peace.

These brief considerations open horizons on the accomplishment of the divine will in our daily lives. This ideal of sanctification has to be the whole fabric of our priestly life.²⁵

2. The Virtue of Faith

Archbishop Lefebvre chose for his episcopal motto the words Credimus caritati, "we have believed the love that God has in our behalf" (I Jn. 4:16). He lived his motto to the full. A man of faith, he never ceased to live it, to proclaim it with strength and to communicate it by his sermons and his spiritual conferences.

St. Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews (*Heb.* 11 and 12), which we might call the Epistle of the Priesthood, really insists on the virtue of faith, and he gives as an example all those who gave their lives for the faith whether in the Old or the New Testament. He also speaks of those who shed their blood to affirm what our Lord Jesus Christ taught them by His Revelation.

In the same way, we could not imagine a priesthood with any other spirit than the spirit of faith. The priest lives entirely on the level of faith, on the level of Revelation. If there had been no Revelation, there would not have been a single priest receiving the priestly character, configuring him to our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the priest has to have a faith that is profound, enlightened, firm, unailing.²⁶

²⁵ *Spiritual Journey*, p. 28.

²⁶ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

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Faith is the most essential thing which we possess and which we have to preserve. Without faith, we cannot have eternal life, “*without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Heb. 11:6). Those are the words of Scripture.²⁷

What Is Faith?

“*Faith,*” says St. Paul, “*is the evidence of things that are not seen*” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is the argument, the proof of things which are not apparent, therefore which we do not see with the eyes of our body.²⁸

That is why so many people think there is nothing beyond this earthly life. It is hard to believe in things which are not apparent, and yet that is what faith is. And how many people, among those who do have faith, have only a weak faith, an extinguished faith in a way, one that is poor and lifeless, because they do not consider enough those things that are invisible! Yet it certainly says in the *Credo*, “He created Heaven and earth, all things visible and invisible,” and the invisible realities are much more important than the visible. The things which we see will disappear. They flatter our vanity, our senses, but there are other realities far superior which are in God. All that we see comes from Him. If only we had the vision of angels, the vision of the elect, we would see that all these things here below are only an effect of the power of God. We would see all the influence of the Creator in creatures and then we would understand that we are nothing and that God is everything. Then we would understand

27 Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 22, 1976.

28 “The true believer opens himself to what is not visible as if he could see it. He has the gift of gazing upon it firmly and of moving at his ease in that domain. He is at home there. Transported into this great land of divine truths, the faith is for him an argument in the broad sense of the word” (Fr. Bernard, O.P., *Summa Theologica, La Foi [The Faith]* I, Éditions de la Revue des Jeunes, 1941, p. 284).

that the magnificent things here below, which science reveals to us, only hold together and subsist at every instant by the almighty power of God.

That is what faith is. It makes us not only perceive spiritual realities, but even more it makes us penetrate supernatural realities, what God revealed of Himself by His Son, by Revelation.²⁹

What is this faith, if not the statement which St. Peter himself made to our Lord: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Mt. 16:16). Repeat often these words of St. Peter which earned him the promise of eternity. Repeat them in the footsteps of all the Catholics who have been martyred because they said to their judges, “We believe only in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. Never will we honor the pagan divinities, which in fact are not divinities at all. We have no God but Jesus Christ.”³⁰

The faith of the priest is his *Credo*, his oath sworn on the eve of his ordination, that oath which rejects all of the errors which could corrupt, demolish his faith and align it with what is merely natural.³¹ The faith is not about things which are natural but about gifts which God has freely given us. God was already not obliged to create us, to give us natural life, of course! And He was even less obliged to give us supernatural life! Yet He did will to give us that divine life which brings us into the heart of the Trinity.³²

Our souls, which were under the rule of the devil, were suddenly transferred into the Holy Trinity. God the Father,

29 Sermon, Ecône, May 29, 1971.

30 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 29, 1986.

31 Archbishop Lefebvre is referring here to the anti-modernist oath sworn by those ordained to the priesthood, an oath by which they reject the error which claims that faith is a natural religious sentiment, arising from the subconscious, and not an assenting of the mind to the truth revealed by God, on the authority of God.

32 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

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God the Son, God the Holy Ghost now dwell there. Our souls have become temples of the Holy Ghost. What a tremendous reality! It is a total, complete change which was effected in us on the day of our Baptism. From now on, here we are children of God, forever tied to eternity if we are loyal to our faith and loyal to grace. It is no small thing!

Over the course of his studies, the seminarian learns to penetrate more deeply into the articles of the faith which the Church holds out to him by Revelation. But that is not enough. The faith is not merely speculative formulae. The faith brings us into a family and makes us profoundly a part of it. The faith makes us members of the family of God.

We believe in Persons, we do not simply believe in the articles of the faith. Our *Credo* tells us, "I believe in God," God who is life, God who is the source of life, God who is everywhere, who maintains all things, without whom nothing would be. We believe in God, Him who is in us, in whom we move, in whom we are (*Acts 17:28*). It is no small thing to believe in God! We believe in the Son, Incarnate Word, come among us to save us, to give us grace.³³

Faith According to Fr. Emmanuel

Fr. Emmanuel says the following in his little treatise on the Trinity: "There are in fact three degrees in the knowledge which man can have of his Creator. The first is the natural knowledge which he enjoys by the light of reason; the second is the supernatural knowledge with which he is enriched by the light of faith; the third, the knowledge or beatific vision which he possesses by the light of glory." He says a few words about natural knowledge than he adds, "What we can reach by natural knowledge cannot satisfy us, who are Christians.

33 Sermon, Flavigny, February 1, 1988.

We are called to climb higher and to penetrate deeper. We are called to have a *supernatural* knowledge of God. This means knowledge by the light of faith, which St. Paul compares to the knowledge that comes to us through the sense of hearing (*Rom. 10:17*): faith comes from hearing, that is to say, from hearing the word of Christ. It makes us know God in a more intimate manner, as the holy word reveals to us the marvels hidden in His Essence; as it initiates us into the secrets of the Creative Nature, in whom we learn to adore the Trinity of Persons.”

This is profoundly true. Faith initiates us into the secrets of the “Creative Nature,” but also into the secrets of the Redemptive Nature, and even of the Glorifying Nature.

”We still indeed have a blindfold over our eyes, yet rather than simply feeling the picture with our fingers, we listen with delight to a description of it, at least insofar as it can be grasped by our intelligence which is riveted to earthly images. (...) A day will come when the blindfold will be taken away. Let us conclude with the thought that this beatific knowledge, so great, so glorious, is entirely contained, as in germ, in that knowledge which faith obtains for us.”

That is the reason why we should seek to know God in as perfect a manner as possible here below. Certainly, we are a little like blind men, or nearly blind, yet faith enlightens us, as Fr. Emmanuel says: “Faith is a beginning of the possession of that total truth which is in God Himself.³⁴ Faith is obscure insofar as the mysteries which it offers to us are above the capacity of reason in the state of our present life; but it is luminous in that these mysteries hidden to our eyes by their excess of light cast in a marvelous new day the things of time and of eternity.”³⁵

34 Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas: “Faith is a habit of the mind, whereby eternal life is begun in us” *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 4, a. 1.

35 Fr. Emmanuel, *Étude sur la Très Sainte Trinité*, ch. 1, “La Foi

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That is exactly right. Faith casts a marvelous light on the things of time and of eternity. That is precisely what we need to have before we start to work. We need to know these things of time and of eternity, to know them by our Lord Jesus Christ because it is He who is our light, the light “*which enlightens every man who comes into the world*” (Jn. 1:9). Our Lord is truly our light. So it is by Him that we have to try to discover a little bit the plan of God and to nourish our desire for God.

We have to remember what Fr. Emmanuel says and which corresponds very well to what St. Thomas tells us. Fr. Emmanuel has a very Thomistic notion of faith.

We could say, “But St. Paul tells us that faith is going to disappear (I Cor. 13:9-12).” It is true that faith is going to disappear in its obscurity, but it is going to be transformed into the light of the beatific vision. Faith and vision have the same object, but obviously the veil is going to fall. The mind which is already enlightened by grace will obviously come to full awareness in the beatific vision, but it is radically the same knowledge.³⁶

To Live by Faith

“*The just man lives by faith*”³⁷ (Heb. 10:38) – we have to live by our faith. The truths set out in the catechism must not remain something purely speculative or theoretical: we must truly live and breathe them; we must truly live and breathe God.³⁸

We therefore have to seek not only faith but the spirit of faith. It is not the same thing. Unfortunately, one may have *et ses Mystères*,” in *Bulletin de l'Œuvre de Notre-Dame de la Sainte Espérance*, 1886-1887.

36 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 8, 1991.

37 *Justus ex fide vivit*.

38 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 12, 1987.

the faith and be separated from God by mortal sin. Whereas the spirit of faith is a spirit animated by the desire to understand God better, to love Him better, to serve Him better, to bring Him more fully into ourselves and into other souls.³⁹ Ultimately, this spirit of faith is none other than the gift of understanding, the gift of the Holy Ghost which perfects the virtue of faith. This gift truly gives us the *sense* of our Lord and of the Church.⁴⁰

We should live that faith by applying the principles of the faith to our daily life. How so? By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by charity toward God and toward our neighbor.⁴¹ The priest performs an act of charity toward God by celebrating Mass. He is adoring God, proving to Him his devotion, his reverence, his love, his union. That is charity toward God, and it is the same charity toward God which then overflows onto our neighbor.

By spreading that charity around him, the priest is responding to what souls are seeking, because souls are not just asking for doctrine; they are also asking for an example. If the priest is not giving an example at the same time as he is giving doctrine, what kind of conviction are souls going to have? That doctrine has to be put into practice.⁴²

Ask the Blessed Virgin Mary for the understanding of the faith, of the Sacrifice of the Mass, of the Catholic Church. Why was she chosen? Because she believed. "*Blessed she who has believed*" (Lk. 1:45)! She had faith. Why were the shepherds, why were the magi chosen to go to our Lord? Because

39 "A faith such as this fixes Jesus Christ definitely in our hearts. It is not a simple adherence of the intellect; it includes love, hope, and the total consecration of oneself to Christ to live of His life, to participate in His mysteries and to imitate His virtues" (Dom Marmion, *Christ – The Ideal of the Priest*, trans. Dom M. Dillon, B. Herder Book Co., 1953, p. 73).

40 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 28, 1975.

41 "*In Christ Jesus, the faith works through charity*" (Gal. 5:6)

42 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1979.

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they believed. The shepherds believed and they found Jesus. The magi believed in the star and they found Jesus. And it is the same for all those who convert to our Lord. Guard your faith with care, my dear friends. Ask the most Blessed Virgin to keep that faith in your hearts. May she guide you and form in you our Lord Jesus Christ, her divine Son.⁴³

3. The Virtue of Charity

The Origin and the Nature of Charity

St. Thomas says that the good tends naturally to spread itself, to overflow.⁴⁴ That is why charity means *to give oneself*. It would be against charity to hold back what one has, like a selfish person. Charity is exactly the opposite of selfishness. Its tendency of nature is to give what it has, to give what it is.⁴⁵ God the Father gives Himself in such a way that the Son whom He engenders is equal to Himself. God the Father is truly, fully charity, since He withholds nothing of Himself, to the point that the Son whom He engenders from all eternity is equal to Himself.⁴⁶

The Father and the Son, loving one another and giving Themselves one to the other produce the Holy Ghost, who is also equal to the Father and to the Son. It is this gift of Themselves which constitutes a third Person, namely, the Holy Ghost. It is this constant circumincession⁴⁷ of all the

43 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1987.

44 *Bonum est diffusivum sui* (*Summa Theologica*, I^a q. 5, a. 4, ad 2; *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, ch. 37; Denis, *The Divine Names*, ch. 4, § 1).

45 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 23, a. 1.

46 Spiritual conference, Econe, February 13, 1978.

47 Circumincession describes the mysterious attraction by which the three divine Persons are drawn one toward the other, go the one toward the other. It is a kind of movement which, in the generation of the Son or the procession of the Holy Ghost, leads one to the other and vice versa. Circumincession therefore names the mutual compenetration of

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substance of the Father which passes to the Son, and from the Father and the Son to the Holy Ghost, which constitutes that immense charity which is the model of all creatures. All creatures, whatever they be, have their model in God, since it is God who created them. That is why charity is a kind of definition of the creature.⁴⁸

If God is charity, what else can He do but spread the charity which is in Him? All of the operations of God *ad extra*, that is, Creation and Redemption, can only be the expression of His charity.⁴⁹

By the very fact that we were created by God, that we come out from the hands of God, so to speak, it means we come from God's love, God's charity. The very mission of our Lord also comes from the love of God desiring to save the world. St. John says it as he relates the words of our Lord: "*God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting. For God did not send His Son into the world in order to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him*" (Jn. 3:16-17).⁵⁰

In His priestly prayer, which is an admirable prayer, one we have to read again and again, our Lord Himself was expressing the charity of God for us in the words He spoke to His Father, before going to express that charity in a much more concrete manner by His immolation on the cross: "*I have made known to them Thy name, and will make it known, in order that the love with which Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them*" (Jn. 17:26). In this prayer, our Lord asks that we might have in ourselves the love which is in Him, and

the Persons by the fact that they are consubstantial. As our Lord said, the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son (Jn. 14:10-11).

48 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 3, 1980.

49 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1978.

50 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 14, 1978.

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that He Himself might be in us. So our Lord's goal is to turn us into charity. He accomplishes this work together with His Father and the Holy Ghost. *"If anyone love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him"* (Jn. 14:23). And He adds, *"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things"* (Jn. 14:26). It is truly the indwelling of the Holy Trinity which realizes in us this work of charity. God is charity and His gift to us can only be charity.⁵¹

We have to strive to have more charity in ourselves: not a charity that we simply "feel," not something purely human, but that charity which God wishes to communicate to us. Our Lord willed to let us share in His divine nature by sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace is the charity of God which resides in us in a permanent manner. It is a participation in the charity of our Lord. It is a quality which embellishes and illuminates our soul. It is the most beautiful thing we can possess, the greatest thing we can possess. It is grace which transforms our soul by filling it up with the charity of Christ.⁵²

God has given us this gift of grace and who are we to refuse it? Who are we to say to Him, "Why did you love us so much, my God?" If God has loved us, are we going to push that love away? He loved us in creating us and He loved us in making us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

That divine life, that life of the Holy Trinity, is what has to determine everything the priest is and does. That life is the reason he was made a priest.⁵³

It is comforting and encouraging to think that, by the charity which is poured out in us, by the sacraments and especially by the Eucharist, we can already begin here below

51 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1978.

52 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 4, 1980.

53 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

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the life that will be ours in eternity. The charity which we have here below is the same as that which we will have in Heaven. Obviously, it is going to be transformed and fulfilled, but it is radically the same. So we can already truly live eternal life here below. We have to strive to do so. That is what ought to be our joy, our consolation and our strength.⁵⁴

The great virtue of the priest is charity. As our selfishness and our pride gradually disappear, we are truly being transformed into charity. We have only one goal and that is to see our Lord reign. Our sole ideal therefore has to be loving Him, particularly as we offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: uniting ourselves to Him with all our soul, with all our heart and leaving the altar animated with the desire to do everything we can so that souls might also taste the joy of knowing our Lord and being united to Him.⁵⁵

To Love Christ with Our Heart and Our Actions

Our Lord Jesus Christ is about to make you His ministers, my friends, by His Church, and how could I do anything else than offer you as your ideal, as the total object of your love, Him for whom you have left all things; Him whom you have never ceased to study throughout your seminary years; Him who, gently and strongly, has sustained you, enlightened you, encouraged you; Him who has never failed you.

Ah yes! Our motto has to be the final word of counsel which St. Benedict left to his monks at the end of his Rule: "May they prefer absolutely nothing to Jesus Christ."⁵⁶

That is what truly Christian souls, truly priestly souls have always done. They have all cried out after St. Paul, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*" (Rom. 8:35).

54 Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 26, 1981.

55 Retreat, Ecône, June 1, 1980.

56 *Christo omnino nihil præponant.* Rule of St. Benedict, ch. 72.

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How do we put that love of Christ into practice? By taking all of His interests to heart. That is where we draw our zeal for our superiors, for our brother priests, our faithful, the Church, the most Blessed Virgin Mary, as well as our Holy Father the pope and our bishop. Our Lord loves them like another Self. We are to love Him in them, and discover in them the life of Christ.

We also practice the love of Christ by seeking to know Him, to become familiar with all of His work, all of His thoughts and sentiments. Before the marvels which we are going to discover in His Heart, in His divine, heavenly soul, we are going to adore in the silence of our own soul all that God has been pleased to accomplish in the soul of our Savior. Let us think of Him in our travels; in our work; in the midst of the admirable nature of which He is the author; when we are with sinners, with the sick, in the midst of all those miseries brought about by sin and for which He is the only remedy.

We love Him also in making Him loved through a holy respect for sacred places, consecrated things, the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Then shall we share in His recompense.⁵⁷

“Peter, dost thou love Me?” (Jn. 21:17). Three times our Lord asked him and Peter, saddened at seeing that our Lord did not seem to trust him, answered, *“Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee” (Jn. 21:15-17).* Ah! Without a doubt, St. Peter was thinking back to the day when he had denied Him. He saw himself weeping for the sin he had committed, and then the triple question of our Lord also reminded him of the three times Peter had denied Him. He felt the sting of remorse entering more deeply into his heart, and he wondered if our Lord trusted him anymore, because He asked Peter three times if he loved Him. That is when he said, *“Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.”*

57 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

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It is that same love of our Lord Jesus Christ which the priest, also, must proclaim. If we truly believe that He is the Son of God, we ought to express to Him our love not only by our words but also in accomplishing His holy will.

Our Lord repeated it over and over, in every possible manner, including when someone in the crowd was congratulating the Blessed Virgin for being His mother. Remember our Lord's answer: "*Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it*" (Lk. 11:28).

He was showing that the merit of the most Blessed Virgin was to have spoken her *fiat*, more than the fact of being His mother; and it is precisely because she spoke her *fiat*, because she did the will of God, that she became His mother.

Consequently, to do the will of God is more important than all the graces we might receive. It is by that submission to the will of God that we are going to be truly the disciples of our Lord, that we are going to be loved by Him and that we are going to prove to Him our love.

"If you keep My commandments, you will be My disciples. If you do the will of My Father, My Father and I will come to dwell in you" (cf. Jn. 15:8-10 and 14:23).⁵⁸ These promises of our Lord show us how we are supposed to prove to Him our love: "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father"* (Mt. 7:21).

So we have to love our Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, and you see that this charity includes in itself all of Christian morality and all of Christian sanctification. The two great precepts are laws of charity and ultimately there is only one precept: to love God. Everything is contained in the love of God, in the love our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because what we ought to love in creatures is what comes from God,

⁵⁸ See also *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 184, a. 3.

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and we are supposed to love them in order to help them reach God. We are not supposed to love creatures for themselves or for us.⁵⁹ We are supposed to love whatever comes from God and whatever is returning to God, and we have to act in such a way that souls might return to God. That is how we are supposed to love our neighbor, and never in any other way.

That is why, ultimately, all of our life and also our eternity can be summarized in a single commandment: love God, love our Lord Jesus Christ above all things, with all our soul, with all our strength (*Dt. 6:5* and *Mt. 22:37-38*).⁶⁰

Our entire priestly life is a life of charity. It is a life of charity toward God, in our Lord who is the great example of prayer and who teaches us to pray “*in spirit and in truth*” (*Jn. 4:23*). Indeed, the life of prayer is the first expression of charity: the love and adoration of the Father who is in Heaven, through His Son and in His Spirit.

Blessed the hours of the breviary and of our meditation! Sublime moments of our Holy Mass which are the expression of our charity toward God!⁶¹

Fraternal Charity

On the evening of Holy Thursday, our Lord told His apostles that they had to be united not only to Him, but also among themselves. He urged them to charity: “*This is My commandment, that you love one another*” (*Jn. 15:12*). He

⁵⁹ “The hierarchy of our affections has to correspond to the hierarchy of interests: we should not love our neighbor either for ourselves – a selfish love, or for him – philosophical altruism; we should love him insofar as he serves the glory of God. And to love him for the glory of God is to desire that he have charity or progress in charity, and to desire them for him out of charity” (Cardinal Mercier, *La Vie Intérieure: Appel aux Âmes Sacerdotales* [*The Interior Life: A Call to Priestly Souls*], Éditions Warny, 1918, p. 339).

⁶⁰ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1974.

⁶¹ Circular letter to brother priests, Dakar, July 29, 1960.

insists on that charity which priests and all of His disciples ought to have for one another.⁶²

We cannot praise God and care nothing for our neighbor; we cannot be all love of God and of souls and be seeking after ourselves. It is by one and the same movement of zeal that the priest goes to his church, to his altar, to pray there and to lose himself in adoration, and that he goes toward the souls who call out for the care of his priesthood.⁶³

The sign that we are His disciples is whether or not we love others, whether or not we love one another. Our Lord offered His apostles so many clear and simple principles before going to carry out His immolation on the cross!

Then, by washing of the feet of His own apostles, He made it clear to the priest that he is in the service of others, in the service of his neighbor (*Jn.* 13:1-20). If anyone wishes to have the first place, let him take the last place; let him be truly the servant of his brothers, as our Lord Himself showed us during the three years of His public life. He served His apostles. We can say that our Lord gave a summary of all of priestly spirituality, in those few words He spoke and the few actions He performed before He left them.⁶⁴

The priest is essentially, by definition, a man who gives himself. That really is the way it is, concretely, over the course of the day. Fr. Chevrier wrote that, "The priest ought to be a man consumed by others."⁶⁵ He gives himself like the Eucharist, like our Lord Himself. He gives his time, his labor, his knowledge, his money, his physical strength.

The priest is a man who forgets himself in order to think only of the good to be done, only of the souls who need his

62 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1981.

63 Letter to brother priests, La Croix Valmer, October 26, 1958.

64 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1981.

65 "*Le prêtre doit être un homme mangé.*" Fr. Chevrier, *Le Véritable Disciple*, Librairie Catholique Emmanuel Vitte, 3rd ed., p. 535.

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care, in the practice of fraternal charity. The priest therefore is charity.⁶⁶

If we truly are going to practice this fraternal charity, we have to know the virtues which St. Thomas Aquinas calls the virtues of politeness.⁶⁷ The angelic doctor speaks of three qualities which we ought to have in our day-to-day relations with our neighbor. We have to tell him the truth. We should not hide it or ever lie. Over and above that truthfulness, if we want to maintain a good understanding with our neighbor, we also have to give him a little of our heart, something of our affection. The virtue which then comes into play is affability. It puts our neighbor at ease in an atmosphere of simplicity and thereby facilitates good relations in society. Finally, the last virtue of politeness which we use in our social relations is the virtue of liberality. It consists in giving to our neighbor something of what we own. Those who love their neighbor wish to make him happy and they show it by giving him their goods. So to live pleasantly together in society, we have to express to our neighbor what we truly think, we have to give him our affection and we have to offer him something of what we possess. That is how St. Thomas treats of the social virtues. He states that the exercise of these virtues is made easier by the gift of piety.⁶⁸ Piety is the flower of Christian civilization. Where this grace of the Holy Ghost is lacking, there is always the danger of falling into worldliness, in which the outward expressions of friendliness toward our neighbor easily become false or exaggerated, start to lack sincerity, turn into simple formalities; whereas Christian civilization is inspired by the Holy Ghost, by a true spirit of humility and charity, by love of neighbor and love of God – a love of neighbor inspired by God.

66 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

67 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 109-119.

68 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 121.

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If there are any virtues necessary for priests in their apostolate, it would certainly be those virtues that render society friendly, pleasant and Christian. The priest ought to be a ferment and a source of charity, of love, creating an atmosphere of fraternity among his parishioners, those to whom he has been sent for their evangelization.⁶⁹

Happy the charity which finds that path toward souls in order to lead them back to the one Shepherd! However zealous that charity may be, if it is to remain true, it must not be like a rushing river, washing away before it all discipline, all rule, all self-control. It is fundamentally humble and forgetful of self and so will take care to ally that overflowing zeal with perfect submission to the will of God. The two are indissolubly linked: it is inconceivable to have a charity that is separated from the will of God.

Our entire priestly life is a life of fraternal charity in our respect for authority, acting not because we are being watched but for God (*Eph.* 6:6 and *Col.* 3:22); a life of fraternal charity in our priestly and missionary community made up of our brother priests, of our helpers: brothers, religious, catechists; a life of charity which draws toward prayer in community, toward working in harmony, toward a unity of thought and apostolic zeal which is none other than the unity of the Holy Ghost.

Blessed the catechists or responsible laymen, blessed the brothers, the religious who are guided and encouraged by priests animated by this charity.⁷⁰

69 Sermon, Ecône, May 28, 1987.

70 Circular letter to brother priests, Dakar, July 29, 1960.

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Missionary Charity

Our great charity toward the world will be to bring this testimony exactly as our Lord passed it on to us by the Church. I do not think I need to insist. A priest who is not a perfect reflection of the thought of the Church loses his *raison d'être* and renders himself unworthy of his priesthood.

It is not true charity if we are leaving minds in error and souls in sin. It is one thing to understand souls and the path which led them into error and sin, and it is another thing to give to error an appearance of truth or to sin a semblance of virtue, leading our interlocutor to believe that he is in the right and doing the good. Certainly, it is a question of nuance, but true charity, entirely made of faith in Jesus Christ, will make no mistake and is not going to set the light under the bushel-basket. It is easier never to contradict, always to approve, and to create for oneself an easy popularity at the expense of truth – that is to say, at the expense of our Lord Himself. When we act in that way, we are actually seeking ourselves and we are not practicing true charity.⁷¹

So if we love our neighbor we have to seek his true good, and that is what the faithful priest is going to do. The priest is not a man seeking his own popularity, seeking after praise, seeking to please men. As St. Paul says, “*If I sought to please men, I would not be pleasing God*” (cf. Gal. 1:10). The priest is not always going to please men because he reminds them of the truth, yet he loves them and he is seeking to guide them toward God. That is genuine friendship, genuine love of neighbor.⁷²

It is admirable to see how being part of the Church gives people a Catholic spirit. What proves that we have a Catholic

71 Circular letter to brother priests, Dakar, July 29, 1960.

72 Sermon, June 29, 1974.

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spirit, practically speaking? The first proof is in our care for all men, whatever their race.

The next proof of our Catholic spirit is that we live of one heart with the Church of time and of place.

With the Church of time, that is to say with the past, by loving our ancestors in the faith, by studying them, by trying to see how they lived the faith, by showing ourselves worthy of the whole Church, of the early Church, of the Church of the Middle Ages.

Our Catholic spirit also appears by our living of one heart with the present, in loving the present Church in Her labors and Her persecutions, living with the Church suffering and triumphant.

Of one heart with the Church of place: our heart has to live in unison with all Christian peoples, to suffer with those who suffer, to weep with persecuted Christians, to rejoice with those who rejoice.⁷³

It is the role of the priest to be a living sign of that faith, that hope, that supernatural charity, wherever he is. In his sermons, in his manner of celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in his manner of giving the sacraments, of preaching, of interacting with the faithful, may he be truly what St. John the Baptist was, “*a lamp, burning and shining,*” (*Jn. 5:35*) and at the same time a radiant charity, by the radiance of the Holy Ghost: that is what the faithful are expecting from him.⁷⁴

Happy the priest who has built his priestly life on these convictions of faith and charity; he can live by hope because his soul is rooted in God. He is able to say in all truth, “*In You, O Lord, have I hoped, I will not be confounded*” (*Ps. 30:2*).⁷⁵

73 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

74 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1983.

75 Circular letter to brother priests, July 29, 1960.

4. The Virtue of Prudence

In his treatise on the virtues, St. Thomas Aquinas gives a large place to prudence.⁷⁶ In ordinary cases, prudence suffices to the priest in the guidance of souls, but in questions that are more complicated and obscure, he needs the gift of counsel. Since the counsel most proper to the Holy Ghost is to be merciful, it is especially in exercising mercy that the priest best reveals the presence in him of this gift of the Holy Ghost.

What is Prudence?

St. Thomas defines prudence as “right reason applied to action,” the proper thinking directing our activity.⁷⁷ You can imagine that prudence is something extremely important. It is like the light which illuminates all of our natural understanding as well as our faith, and which makes us act according to right reason and the faith. It is precisely what the faithful are expecting from us.

The priest therefore has to acquire this virtue of prudence because people are constantly coming to ask his advice, and it is not always easy in the diverse circumstances of life to know how to weigh the pros and cons and help people to resolve their difficulties. It is certainly the principal virtue of the priest for properly directing the souls which are confided to him. People have all the more confidence when a priest truly is prudent. The faithful cannot understand a priest acting against common sense. A man who has gone through years of study, who surely seeks after holiness, how could he advise things which are opposed to simple good sense? People imagine that a priest must necessarily give advice according to common sense and natural reason as well as the

⁷⁶ *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 47-56.

⁷⁷ *Recta ratio agibilium* (*Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 47, a. 2, s.c.).

wisdom of the faith. It means the priest is going to have to know the faith through his catechism, through philosophy and through theology. Prudence is going to appear particularly in a person's judgment, in the answers he gives, in his manner of expressing himself. I am not speaking only of the natural virtue of prudence but of supernatural prudence as well.⁷⁸

The Three Acts of Prudence

There are three actions involved in prudence: counsel, judgment and command. Our soul holds counsel to study the question, reaches a decision and then carries it out.

The defect opposed to counsel is precipitation. We do not take the time to consider how we ought to act. So we launch into action before even reflecting. Precipitation leads to rashness.⁷⁹ We think we know instinctively what we ought to do without needing to take counsel.

St. Thomas Aquinas has an article on that subject which it is very interesting to read. It is not enough to take counsel in oneself, based on what we know; we also have to take counsel around us. That is why St. Thomas asks himself if docility ought to have a place among the parts of prudence.⁸⁰ He says, "As stated above, prudence is concerned with particular matters of action, and since such matters are of infinite variety, no one man can consider them all sufficiently; nor can this be done quickly, for it requires length of time. Hence in matters of prudence man stands in very great need of being taught by others, especially by old folk who have acquired a sane understanding of the ends in practical matters." You are going to be called "old," or an "elder," when you are priests.

⁷⁸ Retreat, Ecône, January 30, 1978.

⁷⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^æ q. 53, a. 3, *ad* 2.

⁸⁰ *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^æ q. 49, a. 3.

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Why do we give this term of “elder” to one who receives the Sacrament of Holy Orders?⁸¹ It is because one who receives the priesthood ought to have the wisdom of an old man, as though he had lived fifty, sixty, seventy years – eighty years.

St. Thomas quotes what “the Philosopher says: ‘It is right to pay no less attention to the undemonstrated assertions and opinions of such persons as are experienced, older than we are, and prudent, than to their demonstrations, for their experience gives them an insight into principles.’ Thus it is written in Proverbs: ‘*Lean not on thy own prudence*’ (Prov. 3:5) and in Ecclesiasticus, ‘*Stand in the multitude of the ancients,*’ that is to say, the old men ‘*that are wise, and join thyself from thy heart to their wisdom*’ (Sir. 6:34). Now it is a mark of docility to be ready to be taught: and consequently docility is fittingly reckoned a part of prudence.” Someone who refuses to take advice is considered imprudent; he is hasty in his judgment.

We should ask counsel not only of men but also of the Holy Ghost, who ought to direct us. St. Thomas writes that, “Since human reason is unable to grasp the singular and contingent things which may occur, the result is that ‘*The thoughts of mortal men,*’ as it says the Book of Wisdom, ‘*are fearful, and our counsels uncertain*’ (Wis. 9:14). Hence in the research of counsel, man requires to be directed by God, who comprehends all things.”⁸² The gift which perfects prudence is therefore the gift of counsel.⁸³ This gift is extremely important because people very easily come to ask the priest

81 In Greek, the word πρεσβύτερος (*presbyteros*).

82 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 52, a. 1, ad 1.

83 “Holiness is entirely contained in charity, not because charity is by essence all holiness, but because it includes the whole organism of virtues and gifts, among which the first place in the matter at hand falls to prudence, counsel, wisdom” (Fr. Victor-Alain Berto, *Contribution à la Théologie des Œuvres* [*Contribution to the Theology of Works*], *La Pensée Catholique* 20, 1951).

for advice. In order to answer them, the priest has to be animated by this gift of counsel.

Next after counsel comes judgment. The defect of judgment consists in what St. Thomas calls *inconsideratio*.⁸⁴ Ultimately, it is not enough to take counsel and to reach a judgment; you still have to put it into action. St. Thomas says that the major sin against prudence is this fact of not carrying out what one judges good to do. It is the defect against the execution of judgment, whether by inconstancy or by neglect. Neglect differs from inconstancy by the fact that the inconstant man starts thinking of something else and abandons his resolution; the negligent man lacks promptness in execution. He puts off carrying out the action and finally does nothing at all.⁸⁵

Prudence and Mercy

Prudence is our reason directing our activity according to God's own thinking. It is worthy of reflection and admiration that the gift of counsel corresponds to the beatitude of the merciful.⁸⁶

Ultimately it is very appropriate. People come to ask your advice in a given situation. For example, parents have a child who is behaving badly. He kept poor company and has let himself be influenced. So they ask you, "What should we do? How can we save him from a bad situation?" You see that if we are not merciful, we may perhaps decide with harshness, austerity, in a way which does not actually correspond to reality. Why? Because we have to take into account man's sinful condition. What is mercy but to take pity on misery? And what is the first misery of all? It is sin. So we cannot

84 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 53, a. 4.

85 Retreat, Ecône, January 30, 1978.

86 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 52, a. 4.

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just say, “He should not have acted in that way; he should not have acquired that vice.” But since, in fact, he does have that vice, what can we do now to save him?

So we have to draw near to the sinner with kindness, the way a doctor leans down over a seeping wound and thinks how to find a solution. A person does not go to the doctor to hear him say, “You should not have gotten sick!” What does a doctor do who is faced with someone gravely ill? He studies the illness, sees what means would be most likely to bring about a cure. It is the same thing with the priest. He should have a merciful heart. That is true prudence, true wisdom, and it goes along with the beatitude, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*” (Mt. 5:7). That is why St. Thomas says that mercy is the beatitude which corresponds to prudence.

Even people who are very simple, you see – I am thinking of all those Africans whom I would meet in the most distant villages, in the forest of Africa, people without any culture, no education, who did not know how to read or write – those people can see right away what kind of a priest they have before them. They size him up immediately, let me tell you. It doesn’t take them long. They can tell the difference right away between one missionary and another. You go to the village once, twice, a third time and then they have figured you out; it’s over. They will say, “This one is a good priest, a true missionary, but that one, on the other hand, he is not a priest, he is not a missionary. He comes because he is supposed to come, because he has to take his turn, but he is not coming for us.”

It happens fast and it is a pity. You have priests who ruin their apostolate simply by a lack of patience, by a lack of mercy. It is terrible!

People will appreciate their knowledge, their qualities, but they are not going to confide in them. It is sad. It really is unfortunate! They are priests as much as the others are. Yet no one dares to approach them, in spite of all their other qualities.

This defect of not welcoming souls, of not having the patience to listen to them, or even disdaining them, is a lack of the virtue of prudence and of the gift of counsel. It is absolutely, fundamentally contrary to the priesthood.

The whole life of a priest can therefore be totally different depending on whether or not he has that virtue of prudence, that gift of counsel and that beatitude of mercy.⁸⁷

5. The Virtue of Penance

Compunction and Contrition

Our Lord passed on to His Church His own spirit of penance. In the next life, only prayer will remain, praise of God without penance, but here below we need to continue the penance of our Lord Jesus Christ and continue His cross. The most holy Church is filled with this spirit of penance.⁸⁸

We cannot study the spiritual life and ignore all mention of sin. It is a horrible reality, painful to admit and one we would certainly like to leave aside, but that is impossible. We are going to carry the effects of original sin until the end of our days. The Old and the New Testaments show that sin is inside of us. Original sin is taken away by the grace of Baptism, but we bear the effects of it and we also bear our personal sins. So we have to struggle against sin and we have to have a constant disposition to triumph over it, not just an attitude that comes and goes.

87 Retreat, Ecône, January 30, 1978.

88 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1982.

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The spiritual authors used to speak of compunction to name that habitual contrition for our sins. This word may be interpreted in a pejorative way, but if we study what the spiritual authors have said of this quality, particularly the ancient authors, and what *The Imitation of Christ*⁸⁹ says about it, for example, we will understand that we all have to try to acquire it. In fact, it is ultimately a kind of continual resolution to avoid sin, to fight against sin, to detest sin.

St. Thomas offers the objection somebody might make: “Really, why should we always have compunction? Why should we be always thinking about sin? Is there not a danger always to be thinking back over our sins? Should we not be thinking only about the love of our Lord, the love of God?”

And he answers, “Displeasure at past sin belongs to charity.”⁹⁰ Because we desire to love God with all our soul, with all our heart, with all our strength, we are going to try to push away the obstacles to that love, the obstacles to that charity.⁹¹

How the saints suffered from their own moral miseries! Think of St. Peter. What a sorrow that triple denial must have been for his holy soul, and the memory of all of his acts of weakness during the public life of our Lord!

Think of St. Paul: “*Who will deliver me from the body of this death?*” (*Rom. 7:24*). Remember the passage in the book of Proverbs: “*The just man sins seven times a day*” (*Prov. 24:16*). If we had a little more holiness, we would be overwhelmed at the sight of all our moral infirmities!⁹²

89 Book I, ch. 21.

90 *Summa Theologica*, III^a q. 85, a.2, *ad* 1.

91 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 22, 1977.

92 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

The Redemptive Value of Suffering

Aware of his condition as a sinner, the priest seeks to acquire compunction; he sees in suffering the means of making reparation for his own sins and cooperating in the salvation of others.

To “put on the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ” also means to put on His cross. There is a cross on the vestment which the priest wears at Mass. So the priest wears the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹³

Our Lord asks all of His disciples to take up their cross daily and follow Him, and the priest ought to be the very first. He ought to be in front of his faithful showing them how to carry the cross, showing them how to sanctify themselves in suffering, in trials, in difficulties.⁹⁴

Life is all woven of physical and moral sufferings. Jesus showed us the example of physical sufferings. Jesus was tired in His pastoral journeys; He suffered from hunger, from the cold. He showed us the example of suffering most of all in His Passion. And yet, we know very well that Jesus did not deserve any of it. He carried all of our infirmities in order to be more like us.

How and why did Jesus will to suffer physically? He willed it in order to satisfy for our sins and to show us the example, because He could have satisfied for our sins in some other way, simply by moral sufferings. He willed to teach us the value, the virtue of suffering. St. Paul and the apostles understood: “*My strength is made perfect in weakness*” (II Cor. 12:9); “*I chastise my body*” (I Cor. 9:27); “O good cross, so long desired.”⁹⁵

93 Sermon, Ecône, June 26, 1987.

94 Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1979.

95 Office of vespers for the feast of St. Andrew.

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We, too, have to try to understand the value of suffering and to meditate on good suffering if we should happen to fall sick. It helps us to work out our own purgatory on earth as well as the purgatory of our brothers. It helps us to think of Heaven, to disdain life here below, and doing so makes us more like our Lord.

So the zealous priest who is penetrated by these truths will be the friend of suffering, in the image of our Lord and of the saints. He will receive suffering as a life companion. Far from cursing it, he will bless it because it brings him a greater desire of Heaven, a greater detachment from this world and one more resemblance to our Lord. We will resemble Him in *“always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame”* (II Cor. 4:10).

We have to avoid complaining all the time; we have to avoid bothering everybody with our illness. Let us inform those who are responsible for our health and trust in them, follow their instructions. We should repeat often, “O good cross,” which purifies me of my sins, stifles my attachment to the things of the world, draws me nearer to Heaven, chases away my illusions, and makes me more like Christ! The cross is something I have so deserved!

To physical sufferings we need to add our moral sufferings. It is certain that we are bound to suffer physically, and we even die a little every day. We have seen how to keep from being upset by those sufferings and how charity, making fire from any wood, turns them into the source of a more perfect Christian and priestly life. However, might we not have a reason to worry, to despair, when we are faced with moral suffering? Is it not a source of discouragement and sadness? Human weakness is so immense, with its constant tendency toward vice!⁹⁶

96 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

The priest carries the sins of the world, in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. He carries them in pain, in suffering, like our Lord Jesus Christ, but also with joy at purifying souls in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ through the words of the Sacrament of Penance, making them white as snow.

The priest suffers at the sight of all these moral miseries, but just like our Lord he has a thirst to heal those souls. Over the three years of His public life, our Lord passed through healing not only bodies but souls as well. That is what the priest does: he heals souls.

The priest cares for the pains of everyday life. He goes to visit families in their trials. He comforts them, teaches them to carry their cross. Certain families have so many trials: difficulties between family members not getting along, trials of misery, of poverty, trials of suffering! How much suffering is in our hospitals!

When a person is healthy, he never imagines he might one day be in a hospital bed himself. The priest knows it. He goes toward all the souls who are in pain. They need the word of the priest. They need to hear someone speak to them of the mystery of the cross.

Seeing the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, souls take courage again and understand that, if our Lord Himself suffered even though He never sinned, we ourselves ought to accept the law of suffering for the expiation of our own sins and also for the expiation of the sins of our neighbor, in the measure willed by God. In that way, the priest brings peace, joy, serenity, and acceptance of trials.

When he raises the host and the precious blood at the consecration, the priest should remember that he has to carry his own cross and that he has to comfort souls that are in pain.⁹⁷

97 Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1979.

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So you have to have that desire, like our Lord Jesus Christ, to pray, to offer yourselves, to suffer, to give yourselves entirely to God so that souls might open their heart and receive the name of Jesus, outside of which there is no salvation. That is why you have to be men of prayer; you have to be men of suffering.⁹⁸

6. The Virtue of Humility

*The dignity of his functions might foster self-satisfaction in the priest, or vainglory or other forms of pride. He therefore has to be vigilant to maintain and develop the beautiful virtue of humility.*⁹⁹

Humility is so necessary for the priest! Since God “*resists the proud, but gives His grace to the humble*” (Jas. 4:6), according to the very wise law of His mercy and His justice, it makes sense that the priest needs to be genuinely humble, even more urgently than do the faithful. He needs it for himself and for his flock. He needs to attract the grace from on high upon the souls of whom he is the shepherd. How can he be mediator between God and men if he is not humble? Will God reveal Himself to a man who is wanting to penetrate His secrets in order to snatch away His glory for himself?

No ministry is possible without humility. God certainly wants to give us His grace but He does not want us to take away His glory. As soon as a priest starts wanting glory for himself, he ceases to be a mediator of grace, which is why humility is so important.¹⁰⁰

98 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1982.

99 “Let the priest not trust in his own strength nor be complacent in his own gifts nor seek the esteem and praise of men but let him imitate Christ, Who ‘did not come to be served but to serve’ (Mt. 20:28)” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

100 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 9, 1991.

What is Humility?

St. Thomas gives us a definition of humility.¹⁰¹ The distinctive characteristic of humility is the conviction of the greatness of God and the littleness of man. “The first step in the acquisition of virtue may be understood in two ways. First by way of removing obstacles: and thus humility holds the first place, inasmuch as it expels pride, which ‘*God resisteth,*’ and makes man submissive and ever open to receive the influx of divine grace, for ‘*God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*” Faith is also the first among virtues in the sense that it is a “first step toward God”.¹⁰²

Here is what Dom Chautard says: “The apostle has got to cultivate humility (and only the interior life will show him how) to the point of effacing himself and disappearing from view until those that look at him *see right through him* to God, so to speak. And thus he will carry out the Master’s words: ‘*He that is greatest among you shall be your servant...*’ (Mt. 23:11). The mere outward appearance of a man of prayer can teach men the *science of living*, that is, the *science of prayer*. Why? Because humility breathes the sweet fragrance of dependence on God. This dependence, which is the unvarying disposition of such a soul, manifests itself by a habit of recourse to God under every possible circumstance, either in order to come to some decision, or to seek consolation in all troubles, or else to obtain the strength to overcome them.”¹⁰³

There you have a few reflections that are full of wisdom, coming from a man with real experience.¹⁰⁴

101 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^{ae} q. 161, a. 1-3; a. 5, *ad 2*.

102 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

103 Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, OCSO, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, The Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946, p. 126-27.

104 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 28, 1975.

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I think that what is going to strike us the most at the moment of our death is our dependence on God. We are going to say to ourselves, “I did not know I was so dependent on God, that everything depended on our Lord Jesus Christ for my salvation. I did not realize. Now I am discovering the reality. I am discovering that our Lord Jesus Christ is everything for my salvation, everything for my Redemption.” And then we will regret not having spent our life in that total dependence on God, in that total dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation and for the salvation of souls.¹⁰⁵

If we want to be zealous, we are going to have to disappear from our own sight. Look at our Lord. Did He preach any other virtue more often than humility? We can say that there are few virtues that He so frequently preached. You see the parable of those invited to the feast and the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Look at the example of our Lord Himself: in the manger, in Nazareth, toward His apostles, toward the sick, on the cross, in His Passion. Read the teaching of St. Paul, as well: “*If anyone thinks himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gal. 6:3). “*Not to us, but to Thy name give glory*” (Ps. 113:9). It is the teaching of all the saints.¹⁰⁶

To See Things as God Sees Them

Humility is the source of a very great knowledge. It allows us really to know the scale of values and to put everything in its place. That is why St. Benedict asks his monks to be so humble.

Imagine if we could see things the way God Himself sees them, the way our Lord Jesus Christ saw them when He was

105 Day of recollection, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, Dec. 13, 1984.

106 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

on earth. Imagine the thoughts of our Lord, having the beatific vision even as He lived in our midst. Each thing was appreciated at its proper value: the thoughts of men, their actions, the occurrences of every day.

If truly we could know a little better who God is, the proper scale of values would put itself right into place. Unfortunately we have a very rough idea of ourselves, of men and of events. If we could have the perception that our Lord had by His beatific vision, we would be stupefied at the foolishness of our estimation, of how ridiculous our manner of seeing really is. At that moment we would realize that things we thought so important, particularly the goods of this world and even the gifts which God has given us, were absolutely insignificant.

Often we appreciate much more the gifts which the world esteems than those God wants for us; for example, knowledge seems much more important than virtue. When a man lists out his titles or everything he owns, we tend to have a very great respect for him, without wondering whether or not he is virtuous.

The world only looks at the outside and does not at all have the same appreciation as God has, or our Lord when He was on earth. We therefore ought to seek humility in order to reach a proper appreciation of things, of people and of events.¹⁰⁷

A Quality Indispensable for the Apostolate

This attitude of humility will make an impression on all the souls we approach. Self-satisfaction is not something that attracts; presumption is not something that encourages other people. On the contrary, what wins people over is humility.

107 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 27, 1975.

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Humility, simplicity, attract and give confidence to souls because souls who see that humility say to themselves, "This man to whom I am speaking is 'a man of God' (I Tim. 6:11). I see that he does not rely on himself. He is relying on God, he is relying on prayer, he is relying on the faith to help me to advance." Then souls are going to trust you. Whereas, if they have the impression that the priest is very self-satisfied, very sure of himself, a little bit authoritative, a little bit autocratic, they are not going to have a perfect confidence. They will see very well that there is something not quite normal there, something which is not perfection. That presumption or self-satisfaction expresses itself and sometimes appears in the form of rash judgments or in a certain clericalism, in the sense that the priest wants to dominate: "I am a priest, so I know what I am saying, I know what I am doing," etc. He makes his power felt by souls, by people who come near him. There is nothing more certain of pushing souls away, and all the more so if he sometimes gets angry instead of always remaining gentle, balanced, reasonable. Sad to say, it is not something rare, but it is something very much to be deplored.

We have to pay very close attention because that presumption is going to lead to discouragement one day. The priest who has too much confidence in himself, who is too much imbued with himself, is going to realize some day that his action is not producing everything he had hoped for. He is going to see that his success is nothing fabulous, that people do not have a great appreciation of him. Then discouragement is going to set in. That is a very, very dangerous state.

Fr. Emmanuel speaks of the real ministry which we have to exercise and then of the faults, the dangers of this ministry: "When the ministry is denatured in this way, the priest who does not succeed in converting souls tends to accuse

the ministry instead of himself. Far from saying: ‘I am not a man of prayer; I do not treat the word of God as coming from God; I do not take enough care that the sacraments, which are holy, be received in a holy manner’: he will much more easily say to himself that the means confided to us are powerless, so that there is nothing we can do and nothing to be done.”¹⁰⁸

You can see right away the gravity of such a judgment – everything ends up being the fault of our Lord, whereas He is the source of grace, the source of wealth. And suddenly the man who is His instrument begins to rebel against Him, saying, “What You give us is worthless!” Then the priest can fall into a kind of spiritual lethargy which no longer allows him to see the evil right in front of his face, nor the good to be done, nor the means to be taken to make his ministry useful for his neighbor or for himself. If the situation continues to worsen, the priest may begin to have doubts about the work of our Lord in creating the ministry, and the ministry which is now powerless in his hands he may well consider to be powerless on account of our Lord Himself.¹⁰⁹

The Practice of Humility

Zeal will therefore push us to seek that humility, to seek the last place, to seek to be forgotten by men, to seek the disdain of the world. We will find our authentic joy in humility because we will be in the truth.¹¹⁰

108 Fr. Emmanuel, “*Traité du Ministère Ecclésiastique (Treatise on the Ecclesiastical Ministry)*,” bk. II, ch. 8, Les Ateliers du Bec, 1963, p. 37-38.

109 Spiritual conference, Econe, February 9, 1991.

110 “Most rightly do we say that humility stands on the side of truth and not on the side of error” (St. Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*, 34, *PL* 44, col. 265).

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To that end, let us keep in mind a few favorite expressions to help us practice humility: “*Who am I, my God, that You should be mindful of me?*” (cf. Ps. 8:5). “*What do I have that I have not received? If it is something which I have received, why should I glory in it?*” (cf. I Cor. 4:7).

It is an illusion to believe that we are useful and even indispensable: “*We are unprofitable servants*” (Lk. 17:10). God is pleased to make use of us, but we do Him disservice much more than we do Him service, because without us the goal would certainly be better attained. It is out of love for us that He wants us to participate in His work.

Man in this world is like a breath of air, a bird resting for a moment and then flying away again. Vanity, vanity, everything we do for ourselves. All that will remain is what we have done for God. Vanity is the mother of lies. Let us seek the truth and there will we find peace.¹¹¹

The most Blessed Virgin Mary herself teaches the priest this sovereign quality which is humility. “*He has looked upon my humility,*” says the most Blessed Virgin in her *Magnificat*. Then she adds that He “*has exalted the humble*” (Lk. 48 and 52). She insists twice on this quality and she says that it is because of her humility that she was chosen. Indeed, humility is the best disposition for contemplating God, for understanding God, for having the wisdom of God, for being with God. Pride is blinding, closes the heart, closes off the mind, limits our gaze to creatures. Humility on the contrary opens the soul to the almightiness of God, to His greatness, to all of God’s attributes. The humble soul is filled with God. That is why the most Blessed Virgin Mary teaches the priest humility before all else.¹¹²

111 Priests’ retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

112 Priestly ordination, Ecône, September 20, 1980.

7. The Religious Virtues

During His discourse after the Last Supper, Jesus Christ gave to priests a line of action by declaring that His apostles were in the world without being of the world (Jn. 15:19). The priest has to live by that expression if he wants to live in a manner worthy of his vocation. However, on account of his many contacts with the world, he may slip unawares into worldliness and lose sight of his priestly ideal. To avoid that pitfall, the practice of poverty, chastity and obedience detach him from the goods of this world and allow him to live more easily of the heavenly realities which it is his mission to communicate to souls.

Poverty, Chastity and Obedience

St. Joseph was not associated with the apostles and made a priest, but he ought to be our example of priestly virtues: an example of chastity, of poverty, and also an example of intimate union with our Lord as His foster father and with His holy Mother, the most Blessed Virgin Mary.

Are those not precisely the virtues which they ought to practice who are seeking the priesthood: humility, poverty, chastity, union with our Lord Jesus Christ and with the most Blessed Virgin Mary? That is the whole life of the priest, his whole interior life.¹¹³

Even if we are not called to religious life strictly speaking, like Benedictines, Carmelites or Dominicans, still by the very fact that we wish to be priests we are called to practice the virtues like our Lord, and therefore as perfectly as do religious. The priest is the one who is most like our Lord Jesus Christ because he pronounces the words of the consecration “in the person of Christ.” Don't you see what an offence it

¹¹³ Sermon, Ecône, March 19, 1988.

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would be to our Lord, saying the words of the consecration to bring Him down to our altars with His body and blood, without wanting to be like Him through the spirit of poverty, obedience and chastity?

What would we think of a priest who pronounced the words of consecration in the person of Christ and said to himself, "Since I am not a religious, I am not obliged to practice all those virtues"? It would be scandalous. Sadly, it happens all too often.

The decadence of the priesthood comes from the disdain of these religious virtues and perhaps the forgetfulness on the part of priests that the Sacrifice of the Mass, and therefore the cross, ought to be the wellspring of their sanctification and of the solidity of their spiritual life. The priest returns to this source of sanctification every day in ascending to the altar. How could he let himself be drawn into disorder after that? The priest is made above all for the sacrifice. There is no sacrifice without a priest, no priest without a sacrifice. The two are intimately linked; it is the priest's very *raison d'être*.¹¹⁴

Was not our Lord on the cross an example of poverty? Could He have given a greater example of poverty than the one He gave us on the cross? Could He have given a greater example of obedience than the one He gave on the cross, "*obedient unto death*" (*Phil. 2:8*)? Could He have given a greater example of chastity than to accept to have His virginal body lacerated by flagellation to expiate all the sins against chastity of the whole world? That is the example which our Lord Jesus Christ has given to us.¹¹⁵

The priest has to find the imitation of Jesus Christ in the Sacrifice of the Mass.¹¹⁶ If priests do not imitate our Lord

114 Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 1, 1982.

115 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

116 The Lord says, "Naked I hung on the cross with arms

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Jesus Christ here below, then who is going to imitate Him? Can a priest say, "The practice of the vows of religion is good for religious, for contemplatives; we are not religious"? Isn't that is what secular priests sometimes say to themselves? To my mind, they are making a fundamental mistake. The priest ought to be radically, intimately religious¹¹⁷ and he ought to have the desire to follow our Lord and so to practice and to live the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience.¹¹⁸

True zeal does not exist outside of obedience.¹¹⁹ We need to imbibe this truth so that we might live up to it; we need to meditate on our humility, as it says in the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*; meditate on maintaining union with the Father by obedience.¹²⁰ Without a doubt, constant, spontaneous obedience demands real virtue. It demands a clear view of the truth and that precise appreciation of himself which the zealous priest is going to have who desires above all things to live in the truth. How this obedience makes man great! How far it is from slavery! The truly obedient man is one whose understanding is healthy, all enlightened by the truth. Remember this: "If you obey, you are *in the truth*; if you resist, you are in error." Man is only great when he is on his knees; man is only true when he obeys.¹²¹

outstretched, offering Myself freely to God the Father for your sins, My whole person a sacrifice of divine propitiation: you, too, must willingly offer yourself daily to Me in the Eucharist with all your powers and affections as a pure and holy offering. (...) But if you trust in yourself, and do not offer yourself freely to My will, your offering is not complete, nor can our union be perfect" (*The Imitation of Jesus Christ*, bk. IV, ch. 8).

117 "Clerics are the Church's natural-born religious" (Fr. Olier, PSS, *Traité des Saints Ordres*, Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1953, p. 108).

118 Spiritual conference, Econe, November 7, 1974.

119 "In an angelic order, in which the principle of authority is grievously disturbed, it is absolutely necessary that the priest, keeping the precepts of faith firmly in mind, should consider and duly accept this same authority, not only as the bulwark of the social and religious order, but also as the foundation of his own personal sanctification" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

120 Cf. book III, ch. 13.

121 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

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It is inadmissible that a priest not seek after sanctity and therefore not seek to flee the world, not seek poverty, chastity, obedience, like our Lord Jesus Christ. Even if he has not made a solemn profession before the Church, he is committing himself to following our Lord Jesus Christ because he performs the most important action which our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished here below, namely His sacrifice.¹²²

If you find these lines a little bit harsh, a little bit austere, please believe that they come from a heart which loves each and every one of you profoundly. I have only one aim, one desire in writing to you in this way: to make you happy in a priesthood which is lived to the full here below and continued on into eternity, and through you to lead the souls chosen by God toward a true Christian life, pledge of their eternal salvation.¹²³

Flight from the World: A Pledge of Perseverance

This brings me to another aspect of our priesthood: the priesthood of immolation, of self-sacrifice, of abnegation. To wish to be a priest and to practice charity without any self-denial would be denying our origin who is Christ; it would be misunderstanding who we are.¹²⁴

In the Old Testament a man could not serve in the worship of God if he was not of the tribe of Levi, even though they were only immolating animals; now that the priest bears the divine Victim in his hands, he ought all the more to be a man set apart and sanctified.¹²⁵

122 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

123 Letter to brother priests, La Croix-Valmer (Var), Oct. 26, 1958.

124 *Ibid.*

125 Sermon, Quievrain, July 16, 1983. "Who could utter what ought to be the hands which fulfill such an office, the tongue which pronounces such words, and how much purer and more holy still ought to be the soul which receives the breath of the spirit?" (St. John Chrysostom, *De Sacerdotio*, bk. VI, ch. 3).

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It is important for priests to think back on what they were seeking in the seminary, on what they promised at their ordination, and to ask themselves whether they really are living out those promises every day. There may be room for renewed effort on certain points, to practice poverty, chastity and obedience more perfectly. We should be stepping back, separating ourselves from the world.¹²⁶

Acquiring the holiness we need to save our souls is no simple thing. We know by our experience of every day and also by the teaching of the Church that the grace of Baptism does not free us from all the consequences of original sin, even though it gives us sanctifying grace by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost and frees us from original sin and from the control of the devil.

Those consequences of original sin explain why our spiritual life takes on the aspect of a spiritual battle lasting throughout our whole life on earth. This teaching is fundamental and sets the tone for our entire apostolate. We are still sick, and we need the Doctor of our souls and the spiritual help that He has prepared.

Would that priestly souls might enter courageously into the spiritual battle to heal their own souls of these wounds and to learn to become doctors of the souls of others by their preaching, by the prayer of the Holy Mass, by the Eucharist, and by the Sacrament of Penance. Retreats are a powerful means for diminishing the blindness of souls and for healing their other wounds as well.

Without a knowledge of these elementary truths, we cannot understand the Catholic spirituality of the cross, of sacrifice, of despising temporal goods so as to be attached to what is eternal.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

¹²⁷ "It is from self-denial chiefly that the strength and power and fruit of every priestly function derive; it is when this virtue is neglected

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Devils use everything delightful and appealing to the senses in order to deepen our wounds. That which happened to Eve continues to happen now. Having listened to the word of the devil, Eve saw that the fruit was delightful, “*good to eat, and fair to the eyes*” (*Gen. 3:6*). She would say to God, but alas, too late, “*The serpent deceived me*” (*Gen. 3:13*).

Hence the insistence of the Church in all of Her spirituality but especially for priestly souls or those consecrated to God, on distancing oneself from the world and its spirit, so as to seek nothing but eternal things, following Jesus and Jesus crucified.¹²⁸

The true priest does not need this advice; his priestly prudence, his strong but gentle concern for the good of souls makes him detest any compromise with the spirit of the world. Souls who desire to find a man of God will make no mistake and will go instinctively to that priest whose mere presence raises up and sanctifies. That priest is not going to be someone skittish or anti-social: his priestly sense is going to give him that exquisite politeness made of respect for others, for souls, and of openness and simplicity. At the same time, his sense of the divine is going to make him understand

that there appears in the priest’s conduct whatever may be of a nature to cause offense to the eyes and hearts of the faithful. If one acts for the sake of filthy lucre, or becomes involved in worldly affairs, or seeks for the highest places and despises others, or follows merely human counsel, or seeks to please men, or trusts in the persuasive words of human wisdom, this is the result of neglect of the command of Christ and of the refusal to accept the condition laid down by Him: ‘If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself’ (*Mt. 16:24*) (...) Sanctity alone makes us what our divine vocation demands, men crucified to the world and to whom the world has been crucified, men walking in newness of life who, in the words of St. Paul, show themselves as ministers of God in labors, in vigils, in fasting, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere charity, in the word of truth (*II Cor. 6:5 ff.*); men who seek only heavenly things and strive by every means to lead others to them” (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

¹²⁸ *Spiritual Journey*, p. 49, 50-51.

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without hesitation what relations would be inappropriate or even just a waste of time.

Oh, if we truly gave our priesthood the first place in our minds and in our hearts – this priesthood which so great, so noble that we could never do enough to live it fully – we would find in that meditation the will to be humble, obedient servants, entirely given over to the will of the Lord, charitable and zealous for our neighbor. Then for nothing in the world would we wish to be unpleasant with him, let alone to cause him scandal. Remember the examples of St. Paul, so anxious not to be a burden to anyone (*Acts 18:3* and *I Cor. 4:12*) and not to scandalize a single soul (*I Cor. 10:32-33*), in order to belong entirely to Christ. Let us revivify our spirit of faith by our prayer, by our meditation, and Christ living in us will give us the courage to forget ourselves in order to be docile instruments in His divine hands.¹²⁹

129 Letter to brother priests, La Croix-Valmer (Var), Oct. 26, 1958.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNION OF THE PRIEST WITH THE VIRGIN MARY

The Blessed Virgin is the mother of priests in an even more special manner than she is of the rest of the faithful because the priest participates profoundly, really, ontologically in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is a privileged son of Mary by that fact alone. From the moment of his ordination, the priest is even more beloved of Mary than he was before.¹ Henceforth he has one more claim to being the son of Mary.²

1. Mary, Mother of Priests

There is a profound affinity between Mary and the priest. Indeed, Mary was chosen to be Mother of the one most truly Priest, Mother of the supreme Pontiff. She was chosen among all women: “*Blessed art thou among women*” (Lk. 1:28). When the angel came to greet Mary, he said, “*Hail, full of grace*” (Lk. 1:28). Mary was full of grace at the moment the angel came to her, for God chose her in a very particular way.

¹ “Our Lady loves everyone with a most tender love, but She has a particular predilection for priests who are the living image of Jesus Christ” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

² Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 29, 1986.

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How carefully Jesus prepared the soul of His Mother! How carefully He showered it with blessings! And when Mary heard the words of the angel, she was afraid she would not be able to remain a virgin (Lk. 1:34). On the contrary! God had prepared everything. Mary would remain a virgin and she would be a mother.

It is a great lesson for priests. They, too, are chosen. Jesus Christ told His apostles, “*You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain*” (Jn. 15:16). Yes, priests are chosen in order to bear fruit also, and what will be that fruit? Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is He whom they will bear, like the Virgin Mary. That is why they ought to have a very particular love for the virtue of chastity, the virtue of purity.

As soon as she was chosen, the most Blessed Virgin sang the greatness of God: “*My soul magnifies the Lord*” (Lk. 1:46). Priests, also, sing the glory of God in their hearts when they receive the priestly anointing and the grace of the priesthood by the imposition of the hands of the bishop: “*My soul magnifies the Lord, (...) because He who is mighty has done great things for me. (...) He has filled the poor with good things*” (Lk. 1:46, 49 and 53). Priests are poor, in themselves. They are aware of their poverty and so they long for goods that are eternal. That is how they become rich in spiritual goods. On the contrary, God sends the rich away empty-handed (Lk. 1:53).

Good priests are profoundly detached from the things of this world, that they might be all filled with our Lord Jesus Christ and receive the Holy Ghost. The angel told the Virgin Mary, “*the virtue of the Most High will come upon you*” (Lk. 1:35). In the same way, the bishop calls down upon the ordinands all the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

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Mary has one more affinity with the priest, for she prepared the Victim who was to be attached to the cross. She prepared Him all His life. She nourished Him, raised Him, followed Him. We could nearly say that she led Him all the way to the altar of the cross. The priest, also, has to prepare the Victim. He ascends the altar and brings the Victim down upon it by the words of the consecration. The Victim is there, just as He was upon the cross, but today the sacrifice is unbloody. Just as she was present at the foot of the cross, so the Virgin Mary is there when the priest utters the words of consecration. The priest has to ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary to place in him the qualities of mind and heart which she herself had as she offered the Victim. She offered Him in the Temple. She offered Him at the foot of the cross – not as a priest, but as the Mother of Jesus and as the mother of all those who were to participate in the Redemption. It is precisely the role of the priest to give Jesus to the world, as the Virgin Mary gave Him for the Redemption of the sins of the world. Those are the affinities which the priest has with the Virgin Mary.³

2. Mary and the Priesthood According to Fr. Le Rohellec

I would like to summarize for you a little pamphlet which was composed by one of our professors at the French Seminary, Fr. Le Rohellec. This priest was our theology professor, a remarkable man! He composed a little pamphlet entitled *Mary and the Priesthood*. He was a profound theologian with a great deal of experience. The reflections he makes on Mary and the priesthood are very instructive, I think, and very consoling. They encourage us to live always more

3 Sermon, Ecône, December 24, 1978.

united to the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially those who are preparing for the priesthood and those who have received the priesthood.

Here is what he says:

“Mary is rightly called Queen of the Clergy and Mother of the Priesthood. These titles are truly hers, in the most strictly theological sense.

“Not only did she give to us Him who is in fact the sovereign Priest of the New Covenant, but she gave Him to us in His very quality as a priest. God called her to cooperate in the priestly ordination of Jesus Christ, of which all the other ordinations in the Church, down to the end of ages, are but a participation, in dependence upon this first.”

“God called her to cooperate in the priestly ordination of Jesus Christ.” The expression is a little bit different, isn’t it? We would like to know more about it. How can we say that God called Mary to cooperate in the priestly ordination of Jesus Christ? What is this priestly ordination and how could Mary have cooperated in it? Fr. Le Rohellec explains:

“Since our Lord became a priest by the very act of the Incarnation, we have to say that His priestly ordination was celebrated in the most pure womb of the Virgin Mary.” What a beautiful observation! “There had to be a holy temple for that divine celebration, a temple without a single shadow to dim its splendor, enriched with the most precious jewels. Mary was the virginal sanctuary, lovingly prepared by the operation of the Holy Ghost, for the performance of the inef-fable rite of the consecration of Jesus as supreme Pontiff.”⁴

Farther down, we have a few words that summarize the reflections of our dear Fr. Le Rohellec:

“We can see by what a close bond the priest is united to Mary. Since she was the sanctuary for the ordination of the

4 Fr. Le Rohellec, *Marie et le Sacerdoce*, p. 1-3.

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great Pontiff, source of all priesthood; since God made this ineffable sacrifice depend on her consent; since she provided the subject for ordination and the holy host of the sacrifice, we have to say that the Catholic priesthood is dependent on Mary, that it has its origin in Mary, and that she is therefore rightly called the Mother of the Priesthood and the Queen of the Clergy.”

I would say that his proof is convincing. It is a philosopher speaking, with perfect logic. Here is his beautiful conclusion, his admirable conclusion: “If Mary is the dispenser of all graces, how could she not hold also that grace of choice which is the priestly vocation? All participation in the priesthood of our Lord is a work of Mary.”⁵

Fr. Le Rohellec was not being sentimental; here he is speaking as a theologian, taking theological principles and drawing conclusions which are solid and at the same time very beautiful. It is very consoling for us to know that all participation in the priesthood of our Lord is a work of Mary.⁶

3. The Priest's Devotion to the Virgin Mary

Fr. Le Rohellec shows how the priest's Marian devotion flows from everything he owes to Mary:

“If he wants to conform himself to the plan of God and make this power he has received bear fruit for souls, the priest has to have recourse to Mary and maintain his priesthood dependent on Mary. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin should not simply be one episode in the work of his sanctification; it ought to be the very form of his spiritual life. Only then will he be a priest according to the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. May pious souls urgently pray to the Mother

5 *Ibid.*, p. 6, § 2 and 3.

6 Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 28, 1988.

of the Priesthood to pour out in abundance the graces of vocation on new generations, that she might raise up fervent priests who are firm in the doctrine of the faith, consumed by the zeal of charity, ready to offer themselves every day as a holocaust in union with Christ, the Eucharistic Victim. May she prepare with motherly care the subject for ordination in every young cleric, just as she did Christ Jesus.”⁷

These reflections of Fr. Le Rohellec are admirable!⁸

We have received everything by the mediation of Mary in receiving our Savior. That is a reality; it is not our own imagining.

Consequently, devotion to the Blessed Virgin is not a devotion like that we might have for one or another saint. Devotion to the most Blessed Virgin Mary is a necessary devotion because God willed it to be so. He could have come among us without passing by the Blessed Virgin, obviously. He could have found another means, but He chose that one. We do not have the right to argue with it and on the contrary we should thank Him, and thank Him infinitely, for having given us a mother. The Blessed Virgin Mary is a mother who takes care of us and who follows the Church in Her difficulties. We can see it well. What a love the most Blessed Virgin has for the Church and for each of us!

How could we not have an immense devotion toward the most Blessed Virgin Mary? And God knows that the Church has given her some beautiful titles. So let us rejoice to see this mother in heaven by whom we receive all graces; she is particularly the mother of priests because she is the mother of the great Priest, of the eternal Priest.⁹

During His Passion, our Lord did something which ought to touch us very deeply and which ought to mark us for our

7 Fr. Le Rohellec, *Marie et le Sacerdoce*, p. 6, § 4.

8 Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 28, 1988.

9 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 15, 1987.

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entire priestly life, and that is the gift He made to us of His Mother: “Behold your Mother” (Jn. 19:27). One more admirable gift which God has given us: that Mary should be the Mother of the priest.¹⁰

So let us love to pray to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, to unite ourselves to her before the Holy Sacrifice, to ask her for a better understanding of the place which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass ought to hold in our life. It is not a superficial place but one that is essential, fundamental.

That is why this devotion to Mary, Mother of the Clergy, Mother of the Priesthood, is very beautiful and very important, because I would say that it touches the very essence of the priesthood. All the fundamental principles are there: our Lord is a Mediator; our Lord willed to take a body to offer Himself as a Victim, to offer the sacrifice; in a sense, Mary became the very altar of the sacrifice.¹¹

4. Learning from Mary Alongside St. John

“Let us go to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16), let us go to Mary and ask her to teach us what she taught to St. John the Apostle, whom our Lord Jesus Christ gave to her as a son. Let us ask St. John, whose Gospel is ultimately that of the Virgin Mary, to give us the thoughts of the Virgin Mary. It seems to me that the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John must have spoken together for hours, for days, for all those years they were together. How can they not have spoken of everything St. John wrote in his Gospel? St. John was a priest.

It is remarkable that all the other evangelists begin their Gospel by the earthly genealogy of our Lord, but St. John speaks of His heavenly genealogy. Don't you think the Virgin

10 Sermon, Ecône, April 16, 1987.

11 Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 28, 1988.

Mary inspired him to do so because the source of all her privileges was not her ancestry, but her divine maternity? So she certainly inspired St. John in tracing out for him the first sentences of his beautiful Gospel: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God*" (Jn. 1:1). The genealogy of the Word of God, of the eternal Word, is much more sublime than the earthly genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John also has particular expressions to raise us up to the Holy Trinity. How many times does he use the image of light? God is the Light (Jn. 1:9), He lights up the darkness (Jn. 1:5), etc. The same evangelist also gives us the words of our Lord, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*" (Jn. 14:6). He is represented by an eagle because of his contemplative soul, and he certainly owed a great deal of that to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who had still higher graces.

Another thought which is also proper to the Gospel of St. John is the notion of unity and of our union with God. Just think of the magnificent priestly prayer of our Lord before His Passion. It is truly the prayer of unity. Our Lord is speaking to His Father and asks that we might all be one as He is one with His Father. He also refers to that unity on other occasions in his Gospel. He speaks of the vine. Our Lord is the vine and we are the branches (Jn. 15:1-2). What a beautiful image, to think that we are attached to our Lord as branches are attached to the life of the vine! It is the same sap which flows in the vine and in the branches. In the same way, it is the life of God, the life of our Lord which is flowing through us. He also speaks often of that indwelling of God, of Jesus, in our souls: "*If you keep My commandments, the Father and I will come to you and We will dwell in you*" (cf. Jn. 14:23). "*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him*" (Jn. 6:56). This idea of our Lord dwelling in our souls, living in us, is an idea which St. John strongly teaches. Can

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we not think that he also drew these ideas of union with our Lord from his conversations with the most Blessed Virgin? For if there was ever a creature here below who was united to our Lord like nobody else, it was certainly the most Blessed Virgin Mary.

St. John likewise insists on the fact that we are united among us by this union with our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that beautiful parable of the sheepfold. Jesus is the good Shepherd and we are the sheep. Jesus is the door of the sheepfold. We have to pass through that door if we wish to enter the sheepfold (*Jn.* 10:9).

We ought to be a part of the flock of our Lord, guided by our Lord. And how do we become a part of it? He said to Nicodemus, “*Unless a man be born of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven*” (*Jn.* 3:5). So it is by Baptism that we enter the sheepfold and that we become members of the flock. Our Lord asked that this flock be unified. He spent the night before His Passion telling His apostles, “*Be united, remain united in charity, love one another*” (*cf. Jn.* 15 and 17).

Those are the thoughts of St. John which, once again, certainly come to us from our good Mother in Heaven. She asks us to be united among us, to follow the Good Shepherd who is our Lord Jesus Christ. And it seems to me that still today she speaks to priests, as she spoke to St. John.¹²

5. The Imitation of the Virgin Mary

The priest is like the Virgin Mary, to a certain extent. Just as the Virgin Mary had power over the body of Jesus in giving Him His body, likewise the priest, too, has a power

¹² Sermon, Zaitzkofen, December 8, 1983.

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over the body of Jesus.¹³ Mary received Jesus in her womb and formed His body. The priest brings the body of Jesus once again to earth in pronouncing the words of the consecration.

And if God willed that Mary should be holy, without sin, immaculate in her conception, pure, virgin from all sin, from all contact with the world, so should the priest be, also.¹⁴

The priest ought to imitate the most Blessed Virgin Mary, to have a pure soul, entirely attached to God; a humble soul detached from the goods of this world in order to be filled with God. That is what the priest has to be if he is going to give God to others.

What should be the graces and the qualities in the heart of the priest if he is truly to benefit from the grace of the priesthood? Let us turn to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, for the Virgin Mary, too, was intimately associated with our Lord Jesus Christ, in a manner even more sublime than the priest. She did not have the particular grace of the priesthood, but she so participated in the mission of God that, if it were not for her, God would not have come down to earth. She had to pronounce her *fiat* for the mission of God to be fulfilled here below. Moreover, our Lord is Savior before all else, and the Blessed Virgin Mary participated in the salvation of the world in an essential manner. Finally, if anyone is a co-redeemer, it is certainly the Virgin Mary. So if we want to know what qualities of heart and mind we are supposed to have, Mary is the one we need to ask.¹⁵

13 “Thus the ineffable greatness of the human priest stands forth in all its splendor; for he has power over the very Body of Jesus Christ, and makes It present upon our altars. In the name of Christ Himself he offers It as a victim infinitely pleasing to the Divine Majesty” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

14 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 27, 1981.

15 Priestly ordination, Econe, September 20, 1980.

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Let us often ask the Virgin Mary to make us understand how she is present at all of our Masses, how she was present at the foot of the cross. Let us ask her to give us an understanding of the mystery of the cross and of the mystery of the sacrifice of the cross. She certainly had extraordinary graces to be able really to measure the immensity of God's charity in this sacrifice, as well as all the consequences of this sacrifice in the world: all of the graces which have flowed from it, all of the souls who are saved thanks to this sacrifice, thanks to the sacraments, thanks to the Church who was born from the pierced Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. The most Blessed Virgin received greater lights than anyone else here below. So we have to ask her to help us understand our priesthood better so that we might love it more.¹⁶

The Blessed Virgin had in a most excellent manner all the sentiments which the priest ought to have, and first of all mercy. She is the Mother of Mercy, she is the mother of sinners, in the sense that it is because of her that we have found mercy with God.

That is why the Blessed Virgin has to be the inspiration of the priest when he goes toward sinners. She ought to accompany us everywhere in our pastoral visits. We have to spread her image, her devotion in all those villages so that sinners might return to God.

It is from her that we are to seek our repose, our consolation, because she really is our mother. She is the source of our faith, she who has conquered all heresies. She has to be our model in our love of the Church because she is the guardian, the patroness and the mother of all the Mystical Body. Let us have at heart to study the soul of the Blessed Virgin, to meditate on her sentiments. The Blessed Virgin will teach us to love the Church.¹⁷

¹⁶ Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 28, 1988.

¹⁷ Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

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A priest who does not resemble the Virgin Mary is not worthy to be a priest. The imitation of the Virgin Mary which is asked of the priest shows to what degree of holiness he is called. That is what the faithful expect. The priest spends six years studying the science of God before being ordained, but that would not be enough if he did not add holiness to that knowledge.¹⁸

O Immaculate Virgin, who, by the extraordinary privilege of your Immaculate Conception, dost teach us all the fundamental truths of our Faith and hast merited to be the Mother of the Eternal Priest, form in us the Priest of Jesus Christ and make us less unworthy to participate in this Divine Priesthood.¹⁹

18 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 27, 1981.

19 *Spiritual Journey*, p. iv.

PART III

THE PRIEST: MAN OF APOSTOLIC CHARITY

The Church is missionary. She cannot help but be missionary. A Church who was not missionary would no longer be sent, would no longer correspond to the Most Blessed Trinity, would no longer correspond to what our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself as the One sent by God. The priest is an apostle, one *sent*;¹ he is essentially missionary, since he continues the mission which our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled here below.²

God willed that men help Him to save souls. He could have saved them directly or else sent an angel to each one, and confided to these guardian angels the care of leading that soul to Heaven. He did not wish to do so. He became man Himself and willed that it be men like us, that it be priests, His apostles, who should convert the whole world. The clergy is therefore responsible for the salvation of souls.³

1 Ἀπόστολος in Greek, *apostolus* in Latin. "The work, too, of the Missions manifests most vividly the power of expansion given by divine grace to the Church. This work is advanced and carried on principally by priests. Pioneers of faith and love, at the cost of innumerable sacrifices, they extend and widen the Kingdom of God upon earth" (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

2 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1978.

3 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1975. "Because it continues Christ's work on earth and acts by virtue of His power,

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The priest is the master of the work, so to speak, of the spiritual life and the sanctification of the world, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace which is communicated to him through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. By the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and by the sacraments, by all of the teaching which he offers, he brings faith and supernatural life, which are none other than eternal life. The priest is therefore the one who brings eternal life to souls.⁴

What does the priest do if not communicate the Word of God, communicate that holy Word by his own words, by his preaching? He has the mission of echoing the very Word of God, the substantial Word of God and all the words which the Incarnate Word pronounced during His life here below. That is the role of the priest. He is to transmit faithfully those words to all those who wish to be the sons of God, to those who truly wish to benefit from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He again communicates the Word of God during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, after having *re-actualized*⁵ the sacrifice of the cross and brought God onto the altar, under the species of bread and wine. The priest communicates Jesus Christ to the faithful in the Holy Eucharist.⁶

the Christian priesthood is in practice the ordinary conduit of all the supernatural gifts which God grants to the world" (Dom Marmion, O.S.B., *Christ – The Ideal of the Priest*, B. Herder Book Co., 1953, p. 59). "We are priests of Christ. Therefore we must labor with all our strength to see that the fruits of His Redemption be most efficaciously applied to every soul" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*). "The priest must be careful not to allow an unbalanced concern for personal perfection to lead him to overlook any part of the duties of his office which are conducive to the welfare of others. These duties include the preaching of the word of God, the hearing of confessions, assisting the sick, especially the dying, the instruction of those who are ignorant of the faith, the consolation of the sorrowing, leading back the erring, in a word, the imitation in every respect of Christ '*who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil*' (Acts 10:38)" (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

4 Sermon, Bienne, July 14, 1979.

5 *Réactuer* in French: to make present in all its efficacy.

6 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1990.

THE PRIEST: MAN OF APOSTOLIC CHARITY

What the faithful expect of the priest is that he be like all those who have gone before him and who have sanctified their villages. How many holy priests have there been who truly sanctified their villages, without being the holy Curé of Ars! They were priests the people trusted. They baptized children, prepared them for First Communion, for Confirmation, taught them catechism, maintained them in the faith, perhaps prepared religious or priestly vocations. They went to those who were dying and assisted them at the moment of their death.⁷ The priest leads an extraordinary life, a marvelous life!⁸

Should priests be incapable of burning for souls because they refuse the flame, because the kindling is still too green and cannot catch fire? No; that wood has to burn and glow and become, in a way, transparent, so that it, too, might communicate light and heat, like the log become all transparent in the fire which consumes it.⁹

Honor onus, honor is a weight. The priest receives the great honor of the priesthood, but at the same time comes the responsibility inherent to it. He is called to live out a magnificent apostolate, sustained by the grace of God and with the support of the faithful and of the saints of Heaven.¹⁰

The priest continues the mission of our Lord by his teaching, by administering the sacraments and by governing souls. These three functions correspond to the three powers received at his ordination: potestas docendi, potestas sanctificandi, potestas regendi.

7 "From the cradle to the grave the priest is ever beside the faithful, a guide, a solace, a minister of salvation and dispenser of grace and blessing" (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

8 Retreat, Ecône, June 1, 1980.

9 Sermon, Weissbad, October 11, 1975.

10 Sermon, Le Pointet, July 13, 1980.

CHAPTER 1

THE PREACHER

The role of the priest is to communicate the faith, to enlighten minds, to teach them the Revelation which our Lord Jesus Christ came to bring us. He does this particularly through Sunday sermons, retreats and catechism.

1. Preaching

Every day, hundreds of thousands of souls leave this earth, to go where? In what direction are we moving? Toward God, toward Paradise, toward Heaven. It is you who are to teach them hope in the word of God, but at the same time fear and trembling for the salvation of their soul. That is how you are going to lead souls to avoid sin, which is what would prevent them from attaining that essential goal.¹

In the holy Church, the most effective means which the Holy Ghost wishes to employ for the salvation of souls are the same ones the saints have always employed in their ministry. Preaching holds a very important place among them. Our Lord said, “*Go, teach all nations*” (Mt. 28:19). That is

1 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1983.

why a priest should never refuse when someone asks him to speak of God, to preach the Gospel, to preach a mission. The Holy Ghost will give him the words he needs. He should not say, "I am incapable, I am not worthy." He is made for that, he is made for speaking, for bringing the Gospel.²

We have to be convinced that souls hunger and thirst after truth; we have to be happy to speak of the truth, long to communicate the truth to men, to speak of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Ghost, of Heaven, of hell, of purgatory, of death, of eternal life, of the Christian life, of the life of bad Christians, of sin, of penance, of charity, of the Eucharist, of the sacraments, of the Mass.³

To Preach Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ Crucified

It seems to me that the altar toward which the priest ascends, an altar dominated by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, is showing him the One whom he is to preach, to teach, namely Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified. It is St. Paul himself who says it: "*I have nothing to preach to you except Jesus, and Jesus crucified*" (cf. *I Cor. 2:2*). The priest at Mass sees our Lord Jesus Christ on His cross, before His altar, and when he pronounces the words of the consecration, it is no longer a motionless cross which he has before him and in his hands: it is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself as He was on His cross, but henceforth living, risen again in the splendor of His glory. It is He whom the priest holds in his hands after pronouncing the words of the consecration. That is what he is supposed to preach.⁴

Our Lord was already a mystery for those around Him when He was among us Incarnate. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as

2 Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost 1974.

3 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

4 Sermon, Cœnsingen, June 28, 1980.

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man, represented a veritable mystery for them. How could this man who is like us, who eats like us, who travels like us, who grows tired like us – how is it possible that this man be God? That He be the Creator of the universe? That He be the One who cast the stars across the heavens, who created everything there is? That He hold each and every one of us in His hands? Is it possible? A man like us! Yes, there is no doubt about it. This man who was born of the Virgin Mary, who grew up in Nazareth, who traveled the roads of Palestine, who worked miracles among the men of His nation – that man was God.⁵

Remember that our Lord asked the apostles who He was, who the people thought He was. God knows if our Lord was a subject of conversation throughout Palestine at that time! And they told Him, “*Some say that You are a prophet, others say that You are Jeremias, others Elias come back to earth*” (cf. Mt. 16:14). Then our Lord turned to the apostles and asked them, “*And you, who do you say that I am?*” And Peter made this solemn declaration of his faith: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Mt. 16:15-16). Because Peter proclaimed his faith, our Lord said to him, “*Flesh and blood has not revealed this to thee, but My Father in Heaven. And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church*” (Mt. 16:17-18). This affirmation, this declaration, this proclamation of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ by St. Peter is fundamental for the Roman Catholic Church. That is what St. Peter said and what we must say in our turn: “Our Lord is the Son of God.” That is why we have to preach Christ, the Son of God (cf. Acts 9:20).⁶

The apostles began speaking of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ after they had received the Holy Ghost. Right

5 Sermon, Ecône, June 6, 1976.

6 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1974.

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away St. Peter told the Jews around him, “*You crucified the Son of God, the Just, who had come to redeem you*” (cf. Acts. 2:22-23). Then the Jews asked him, “*We realize our mistake. What are we to do?*” (cf. Acts 2:37). “*Be baptized; repent of your sins; do penance and you will receive the Holy Ghost.*” Then three thousand of them received Baptism. They were transformed and their minds submitted completely to our Lord Jesus Christ (after Acts 2:38 and 41).

That is what the Holy Ghost should put into our hearts also, and what we always need to remember: the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is a man, but He is God. So we have to adore Him. We have to recognize Him as the only King, the only Lord, the only Priest.⁷

The mission of the priest is to preach the Gospel and to preach in particular that which was the very reason for the Incarnation of our Lord and the reason for His death on the cross, the reason for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the reason for the foundation of the Church and of the priesthood. Alas! That reason is sin. If we had not sinned, we would have had supernatural life but our Lord would not have come to earth to give it back to us. “For our salvation, He came down from Heaven” (*Credo*). It is for our salvation that He came down from Heaven and that He died on the cross.

That is why the priest has to make men understand that they are sinners, and that because they are sinners our Lord came down to earth and died on the cross to redeem them, to give them back the life they had lost through sin.

Today nobody wants to talk about sin any more; but once people stop talking about sin, the Incarnation becomes incomprehensible. The Incarnation loses its meaning. That is why no one understands our Lord Jesus Christ any more, nor

7 Sermon, June 6, 1976.

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the Church, nor the priesthood, nor the Sacrifice of the Mass, nor the sacraments.

“O happy fault!” we sing on Holy Saturday.⁸ It might seem inappropriate to say such a thing, and yet our Lord proved such overflowing love for us after our sin that we can truly sing, “O happy fault! which brought us so much love from our Lord Jesus Christ that He shed all of His blood for us here on earth.”⁹

To Preach Love and Mercy

Priests have to preach love by their words but also by their example because light is meant not only to shine but also to warm. Priests have to be filled with the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross is the most beautiful, the greatest, the most sublime act of charity which ever took place here on earth. No other act of charity even comes close to resembling that which our Lord accomplished on His cross. He produced an infinite act of charity. By His immolation He loved God; He sang the glory of His Father, the glory of the Trinity. Could He have performed a greater act of love of neighbor than to shed all of His blood on the cross to redeem us? No, it is impossible.

So we, who are preachers of the cross, cannot do otherwise than preach charity and be charitable ourselves. St. John says that “*God is charity*” (*Jn.* 4:8). We ought therefore to preach charity. We first have to express that charity toward those who have received the grace of Baptism, as we have. As St. Paul says, we ought first to practice charity toward our brothers in the faith (*Gal.* 6:10), toward those who, like us, bear the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in them; but we also

8 *Exsultet* or proclamation at the Easter Vigil.

9 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

ought to prove our charity toward sinners, toward those who are in error, who are in heresy, in schism; toward those who abandon our Lord Jesus Christ. What is the name of that love which we need to have toward those sinners, toward people who live in error? Its name is mercy. The cross is a work in which mercy shines out most particularly, because if our Lord Jesus Christ had not come down in pity toward our misery, if He had rejected us as sinners because of His hatred of sin, then we would all have been condemned. No one, not a single one of us would have been saved, except the most Blessed Virgin Mary. That is why we have no right not to be merciful, not to lean down in pity toward the miseries of this world. We have to go toward sinners, not so that we might be attracted by their sins or weak in the face of the error and disorder of sin, but so that we might heal them, attract them toward spiritual health, the way a doctor leans down in pity toward those who are sick in order to bring them back to health. That is what we have to do.¹⁰

To Preach Jesus Risen from the Dead

St. Paul writes, “*If Jesus Christ has not risen, vain is your faith*” (I Cor. 15:17). There is no use believing in our Lord Jesus Christ if He is not risen from the dead because His Resurrection is the indisputable witness of His divinity. But the Church believes in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. She believes in His triumph here below and in eternity. That is why She travels the world with Her missionaries, to preach His Resurrection. In Her preaching, She meets with what the apostles met. St. Paul preached our Lord Jesus Christ in Athens and when he came to the Resurrection, his listeners said, “*We will hear you on this some other time*”

10 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1978.

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(Acts 17:32). They did not want to believe. However, the *Acts of the Apostles* says that a few people did follow St. Paul and they converted (Acts 17:34). It is the same way over the whole history of the Church. Apostles, priests, missionaries have preached the Resurrection of Jesus. Some believed and some did not.

Still today, we preach that our Lord Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, that He is the Savior, our God, and that in a few years we will all find ourselves face to face with Him, in all His splendor, in the next world. Like the apostles on Mount Tabor, we will see Him in all His magnificence in His eternal reign. That is why we long to spread that faith all around us and to act in such a way that the greatest possible number of people might follow our Lord Jesus Christ in His Resurrection, in His Ascension to Heaven. That is the mind of the Church.¹¹

We cannot separate Jesus from Mary. It is impossible. God willed that the Virgin and Jesus be united for eternity. We cannot separate them. That is why, when I speak to you of preaching Christ, of loving Christ, of communicating Christ, we cannot do otherwise than think of the Virgin Mary, for she, too, preached Christ.¹²

To Preach the Social Kingship of Our Lord

You are to preach our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ asked us to establish the kingdom of God when He sent His seventy-two disciples to preach the Gospel: “*Go and preach the kingdom of God*” (Lk. 10:1-16). That kingdom of God is His kingdom, for He is God. Our Lord preached it as well. That is what the Gospel says: “*He spoke to the apostles*

11 Sermon, Ecône, April 19, 1987.

12 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1974.

of the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). So the kingdom of God was the great preoccupation of our Lord. We, too, who are His disciples, ought to be preoccupied by His reign over ourselves, over individuals, over families, and over societies.¹³

We ought to preach everywhere that there can never be happiness here below without the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴ We cannot do anything meritorious for Heaven without the grace and the spirit of Jesus Christ. Those are truths which are obvious for the Church but which many Catholics today no longer wish to receive. They find it unacceptable that there be no salvation outside of Jesus Christ and the Church. Yet, could someone who is not a member of the Mystical Body of Christ ever go to Heaven, since Jesus Christ Himself is Heaven? He is God, and God is Heaven. Consequently, anyone who is not attached to Him is not going to be in Heaven. In Paradise there is not going to be anyone who is not a member of His Mystical Body. Those are truths which we have to keep remembering.¹⁵

Those who govern our societies today and who refused to recognize the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ are looking now for solutions, new plans, new techniques to try to take care of the problems of humanity. They would do well to remember that they have abandoned the only One who could have given them those solutions. No one other than our Lord Jesus Christ is capable of truly bringing us the solution to all the problems in our society. It is all about rebuilding Christian civilization.¹⁶

13 Sermon, Ecône, October 29, 1978.

14 “All the good that Christian civilization has brought into the world is due, at least radically, to the word and works of the Catholic priesthood” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

15 Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

16 Sermon, Ecône October 31, 1976.

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And I believe I can say with certainty that, if, unfortunately, our seminary and the work we do here are under attack, it is precisely because we are proclaiming those truths and because the world no longer wants to hear them; because we supposedly have to conform ourselves to modern man. But who is this modern man if not, very often, one who does not want to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, who refuses His reign and His grace? No one wants to believe in the supernatural any more. No one wants to believe in the grace of our Lord. No one wants to believe in anything but man, who, thanks to science, is now supposedly able to govern the world in the place of God.

As for us, we are going to continue proclaiming the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We want Him to reign. That is why we adore Him and why we seek to adore Him in a manner that is worthy of Him.¹⁷

The Basis of an Ardent Preaching

How are we supposed to present doctrine in our preaching? For me, that question has already been resolved by the Church. That fundamental synthesis allowing us to unite in a single vision philosophy, theology, the spiritual life and even the mystical life, along with all of the studies we have already completed, is the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas.

There is no better or more perfect synthesis, and a living synthesis at the same time. It is not a fossil; it is not purely speculative. There is everything in this *Summa* of St. Thomas, over and over approved by the Church. It is an extraordinary synthesis. It brings together all of the subjects taught in the seminary and offers the priest profound convictions for his spiritual life. We find there all the wealth of the spiritual life,

¹⁷ Sermon, Ecône, May 18, 1975.

of the Gospel, of the Christian life, and all of it is founded on philosophical principles, theological principles, unchanging principles of the spiritual life. It is going to give the same solidity and force to our own spirituality, to our own preaching, and the faithful recognize that immediately.

Just as the faithful used to say about our Lord Jesus Christ, “*We have never heard anyone speaking with such authority*” (cf. *Lk. 4:32*), in the same way, if we have that conviction of a knowledge of the Christian life, of the wisdom which the Church teaches us in the seminary and particularly in the *Summa Theologica*, it is going to give us a strength and an authority which impress the faithful and encourage them.

The faithful can sense that the convictions we have do not simply come from an attachment to personal ideas or to sentimental affections. They see that our spirituality is founded on principles.¹⁸

To Proclaim the Truth with Humility

The priest has to be faithful in passing on the truth. That truth does not belong to him. It was given to him as a treasure, placed in his hands, in his mind, so that he might give it to others just as he received it, without any changes.

He has to be faithful in his teaching, taking nothing away. He has to give this good nourishment to souls who are awaiting the light of the truth. He should not be teaching simply what people like to hear. Our Lord, as the psalmist says, “*does not consider what pleases men*” (cf. *Ps. 52:6*). He should be teaching what is good for them, what edifies them, what helps them to practice the Christian life.¹⁹

18 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1989.

19 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985.

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You have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and you proclaim that faith, but you have to do so with humility. This truth does not belong to you. St. Paul says, “*What could we do against the truth?*” (cf. *II Cor.* 13:8). The truth is the truth and there is nothing we can do about it. It is not yours; you are not the one who made it. Even though you have studied it in the seminary, delving into the books of Scripture along with books of philosophy and theology, you still cannot say that this truth belongs to you. This truth is God Himself. You can only know it, transmit it and love it with all your soul, with all your heart. Since you know that it does not belong to you, you should proclaim it in all humility and not as though you were masters of it. The Blessed Virgin herself was chosen for her humility. The most Blessed Virgin Mary said that the Lord “*looked upon my humility*” (*Lk.* 1:48). That is why she became the Mother of God. So, in the way you carry this message of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, practice humility, gentleness, simplicity, but also firmness.²⁰ Be firm precisely because, once again, this truth does not belong to us. We cannot change it. It is what it is. It is what our Lord Jesus Christ gave us by holy Revelation. We can only study it with respect, with love, and transmit it faithfully to others, to future generations.²¹

20 “It is the priest’s task to clear away from men’s minds the mass of prejudices and misunderstandings which hostile adversaries have piled up; the modern mind is eager for the truth, and the priest should be able to point it out with serene frankness; there are souls still hesitating, distressed by doubts, and the priest should inspire courage and trust, and guide them with calm security to the safe port of faith, faith accepted by both head and heart; error makes its onslaughts, arrogant and persistent, and the priest should know how to meet them with a defense vigorous and active, yet solid and unruffled” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

21 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1977.

2. Retreats: Incomparable Graces

I wish that you could have an idea of the benefit of spiritual exercises and of the graces that flow from them, first because the popes have said it themselves over and over again. It is certain that those who have followed these exercises remain marked by them for many years, sometimes all their life, particularly those who discovered their vocation during a retreat.²²

How indeed are we to teach the faith or bring the faith back to life in souls who have strayed far from the Church or who no longer really live the life of the faith? “*The just man lives by faith*” (*Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11*). If those souls are not penetrated by that faith, they are going to die.

So, by these spiritual exercises, over three days, five days or ten days, you can allow the divine life to resurrect in these souls, that life which is meant to enlighten them and make them live. For a certain period of time you are able to put them back in contact with divine realities, eternal realities, true realities, whereas normally they are surrounded by earthly realities which are only fleeting and are often deadly for their souls.

These people all have a soul, a soul to be saved, and in order to do so it has to be maintained in the faith, in virtue, in charity. So, be ready to give retreats. Be happy to give the spiritual exercises. They are incomparable graces. How many souls have rediscovered the path of truth and the path of virtue thanks to these retreats, and kept to the path from then on! How many vocations! Take your own experience. For most of you, it was on retreat that you received the grace of your vocation, or at least that you discovered it. So be ready to give those spiritual exercises, to give those retreats.²³

22 Sermon, Econe, February 11, 1979.

23 Sermon, Econe, March 31, 1979.

THE PREACHER

Why are the faithful drawn to an Ignatian retreat, even if they do not know exactly what it is? What touches them in an Ignatian retreat is the synthesis. It brings together all of philosophy, all of theology, Holy Scripture, the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, Christology, all in the space of six days. People also see their own life in a kind of summary. We speak to them of the last things, of the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ; we open a new horizon on the divine life that is in them; we speak to them of the Christian life, then of the obligations which flow from it if they wish to remain Christian. Over the space of six days, we place this synthesis before them which they had never seen with such intensity. They had heard people speak of the last things. One time, somebody talked to them about hell... six months later, somebody else spoke of purgatory... three months later, another person spoke about Heaven... and they had certainly heard about the grace of our Lord... but they had never had that general view of things presented to them. So a retreat truly summarized for them the grave question of the meaning of their own life, showed them everything that was at stake for their future, and then presented to them the convictions they would have to have and the life they would have to lead. Do they or not wish to live the Christian life as our Lord established it? Those are the points that touch them, you see.²⁴

If there is one thing which counts on these retreats for those who come seeking light and strength to continue their Christian life, it is receiving from the priest the absolution of their sins and the graces that are going to allow them to be strong in the face of obstacles and always to accomplish their duty as Christians. How many people have rediscovered the faith, rediscovered fervor and devotion during these retreats! The retreat is a magnificent apostolate and it offers profound consolations.²⁵

²⁴ Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 13, 1989.

²⁵ Sermon, Jurançon, July 29, 1979.

These retreats are certainly the occasion for a person to look to the salvation of his soul over the course of a few days of prayer and reflection. That is where we can truly practice the vigilance insisted on by our Lord. Fr. Barrielle has passed on to us an extraordinary heritage by these retreats and we have to make this heritage bear fruit. I am happy to think that many of our young priests are preaching these exercises, which do so much good to souls.²⁶

3. The Teaching of Catechism

Wherever you may be, it seems that there is one thing very important, really capital among the duties of a priest, and that is the teaching of catechism, the teaching of Christian doctrine. That really is what the faithful ask of you and also what catechumens are asking, those who wish to become a part of the Mystical Body of our Lord or those who would like to convert to the Catholic religion, the true religion.²⁷

You are going to teach children in catechism class the fundamental truths of our life. Indeed, the catechism explains to us why we are on this earth, who our Lord Jesus Christ is, what the sacraments are, and what the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is. Souls need to know all that in order to appreciate what God has done for us and to discover the depth of His love for us. I am sure you will do so with dedication, and souls are going to be happy to hear from you the truth which our Lord taught to us.²⁸

The Curé of Ars said that there is nothing so beautiful, nothing so moving as to teach catechism, to open the great mysteries of the faith to the minds of children who come to ask you for that singular grace of knowing our Lord Jesus

26 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1979.

27 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1979.

28 Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1979.

Christ. You are going to prepare those children for their First Communion. First Communion is such a beautiful moment in a person's life! Everyone rejoices. A child becomes the tabernacle of the body, the blood, the soul, and the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are going to prepare them for that and also to make good confessions, to assist at the holy Mass. What a magnificent role the priest has, bringing young adolescents through all the stages of the faith!

Then, one day, it will be your job to prepare them for their vocation: religious vocation, priestly vocation, the vocation to marriage. You will have to prepare them by showing them what our Lord Jesus Christ has taught, by teaching them the love of God and the love of neighbor, which contain all the commandments of God.²⁹

To Affirm the Truths of the Faith

After spending years and years in the seminary, we perhaps have too much of a tendency to be a little bit like scientists of the faith, so to speak. You have delved into Christian philosophy, into theology, canon law, Holy Scripture. You have studied, you have reflected, you have tried to penetrate these mysteries during your six years of study in the seminary.

But we have to be careful of that tendency – and perhaps that defect to a certain extent – of considering the faith as a science and seeking to penetrate the great mysteries of the faith by our human understanding, trying to understand these mysteries like those who devote themselves to medicine or other human sciences. That would be a great obstacle in helping souls to believe, because faith consists in adhering to these mysteries on the authority of God who reveals them to us and not because of the knowledge we may have.

29 Sermon, Montreal, November 10, 1985.

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These great mysteries are summarized in our *Credo*: the mystery of the Trinity, of the Creation, of the Incarnation, of the Redemption, of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, of the sacraments, of grace, of the gifts of the Holy Ghost infused into our souls. All those realities are presented to our faith and not to our understanding, which are two different things. Of course, we should seek to know the benefits of our faith, but we should believe them because God has revealed them, and that is precisely the role of the Church, the role of the pope, the role of the bishops, the role of priests, to transmit that deposit of the faith, to transmit those truths.³⁰

In transmitting to souls the truth revealed by God, the catechist ought to trust in the grace of God more than in his personal ability or in his pedagogical talents. Doubtless, it is good to cultivate those gifts, but the faithful are asking for doctrine, they are asking for the faith and so the catechist ought to give it as our Lord gave it. And there I would like to draw your attention to the need not so much to prove the faith as to affirm it. Apologetics are necessary. It is useful to speak of the proofs of the credibility of our faith to the souls who ask for them, but it is much more necessary and more effective to affirm our faith.³¹

Indeed, we ought to submit our mind and our will to the almighty power of God. We really are nothing at all. God, who gave us our little minds, comes Himself to reveal truths to us adapted to the highest minds of Heaven, those of angels and archangels. He has revealed to us His own mystery. And here we are wanting to know everything! Which would mean already being like Him! No, we have to submit our minds to the faith.³²

30 Sermon, Jurançon, July 29, 1979.

31 Sermon, Econe, March 31, 1979.

32 Sermon, Jurançon, July 29, 1979.

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Those who come to the Church to ask for the faith already have that conviction that the faith which we have to give them comes from God. If therefore they are already submitting themselves to the authority of God, they are only asking for one thing: that we teach them what God said, what our Lord said, what He has revealed. That is what they come looking for from us.

So you have to affirm the truths of the faith. The faithful are looking for that because it is all the authority of God, of our Lord, which is coming to them through you in that affirmation of the faith. It is no small thing. You are not acting on your own authority; you are acting on the authority of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ. So you have the right and the duty to affirm that faith and to say, "You have to believe the truths of the *Credo*, the truths which are taught to you in the catechism."

Thus you really will be giving the milk of doctrine to those who need it. You really will be nourishing the souls, the hearts, the minds who are thirsty, who are hungry for that doctrine and who need it in order to live (*cf. I Cor. 3:2*).³³

A Difficult Art

You are going to have to seek out, with your heart of a priest and with your missionary spirit, all of the possible ways for the truths of the faith to penetrate these children, these people whom you will teach in your catechism classes. You will have them for a year, maybe two years, and then what?

How many of those whom you will have taught catechism are perhaps going to stop practicing, even if they don't leave the Church? They may forget everything you ever taught

33 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1979.

them, so to speak, but if they have been penetrated with this doctrine, be it only for two years; if they have lived that faith, knowing that our Lord Jesus Christ saved them, redeemed them; if they have lived for two years, three years, in that heavenly company in which we should live with the most Holy Trinity, with our Lord Jesus Christ, with the most Blessed Virgin Mary, with the angels, with the souls in purgatory; if they have believed in hell and in the devil, they will not forget all those things. If they were once truly convinced of those things, even if they have abandoned the Christian life for a certain time, abandoned going to church and being near priests, still a day is going to come when God gives them a particular grace to make them come back, and perhaps at the hour of their death they will think of those catechism classes you gave them and so, by the grace of God, they may be saved. So you have to be ready to teach catechism.

Ultimately, that is what you are doing in the seminary. You are studying the catechism through all of your theology. But do not just stay on the level of speculation; live your theology, live that catechism and start learning already to give it to others. Do not hesitate to seek out in particular the lives of those saints who taught catechism.³⁴

Someone gave me two books of saints' lives which belonged to the holy Curé of Ars. Saints' lives were what he used to preach about. As he told the lives of saints, he would insist on this or that virtue. Our Lord is the source of all good, of all virtue. So the virtues of our Lord are woven throughout the lives of the saints. The faithful are really very receptive to those things.

What you have been learning all through your seminary training is going to allow you to pass on the truths of the faith by placing them within reach of the faithful. It is not

34 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1979.

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always easy to communicate your own knowledge, but you will manage little by little to find the words and examples you need, to express that truth which you have learned, without deforming it, without changing it. That is where you can do an enormous amount of good.³⁵

A catechist has to have confidence that his words, falling upon the souls of children or the souls of adults as he is preaching, as he reads out the Gospels or other readings, are like a seed falling on ground prepared in these souls by God; he has to trust that God is the one who will cause that seed to grow.

We always have to keep trusting in the grace of God, even if on the outside it seems to us that we are not having all the success we would have hoped for in our preaching, our reading, or our catechism.³⁶

35 Retreat, Econe, June 1, 1980.

36 Sermon, Flavigny, February 1, 1988.

CHAPTER 2

THE SANCTIFIER

In addition to preaching, a second function of the priest is to sanctify. The priest sanctifies the faithful by communicating grace to them through the sacraments. The following texts contain advice of a pastoral nature, most often addressed to deacons. It is not a treatise of theology but a certain number of considerations meant to nourish the souls of future priests.

How did our Lord will to communicate to us the infinite merits of His sacrifice, of His cross? By opening His heart. His heart was pierced and from His heart was born the holy Church of God. From His heart were born the sacraments: the Sacrament of Baptism, the Sacrament of the Eucharist; all of the sacraments were born from the heart of Jesus.¹

1. The Sacraments in General

Signs That Produce Grace

Our Lord willed that priests be the instruments to communicate eternal life to souls and He confided the

1 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 27, 1982.

sacraments to them. He placed Himself in their hands, in a certain way, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, but also in the other sacraments because the sacraments are the channel of His own life. It is so good for priests to remember that need to venerate the sacraments which they give to the faithful! As it says in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, the sacraments are the signs of sacred realities. They are not only symbols, as people today would like to have us believe; they are signs which produce the things they signify.²

This signification is indeed mysterious. That is why, following the custom of the Greek language, the Fathers of the Church have often called the sacraments mysteries, *mysterium*. The fact that signs, the fact that words should communicate divine life is a great mystery. God, in the designs of His Providence, has by His almighty power tied the dispensation of divine graces to sensible elements, to certain gestures, to certain words and to the intentions of the minister.

Another very beautiful observation which the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* makes about sacraments is that a sacrament represents three things: one thing which is past, one present, and one future.³

The reality which is past is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is an intimate, profound, essential bond between each sacrament and the Passion of our Lord.

There is also an element which is present, namely, the dispensing of grace by the sensible sign.

Finally, there is a link to the future, because all of these signs are concerned with eternal beatitude. They are made for that. They lead to eternal blessedness. What

2 See the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, ch. 14, § 2.

3 See the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, ch. 14, § 3.

a magnificent reality! What a sublime reality in this triple bond of the sacrament with the Passion of our Lord, with the grace produced by the sacrament in the present moment and with eternal beatitude!⁴

God chose seven sacraments, sensible signs into which He infused the Holy Ghost. The choice of sensible elements in the reception of grace is tied to our human nature. We are sense beings. We need to touch, to see, to hear the elements which give us the Holy Ghost. That is why we are anointed with holy oils at Baptism, Confirmation, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders.

In fact, God has communicated His grace to us through these sensible signs to humble us. We are sinners. What lost us was our pride. So our Lord Jesus Christ chose means for sanctifying us which are humiliating for our human nature. We are dependent on material elements: on water for Baptism, on the holy oils for the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, on the word of the priest for the absolution of our sins. It is no small humility which God demands of us in asking us to confess our sins to a creature like ourselves but vested with powers, vested with His Holy Spirit to take those sins away. It is also with humility that we are asked to present ourselves to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We have to kneel down and receive the sacred body of Jesus on our tongue. So our Lord is asking us to humble ourselves. That is the spirit of the Catholic Church, the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus willed that the Holy Ghost descend upon Him on the day of His Baptism, to manifest that He was filled with the Holy Ghost and that He was the source of the Holy Ghost; yet He also willed to humble Himself even unto death on the cross. Therefore we ought to humble ourselves in receiving the sacraments but at the same time think that the

4 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983.

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humiliation which is asked of us is also filling us with the Spirit of God, giving us the Spirit of God. So we have to have a respect for the sacraments and teach the faithful the great value of the sacraments by our own respect, so that they themselves might approach the sacraments in an attitude of humility, confidence, hope, charity, and that they might be transformed in the fire of the Holy Ghost, the fire of love, the fire of charity.⁵

“Do this in memory of Me” (Lk. 22:19; I Cor. 11:24). “Forgive them their sins. Receive the Holy Spirit: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained” (Jn. 20:22-23). “Go, therefore, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). That is what our Lord Jesus Christ said to His apostles. That is what we have to do in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶

What a need there is to reflect more deeply on these sacraments, which are so beautiful, so noble, so divine, since our Lord Jesus Christ Himself instituted them: Baptism; Confirmation; the Sacrament of Penance; the Sacrament of Holy Orders, which gives that grace of participating in the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ; the Sacrament of Marriage; the Sacrament of Extreme Unction!⁷

What a beautiful mission, my dear friends! How the faithful await that of you! They are waiting for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to descend into their soul that they, too, might be associated with, united to our Lord Jesus Christ in His cross and in His love, in His infinite charity.⁸

5 Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1985.

6 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1978.

7 Sermon, Jurançon, July 29, 1979.

8 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1978.

The Importance of the Sacraments

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* insists on the greater necessity of certain sacraments, of Baptism for example.⁹

Our Lord said that, “*Unless a man be reborn of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into eternal life*” (cf. *Jn.* 3:5). Certainly, the Church teaches us that Baptism may be a Baptism of desire or Baptism of blood, but the Baptism of desire is none other than the desire for Baptism of water. And how can they have this desire if they do not know about Baptism? Catechumens know about it and desire it. But how many souls have this implicit desire of Baptism? How many souls are capable of making an act of charity toward God which includes the implicit desire of Baptism? It is a great mystery.¹⁰ Today, people are too quick to do without the sacraments, thinking that all souls are saved without the sacraments. That is not possible. God willed that His life be distributed through the sacraments.

The Sacrament of Penance is likewise necessary for those who have fallen into mortal sin. If they wish to recover life, if they wish to have eternal life, repentant sinners need to present themselves before the Sacrament of Penance in the proper dispositions in order to receive holy absolution so that their sins might be taken away and that they might be reborn to life through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 See the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, ch. 16, § 1.

10 Catechumens have an explicit desire of Baptism. Certain pagans may have an implicit desire for Baptism. A letter of the Holy Office to the archbishop of Boston (August 8, 1949) notes that “anyone who draws near to God has to believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.” St. Paul indeed said, “*Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a rewarder to those who seek Him*” (*Heb.* 11:6). See also *Summa Theologica*, III^a q. 66, a. 11 and q. 68, a. 2; II^a II^{ae} q. 2, a. 5.

The third necessary sacrament, still according to the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, is the Sacrament of Holy Orders, this time not necessary for the eternal life of the priest, of the subject himself, but for the life of the Church. The Church could not exist without the priesthood.¹¹

Dispositions for Receiving the Sacraments

It is very useful always to keep in mind that grace is efficacious, grace is fruitful based on the dispositions of those receiving it, hence the importance for us of preparing people well. The treatise on justification in theology is one of the most important for giving the principles of the apostolate. It shows that justification, meaning reception of grace, occurs based on the following principle: “All that is received, is received according to the capacity,” and therefore according to the dispositions, “of the one receiving it.”¹² That principle is absolutely essential in the apostolate because it shows us how much we have to prepare people to receive grace.¹³ If those who ask us for the sacraments are well prepared, to that extent grace will bear fruit in their heart. This question of the reception of the sacraments is ultimately the whole problem of the apostolate because there is remote preparation by preaching, by retreats, and then there is a more immediate preparation by instruction and direct counsel.¹⁴

That ought to be an encouragement for priests to prepare souls to receive the sacraments well. We sometimes use this saying: “The sacraments are for men.”¹⁵ It is true, but

11 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983.

12 *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur.*

13 This subject is presented in a masterful way in the *Traité du Ministère Ecclésiastique* of Fr. Emmanuel (bk. I, ch. 4 and 6, Les Ateliers du Bec, 1963, pp. 17-18 and 20-22).

14 Conference to deacons, April 12, 1976.

15 *Sacramenta propter homines.*

we ought to add: “The sacraments are for men who are well-disposed.” What is the good of giving the sacraments if souls are not well disposed? It is our Lord Himself who says it: “*Do not give to dogs what is holy, neither cast your pearls before swine*” (Mt. 7:6).

If souls are unable to receive grace because they have a public obstacle, one that is official and known to all, then we cannot give them the sacraments. We have to prepare them first.

The preparation of souls for the sacraments is important, whether it be teaching catechism to children or teaching the faith in conferences for the faithful. That way, souls are able to prepare themselves by contrition, by humility, by charity to receive the sacraments with full effect.¹⁶

Priests therefore need to remember that necessity for souls to be well disposed if they are to receive grace effectively. Hearts have to prepare for the reception of graces. People should not come merely out of habit, out of routine, to receive the sacraments, to receive the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Otherwise those graces run the risk of not being fruitful and not increasing sanctifying grace in those souls.¹⁷

The Ritual: A Marvelous Little Book

The ritual is a precious little book which you should always have at your side in order to follow its advice, its directions and the rules it gives. It is a marvelous little book! You have to read the introductory notes in the chapter on the sacraments to see how the Church tells the parish priest in what manner he ought to prepare himself to give sacraments. It is absolutely extraordinary, I can tell you. It really

16 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983.

17 Sermon, Ecône, April 7, 1984.

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is a synthesis of moral theology and spiritual theology all in one. The first chapter of the ritual treats of what should be observed in general in the administering of sacraments. It has some really admirable descriptions.

The first paragraph explains that we have to observe the rites of Tradition.¹⁸ “If anyone shall say that the received and approved rites of the Catholic Church accustomed to be used in the solemn administration of the sacraments may be disdained or omitted by the minister without sin and at pleasure, or may be changed by any pastor of the churches to other new ones: let him be anathema.”¹⁹ So a person cannot just come along and change the rites. It is understood that the Church may change the rites, to a certain extent, but only to a certain extent, to the extent that it does not touch the essence of the sacraments nor their signification.

“Since there is nothing more holy in the Church, nothing more useful, nothing more excellent, nothing more divine than the sacraments, which were instituted for the salvation of the human race by our Lord Jesus Christ, the pastor or the priest to whom falls the administration of these sacraments ought first to remember that he is dealing with things which are holy. Therefore, at every moment, he ought to be ready for the holy administering of that office. That is why he will take constant care to live a pious, chaste and upright life because, even though the sacraments cannot be affected by impure ministers, nor by ministers not in the state of grace, nonetheless those who administer the sacraments in a manner that is impure and unworthy know that they incur the pain of eternal death.”²⁰

18 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

19 Roman ritual, Title 1, single chapter; Council of Trent, 7th Session, March 3, 1547, *Decree on the Sacraments*, can. 13, *DS* 1613; *DZ* 856.

20 *Ibid.* Retreat for future deacons, Econe, October 28, 1978.

In the ritual there is so much advice of that kind, on the manner in which the priest ought to give the sacraments and on many other questions as well! Those are things which you absolutely have to read in order to practice them according to the spirit of the Church.²¹

2. Baptism

The priest has to baptize. Today he fairly often has to prepare adults. Considering all the waiting before Baptism, the priest has to prepare these people to go to confession and then to be baptized.²²

What are the dispositions which the Church asks of adults who are going to receive the grace of Baptism? She asks for “theological faith,”²³ that is, a faith which is not only a sentiment but an adhesion of the mind to truths revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ because our Lord Jesus Christ is Truth itself.²⁴

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost gave to the apostles a lively faith, a deep faith, because of their divine adoption. It is then that they believed in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and in His attributes as King, Priest and Judge. From then on there was no longer any doubt in their minds or any hesitation. They were truly filled with the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord Himself had promised they would be. That is what the Holy Spirit gives by the grace of Baptism. We become children of God, adopted sons of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁵

21 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

22 *Ibid.* The “confession” to which the Archbishop is referring is an acknowledgement of sins which is not sacramental but which is intended to excite catechumens to greater repentance of sins committed.

23 *Fides theologica.*

24 Sermon, Ecône, April 7, 1984.

25 Sermon, Ecône, June 6, 1976.

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God willed to make us into His sons, to bring us into the Holy Trinity, by an absolutely incredible grace which is something really extraordinary. God could have kept His mystery to Himself for all eternity without even revealing it to the angels, and behold, by an extraordinary mystery of grace, the same way He created us, He also revealed to us His Holy Trinity and made us His sons: “*Henceforth I will no longer call you servants but friends*” (Jn. 15:15). From now on, our Lord treats us like His sons and so He reveals to us realities concerning His heavenly Father which are going to be our joy, our admiration, our happiness for all eternity.²⁶

The Church also asks those who wish to be baptized as adults to have a hope whose object is the grace they are to receive, on account of the mercy of God. Those who are to be baptized need to understand that this grace, fruit of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a new birth which introduces them into the Mystical Body of our Lord, into the heart of the Holy Trinity.

The Church also asks these catechumens to have the beginning of a Christian life. Concretely, that beginning means an obedience to the commandments of God. A public sinner may not present himself to receive the grace of Baptism, obviously! Our Lord clearly stated, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments*” (Jn. 14:15). Consequently, charity is already present in the observation of the commandments, because it expresses our submission to the will of God.

The Church therefore asks for faith, hope and the beginning of a Christian life. We need to remember these three dispositions because they are fundamental. If we want grace to increase in us, we have to keep that faith, that hope and that charity constantly in our hearts and in our minds.

26 Sermon, Ecône, May 29, 1971.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

The Church also adds the fear of God. It is of course a filial fear, the fear of being separated from God, from our Lord Jesus Christ, from Him who has given us everything and to whom we owe everything. Finally, the Church demands a hatred of sin, because sin is the evil which separates us from God, keeps us far from God.

You see how beautiful they are, these simple dispositions which the Church asks of every catechumen. That is why we ask that there be a certain lapse of time when we prepare catechumens to receive the grace of Baptism, so that they might prepare themselves better and become used to living in that state of mind and heart. These dispositions are going to allow them to receive sanctifying grace in a fruitful, efficacious manner, which will make their Christian virtues increase more quickly.²⁷

You are going to be pouring forth that same grace of Baptism, you are going to be pouring forth the blood of our Lord on the souls of the children you baptize. “I believe in one Baptism for the remission of sins” (*Credo*). That blood is for the remission of sins and it is what you are going to be pouring forth when you baptize little children.²⁸

The true doctrine concerning Baptism corresponds well to the missionary spirit that our Lord inspired in His apostles. The visible outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the baptized at the beginning of evangelization confirms the vital importance of Baptism. Still today, in pagan regions, missionaries can recognize baptized people by their faces – faces which are open, relaxed, trusting – whereas the pagans give an impression of servility, fear and distrust.

From then on, the blood of Jesus in which Christians have been baptized calls them to unite to Jesus’ sacrifice

27 Sermon, April 7, 1984.

28 Sermon, Fanjeaux, July 7, 1979.

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every Sunday and thus to accomplish the most important act of the virtue of religion, for the glory of the Holy Trinity, in union with our Lord and all His Mystical Body.²⁹

3. The Holy Eucharist

The Fruit of the Mass

The very reason our Lord has us participate in His priesthood is that we might sanctify, which means divinize souls by the communication of His own life through the sacraments.

It is obvious that the Holy Eucharist is the center, the heart of the sanctification of souls. The Holy Eucharist is the center of the sacraments which our Lord Jesus Christ instituted, and this sacrament was inaugurated with His sacrifice. Henceforth the sacrifice and the Sacrament of the Eucharist are indissolubly united. The priest constitutes the sacrament in offering the sacrifice.³⁰

Every day, you are going to ascend the altar to *re-actualize*³¹ the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. What more beautiful lesson, what more profound, more concrete, more moving lesson than this sacrifice of the cross, alive once again before your eyes, with yourselves becoming instruments of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ! Your lips replace those of our Lord. Your words will be those of our Lord Jesus Christ to reproduce this sacrifice of the cross and spread its blessings over yourselves and all those for whom you pray and for whom you offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.³²

Why are you going to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, my dear friends? Our Lord said, "*I came that they may have*

29 *Spiritual Journey*, p. 48-49.

30 Sermon, Ecône, March 23, 1985.

31 *Réactualiser* in French: to make present in all its efficacy.

32 Sermon, Ecône, June 27, 1986.

life, and have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). The Sacrifice of the Mass has no other *raison d'être*. The Mass is made for giving life. And what life? Not the life of this world, not the life of the body, but supernatural life, divine life, for our Lord wished to give us His own life, His divine life, and bring us into the Holy Trinity, every one of us. As small, as weak as we are, our Lord willed that we might participate in His divine life. He died on the cross to give us back that divine life which we had lost. It is to give life that you are going to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the fruit of the sacrifice is the Eucharist, where the body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ are found present. How sublime it all is, how beautiful!³³

No one, not even the priest, will ever have a perfect understanding of this mystery, so immense is the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ. That God Himself should have become man to give Himself to us as nourishment: there is a mystery which surpasses us completely; a mystery of the great and immense charity of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ for us!³⁴

The Fruit of the Tree of Life

What is the most beautiful dream a priest can have? To give our Lord Jesus Christ; to communicate our Lord Jesus Christ. He can do nothing more beautiful, more great, more rich, more supernatural, more divine.

And when especially does the priest give our Lord Jesus Christ? When he gives the Holy Eucharist, when he gives our Lord Jesus Christ Himself to souls. What greater thing could he do? To prepare souls to receive our Lord Jesus Christ and to give our Lord Jesus Christ to them is the essential mission of the priest. He has no other.

33 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

34 Sermon, Notre-Dame de Launay, September 4, 1977.

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In giving them our Lord Jesus Christ, he is giving them Heaven, he is giving them eternal life, he is forgiving their sins; he is giving them everything – the greatest, most beautiful thing there could possibly be.

And that is exactly what our Lord wanted the priest to be. He wanted the priest first and foremost to offer Him the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which continues the sacrifice of the cross, so this fruit of the cross might be a nourishment for souls. Eve once poisoned humanity by the forbidden fruit which she ate in the earthly paradise; the priest now communicates life to souls by the fruit of that tree which is the cross, the fruit which is our Lord Jesus Christ. The tree of life whose fruit men were not allowed to take in the earthly paradise has now come back to earth and communicates eternal life to us by giving us the Son of God Himself, the life of God in itself, foretaste of our eternal life, foretaste of Paradise. What could a priest do that would be more beautiful? What could more beautiful in a man's life than to give our Lord Jesus Christ to others?³⁵

4. The Priest in the Confessional

A Magnificent but Exacting Ministry

There is a real need to speak about the Sacrament of Penance in particular because in many circumstances it takes up a great part of the time that a priest devotes to the apostolate. Given the weakness of souls and the scandals of the corrupt society they live in, people do fall very often. Our Lord in His infinite wisdom instituted a second “life-raft” for them to cling to.³⁶

Mercy means reaching down with kindness to those who are in misery, and spiritual misery in particular. The more

35 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1974.

36 *Spiritual Journey*, p. 49.

grave is not bodily misery but spiritual misery. Obviously we are quick to lean down and help those who suffer in their body, who are abandoned, who are sick. That is very good, it is very beautiful; but it is rather spiritual misery which ought to be the first object of a priest's concern. The priest should feel a heart of mercy beating within him and should be drawn to those souls who are in a state of sin, of spiritual misery, so that he might bring them life.³⁷

The confessional is one of the privileged means for the priest to touch souls. "*Receive the Holy Spirit: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained*" (Jn. 20:22-23). The confessional is where the Holy Spirit gives Himself to souls. That is why the Church has always had a great appreciation for the Sacrament of Penance and why the saints spent their lives in the confessional. Remember the holy Curé of Ars and not long ago the good Padre Pio: they spent their lives in the confessional because they knew it was the way that souls were going to receive the Holy Spirit.³⁸

Holy priests have always had a great devotion toward the Sacrament of Penance. Holy parish priests, especially those who were in charge of souls, gave themselves over to this ministry with supernatural zeal. I do not think we can say that this ministry is very pleasant, naturally speaking. It is an ordeal to spend hours and hours in the confessional, listening to all those miseries. On the eve of feasts, when he has to spend the afternoon and sometimes the whole day in the confessional, the priest has to be constantly in a state of tension, a tension which is certainly very exhausting, very exacting.³⁹

37 Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 26, 1981.

38 Sermon, Ecône, Pentecost, 1974.

39 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

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In the missions in Cameroon, for example, there were thousands and thousands of converts. So the poor priests were in the confessional from eight o'clock in the morning until noon and from two o'clock to six o'clock in the evening, three or four days a week. Lines of a hundred people were standing there waiting in front of every confessional. They were in line so they would not argue over who went first. That way I could watch them and be sure that each one got to go when it was his turn. It was really something else! The poor Fathers did everything they could, but it was truly difficult to give very precise direction.⁴⁰

So it is obvious that, naturally speaking, the ministry of confession is not very attractive; but, supernaturally speaking, it is truly very beautiful. That is where we really have contact with souls, and there we can be certain that it truly is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which we are pouring onto them to wash them of their sins, as we give them absolution.

A Demanding Ministry

The ministry of confession is certainly the one which demands the most priestly qualities. Plus it is a sacrament which makes us put into practice all of the knowledge acquired over the course of our seminary studies. It is not so difficult to celebrate well the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is enough to know the rites well, to be a little bit pious, to be aware of what we are doing. It does not require a great deal of judgment; it is enough to perform well what the Church asks.

Whereas, in the Sacrament of Penance, we have a whole series of principles to know and qualities to possess and all our judgment to exercise.⁴¹

40 Spiritual conference, Ecône, May 12, 1989.

41 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

The fruitful exercise of this ministry requires that the priest have a number of qualities: the knowledge of the divine law and of the laws of the Church so as to judge the gravity of the sin confessed; prudence, discretion, counsel, merciful charity following the example of our Lord, in order to bring appropriate help to the sick soul. In general, souls appreciate a gentle firmness more than liberal laxity; they are longing to be healed, even if that desire is not explicit.⁴²

All of that demands knowledge and virtue together. It is certainly a very heavy charge which our Lord has placed on our poor shoulders, having to guide these souls which do not belong to us, souls which the good God brings to us so that we might direct them toward Him. It is a delicate ministry and one of the most important of our priesthood.⁴³

The Priest: A Doctor of Souls

The priest is acting as a doctor of souls. Our Lord walked before us in this role, and with what perfection! Should we be surprised? Not at all; it makes perfect sense.

What is the virtue that leads someone to heal souls and bodies? Mercy. What is mercy? It is the perfection of charity, since charity is essentially giving without a thought for oneself. To practice mercy a person cannot be thinking of himself because there is a kind of beginning of death in the sinner, in the sick person, and death is something repugnant, something repulsive. The merciful heart looks beyond that repugnance and sees a possibility of life, and so he conquers his repulsion, forgets himself, and brings the sinner or the sick person back to life.

Our Lord was mercy itself. His entire life is a work of mercy: “*God, who is rich in mercy, by reason of His very*

42 *Spiritual Journey*, p. 52.

43 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

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great love wherewith He has loved us even when we were dead by reason of our sins, brought us to life together with Christ” (Eph. 2:4-5).

When we look at that work of mercy which is the Redemption and at the mysterious humiliations of our Lord in His Passion, there is nothing we can say; it leaves us speechless. We have to meditate on our Lord’s words and actions toward sinners for our own education as priests and pastors, not to mention all the bodily infirmities which He healed and which were only the image and the consequence of sin. You see the admirable mercy of the father of the family in that moving story of the prodigal son: “*While he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him*” (Lk. 15:20). What a magnificent example! In the case of the woman taken in adultery, He says to her, “*Go thy way, and from now on sin no more*” (Jn. 8:11). Ultimately, everything is contained in this expression: “*Be merciful, therefore, even as your Father is merciful*” (Lk. 6:36). How many times are we to have mercy? “*Seventy times seven times*” (Mt. 18:22).

We should not confuse mercy with weakness, which would mean we were encouraging sin. You see the examples which our Lord gives us. He always demands contrition, regret for sin. Yes, as long as we do not have a positive reason to doubt someone’s contrition, let us be merciful.

Otherwise, let us do everything possible to conserve and increase life. A truly zealous priest is going to see; he is going to sound hearts; he is going to know when to correct – for St. Paul says that “*whom the Lord loves, He chastises*” (Heb. 12:6) – and when to be patient, when simply to give advice. The good doctor is one who knows how to diagnose the sickness correctly and then apply the proper remedy.⁴⁴

44 Priests’ retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

The aim of the doctor is to bring a sick man back to health. To do so he has to draw close to the sick man and examine his illness carefully in order to discover its causes and take into account all the circumstances. It is the same thing for the moral sickness which is sin. The priest has to draw close to that misery. If the priest is not merciful but comes with an attitude of condemnation, of harshness toward the sinner, then the sinner is going to close in on himself and maybe he will die. He is no longer going to trust the priest, he is not going to know where else to turn and he is going to perish.

The priest therefore has to have that mercy in his heart and know how to listen to people. He is there to receive the sorrows, the difficulties, the miseries of people and to try to put them back on the path, gently, peacefully, sometimes needing to be firm. Obviously he has to be firm sometimes, to make a cut with the scalpel, to cause pain to the person who is sick, but always with a merciful spirit, with the idea of healing. He must never have any disdain – never, absolutely never!

In the first place, God is the only one who can really weigh all things. He is the only one who can know in what circumstances those people may have lived and the infinite number of graces which we ourselves have received, the number of graces we have neglected, graces which would have made us much better if we had taken advantage of them.

So, here comes a soul which is perhaps all ready to receive that grace which is going to convert him, which is going to put him in communication with our Lord, like St. Augustine who lived in sin and who all of a sudden became one of the noblest of souls – and here we are disdainning him! If we place him back on the right path, maybe he is going to go much farther than we. So we do not have the right to disdain him.

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We can disdain people's judgments. If we are dealing with an atheist who is insulting our Lord, who is blaspheming, obviously you cannot allow such a thing; but you must not disdain him as though he were already damned. As long as a person is still on earth, he can always be saved! Certainly, it is reasonable to feel sometimes an indignation toward sin, in the face of a truly abominable situation, in the face of really odious actions, in the face of absolutely unacceptable ways of behaving, but we always have to give the sinner a chance of converting.⁴⁵

Let us strive to judge with benevolence. "*I do not wish the death of the sinner, saith the Lord, but rather that he convert and that he live*" (cf. Ez. 18:23 and 32); "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Lk. 19:10). Those are the principles of the true priest. He has to pray to God to help him in the practical application of administering penance and the Sacrament of Penance.

The truth before all things! Let us not have personal principles but the principles of our Lord and of the Church; that is where the truth is. Ultimately, it is great charity, true charity which has to guide us and not charity after the manner of modernists or liberals. That is why we say, "*Love and do what you will.*"⁴⁶ Indeed, if we truly love, it means according to truth, if we love souls and not just "people." If we have in our heart a love only of their Christian life, of their eternal life, then we are really going to do what is appropriate for them, as though impelled by the Holy Ghost, and souls are going to follow us and accept everything that we ask of them because they are going to see that we are guided only by the thought of their own good.⁴⁷

45 Retreat, Ecône, January 30, 1978.

46 St. Augustine, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. John*, treatise 7, § 8, PL 35, col. 2033.

47 Priests' retreat, handwritten notes, 1938.

A precious piece of advice for this apostolate is for us to act in such a way, publicly and socially, that nobody need have any fear of asking us for the Sacrament of Penance; that is to say, for us always to maintain a truly priestly demeanor.⁴⁸

Advice to Give to Penitents

Obviously, not all penitents are going to be difficult cases, but we still have to adapt to each one the words we need to say, the advice we may give, and those things call for reflection as well as a profound union with our Lord.

Moreover, it often happens that penitents themselves ask questions about the gravity of a given sin, according to the circumstances in which they committed it, or else they ask for a few explanations, a little advice on this or that practical difficulty in their Christian life. And we have to do it quickly; we are not going to have very much time to think. We have to be able to give right away a response as complete, as perfect as possible, in order to support and encourage the penitent in his Christian life.⁴⁹

In general, souls are simple with us, even people who are extremely cultured. It is a beautiful thing to see. We are often edified by the ministry of confession. University professors, very cultured people, people of a certain age as well, with a certain experience, people who have an influence in society because of the post they hold, come to the confessional with the soul of a child. Those people are ready to receive the advice of the priest. Do not imagine they are asking for high mystical considerations or anything extraordinary, but simply that the priest enliven their faith a little bit, that he help them to be better by giving them some specific advice.

48 *Spiritual Journey*, p. 52.

49 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

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Souls are crying out for that. So it is up to us to develop that virtue of faith in them, that lively faith.⁵⁰

I think that we need to remind penitents – often, in fact – that it is not by the grace of the priest himself that sins are forgiven, but really by the grace of our Lord, by His blood. So the penitents ought to be grateful and at the same time aware of the gravity of sin, because the price for the Redemption of that sin was the blood of God Himself.⁵¹

Since contrition is essential to the reception of the Sacrament of Penance, it is often useful to insist on that quality of soul as well as on firm resolution. Contrition has to be interior and habitual if it is going to be effective. If it is lasting, that profound sentiment of regret for sin is going to shelter the soul from sinning further and maintain it in humility, in defiance of itself, and in a state of continual vigilance. That is the advice which our Lord was constantly repeating: “*Vigilate; Watch*” (*Mk. 14:38*).

Of course, satisfaction is made by the prayers or actions imposed by the confessor, but it should also be something continuous: in our daily prayers, in sacrifices and self-denial, in fasting and alms. The reality of the Mystical Body appears in all its efficacy in this question of satisfaction applied by indulgences. It is true, over the course of history, indulgences have been abused for financial gain. But these simoniacal abuses, which certainly are to be condemned, do not take away the precious reality. Indulgences do help us to pay back the debt which we still have toward God, before our particular judgment comes at the hour of death.⁵²

50 Spiritual conference, May 12, 1989.

51 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

52 *Spiritual Journey*, p. 52.

A Ministry Sanctifying for the Priest

A ministry which is well fulfilled is effective for the faithful, but also for the sanctification of the priest. I sometimes have the consolation of receiving letters from brother priests who are just beginning their apostolate and who write to me, “Ah! I imagined that in the apostolate I would quickly fall into dryness, into a poor spiritual state. On the contrary, I realize I am being encouraged by particular graces which God is giving me as I fulfill my apostolate and particularly that of confession.”

So the priest needs to have trust. If he exercises his apostolate the way God desires, he is going to receive particular graces allowing him to do good to those to whom he has been sent.⁵³

The most Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of the eternal Priest and thereby mother of priests in a very particular manner, pours these graces with abundance into the souls of faithful priests.⁵⁴

5. The Sacrament of Confirmation

The priest likewise has the mission to prepare children for the Sacrament of Confirmation. People tend to give too little importance to Confirmation whereas this sacrament is

53 The graces which the priest receives in his ministry are tied to the sacramental grace of Holy Orders. Indeed, “The [sacramental] grace is given that the priest may perform the duties of his state not merely validly but also holily, and that this spirit of holiness which is intended to characterize all his work may develop in unison with his growth in grace and charity demanded by the supreme commandment” (Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Priest in Union with Christ*, TAN Books, 2002, Part I, ch. 2).

54 Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986.

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more necessary than ever. It is a strengthening in the faith and in the grace of our Lord. It produces an outpouring of the Holy Ghost, who makes us truly fit for combat. The young people of today are faced with this combat of the faith which is more violent than ever and they have a real need for the Holy Ghost. It is true that there are different customs depending on the country as regards the age at which the sacrament is given. In Spanish countries, they tend to give it very early. Oftentimes, people even used to give it after Baptism. That might be a little bit early, but it was done because bishops considered that children needed not only to be born into the faith but to be confirmed in the faith. So they received Confirmation right away in order to benefit from the graces of the Holy Ghost from earliest childhood. It could more or less be justified, but it really is not the general custom of the Church.

On the other hand, it would be fitting to give Confirmation at the same time as the profession of faith because Confirmation ends with a profession of faith, by the recitation of the *Credo*, the *Our Father* and the *Hail Mary*. It would be quite appropriate to carry out both ceremonies at the same time because sometimes people give as much importance to what we call the Solemn Communion or the profession of faith as to the Sacrament of Confirmation. There may be a certain deformation there, a certain lack of appreciation of the Sacrament of Confirmation.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989. It is the custom in certain European countries for children around 12 years old to make a "Solemn Communion," renewing the promises made in their name at Baptism and professing their attachment to Jesus Christ. *Translator's note.*

6. The Sacrament of Marriage

Marriage Preparation

The preparation of fiancés for marriage is a part of the priest's apostolate. The Church has always asked priests to prepare people who were going to receive a sacrament. No one would imagine giving the sacraments to people who were unaware of what they were receiving. The Sacrament of Marriage is so important! It is a question of their whole life for those two people. Obviously, the priest is not going to be satisfied with simply asking them a few questions as a kind of formality before the marriage and just saying to them, "Come to confession the day before the wedding, then you get married, and that's all there is to it!" Not at all! The priest who is conscious of his duty needs to say to the fiancés, "Listen, if you do not have the chance to follow a retreat for fiancés, you absolutely have to come to see me. I will give you a few instructions on the nature of the Sacrament of Marriage, on the ministers of the sacrament, on the object of the contract, on the moral questions related to marriage," and so on. Immorality is so common today!

Unfortunately, even in the Church, it seems that people are afraid to speak of the sins against the holiness of marriage, to the extent that young married people may very well wonder if what they are doing is in conformity with morals or not. The priest therefore has to inform the future couple of what is allowed and what is forbidden in the use of marriage, all in remaining discreet, obviously, in his manner of saying things. There was a priest in the Vendée, who is dead now, Fr. Loizeau, who used to be at the French Seminary, who preached retreats to fiancés which were excellent in every way: spiritually, doctrinally and morally. He spoke of the importance of the Sacrament of Marriage, of the role of

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parents in the education of children. He gave a whole set of instructions which were really remarkable.

So marriage preparation is part of a priest's apostolate. We have to think about the fact that marriage is a sacrament. It is no small thing; it is the basis of society. The preparation of fiancés for the Sacrament of Marriage is therefore one of the important roles of the priest.⁵⁶

The Mutual Support of the Spouses

Here is a passage in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas which I have often used for sermons at weddings.⁵⁷ St. Thomas has two parts of the sentence which we have to hold on to. He says in an answer to an objection: We ought to love our neighbor "on account of what he has of God."⁵⁸ He also says in the body of the same article, "What we ought to love in our neighbor is that he may be in God."⁵⁹ These two considerations are marvelous because they show that I cannot love in my neighbor what is not of God. That is very important. You have to love one another, but with what kind of friendship? For what there is of God in you and so that God might be in you. You have to love your spouse so that he or she might be in God, and that is the true reason for your friendship, the depth of your friendship for one another. You must not love in him or in her what is contrary to God, what draws him away from God. Consequently, you must not foster your spouse's defects or sins or bad tendencies. You see how profound these two little expressions are. I can assure you that people who have heard that once really hold onto it; it does not take much to remember!⁶⁰

56 Conference to deacons, April 12, 1976.

57 *Summa Theologica*, II^a II^e q. 25, a. 1, ad 1.

58 *Amatur homo propter illud quod est Dei in ipso.*

59 *Hoc debemus in proximo diligere ut in Deo sit.*

60 Spiritual conference, Ecône, April 6, 1981.

Sanctification by the Family

Know that one of the principal roles of the priest is the sanctification of homes, the sanctification of families. You are going to be pouring out the grace of the sacraments in order to sanctify families. You are also going to be helping parents in the sanctification of their children and in the preparation of their children for their own mission, their vocation, whether it be a religious, a priestly vocation, or the vocation of Christian parents. That is an important role for the priestly ministry. And you will need to have faith in the supernatural means that ensure the sanctification of souls. It is by the grace of God that you are truly going to sanctify souls, the souls of all the members of a Christian home, the parents as well as the children.

Our Lord Jesus Christ willed to be born into a home. He could have chosen another means than that of coming to earth to save us. That is the way He chose. He willed to have a mother and He willed that mother to have a spouse, St. Joseph. He willed to be born into that home. He willed to live in that home for thirty years out of the thirty-three which He spent here below. What could be the meaning of our Lord's staying such a long time in a family? It is not because He needed it. He is the one who gave all of the qualities to the home of Mary and Joseph. He was God; He had nothing to receive from them. But He willed to remain in that home precisely in order to show the importance of the family, because it is from the family that children are born and that is where they prepare for the mission which they are going to have to carry out in the world, just as Jesus willed to prepare Himself for His mission in the midst of His family. What a great lesson!

Next, before the beginning of His public life, our Lord sanctified the waters of the Jordan and in so doing sanctified

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the water which would flow on the foreheads of all those who would be baptized throughout ages. It is another great lesson for Christian families and an invitation to baptize their children as soon as possible, to make them part of that family of the Holy Trinity, to make them already a part of the family of Heaven. Our Lord wished by these signs to manifest His will to sanctify the Christian family and to show that the family is the privileged means by which souls are prepared for their mission here below and in Heaven as well.

In the hymn for vespers of the feast of the Holy Family, at the sixth stanza, it says, "By grace, all of the virtues blossomed in your home. Ah! Make it so that our families might reproduce these virtues in their lives." That is what Christian parents need to ask of the Holy Family: that the virtues which they practiced might be honored in their homes, also.⁶¹

Marriage and the Eucharist

It is very important to think about the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ chose to work His first miracle at a marriage. The Church has always considered that presence of our Lord at the wedding feast of Cana as the sanctification of marriage and the manifestation of the institution of the Sacrament of Marriage.

You see with what delicacy our Lord shows what He is thinking when He changes water into wine. Our Lord certainly willed to announce the Holy Eucharist as well, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, transubstantiation. What a miracle! The miracle of bread changed into the body of our Lord and of wine changed into His blood is much more perfect, much more divine, much more extraordinary, than that of water changed into wine.

61 Sermon, Ecône, January 8, 1989.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

It is also a sign that the sanctification of marriage has to take place by the Holy Eucharist. People who are in the path of marriage have to have a great devotion to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to the Holy Eucharist. That is where they are going to draw the graces to fulfill their mission the way God wills, particularly in what concerns the education of their children.

Something painful for Catholic parents today is to feel very often that the Christian education of their children is slipping through their hands because of the scandals of the world. Those who ought to be protecting the family and helping parents to educate their children in a Christian manner are those who, on the contrary, are scandalizing them, leading them toward sin, turning them away from our Lord Jesus Christ. What sorrow, what tragic situations in families today! How many letters we receive from weeping parents, begging the seminary to pray for their children, for a son, for a daughter, who has completely turned away from God, who has completely abandoned all practice of religion, who is living an immoral life! And those are children from profoundly Christian families, profoundly Catholic families.

So today more than ever we have to remember that the graces of the Christian education of children come above all from the parents' own devotion to the Holy Eucharist. That is where their children in turn are going to have to draw all of the graces they will need in order to resist the scandals of the world.⁶²

Marriage and the Cross

When you bless a marriage, you must not forget to tell those who are uniting themselves in the bonds of marriage that the very meaning of the sacramental grace of Matrimony

62 Sermon, Ecône, January 9, 1977.

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is in the cross; it comes from Calvary. The sign of marriage is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Paul says it, that the birth of the mystical bride of our Lord took place through the piercing of the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. His holy Church, His mystical bride, was born of the wound of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as that union between our Lord Jesus Christ and His mystical bride was extraordinarily fruitful, producing innumerable children, in the same way, spouses have to love one another – if need be, give their lives for one another – that they, too, might transmit natural life and supernatural life, in order to people Heaven with elect. That is the sign of the grace of marriage.

Consequently, you have to tell spouses that, whenever you ascend the altar and they assist at Mass, the sacramental grace of their marriage is being renewed, is being revived by the example of Calvary, by that Eucharist which they are receiving, by that Victim who comes into them. That is what marriage is, and we must not forget it.⁶³

The strength of Christian marriage comes from the gaze of the two spouses upon the cross, upon the sacrifice. Christian couples know that marriage, too, is a way of the cross. Marriage has to be founded on the Sacrifice of the Mass, on the renewal of the sacrifice of the cross, and on Communion, which is a communion with the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Spouses who consider their marriage in that light are going to bear their difficulties together. On the contrary, when they are only looking for pleasure in marriage and refuse all sacrifice from the outset, they are bound to fall into sin. They do not want to hear the advice we give them because they find it too harsh: “Oh! That is too harsh – nowadays, you know, in the modern world,” and so on.

63 Sermon, Fanjeaux, July 7, 1979.

How can you expect to live a Christian life if you do not let the cross into your life? The Christian life is the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in us. Our Lord Jesus Christ crucified heals us of our sickness, our concupiscence and all our disorders, by His cross.⁶⁴

7. The Sacrament of Extreme Unction

One of the beautiful ministries which the priest should not forget is that of visiting the sick. We would like the greatest possible number of souls to go to Heaven, and if anyone is close to the next world, it is certainly those who are in the hospital, who are near death. This ministry to the sick and the aged is something beautiful because the priest is helping souls to win Heaven. That form of apostolate is not always very easy, especially today when so many people have not been practicing most of their life. Preparing these people for death is not simple because they only have a few weeks left to live. We have to go to see them often and try to give them the last sacraments.⁶⁵

How do we prepare souls to receive Extreme Unction? We have to count on the grace of God and then go to see them. These visits to the sick who are in the hospital are very important because they allow the people to get to know us and later, if they need the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, they will more easily accept it than if we offered it right away the first time. Actually, people are often terrified at the thought of Extreme Unction. Many people think of death right away as soon as we mention Extreme Unction. Often the people around the sick bed are more terrified than the sick person himself. All those things demand a preparation.

64 Conference to future deacons, Ecône, June 1, 1990.

65 Retreat, Ecône, September 1989.

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We have to take all that into account if we are going to carry out this ministry well.⁶⁶

Before talking to you about the effects of Extreme Unction, I would like to say a word or two about the matter of the sacrament and the people to whom it ought to be administered. I am going to read you what the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* says on this subject.

“Pastors should also teach what are the component parts of this Sacrament, its matter and form. These St. James does not omit, and each is replete with its own peculiar mysteries. Its element then, or matter, as defined by Councils, particularly by the Council of Trent, consists of oil consecrated by the Bishop. Not any kind of oil extracted from fatty or greasy substances, but olive oil alone can be the matter of this Sacrament.” The mention of olive oil is explicit in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*; I am not making anything up: “Thus its matter is most significant of what is inwardly effected in the soul by the Sacrament. Oil is very efficacious in soothing bodily pain, and the power of this Sacrament lessens the pain and anguish of the soul. Oil also restores health, brings joy, feeds light, and is very efficacious in refreshing bodily fatigue. All these effects signify what the divine power accomplishes in the sick man through the administration of this Sacrament.”⁶⁷

That is what the Church required at the time of the Council of Trent, which means it was required long before, as well. How is that we now disdain this millenary, this bi-millenary tradition, and say that we can use any oil we like?⁶⁸

Next, to whom should Extreme Unction be administered? That is a very important question because there are

66 Retreat for future deacons, April 1, 1976.

67 *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, ch. 25, § 1.

68 The necessity of the use of olive oil is certain (*cf.* Council of Florence, *Exsultate Deo*, November 22, 1439, *DS* 1324; *DZ* 700).

many errors on the subject. The Council of Trent stipulates: “Although instituted for the use of all, Extreme Unction is not to be administered indiscriminately to all. In the first place, it is not to be administered to persons in sound health, according to these words of St. James: ‘*Is anyone sick amongst you?*’ (Jas. 5:14). This is also proved by the fact that Extreme Unction was instituted as a remedy not only for the diseases of the soul, but also for those of the body.”⁶⁹

One of the effects of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction is therefore not only to give health back to the soul, to take away sins, but also to give health to the body. It is stated literally in the discourse of St. James, “*Is anyone among you sick? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up*” (Jas. 5:14-15), the Lord will comfort him even in his body.

Actually, it is common for sick people to experience a real renewal of health after the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. Many of those who have received it are still in good health today. But even if that state does not last, it is a way for God to allow a person who is dying truly to offer up his life, courageously and fully conscious.

In any case, one of the primary effects is to forgive sins. Another effect is to give peace of soul. “Nothing conduces more to a tranquil death than to banish sadness, await with a joyous mind the coming of our Lord, and be ready willingly to surrender the deposit entrusted whenever it shall be His will to demand it back. To free the minds of the faithful from this solicitude, and fill the soul with pious and holy joy is, then, an effect of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction.”⁷⁰

69 *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, ch. 25, § 2.

70 *Ibid.*, § 5.

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This peace of soul comes from the fact that the sacrament chases away the ideas, the imaginings, the fears, the anxieties which the devil tries to inspire in the soul. Before death, the devil tries to make the soul believe he is going to be damned. He does everything to give rise to emotions which could make the soul sin and put him back under his own power; but with Extreme Unction, “the soul of the sick is relieved and encouraged by the hope of the divine goodness, strengthened by which it bears more lightly all the burdens of sickness, and eludes with greater ease the artifice and cunning of the devil who lies in wait for it.”⁷¹

So, considering all the marvelous effects of this sacrament, as it also says in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, we should not wait until the sick person is actually unconscious, in a coma, before giving it to him.⁷²

The priest is truly a man who brings grace, who brings spiritual life, who brings supernatural life to souls. What a joy it is for the priest to give the sacraments! What a joy to baptize! What a joy to give our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion! The priest gives divine life to souls. Oh, but the life of a priest is a beautiful thing! It is so consoling! so sublime!⁷³

Let us ask the Mother of Jesus, who was filled with the Holy Ghost, to help us to better understand that our ministry is truly a spiritual ministry, one which communicates the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, to the souls toward whom we are sent, in order to transform them in the Holy Ghost and to prepare them for eternal life.⁷⁴

71 *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, ch. 25, § 5.

72 *Ibid.*, § 2. Easter retreat, Ecône, April 2, 1980.

73 Sermon, Ecône, June 30, 1979.

74 Sermon, Ecône, April 4, 1985.

CHAPTER 3

THE SHEPHERD OF SOULS

Finally, the third function of the priest is to govern souls, that is to say, to find every possible way of bringing them to Heaven. His role is to save souls. To do so, he has to guide them, show them the path. Our Lord said that He was the Way: “*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*” (*Jn. 14:6*). The priest is the way as well. In the footsteps of our Lord, he has to show the faithful the way to Heaven.¹

The pontifical says that “the office of the priest is to govern.”² Remember the parable of the Good Shepherd. It is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who said it: the shepherd goes before his sheep, he leads them. And because he is a true shepherd, the sheep hear his voice and recognize his voice and they follow him. He is going to lead them into pastures where they will find their nourishment. What a beautiful image: the Good Shepherd! On the contrary, the sheep do not know the hireling, the thief. They flee. The hireling, who does not know his sheep and who does not love them, scatters the flock and destroys the flock (*cf. Jn. 9:11-16*).

1 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 13, 1982.

2 *Sacerdotem oportet præesse* (Roman pontifical, admonition to ordinands).

THE SHEPHERD OF SOULS

You are going to be that good shepherd. You are going to lead souls to Jesus Christ. You are going to lead them to the altar so that they might find there the spiritual food for their soul.³

1. The Exercise of Authority

The apostolic role of the priest is a participation in the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is therefore important that the priest who participates in this authority, in this power, in this ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ before the faithful, exercise it in the manner that our Lord Jesus Christ wishes.⁴

Authority is not just something we receive, it is something we have to conquer by showing that it does not belong to us, that we know very well that it merely reposes in us; but also by the very fact that, when we are gone, the authority remains. Is it not true, indeed, that men who are nobly-born are happy to obey God and find it difficult to obey men? That means that in our own authority, men have to see only the authority of God, of our Lord.

The exercise of authority is something holy and precious beyond all things. There is no reality more disdained and travestied today, even in the Church. That is what explains the death of all of our societies, because authority is the formal cause of any society.

No other notion was so attacked at the Council as the notion of authority, of paternity. Tyranny then comes along to replace it, either a tyranny of people who abuse their authority or an impersonal tyranny of the greater number, which is even worse.⁵

3 Sermon, Econe, September 21, 1980.

4 Sermon, Econe, February 1, 1986.

5 Letter to the Members of the Society, Rome, April 11, 1979.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

We must not act in the apostolate giving the impression that this ministry comes from us, that it belongs to us, that we detain that authority because of our own virtue, in a way that makes us a little haughty and perhaps almost a little disdainful of the faithful. That is not at all a fitting attitude for a priest. It is not fitting in one who participates in the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We always ought to live thinking that these gifts do not belong to us. They have been given to us and we are going to have to render an account of how we have used them. We are not worthy of them, so let us not forget that we have to use these powers, certainly, with all the authority which is given to us, but also with all the humility we are supposed to have toward God and toward the faithful

While it is true that we ought to have a greater holiness than the faithful because we have received these gifts, we should not forget – and how many times have we seen it ourselves! – that the faithful may have even more abundant graces than we do: not graces of participation in the priesthood, but graces of holiness.

So let us not imagine that, because we have received these gifts, we are in a state of perfection and that we have rights which allow us to use and abuse our authority over the faithful. That is very important for spreading the graces of the Holy Ghost in the souls of the faithful and for the benefit which the faithful draw from them. These graces must not be limited, so to speak, hindered, diminished by the slightly prideful manner in which we give them.⁶

2. The Qualities of a Good Shepherd

It is good to read and reread the Gospel in order to see what advice our Lord gave to His apostles in their apostolate

6 Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986.

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and to see His own manner of acting. That is very important for the fruits of the apostolate.⁷

Remember that expression of our Lord: “*Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart*” (Mt. 11:29). He, the Creator of the world, the Master of the world, the King of the universe, said, “*Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*” Should we not be imitating Him when we ourselves are exercising the charge of shepherd? It is the best means of apostolate. Those who are meek and humble attract souls. It is not a question of abandoning the truth nor even of hiding it, but of enlightening souls with gentleness, with kindness, with humility, knowing we are sinners ourselves and therefore understanding the difficulties of those who are in sorrow, in pain or in moral disorder. The priest has to ask our Lord to give him this grace of meekness and humility in his apostolate in order to be a good, true shepherd.⁸

Paternity demands a constant union with God, with our Lord, both to be legitimate and to be effective. If only we could understand that!⁹

You are going to be guiding souls in their anxieties, in their difficulties, in their obscurities; you are going to be their light. “*You are the light of the world*” (Mt. 5:14). You are going to be their light in charity, in patience, in kindness, in gentleness, in longsuffering. You are going to listen to the souls who are coming to you to receive that light. You are not going to reject them. Be patient, be kind: be fathers. Act in such a way that when these souls draw near to you, they have the impression of drawing near to our Lord Jesus Christ and of receiving from Him the answer they needed.¹⁰

7 Sermon, Ecône, February 1, 1986.

8 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985.

9 Letter to the Members of the Society, Rome, April 11, 1979.

10 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1985.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE PRIEST OF JESUS CHRIST*

Have a merciful heart. Reach out to sinners. You are sinners also. We are all sinners; we all have need of the Redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are going to have to look with kindness on the souls who come to you. You are going to have to treat them like a father, like a mother, listening to them, welcoming them with kindness and with gentleness, with patience, in order to lift them out of their sins, to give them absolution, to prepare them to receive Jesus in the Eucharist with the best possible dispositions, so that grace might truly flourish in their heart and in their soul and blossom into Christian virtues.¹¹

You have to go in search of souls; you have to go visit them. You have to go console them in their trials, in their difficulties, and who does not have difficulties? You will have to go to see them with kindness, with patience, with humility, with charity. The faithful long to meet this heart of a father, this heart of a mother in the priest, to bind up their wounds: wounds of sin, wounds of trials, which we all have to go through, and to help them to carry their cross with our Lord Jesus Christ. You are going to be visiting the sick in the hospital. You are going to lead the dead to their final resting place. You are going to console the living. And thus you will be living out your priestly ideal in saving souls. What a magnificent life! What a sublime vocation!¹²

Our Lord said in the Gospel of the Good Shepherd, “*Other sheep I have who are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice*” – that is to say, “the truths of the faith which I wish to teach them” – “*and there shall be one fold and one shepherd*” (Jn. 10:16).¹³ This

11 Sermon, Econe, June 29, 1984.

12 Sermon, Montreal, November 10, 1985.

13 “The Good Shepherd said: ‘And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring’ (Jn. 10:16); and again, ‘See the countries for they are white already to the harvest’ (Jn. 4:35). How can a

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exhortation is absolutely contrary to modern ecumenism. Our Lord asks that we lead the sheep to Him. He does not say to leave them in the fold where they are but to lead them to Him. That is what a good priest is going to do. He is going to go out to look for the lost sheep, the sheep who have gone astray through error, through sin, in this world of sin, under the influence of the devil. He goes out to look for them with courage, with zeal, imitating the Good Shepherd.¹⁴

We have to have this heart of a shepherd who goes out to look for his sheep one by one and tries to bring them back – sometimes reaching the parents through the children, for example. We have the children in catechism class and we take advantage of the occasion to go visit the parents. A child says to you, “My mother is sick.” And you say, “Well then, I will go visit the mother because she is sick.” There are many tiny proofs of affection which we can show to people, which transform them and can bring them back to our Lord and to the practice of religion. That is the art of the shepherd.¹⁵

You have to make your own the interests of our Lord Jesus Christ. All your life, you are not going to be doing anything else than multiplying the members of the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that those who are part of the Church militant here below might one day be part of the Church triumphant, because ultimately there is no other reason why God created us and saved us. He created us and saved us so that one day we might participate in His divinity and in His glory in Heaven. If your life is entirely given over to that goal, then it is going to bear fruit.¹⁶

priest meditate upon these words and not feel his heart enkindled with yearning to lead souls to the Heart of the Good Shepherd? How can he fail to offer himself to the Lord of the harvest for unremitting toil?” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

14 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985.

15 Retreat, Ecône, June 1, 1980.

16 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1982.

You are going to draw after you many souls who are in need of your ministry, who are in need of your words, who are in need of your help in order to advance courageously toward Heaven and toward eternal life.¹⁷

3. Spiritual Direction

A Very Beautiful, Very Delicate Ministry

It is normal that people, young people for example, come to the priest for spiritual direction. Some of them have a vague desire of a vocation and are having trouble discerning exactly what God wants from them. Their confessor advises them to take a spiritual director to see, to study whether or not they have a vocation. Aside from the question of a vocation, young people often ask us to follow them spiritually. Likewise, other people in the world, especially those who are members of a third order, the Franciscan third order, the third order of the Society of Saint Pius X, Benedictine oblates, or else those who regularly go on retreat: all those people who are desiring a greater perfection know that they need to have advice, they need a certain orientation, certain directives in order to progress in the spiritual life. Next, among the religious who are in our priories, there are often some who ask for spiritual direction.

The direction of souls is a delicate role, which demands a certain number of virtues and qualities. This ministry is different from that of confession but it also supposes prudence and wisdom, as well as a knowledge of spirituality. You have been lucky enough to have a year of spirituality in the seminary. That year explained to you what the spiritual life is, the interior life, and the different stages of that life:

¹⁷ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

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the level of beginners, of those progressing and finally those who are perfect – levels corresponding to the purgative life, the illuminative life and the unitive life. It is necessary to know at least the essential elements of each of these stages in order to situate people a little bit and bring them from one stage to the next. Of course, these stages are not absolutely separate, as the great St. Teresa of Avila pointed out so well. Even when a person is in the unitive life, as she herself was, he always has to keep coming back to the purgative life.¹⁸ In fact, we always need to be regretting our sins. So it is not a question of saying, “That stage is over, so I can stop thinking about everything recommended for that age of the interior life.” No, because there is a certain spill-over of those different stages.

Moreover, when the priest is directing souls, he always has to act as a priest. He has to stay in the perspective of his priesthood and of the communication of graces and spiritual gifts, because these contacts, these conversations, especially if they are long, can have a certain danger. It is clear, it is obvious. The danger is in going beyond spiritual considerations and falling into a kind of familiarity or natural friendship which is no longer a spiritual friendship. And then everything goes downhill. My sixty years in the priesthood have given me the experience of those things. There is no reason to fear as long as we are acting according to the will of God and within the limits which God imposes. The grace of God intervenes as long as the priest is acting as a priest, fulfilling his priestly function.¹⁹

18 St. Thomas Aquinas says the same thing: “There is room for internal penance [which makes us weep for sins committed] even in the proficient and the perfect” (*Summa Theologica*, III^a, q. 84, a. 8, *ad* 2).

19 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

How Should We Guide Souls?

In spiritual direction it is more encouraging to motivate souls to acquire virtues, and by the very fact to avoid vices, than to concentrate on the strict application of the law, even though laws are absolutely necessary for guiding us in the proper use of our freedom.²⁰

The soul sees the acquisition of virtues as a magnificent ideal to be pursued. It is a fulfilling, enriching work of sanctification, undertaken by the help of the Holy Ghost, to attain the desired goal: to obey the will of God and accomplish the work of charity for God and for one another which has been entrusted to us, and so to merit eternal life.²¹

Souls can sometimes surprise us by their progress, by their zeal in frequenting the sacraments, by their prayer, their meditation. We could be tempted to think that all those people are not really ready, they are not really capable; but the grace of God is there. Obviously, if you look at things in a human way, it is true, certainly, that these souls seem to you insufficiently disposed, insufficiently adapted, but then you quickly see them making progress. You are going to be astonished at the particular graces they receive. That is the way it is. You have to believe in the grace of God and in the Holy Ghost.²²

Souls are going to come and confide in you and present to you their difficulties. You always have to tell them, “Look at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” which is the great mystery taught by the apostles, especially the apostle St. Paul. In that cross is the solution to all difficulties since the cross is charity; it is love carried to the point of sacrifice. All

20 *Spiritual Journey*, p. 24-25.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

22 Spiritual conference, February 9, 1991.

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problems find their solution in charity, and in charity even to sacrifice of self – even to death if need be.²³

Spiritual direction is therefore a beautiful ministry which can bring real help to the faithful and allow them to progress. The priest should not run after souls to try to direct them because he has many other occupations, but he should not fall into the opposite extreme either in systematically refusing to help. That is maybe a little bit what used to be lacking in our secular clergy, who had not gone through a year of spirituality or any kind of novitiate.²⁴

23 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1980.

24 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

CHAPTER 4

FOR A FRUITFUL APOSTOLATE

The missionary often feels weak and powerless at the sight of the immense work to be accomplished. The One who sent him to evangelize the poor never promised him an easy victory. So the missionary looks toward Him who will come to his aid in enlightening souls, infusing in them the fire of charity, as they lie there by the millions in the darkness of error and the slavery of vice.¹

1. The Priest: Instrument of Our Lord

To exercise a good apostolate, I think that the first thing is to pray and to ask God, through our Lord, that He might give us the sense of God. What does that mean? I do not say the knowledge of God, which is something different, but the sense of God. Even the devil has the knowledge of God, so that is not enough; we also have to have the sense of God.

The good God has a thought, a plan, an ideal which He pursues with fidelity, with continuity. You know what that

¹ Written in the guest book of the hospital of Bourguillon (*Œuvre des Malades*), August 7, 1952.

plan is by the faith, by theology, by the simple catechism, by the *Credo*. The *Credo* is the summary of the plan of God, which begins with the Holy Trinity and ends in eternal life. The priest has to step into this plan and for that he has to pray before deciding on the way to accomplish his ministry and organize his apostolate. He has to ask God for light so as not to make a mistake, so as not to step into that plan in a way which is not in accordance with God's desire.

Our Lord told us that "*we are unprofitable servants*" (Lk. 17:10). He does not need us, which is the first thing we have to realize. And yet, He wishes to make use of us. So we are going to have a role in that plan. For how long? We do not know, but however long it may be, a few years is little indeed compared to eternity, compared to thousands and thousands of years. Our action is going to be very limited.

However, since we are instruments of our Lord Jesus Christ, Word of God, God Himself, our action can have a considerable influence. That is why the most important thing is to be instruments truly joined to Him who is making use of us.² The instrumental power of God is going to pass through us and realize things which, without God, we would be incapable of realizing, like the artist who uses a chisel to bring a magnificent statue out of a piece of rock or out of a length of wood. His chisel is not really the cause of that magnificent statue, and yet it really is with the chisel that

² "This further point also is worthy of profound consideration, namely that men are but the instruments whom God employs for the salvation of souls; they must, therefore, be instruments fit to be employed by God. And how is this to be achieved? Do we imagine that God is influenced by any inborn or acquired excellence of ours, to make use of our help for the extension of His glory? By no means (...). There is, indeed, only one thing that unites man to God, one thing that makes him pleasing to God and a not unworthy dispenser of His mercy; and that one thing is holiness of life and conduct. If this holiness, which is the true supereminent knowledge of Jesus Christ, is wanting in the priest, then everything is wanting" (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

the power of the artist brought a statue out of the wood. It is the same thing with us! We are instruments.

We know that God is the source of all sanctification. So we have to stay united to Him in order to receive that instrumental strength from Him. We have to be flexible instruments, completely submitted to the will of God in order to become effective instruments in His hands.

You can tell that there is going to be a difference between the instruments, first of all because the gifts which God has given us are different. Each of us has different gifts, whether it be intelligence, or willpower, or natural, physical qualities... God is going to make use of them to infuse supernatural life, His own life into souls, and to bring them to eternal life, to the divine life. He is therefore going to make use of us.

So, when it comes to saving souls, do not imagine that the one who is most intelligent is the one who is going to do it best, but rather the one who is most holy.³ Yes, it will above all be the holiest, because the man who truly desires to work for the salvation of souls according to the plan of God has to place himself entirely in the hands of our Lord. To the extent that he resists God's influence, that he does not place himself completely at God's disposal, then obviously, to that extent any action he performs is going to be vain, and all the more so if he lives as an instrument nearly separated from God, doing things humanly and not supernaturally.⁴

3 "There is abundant evidence from every age that even the humblest priest, provided his life has the adornment of overflowing sanctity, can undertake and accomplish marvelous works for the spiritual welfare of the people of God; an outstanding example in recent times is John Baptist Vianney, a model pastor of souls" (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

4 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 8, 1991.

2. Living in Dependence on God

We have to be in a complete dependence on God in our apostolate. That is very important. I know, you are full of zeal, you have only one desire and that is to convert all the people around you, to bring them to our Lord; but in all that enthusiasm, there can be a great deal of purely human zeal, purely natural zeal. Be careful.

I think that there is a great danger in wanting to go faster than Providence, in saying, “Well, now, I am going to do this, I absolutely have to do that.” So I throw myself into it headfirst, with all my zeal, in order to make it happen. I do not say to myself enough, “Does God want it? Does He want it at this moment? Does He want it in this way, at that speed? Would He not want me to reflect a little more or else that I wait a little longer, so that His will might be accomplished more than my own? Because if I do my will, I run the risk of not doing God’s will.” Then afterwards I should not be surprised if the will of God has not been accomplished as well as I would have liked.

On the contrary, when I am aiming at this or that goal in my apostolate, if I can truly say, “I believe very sincerely that the moment has come. God wants me to do this; objectively, everything is showing me that it is the will of God. My superiors are not opposed. On the contrary, they are encouraging me. The Church is encouraging me, my faith is encouraging me. So there is every assurance that my enterprise is of God.”

If we are lacking these different guarantees, we are going to fall into subjectivism and we are going to end up persuading ourselves that the desire we have is actually the desire of God. You really have to be careful with that! There

have to be objective proofs of the will of God, not just purely subjective indications. One of those proofs is at least that the superior wants it, unless the superior himself is moving away from truth and objectivity in a very obvious manner, for example in opposing things that are of faith, as we are sadly witnessing right now in the Church.

There is a danger of falling into subjectivism, which is a form of Protestantism. Let us take care! Protestants are used to acting in that way. The conception of their project, the movement of their will they consider to be the will of God. I have sometimes noticed this behavior in people who have converted from Protestantism. When they want something, they are convinced that God wants it. Therefore, when someone is opposed to my project, he is going against the will of God and against Providence. It is very easy to substitute our own will for the will of God. So pay very close attention: that may be a fault which comes naturally to you, ultimately wanting to do “your will.”

In your apostolate, I give you this advice: see the objective will of God and not the subjective will of God, and do not walk before the will of Providence but follow after it. People ask you to open a chapel in such and such a place, where there are many faithful. You are already overworked. But then circumstances arise, showing you a few possible vocations, and then your superior comes and says, “That could be very good.” Little by little, the objective circumstances, beyond your own will and nearly against your will, are truly pushing you to do something in that domain. So in the end you make the decision to open the chapel. What you do is going to be blessed by God because it was not your personal will at the origin of the decision. It truly is God who showed you objectively His will, and even if your health has to suffer, well then, God will give you health. Have confidence. Since

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it truly is God who is asking you to do it, He will give you the means.

But when it is our own will we are doing, that is much more dangerous because then we are forcing the situation. We will not have the means to carry it out, or the health, or the organization. That apostolate will probably end up not being successful and then people are going to lose confidence. Ah! we wanted to do our own will and look what happens! Of course, that is not always the way things happen, but there is that danger.

So we have to pay attention. It is a question of prudence in the apostolate, but above all of dependence upon God. That dependence is absolutely indispensable. If we do not act in total dependence upon God, it is no longer He who is acting through us. And He has to be the one acting. According to the motto of St. Paul, "*For me, to live is Christ*" (*Phil. 1:21*).

We have to be in His dependence. And the goal of our apostolate will be to bring families into that same dependence. We are going to be teaching souls that dependence on God, that dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ, by the sacraments, by the grace of God, by prayer, by the accomplishment of the will of God. We are not charitable just because we feel a great deal of fervor. The test of charity is the accomplishment of the will of God; it is therefore total dependence upon God. Our Lord Himself told us, "*You are My disciples if you fulfill My commandments. If you fulfill My commandments, We will come to you and We will dwell in you*" (*cf. Jn. 14:23*). So it is very clear that holiness is dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

So the conclusion I have to give you is that we should never consider a function as our own, never attach ourselves personally to it and never seek to tie to our own person

5 Recollection, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, December 13, 1984.

the souls who are confided to us, but always make them understand that we are only workers in the vineyard who are employed for a time and then pass on. Here again we are deluding ourselves and we are being very presumptuous to think that we are the only ones capable of worthily fulfilling such and such a function, of accomplishing such and such a charge. People might tell us so! But let us thank God when He changes our function and keeps people from being attached to us personally, instead of being attached to Him, the one true Priest, the one true sanctifier, and some day the one reward of souls.⁶

Let us entrust ourselves to the most Blessed Virgin Mary. If there was ever one creature who was dependent upon our Lord Jesus Christ and upon God, it is certainly the most Blessed Virgin Mary. She had that attitude almost by nature, since she did not have original sin. So let us ask her to grant us discernment of the will of God.⁷

3. Accepting Trials with Generosity

Our Lord gave His apostles a glimpse of what their apostolate would be. He began by telling them, "*I am sending you forth like sheep in the midst of wolves*" (Mt. 10:16). What an expression, coming from our Lord Jesus Christ who is God, who knows all things! He begins by warning His apostles about the opposition which they were going to encounter and which might have discouraged them. He tells them about it in advance so that His disciples might stand firm in the faith before obstacles, before difficulties, before trials.

6 Letter to brother priests, La Croix-Valmer (Var), October 26, 1958.

7 Recollection, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, December 13, 1984.

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Then, for a long paragraph, St. Matthew quotes the words of our Lord to His disciples, in the tenth chapter: “*You will be persecuted by your friends, by your brothers. (...) I have not come to bring peace but the sword*” (cf. *Mt.* 10:21-34). Another terrible expression! I have not sent you in peace, but I have sent you where you will find the sword: separation in families, separation between parents and children, between brothers and sisters.

What does that mean? We are also a family; the Church is a family: separation in the Church, with our brothers in the faith who are going to persecute us, who are going to lead us before tribunals, our Lord says. But do not fear, do not think about what you are going to say before the tribunal, before the judges: the Holy Ghost will inspire you (cf. *Mt.* 10:17-22 and *Lk.* 21:12-18). What a lesson from our Lord! And I think that it has never applied as much as today.

The apostles showed us the example when they went off, sent by our Lord throughout the world. From the beginning of their apostolate, they were immediately persecuted, pursued, imprisoned, threatened with death by their brothers, by the members of the synagogue, by the leaders of the priests. St. James, brother of St. John, had his head cut off by his brothers. And the other apostles scattered throughout the world to go to preach the Gospel, and they all died martyrs.

St. Paul explains all of the cares he had over the course of his apostolate: cares of persecution, not only physical but also persecution from bad Christians. He says it to Timothy, for example (*I Tim.* 1:19-20). God had already said it through Isaiah: “*This people glorify Me with their lips but their heart is far from Me*” (*Is.* 29:13), and our Lord Himself reminds us of it (*Mt.* 15:8). So we have been warned.⁸

8 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 29, 1986.

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Our Lord and all of the apostles suffered. After them, what priest has not suffered from the situation where he finds himself? What priest has always been happy in his path, has never had difficulties, has never met with opposition? The priest is a man sacrificed. The priest is the man of the cross. That is why you are going to meet with difficulties wherever you go.⁹

Dear friends, you probably see for yourselves that there are going to be obstacles to your fervor, to your desire for holiness and perfection, which you may not suspect as you leave the seminary.

Sometimes it is after nearly ten years of priesthood, sometimes longer than that. There comes along a sort of weariness, a kind of boredom, a certain routine, I might say, and then *assueta vilescunt*,¹⁰ the things we do all the time cease to hold an interest, become automatic, which constitutes an obstacle to our desire for holiness.

There may also be a disappearance of sensible fervor, of sensible consolations in our union with God, in our ministry, in the accomplishment of the sacred actions which we have to perform every day.

Add to that perhaps a certain lack of success in our apostolate. We had hoped that the apostolate would produce more fruit, much more abundant, much more visible, and after a few years we realize that the effects are very limited; they are not as significant as we would have liked; souls are not becoming holy as quickly or as perfectly as we had hoped. So perhaps a certain disillusionment can cause a kind of apathy, a certain lukewarmness in carrying out the apostolate and in the exercise of the priesthood.

9 Retreat, Ecône, June 1, 1980.

10 The things we do habitually become base in our eyes, something like, "Familiarity breeds contempt."

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There may also be difficulties in the organization of your daily life. You had hoped when you left the seminary that your time of prayer would not only be respected but that maybe you could even add a half-hour of contemplation here or there. And here you are: not only can you not add anything but often you have to take away. We are pulled this way and that, by the demands of the faithful, by the requirements of organization and of the apostolate. So the fact of seeing that life of prayer and that life of community very often difficult to realize can also become an obstacle to your sanctification and the cause for a certain anxiety. We ask ourselves, "But if I go on like this, how will I ever make it? What will be the result in five years, six years, if I go on living with so little possibility of recollection or of truly leading a life of prayer and union with God?" So these suggestions come, which could just as much be from the Holy Ghost as from the devil: "Oh! I would do better to go off to a contemplative congregation, I would perhaps do better to ask for another post, one less important, less caught up in the world, a little more in the country, not in the city." Oh, yes, there are temptations like that. Personally, I think that they come more from the devil than from the Holy Ghost.

And then there can be other trials, for example changes of post. We were doing very well in one place, we said to ourselves, "In that place, I could really live out my priestly life, my little life program which I had set up for myself and decided on when I was in the seminary. It was good, I had an ordered life, a life of community which was fairly pleasant; I got along well with my brother priests. My apostolate was not too absorbing and allowed me to have a priestly life such as I had dreamed of when I was in the seminary. Now they have put me in a post which I do not like at all; I am not used to this kind of apostolate and I will certainly have a hard

time living out my priestly ideal the way I had planned,” and so on. So in our mind and in our heart we feel a little bit like our world had fallen apart; it is a trial. Those are so many obstacles to your serenity, to your peace in the apostolate.¹¹

When you are suffering, when you are having doubts, when you are hesitating, when you are going through trials, look at our Lord Jesus Christ. Look at Him in His Passion, look at His cross. He suffered, also. He bore the departure of all of His apostles. He bore courageously that total abandonment. And God gave Him His reward in raising Him from the dead. He rose again Himself, by the power of His divinity.¹²

Since we are the disciples of a Master who suffered and who died on the cross, there can be no thought of our living without sufferings and trials. But those trials are also graces. And the priesthood does also bring moments of profound joy.¹³

Indeed, I do not believe that there is any vocation which brings a more profound happiness, a more intimate happiness than the priesthood, even in the midst of trials – but on the condition that they live it fully, totally, and without mediocrity.¹⁴

Thus, in spite of the difficulties which priests meet with today in their apostolate, they do have consolations. There are still beautiful souls: souls who are seeking to be united to God; souls who have the faith. That is a great consolation for priests. It helps them to keep themselves in that faith which was taught to them in the seminary and in that desire for holiness and sanctification which is so necessary to priests.¹⁵

11 Recollection, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, December 13, 1984.

12 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1985.

13 Sermon, Ecône, February 11, 1979.

14 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1979.

15 Sermon, Ecône, December 4, 1988.

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May the Virgin Mary accompany them. May she be their mother. May she keep them in that love of our Lord Jesus Christ, a love undivided, profound, definitive, without any more hesitation, and may they truly be the apostles of Christ.¹⁶

¹⁶ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1985.

CHAPTER 5

PRAYER AND APOSTOLATE: ONE AND THE SAME DIVINE FIRE

After speaking of the priest as the man of God and of the priest's mission toward souls, we conclude with a few reflections on how these two aspects of a priest's life have to be intimately connected.

The active life always ought to lead to contemplation, and contemplation lead to a more fervent, more Christian life. If we understood things properly, there would not be any distinction in us between active life and contemplative life. It is one and the same thing; it is the same divine fire which ought to animate us. Whether we are praying, or acting, or living, or sleeping, or eating, whatever we are doing, we need to do it for the glory of God; that is what St. Paul tells us (*I Cor. 10:31*).¹

1. The Dangers of Too Human an Apostolate

Priests little by little get used to being completely devoured by their apostolate, by visits, by occupations, to

1 Sermon, Weissbad, October 11, 1975.

the point of no longer doing their exercises of piety. Soon they are not even praying. We get used to not praying, so much so that it becomes difficult to pray. That is when the situation starts to be very serious.²

When they are supposed to be praying, those priests start thinking, “Oh! There is still something else I have to go do.” Someone who reaches that point would do well to go on an eight day retreat and take himself in hand because he is starting to slide. He lives in the world, he lives for other people, of course. He is very zealous, very much appreciated. He may be very generous, very good with the children. Everyone loves him. So he lets himself get carried away, he lets himself be dragged along. On all sides, people are asking for him to come. He never says no and then, all of a sudden, no more prayer! He says his breviary quickly, when he can squeeze it in, and sometimes he replaces it by some other prayer. He says his Mass, of course, but he is no longer recollected, he no longer has that desire to pray. Prayer becomes a burden. If someone says to him, “Listen, you need to stop, go do your meditation,” fine, he goes and sits down, he goes to do it out of obedience, but he no longer knows how to pray, he no longer knows how to meditate, he no longer has that contact with God and with supernatural realities. He has become so absorbed by the material, external side of his ministry that he has lost sight of the essential, which is intimate union with God. Of course, he may find it easy to

2 “Woe then to the priest who so far forgets himself that he abandons the practice of prayer, rejects the nourishment of spiritual reading and never turns his attention inwards upon himself to hear the accusing voice of conscience. Neither the festering wounds on his conscience, nor even the tearful pleas of his Mother the Church, will move such an unfortunate priest until those fearsome threats come upon him: ‘Blind the heart of this people, make dull their ears, and close their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and be converted and I should heal them’ (Is. 6:10)” (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

preach; people like him; apparently he is doing a good job fulfilling his ministry; but he is in the process of emptying himself out completely. That is very serious – very, very serious. How many have fallen in that way! Because there is no lack of opportunity for us to turn away from prayer and plunge into our ministry.³

Never separate prayer from your apostolate. Do not imagine that you will have a fruitful apostolate if all you think of is going from house to house visiting the souls who wish to see you, if you have not prayed first. People should feel, see, observe that the priest is first and above all a man of prayer, a man of the Sacrifice of the Mass. It is indispensable. That is where your zeal should be first directed. Take care not to let yourselves be tempted by that apostolate of action, which ends up killing, suffocating the life of prayer, and ultimately destroys the apostolate.⁴

Do not say, “What are you telling us? What do expect? After all, I am an apostle; I was born to dedicate myself to helping people!” Yes, but your reasoning is false. If you really want to help people you have to pray first, to ask our Lord to help you in your apostolate, and then you will do a much better job. You are not the one preparing those souls. Sometimes you run into people who are not practicing Catholics or who have difficulties. So who is going to convert them? It is our Lord, not you. There is where our Lord will give you the grace if you are men of prayer. If you no longer pray, those graces will no longer come. You will step into your apostolate and find many closed doors and much difficulty in preparing hearts. That is something you have to very careful about.⁵

3 Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 29, 1984.

4 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 2, 1977.

5 Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 29, 1984.

Alas, so much of the clergy today is abandoning prayer. You will not be among them, you will not betray the mission of the Church, you will be sons of the Church because you will pray. We need prayer now more than ever. The faithful need to see you praying, to see you believing in our Lord Jesus Christ, to see you continuing the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶

If we have that sense of prayer and if we are intimately convinced that our first apostolate is to pray, maybe we will be more faithful in getting up in the morning to make our meditation, to say our breviary in the calm of those first hours of the day. And we will be more generous in living a disciplined life, knowing how to end our outside apostolate no later than ten in the evening, so as to get enough rest and not spoil our apostolate of prayer and meditation.⁷

So you need to ask God always to maintain in you that profound desire for prayer and to unite you to Him, and you need to ask it especially of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.⁸

2. The Mass: Source of a True Apostolate

The priest, by nature, by institution and by the will of our Lord, is the one who, in His name and as His minister, offers to God a sacrifice of praise, of thanksgiving and of propitiation for the sins of men. He applies all the graces of salvation by way of the sacraments and by this Eucharistic sacrifice which is none other than the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It is in preaching the good news of salvation and in communicating grace by the sacraments, particularly by the Eucharist, that the priest strengthens the Mystical Body of our Lord. That is the Catholic priest.

6 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1982.

7 Letter to brother priests, La Croix-Valmer, October 26, 1958.

8 Spiritual conference, Ecône, May 12, 1989.

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He is, essentially and above all, the one who ascends the altar and offers the divine Victim substantially present on the altar.⁹

When he has offered the Holy Mass, a priest may say that he has already completed eighty percent of his priestly ministry for the day. Indeed, it is our Lord above all who works our Redemption and not the priest himself, who is only an instrument.

Once the priest has offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the morning, all of the graces of his apostolate flow from there.¹⁰ Even if he has no apostolate to perform for one reason or another, if he is sick or in a country where unfortunately the apostolate is not very fruitful, well then, he has the consolation of having offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and of having spread graces in the measure willed by God.¹¹

All that the priest does over the course of the day is either the consequence of the Sacrifice of the Mass which he has offered or a preparation for the Sacrifice of the Mass. At catechism, the priest teaches the faith to children. He wants to lead them to Jesus Christ. But where is Jesus Christ? He is present essentially in the Eucharist. So ultimately the priest is preparing children to receive the Eucharist.¹²

To live the Mass is the support, the joy and the happi-

9 Conference, archives of the seminary of Ecône.

10 "When a priest celebrates the Eucharist, he honours God, and gives joy to the angels; he edifies the Church, helps the living, obtains rest for the departed, and makes himself a sharer in all good things" (*The Imitation of Christ*, bk. IV, ch. 5, § 3). "In the Eucharistic Sacrifice, when 'in the person of Christ,' he consecrates bread and wine, which become the Body and Blood of Christ, the priest can draw from that same fountain of the supernatural life the inexhaustible treasures of salvation and all those helps which he needs for himself personally and for the fulfillment of his mission" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

11 Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, October 28, 1978.

12 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1975.

ness of the priest. I think that a priest who has been able to celebrate his Holy Mass in the morning has practically fulfilled his whole day. His day is no more than an application of the Sacrifice of the Mass. Everything ought to come from the Sacrifice of the Mass. Imagine having a priesthood without any Mass: it is hard to see what kind of apostolate they could carry out. It really is the Mass which is at the heart of our apostolate because our apostolate is first and foremost supernatural: it is first and foremost the application to souls of the graces of our Lord. It is not we who convert souls. We are incapable of changing the mind, the heart, the interior dispositions of a person's soul. We can talk for years on end; if the grace of God is not there transforming it, that soul is going to be deaf to our entreaties. Whereas if we think that, in the morning, our Lord has in a way placed in our hands all the graces of the Redemption, of His Calvary, of His sacrifice, then we go out toward souls with all those graces. We can be certain that our apostolate will have a result, even if apparently we do not see it. The graces of our Lord will descend into souls. But without the sacrifice of the cross, source of all grace, our apostolate is going to be vain!¹³

The priest has to live his Mass every day and every moment of his life. He has to continue his Mass throughout his day, that is to say, continue the teaching which he gives by the Epistle and the Gospel; continue the life of sacrifice which he accomplishes upon the altar by the presence of our Lord, who is Himself continuing His sacrifice of the cross and so proving to us His love.¹⁴

¹³ Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 25, 1975.

¹⁴ "Being in such close contact with the divine mysteries, the priest cannot but (...) feel inspired to assimilate his life to his exalted dignity, and orient his life towards that sacrifice in which he must needs offer and immolate himself with Christ. Consequently, he will not merely celebrate Holy Mass, but will live it out intimately in his daily life" (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

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The true priest loves souls, gives himself to them, sacrifices himself for them for the love of God. He gives himself to souls as he gives them the Eucharist. He gives them Jesus by teaching and by Holy Communion. All of his priestly life thereby becomes a Mass. The holy priest lives his Mass and brings all those around him to live it, as well. He leads them to understand that all of our lives ought to be a Mass, a total oblation, a continual sacrifice of ourselves, out of love of God and out of love of neighbor. That is the ideal of the true priest, an ideal which brings him a lasting joy and peace of soul.¹⁵

3. At the School of Dom Chautard

The first quality you have to foster is zeal for God. Do not be one of those activists who only think of the apostolate in a human way, an active way. Remember that your apostolate is first and foremost one of prayer. The apostle first has to go down on his knees. He first has to pray, honor the Lord whom we wish to preach. We have to manifest our faith and our adoration toward the God whom we are preaching.¹⁶

They are living an illusion, as well as a certain presumption, who assign a greater importance and apostolic value to their various works or to their different contacts, conferences, or visits, than they assign to prayer, the Holy Mass, the word of God, and the sacraments.¹⁷ The apostolate

15 Sermon, Le Pointet, July 13, 1980.

16 Sermon, Econe, February 2, 1977.

17 "Some of those who find 'recollection of the heart' (*Jer.* 12:11) a burden, or entirely neglect it, do not seek to disguise the impoverishment of soul which results from their attitude, but they try to excuse themselves on the pretext that they are completely occupied by the activity of their ministry, to the manifold benefit of others. They are gravely mistaken. For as they are unaccustomed to converse with God, their words completely lack the inspiration which comes from God when they speak to men about

is above all the work of Christ and of His Spirit, a mysterious and supernatural work.¹⁸

Here is what Dom Chautard says in *The Soul of the Apostolate*, that excellent little book which has done so much good and continues to do so for anyone who reads it.

“With what insistence [our Lord] strives to impress upon the minds of the Apostles the fundamental principle that HE ALONE, JESUS, IS THE LIFE, and the consequence that, in order to *share* in that life and *communicate* it to others, they must be grafted on to the God-man.”¹⁹

That is why Dom Chautard then turns on what Cardinal Mermillod calls “the heresy of good works.”

“Feverish activity taking the place of God; grace ignored; human pride trying to thrust Jesus from His throne; supernatural life, the power of prayer, the economy of our redemption relegated, at least in practice, to the realm of pure theory: all this portrays no merely imaginary situation, but one which the diagnosis of souls shows to be very common, though in various degrees, in this age of naturalism, when men judge, above all, by appearances, and act as though success were primarily a matter of skillful organization.”²⁰

There you have a witness to the need for faith in God, in the Holy Trinity, in our Lord Jesus Christ, which ought to make up the whole atmosphere of our apostolate. If we become too caught up in the organization of works, in

God or inculcate the counsels of the Christian life; it is as if the message of the Gospel were practically dead in them. However distinguished for prudence and eloquence, their speech does not echo the voice of the good Shepherd which the sheep hear to their spiritual profit; it is mere sound which goes forth without fruit, and sometimes gives a pernicious example to the disgrace of religion and the scandal of the good” (St. Pius X, *Hærent Animo*).

18 Letter to brother priests, La Croix-Valmer (Var), Oct. 26, 1958.

19 Dom Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, The Abbey of Gethsemane, 1946, p. 9, emphasis in the original.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

material affairs, duties, and contacts, and we abandon that atmosphere, then little by little the supernatural aspect of our work is going to disappear. We are still going to be ministers, but a little like office-workers in the Church.²¹

Dom Chautard quotes the words of Fr. Timon-David, who was in charge of children, youth centers, young people, and founded all sorts of groups and organizations. Here is what he says: “We rejoice to recall the emotions in our heart (as a young priest) on hearing the latter speak as follows:” (Dom Chautard is speaking of Fr. Timon-David) “‘Bands, theatricals, lantern-lectures, movies – I do not condemn all that. When I started out, I too, thought no one could do without them. And yet they are nothing but crutches, to be used when there is no alternative left. However, the further I advance, the more my end and my means become supernatural because I see more and more clearly that every work built upon a merely human foundation is bound to collapse, and that only the work that aims at bringing men closer to God by the interior life, is blessed by Providence. Our band-instruments have been relegated to the attic for a long time, and yet the work is going on better than ever before. Why? Because, thanks be to God, my priests and I see much clearer and straighter than before, and our faith in the action of Christ and of grace has increased a hundred percent.’”²²

All that is very beautiful and it is perfectly true! So let us take the example of those who went before us and who truly understood how the apostolate works.²³

21 Spiritual conference, February 8, 1991.

22 Dom Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, p. 52-53.

23 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 9, 1991.

4. The Secrets of Perseverance

In the face of all of the trials he is to bear over the course of his ministry, what action should the priest take in order to remain fervent throughout his priestly life?

If we want young priests to be able always better to serve the Church, they have to keep themselves in that spirit of faith and of holiness in which they were brought up in our seminaries. With what consolation, with what joy, we assist at the first Masses of these young priests, whose hearts are entirely turned toward the glory of God, the salvation of souls and the good of the Church. But they have to persevere in that desire; that quality of mind and heart has to endure; it has to remain, in spite of trials, in spite of the weight of the day, in spite of the difficulties of the apostolate. They must not let themselves be taken in by an activism which would make them lose their piety, their sense of prayer. All those things are very important for the Church.²⁴

Priests not only have to remain faithful to the Church of all time, but they also have to keep the desire for sanctity; they cannot let themselves be carried away by a certain activism which would decrease the value of their interior life; they must not lose themselves trying to save others, but rather save themselves as they are saving others.²⁵

The success of our apostolate, seen or unseen, has to matter little to us. The greater or lesser number of souls has to not make us anxious. St. Francis de Sales said, “A single soul is a whole diocese.”²⁶ Our apostolate will be strictly

24 Sermon, Ecône, January 7, 1982.

25 Sermon, Ecône, March 31, 1983.

26 St. Francis de Sales, *Une Pensée par Jour (A Thought for Every Day)*, Éditions Clovis, 2003, p. 20.

supernatural in all its motives if it is willed exclusively for the glory and the reign of our Lord. It is the condition *sine qua non* of real efficacy in our apostolate.²⁷ That is going to be the secret of our zeal, one which never grows tired, is never discouraged by trials or failure, by obstacles or opposition, even if they come from our brothers.²⁸

Our predecessors have given us the example of perseverance to the end and our Lord expects that perseverance of us: “*He who perseveres to the end will be saved*” (Mt. 10:22; 24:13). Today more than ever, priests have to hold onto that word of our Lord. If they persevere to the end in faith and Christian virtue, according to the teaching which they have received in the Tradition of the Church, according to the most beautiful examples which the saints and martyrs have left them, then they will be saved, and they will draw after them many souls, carried along by their words, by their courage and by their virtue. Today more than ever, the faithful need priests who are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.²⁹

Let us therefore seek to be faithful, with all our soul, with all our heart, so that one day God might say to us, “*Blessed servant, so good and faithful. Because you have been faithful over small things, I will set you over great things for all eternity*” (cf. Mt. 25:23). So our Lord has promised us an eternal reward if we are faithful. Let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary to give us that grace of final perseverance and of fidelity.³⁰

27 “Do not allow yourselves, therefore, to be carried away by the immoderate desire for success, do not allow yourselves to be dismayed if, after assiduous labor, you do not gather the desired fruits. ‘One sows, another reaps’ (Jn. 4:37)” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

28 Letter to members of the Society, Christmas 1976.

29 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 29, 1986.

30 Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1975.

The most Blessed Virgin Mary was also faithful to Jesus to the end, all the way to martyrdom, all the way to the piercing of her heart by a sword. She did not abandon Him. All of the apostles abandoned Him and turned toward the world, all except for St. John. Alas! How many priests leave our Lord to go into the world themselves! As for us, let us strive to remain close to the Virgin Mary, to our Lady of Compassion, in order to share in the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His Church.³¹

In Book One, we followed the path of the seminarian from the birth of his vocation all the way to the priesthood. Then, after defining the priesthood, we considered the priest in his relation with God and accompanied him in his apostolic ministry. These texts only contained a few allusions to the decadence of the priesthood. It is now time to study in what this decline consisted, point out its causes and discover the remedies.

31 Sermon, Ecône, June 26, 1987.

BOOK THREE

**THE CRISIS OF THE
PRIESTHOOD AND THE SOCIETY
OF SAINT PIUS X**

PART 1

THE CRISIS OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Many opinions and writings of all sorts, especially coming from men of the Church, are advising us to open ourselves to the world. This modern current would like to turn the priest into something secular, make him like other men, and consequently take away any difference or distinction between the world and himself.¹

1 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1974.

CHAPTER 1

A NEW CONCEPTION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

1. Reforms That Touch the Heart of the Priesthood

Because the priest is defined by the sacrifice, any attack on the sacrifice calls into question the very identity of the priest. The liturgical reform of the Mass and of the ordination rite after the Council touches this sacrificial aspect of the priest. It therefore has consequences for the priest's own notion of his priesthood.

The New Mass: A Priest Without a Sacrifice?

If the most venerable rite of Mass is not enough, by itself, to bring the priest to live of sacred realities, then certainly an impoverished and equivocal Mass can only weaken his priestly spirit. The so-called Mass of Paul VI has indeed obscured the sacrificial aspect of this liturgical act.

We have to recognize that the true notion of the priesthood and the very *raison d'être* of the priest had begun to disappear from the minds even of priests well before the Council. Alas! how many priests celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass without knowing anymore

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exactly what they were doing, going through the motions, like office-workers of the Church, whereas all the greatness, all the *raison d'être*, all the joy, all the consolation, all the strength of the priest is there in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass! If the priest is no longer aware of those things, he is no longer really a priest.

Instead of returning to those fundamental notions of the Catholic faith concerning the holy mysteries, they wanted to introduce a completely new spirit. Far from giving the holy mysteries back their true meaning, they started redefining them to be like the Protestant 'supper,'¹ and so destroyed everything in them that was mysterious, everything great, divine and sacred.²

If we change the liturgy profoundly then we change the priesthood, because the priesthood is entirely oriented toward the liturgy. That is the very definition of the priesthood: the priest is made for the sacrifice. If we start to denature the sacrifice, we denature the priest, and I would go even farther and say that if we start to destroy the notion of the Sacrifice of the Mass, there is no more Catholic Church because the Mass is the mysterious treasure, the unfathomable, ineffable treasure, which our Lord gave to the Church.³

So we have to enter into this sacrifice ourselves, and that I think is what makes the profound difference between the *Novus Ordo* and the Mass of all time: the *Novus Ordo* is not presented as a propitiatory sacrifice, at least not officially, in its definition.⁴

1 Cf. *The Mass of All Time*, pp 187-88; 226-230; 244-56; 302.

2 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1980.

3 Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1974.

4 Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 28, 1988. In the first edition of the introduction to the new missal, the *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani* of April 6, 1969, the Mass is defined as follows: "The Lord's Supper or Mass is the sacred assembly [also: 'synax': meal; banquet] or congregation of the people of God gathering together, with a priest

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Men of the Church have kept silent on these fundamental truths: the sacrifice of our Lord, sanctifying grace in our souls, and the life of Jesus in our souls. Protestants deny these truths. So to make them happy, they took out of all of our rites, all of our liturgy, whatever expressed those fundamental truths of our Catholic faith.⁵

There is almost a transcendental relation⁶ between the priesthood and the Mass, because the priest is the one who offers the sacrifice and the sacrifice cannot be offered without a priest. We cannot conceive of a sacrifice without a priest nor can we conceive of a priest without a sacrifice. So there is an essential relation there. Why have so many priests abandoned their priesthood, if not because they really were wounded to the heart by the destruction of the Sacrifice of the Mass? It is obvious. The facts are there, showing us that all faith in the essential dogmatic realities of the Mass is being lost.⁷

In the Catholic religion it is the priest who celebrates Mass; it is he who offers the bread and wine. The notion of a “president” was borrowed directly from Protestantism. The vocabulary follows the change of mentality. Before, we would have said, “Monsignor Lustiger will celebrate a Pontifical Mass.” I am told that at Radio Notre Dame, the expression they now use is, “Jean-Marie Lustiger will preside at a concelebration.”⁸

presiding, to celebrate the memorial of the Lord. For this reason Christ's promise applies supremely to such a local gathering of the Church: *‘When two or three come together in My name, there am I in their midst’* (Mt. 18:20) (*Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979*, transl. Intl. Committee on English in the Liturgy, Liturgical Press, 1982, § 1397: GI art. 7, note 4; see also Archbishop Lefebvre, *The Mass of All Time*, pp. 222-25).

5 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, June 27, 1982.

6 We may define a transcendental relation as an essential relation.

7 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 19, 1982.

8 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 22.

The New Ordination Rite

An attentive reading of the new ordination rite reinforces the idea that the priest is not first one who sacrifices, even though his principal mission is indeed to offer the holy sacrifice to God.

The ritual, before the reform, had the bishop say, "Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate Mass for the living as well as for the dead, in the name of the Lord." He had earlier blessed the hands of the ordinand in pronouncing these words: "That whatsoever they shall bless may be blessed, and whatsoever they shall consecrate be consecrated and sanctified." The power conferred on the new priests was expressed without ambiguity: "May they change by a holy benediction bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Thy Son for the worship of Thy people." Now the bishop says, "Receive the oblation of the holy people to offer it to God." The new priest is more a go-between than one who possesses a ministerial priesthood, one who sacrifices. It is a completely different concept. In the Holy Church, the priest was always considered to have received a character by the Sacrament of Holy Orders.⁹

Pius XII had said that it was forbidden under pain of mortal sin to do away with the tradition of the instruments.¹⁰ Now they have changed the words spoken by the bishop at the tradition of the chalice and the paten.¹¹ Why would they have eliminated those words? Certainly, the power

9 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

10 We commonly give to a liturgical object, such as the paten or the chalice, the name of *instrument*. *Tradition* is a liturgical gesture by which the bishop has the ordinand touch the instruments of his ministry, here the chalice containing the wine and the paten containing an unconsecrated host

11 Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 28, 1988.

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has already been communicated in the essential rite of the imposition of hands with the consecratory preface, as defined by Pius XII.¹² Yet, this pope asked that nothing be changed in the accompanying rites of ordination.¹³

Another change took place in the rite of priestly ordination: the elimination of the imposition of hands at the end of Mass, signifying the power to confess.

The Church, in Her Tradition, wished to keep the words which our Lord spoke to His apostles in giving them the power to absolve. Here are those magnificent words: “Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained” (Jn. 20:22-23).

We can understand very well why the Church treasured that ceremony and why She has the bishop say the very words of our Lord. The bishop pronounces these very important words over the priests at the end of their ordination so that they might be aware of the power which they possess to forgive or retain sins. This power of the priest is an extremely important power of judgment. It is this power which makes up the essence of the Sacrament of Penance. In the Sacrament of Penance, the person is coming before a tribunal. The priest is the judge, that is to say, he gives a sentence of guilty or not guilty.¹⁴

12 Pius XII, *Sacramentum Ordinis*, November 30, 1947. This text was published in order to do away with any doubts as to the matter of the Sacrament of Holy Orders; a text from the Council of Florence (1439) could have led to believe that the essential matter was the tradition of the chalice and not the imposition of hands.

13 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, 1989.

14 “If anyone says that the sacramental absolution of the priest is not a judicial act, let him be anathema” (Council of Trent, 14th Session, November 25, 1551, *Canons on the Sacrament of Penance*, can. 9, *DS* 1709; *DZ* 919).

Today, they have taken out of the ceremony of priestly ordination that imposition of hands with the words which our Lord Jesus Christ Himself uttered in giving the apostles the power to forgive sins.

It does not mean that the priest ordained according to the new rite does not have that power, because ordination gives him all of the priestly powers, if the words are valid.¹⁵

However, it is unacceptable for the conciliar Church to have done away with such a thing.¹⁶

2. A Systematic Desacralizing of the Priesthood

Common Priesthood and Ministerial Priesthood

If the priesthood is not oriented above all toward the altar of sacrifice, then it is no longer necessary to distinguish so clearly between clerics and laymen. That is why theologians have emphasized the common priesthood,¹⁷ diminishing the specificity of the ministerial priesthood. This thesis, which takes its inspiration from Protestantism, is at the source of certain errors of Vatican II.

The Church has always taught that there is an essential distinction between the priesthood of priests and the priesthood of the faithful, the second being called priesthood by analogy. The reason priests receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders is that they are distinct from the faithful: because

15 The essential words of the form of the Sacrament of Holy Orders in the Latin rite are: "We beseech Thee, Almighty Father, invest these Thy servants with the dignity of the priesthood (...) that they may hold the office, the second as to importance, which they have received from Thee," that is the say the priesthood of the second rank after the episcopacy.

16 Ordination retreat, Montalenghe, June 23, 1989.

17 Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity*, Chapman, 1957; see for example p. 173, 175-180, and 181-221. On the contrary, the Catholic doctrine is expressed by Fr. Berto (*La Pensée Catholique* 11, 1949, p. 31-46).

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they have been chosen from among the faithful to receive that particular distinction of the three powers.¹⁸

The unchanging doctrine of the Church is that the priest is invested with a sacred and indelible character: “*You are a priest for eternity*” (Ps. 109:4; Heb. 5:6). Whatever he may do, before the angels, before God, in all eternity, he will remain a priest. Even if he throws away his cassock, starts wearing a red pullover or any color he likes or commits the most awful crimes, it will not alter anything. The Sacrament of Orders has made a change in his nature.¹⁹

Luther considered the distinction between clergy and laity²⁰ to be “the first wall raised up by the Romanists.” Thus, all Christians are priests, and the pastor is only exercising a function in presiding at the Evangelical Mass.²¹

They would like to have us believe that the priest is a man among other men and that he has no reason to stand out, to the extent that the very idea of the priesthood is now disappearing. The priesthood of the priest is being blurred into the priesthood of the faithful.²²

To be sure, *Lumen Gentium* distinguishes between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood of the priests (cf. § 10). Fine. But then the text includes long pages that speak of the priesthood in general, confusing the two, or making of the priesthood of the priests seem to be one function among others of the common priesthood (cf. § 11).²³

18 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985. These three powers: to teach, to govern and to sanctify, which were discussed above, were given by our Lord to the apostles and passed on to the Church who exercises them through the ministry of the pope, the bishops and the clergy.

19 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 55.

20 This distinction between clerics and laymen is of divine law: CIC, can. 107.

21 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 24.

22 Sermon, Ecône, February 2, 1974.

23 *They Have Uncrowned Him*, p. 171.

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It is always the same ambiguity we find throughout the Council, and it is disastrous because people can say, "But look, we are proclaiming the truth!" Yes, you certainly do proclaim the truth, but then in the pages that follow you act as though you had not affirmed that truth and everything is mixed together. So those who want to teach like Protestants can also base themselves on the writings of the Council.²⁴

Theologians like Hans Küng deny the existence of a priesthood specially reserved to certain individuals. The new theology follows the example of the Protestants and minimizes the priesthood of the priest while exalting that of the laity. There is no denying that it was already a tendency in Vatican II, whose texts are equivocal and allow many false interpretations.

Even though such a thesis is contrary to all of Catholic Tradition, it is still openly taught by modern theologians. The liturgical reform helps reinforce that tendency in authorizing an exaggerated participation of the laity in a ministry reserved up until now to the priest alone, in virtue of his consecration.

These practical measures helping to blur any distinction between the priest and the faithful render useless and ineffective certain verbal reactions on the part of the Holy Father and the synod. Moreover, please notice that even in these protests, the emphasis is typically on evangelization and not on the sacrificial, sacramental ministry, which is also just like the Protestants. There is no longer any defense of the priesthood and of its sacred character in view of the offering of the sacrifice.²⁵

We have seen a bishop, not "suspended," write, "The priest is not somebody who does things that the ordinary

24 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 30, 1982.

25 Conference, archives of the seminary of Ecône.

faithful don't do; he is not 'another Christ,' any more than any other baptized person." This bishop was merely drawing the conclusions from the teaching that has prevailed since the Council and since the liturgical reform.²⁶

As the emphasis is placed on the common priesthood rather than on the distinction between clerics and laymen, many signs which used to mark that distinction have now been eliminated: abandoning of ecclesiastical dress, suppression of the ceremony of tonsure, suppression of the minor orders and of the subdiaconate. These different measures have contributed to the desacralization of the priest.

The Abandoning of Distinctive Signs

One external sign which is now attacked from all sides is the wearing of the cassock, not so much in church or for visits to the Vatican as in everyday life. The question is not essential but it is very important. Each time the pope has issued a reminder, and John Paul II has done so repeatedly, howls of protest are heard from the ranks of the clergy. I was reading in a Paris newspaper the declarations made by an *avant-garde* priest on the issue: "This is childish... In France, wearing a recognizable uniform is absurd because nobody needs to recognize a priest on the street. Quite the contrary: the cassock or the Roman collar create a barrier ... The priest is a man like the rest of us."²⁷

In all religions, leaders wear distinctive signs. Even anthropology can tell you that, since anthropology is now

26 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 54.

27 "In June 1962, the French bishops decided to give general permission for the wearing of the clerical suit. Archbishop Lefebvre noticed that in the space of a few months, priests were going 'far beyond' the terms of that permission. He saw that it led 'in many dioceses to abandoning any distinctive sign of belonging to the clergy' and to the wearing of lay clothes" (Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, *Marcel Lefebvre*, p. 360).

the rage. Among the Moslems you see differences in dress: different collars and rings. Buddhist monks wear saffron-colored robes and shave their heads. In Paris and other large cities you can see young people on the streets who have adopted the Buddhist religion and no one criticizes their way of dressing.

The cassock [or the religious habit] identifies the cleric or the religious, just as the uniform identifies a soldier or a policeman, yet with this one difference: soldiers and policemen become regular citizens when they put back on their civilian clothes, whereas the priest is supposed to keep his distinctive habit in every aspect of his life. Indeed, the sacred character which he received at ordination means that he is in the world without being of the world. We read it in St. John: "*You are not of the world... I have chosen you out of the world*" (Jn. 15:19). His clothing has to be distinctive and at the same time reflect a spirit of modesty, discretion and poverty.

Secondly, the priest has the duty to bear witness to our Lord: "*You shall be witnesses for Me*" (Acts 1:8), "*Neither do men light a lamp and put it under the bushel*" (Mt. 5:15). Religion is not supposed to hide in the sacristy, as the governments of Eastern European countries have long since decreed; Christ commanded us to show our faith, to make it visible by a witness meant to be seen and understood by all. Obviously, the witness of the word is more essential to the priest than the witness of his clothing, yet his words pass much more easily with that very clear manifestation of the priesthood which is the wearing of the cassock.

It is unfair to assume that everyone we meet over the course of the day or in our business relations is antireligious. Young priests who come out of Econe see it every day, as well as all those priests who have not burned their incense to

anonymity. Barriers? Quite the contrary. People stop them in the street or in the train station, often simply to express their joy at seeing a priest. Everyone talks about dialogue in the new Church. How can we begin a dialogue if we start by hiding from possible interlocutors? In communist countries, the first action of a dictator is to forbid the cassock and it is one of their methods for smothering religion. We have to believe that the contrary works as well. The priest who declares his identity by his external appearance is a living sermon. The absence of recognizable priests in a large city is a serious step backward in the preaching of the Gospel; it is the continuation of the nefarious work of the Revolution and of the laws of separation of Church and State.

I would add that the cassock preserves the priest from evil; it imposes on him a certain attitude, constantly reminds him of his mission on earth and keeps him out of temptation. A priest in a cassock is not going to have an identity crisis. As for the faithful, they know whom they have in front of them: the cassock is a guarantee of the authenticity of the priesthood. Catholics have told me the difficulty they have in going to confession to a priest in a business-suit; they have the impression that they are confiding the secrets of their conscience to some sort of nobody. Confession is a judicial act; why do you think the civil court has its judges wearing judicial robes?²⁸

Priests began by casting aside the cassock, which means laicizing themselves. They turned themselves into laymen. They thought that laymen would be much more open with them if they dressed in lay clothing, that they would be everybody's friend and then they could bring them all to church. Not only did they not attract anyone, they practically chased away half of the Catholics from the churches. As for

28 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 34-37.

them, what are they now? They are no longer men of the Church. It is over. People no longer recognize them as being men of the Church.²⁹

Clerics who no longer wear any sign of their clerical state have obviously profaned themselves. I would say they are nearly committing a sacrilege against their clerical state. They are despising their clerical state. It is unacceptable because the clerical state is of divine institution, for the good of the faithful. By the very fact that they want to be like everyone else, those clerics are destroying the hierarchy of the Church. Canon law specifically says that someone who does not wear the cassock for a long period of time loses his status as a cleric.³⁰ It is in the law. If someone tosses away his cassock saying, "I'm done with it!" and deliberately abandons his cassock for an extended period of time, he should automatically be reduced to the lay state because he is disdainful of his status as a cleric in the eyes of the faithful.³¹

This disappearance of all witness of dress clearly betrays a lack of faith in the priesthood, a misunderstanding of the religious sense of those around him, and it is also a form of cowardice, a lack of courage in his convictions.³²

Even for people who no longer practice, who no longer have the faith, the priest is the man of God. That is why they are terribly disappointed and troubled by that desecralization of the priest. They no longer understand. That priest, with a little cross just barely showing or with nothing clerical at all, who shows up in a suit and tie and says, "I'm Father So-and-So" – is that the man of God?

29 *Against the Heresies*, p. 277.

30 *CIC*, can. 136, § 3. The canon specifies that this automatic laicization concerns only minor clerics, that is to say, those who have not made a definitive commitment to the service of the Church.

31 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 30, 1982.

32 Circular letter to the members of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. February 11, 1963, in *Fideliter* n. 59, pp. 93-94.

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The man of God has to show who he is by what he wears.³³ He may be needed at any moment, if someone wants to go to confession or if someone is sick. People have to know whom to approach. If there is no distinctive sign, how will they know who they are dealing with?

A layman in civilian clothes who comes up and tells me he is a priest, is he really a priest? Am I dealing with a priest? People wonder. There are sick people who send priests away if they are dressed in civilian clothes. It is absolutely normal.³⁴

So the priest does not have the right to hide who he is, to disappear into the crowd and become one of the faithful. He is marked by God to be at the service of the faithful, to bring them grace.³⁵

We wish to maintain very clearly that which distinguishes the priest, that which makes him different from everyone else, because the priest has been chosen, he has been called by our Lord Jesus Christ to share in His priesthood and to consecrate himself definitively to Him.

Today more than ever, in this time of atheism, in this time of forgetfulness of God, the world needs to see people who affirm their faith and especially those who have been given a responsibility for the faith.

The priest has a duty to declare his faith in our Lord Jesus Christ everywhere, not only by his words but also by his bearing and by his example. So it is good for him to have an outward sign that also expresses his faith. Such has always been the mind of the Church.³⁶

33 Council of Basel and the 5th Lateran Council (under Leo X, in 1511, 9th Session).

34 Retreat for the tonsure, February 1, 1984.

35 Sermon, Limburgershof, April 4, 1975.

36 Sermon, Econe, February 2, 1974.

The Elimination of the First Orders

Today, the new code of canon law no longer speaks of the tonsure, nor of the minor orders at all, nor of the subdiaconate. The entry into the clerical state is now the diaconate.³⁷

Considering the suppression of the minor orders by those in charge of the Church today, one may ask if it is really appropriate for us still to confer these ordinations of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte on those who come forward to receive them.

A decree has indeed been published eliminating these ordinations as well as the subdiaconate, and replacing what these ordinations used to represent by what they now call ministries. Only two ministries, moreover: lector and acolyte, but their number could be increased by the bishops if they thought it would be useful.³⁸

The Council of Trent proclaims that a man rises to the priesthood by the minor orders and by the major orders, and it lists the four minor orders.³⁹ Then it takes the trouble of saying, "If anyone says that besides the priesthood there are in the Catholic Church no other orders, both major and minor, by which as by certain grades, there is an advance to the priesthood: let him be anathema."⁴⁰ How should we understand these things? Did the Fathers of the Council of Trent, without thinking, intend to turn a tradition of the Church into something unchangeable? Or would they have anathematized those who claim that there are no minor or

37 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1987.

38 *Motu proprio Ministeria Quædam*, August 15, 1972, in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis* 64, pp. 529-534.

39 Council of Trent, 23rd Session, July 15, 1563, *The Doctrine on the Sacrament of Orders*, ch. 2, *DS* 1765; *DZ* 958.

40 Council of Trent, 23rd Session, July 15, 1563, *Canons on the Sacrament of Order*, can. 2, *DS* 1772; *DZ* 962.

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major orders in addition to the priesthood, if they had not considered it necessary and timely precisely in view of the errors of Protestantism?

So how can we keep from thinking that there is a negation going on of what the Council of Trent was trying to do? It is hard to believe otherwise. And the Council of Trent was not inventing anything. The Council of Trent was only continuing and affirming a long tradition of the Church.

Already in the 3rd century, in the year 251, Pope St. Cornelius lists out the different orders: priests, deacons, subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, lectors and porters. Then he gives the number of those about to be ordained in his diocese, in the diocese of Rome. We are justified in thinking that Pope St. Cornelius was not the first one to confer these ordinations and distinguish these minor and major orders. For there already to be such a large number in the diocese of Rome, we can assume that these orders had existed at least for several decades, if not for a hundred years before, which brings us practically back to the apostolic age.⁴¹

It is very informative to reread those ancient documents and I encourage you to do so, as I have been doing myself over the last few days. St. Clement, a successor of St. Peter, lived in the first century. Historians say he was more or less a contemporary of St. John. They say he lived to be about a hundred. His writings are very informative. There are a few doubts whether some of them were really written by St. Clement, but the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which are attributed to him, date from his time period, and those *Apostolic Constitutions* speak of minor orders: they speak of porters, of exorcists, of lectors, of ministers. There is no explicit mention of acolytes, but we can probably consider that those called “ministers” are acolytes and subdeacons.⁴²

41 Sermon, Ecône, March 26, 1977.

42 *Apostolic Constitutions*, bk. VIII, § 22-28.

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Therefore, we can say in all truth that these ordinations are of apostolic origin. There is not the shadow of a doubt.

It even seems that our Lord Jesus Christ must have given very precise instructions on the manner of establishing the hierarchy of the Church and the manner of ordering ceremonies in the Church, because the writings of St. Clement on the liturgical ceremonies prove that they were already practically the same as the ceremonies we perform today. Details and refinements have simply been added over the course of the centuries. That ought to be a great encouragement for us to think that we are in communion with all those who have received the different ordinations throughout the ages, exactly as you are doing.⁴³

This antiquity is confirmed by the Council of Trent.⁴⁴ The minor and major orders already existed “from the beginning of the Church.”⁴⁵ What does “the beginning of the Church” mean? Well, the Church began with the apostles.

So how can we accept their destroying such a holy tradition of the Church, one which has lasted for nearly 2000 years, in order to bring us closer to Protestantism and do exactly what the Council of Trent was intending to condemn?

It seems to me that this transformation, which goes hand in hand with the rest of the liturgical reform, has no other goal than the practice of an ecumenism meant to bring us very far indeed from the truth of the Catholic Church, because it is not only the minor orders which are struck down as it were by these decrees governing the new liturgy, but also the subdiaconate. It is all the new liturgy, and especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is meant to bring us closer to Protestantism, and all for the sake of ecumenism.

43 Sermon, Ecône, February 8, 1987.

44 Council of Trent, 23rd Session, July 15, 1563, ch. 2, *DS* 1765.

45 *Ab initio Ecclesia*.

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Nor is their goal any kind of a secret; the very authors of the reforms are the ones saying so, to such a point that we can look around us and see supposedly Catholic ceremonies going on which are purely and simply Protestant. But it gets worse: the very spirit of Protestantism is little by little penetrating the mentality of priests and even bishops, and all the more so of the faithful.

Confronted with these facts which we simply cannot deny, and in spite of our desire to be entirely subject to the Catholic hierarchy, we are forced to observe that what is being done and what is now happening in the Church is in fact taking us away from Catholicism. It is because Catholicism is a whole tradition, and that tradition has been codified, it has been dogmatized, defined by the councils, by the popes, by the doctors of the Church, by all those who make up the teaching Church.

That is why, in spite of our sorrow, even in spite of the condemnations which may fall upon us as a result, we continue to give you the ordinations as the popes and the Church have defined them, and as the Council of Trent in particular has defined them forever. It was the intention of the Council of Trent that what it stated should always remain in effect, since anathemas were issued against anyone saying the contrary.

Thus, the ordinations which we confer on our seminarians are given in the spirit of the Church. Even if they are only sacramentals, the ordinands are still receiving a grace, perhaps not *ex opera operato*, as the theologians call it, but *ex opera operantis*,⁴⁶ that is to say, according

46 The expression *ex opera operato* means that the grace signified by the sacrament is given by the sacrament itself, independently of the dispositions of the minister; the expression *ex opera operantis* on the other hand means that the grace is produced according to the more or less perfect dispositions of the one who receives the sacrament.

to their dispositions and according to their power of intercession before our Lord, through the intercession of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, through the intercession of all the saints and of all those who come to pray with them on the occasion of these ordinations.⁴⁷

3. A New Type of Apostolate

If the priest no longer has for his priority the offering of the sacrifice to God, what is to be his ideal? All he can do is evangelize. However, if the finality of evangelization is taken away, the priest is in danger of turning into a social worker or even a politician.

Evangelization Turned from Its End

Notice that the Council decree on the priesthood insists more than in the past on the mission of the priest as one who is *sent* in the footsteps of the ultimate Apostle.⁴⁸ It primarily emphasizes the ministry of the word, the ministry of preaching. However, this ministry is not an end in itself; it prepares and leads to another ministry which is more essential and which constitutes the specific finality of the priesthood, [namely, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass].⁴⁹

Yet, when you read the ordination sermons of the different bishops, you realize that there is no longer any mention of the Sacrifice of the Mass at all. The priest is one who brings people together. He is a link, a man who builds up solidarity; he is a communion. Those are words which have nothing to do with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.⁵⁰

47 Sermon, Ecône, March 26, 1977.

48 Archbishop Lefebvre is speaking of the document of Vatican II on the priestly ministry, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*.

49 *Avis du Mois (Monthly Bulletin)*, March-April 1966.

50 Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 28, 1988.

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Here is the order of service for a priestly ordination which took place at Toulouse a few years ago. A commentator starts off, introducing the ordinand by his Christian name C., with the words, "He has decided to live more thoroughly his self-dedication to God and to man by consecrating himself entirely to the service of the Church in the working-class." C. has worked out his "pathway," that is to say, his seminary training, as part of a team. It is this team which presents him to the bishop: "We request You to recognize and authenticate his application and ordain him priest." The bishop then asks him several questions purporting to be a definition of the priesthood: Do you wish to be ordained a priest, "to be, with the believers, a Sign and a Witness of what Mankind is seeking, in its striving for Justice, for Brotherhood and for Peace," "to serve the people of God," "to recognize in men's lives, the action of God in the ways they take, in their cultural patterns, in the choices open to them," "to celebrate the action of Christ and perform this service"; do you wish "to share with me and with the body of bishops the responsibility that has been entrusted to us for the service of the Gospel?"

The "matter" of the sacrament has been preserved in the imposition of hands which takes place next, and likewise the "form," namely the words of ordination. But we cannot help but notice that the intention is far from being clear. Has the priest been ordained for the exclusive service of one social class and, first and foremost, to establish justice, fellowship and peace at a level which appears to be limited to the natural order only? The Eucharistic celebration which follows, "the first Mass" in effect, of the new priest was indeed along those lines. The offertory was specially composed for the circumstances: "We welcome You, Lord, by receiving on Your behalf this bread and wine which You offer us; we

wish to show by this all our work and our efforts to build a more just and more humane world, all that we are trying to bring about so that better living conditions may follow..." The prayer over the offerings is even more dubious: "Look, Lord, we offer You this bread and this wine, that they may become for us *one of the ways in which You are present.*" No! People who celebrate in this manner do not believe in the Real Presence!

One thing is certain: the first victim of this scandalous ordination is the young man who had just pledged himself forever without exactly knowing to what, or maybe thinking he knew. How could he fail, sooner or later, to start asking himself certain questions? Because the ideal that has been proposed to him cannot satisfy him for long; the ambiguity of his mission is going to become obvious. That is what they call "the identity crisis of the priest." The priest is essentially a man of faith. If he no longer knows what he is, he loses faith in himself and in his priesthood.

The definition of the priesthood given by St. Paul and by the Council of Trent has been radically altered. The priest is no longer one who ascends to the altar and offers up to God a sacrifice of praise for the remission of sins. The relative order of purposes has been reversed. The priesthood has a first aim, which is to offer the sacrifice; that of evangelization is secondary.

The case of C., which is far from being unique – we know of many examples – shows to what extent evangelization has taken precedence over the sacrifice and the sacraments. It has become an end in itself.

This grave error has had serious consequences. An evangelization which is deprived of its goal becomes disoriented and starts seeking new goals that are pleasing to the world, such as a false social justice and a false liberty.

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These concepts take on new names: development, progress, building up the world, improving living conditions, pacifism. We are in the kind of language that made all the revolutions.⁵¹

The New Social Mission of the Priest

One day I was presenting to a cardinal what I was doing in my seminaries, with a spirituality especially centered around a deep understanding of the theology of the Sacrifice of the Mass and around liturgical prayer. He said to me, “But Your Lordship, that is exactly the opposite of what our young priests are looking for. We no longer define the priest except in terms of evangelization.” I answered, “What evangelization? If it is not fundamentally and essentially tied to the Holy Sacrifice, how do you define it? Political evangelization? Social evangelization? Humanitarian?” If he is no longer announcing Jesus Christ, the apostle turns into a militant Marxist or a union worker. It is normal. We can perfectly understand. He needs a new absolute and that is how he finds it; but he loses that of the altar.⁵²

You know, it is truly painful to read or listen to speeches where people are talking about wars, hunger in the world, all those forms of injustice in the world, and hear them conclude by saying, “We need a better distribution of goods, more justice, more peace in the world, an understanding among men,” without the least mention of our Lord Jesus Christ. No mention is made of the one solution capable of solving the problem.⁵³

51 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 50-52.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

53 Retreat for future deacons, Ecône, October 27, 1978.

The Sacraments: Communitarian Signs

Once the sacrifice of the altar stops being the first reason for the priesthood, all of the sacraments are affected and the priest starts calling upon laymen to administer them because he is busy with union work or politics. Baptism is administered by laymen or married deacons. They are also the ones distributing the Eucharist and carrying it to the sick. The Sacrament of Penance really takes up too much time, so they try to discredit it and replace it with community ceremonies of penance. There are efforts in every country to force the hand of the ecclesiastical authorities. Now that they have destroyed the Mass, that is how they are little by little destroying the sacraments.⁵⁴

Be on your guard as well against the modern tendency to consider all the sacraments as communitarian signs. The new sacraments are marked by a kind of collectivism. Yet, our Lord instituted the sacraments to sanctify persons, individuals, and not simply to be communitarian signs. Today there are collective baptisms, on the pretext that baptism is no more than the attachment to a community. That is not the profound meaning of baptism. "I believe in Baptism, in one Baptism for the remission of sins" (*Credo*) – for the remission of original sin in particular and to give the life of God, eternal life.

The same goes for collective absolutions and collective Extreme Unction. It all changes the meaning which our Lord Jesus Christ willed to give to the sacraments. Certainly, society helps us to be saved; but when we appear before God at the hour of our death, it is not the collectivity which is going to be judged but our own soul. So we have to be on our

54 Priestly retreat, Barcelona, April 1972.

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guard against that sort of new perspective of the sacraments which also threatens to make those sacraments invalid.⁵⁵

The Sacrament of Penance consists essentially in a judgment. However, you have to know the case if you are going to judge it. How can you expect to make a judgment if you do not understand the case? To judge you have to hear the person who is concerned. Our Lord said, "*Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained*" (Jn. 20:23). So there are two possibilities: to retain or to forgive. And to do either one there has to be a judgment on a person and not on a mass of people, not on a crowd. But today there is a tendency to want to do away with personal confession and replace it with collective absolution.

They say that you have to go to a priest afterwards if you can, at some point during the year, if you are aware of having committed a mortal sin. Some people are going to say to themselves, "I really don't have time to go right now; I'll go later on." And then afterwards, "It doesn't even matter, I've been receiving Communion for six months." Go ahead and say, "All the people with mortal sins on their conscience have to use the confessional." People are going to say to themselves, "If that man is going into the confessional, he must have a serious sin on his conscience, since collective absolution is enough for whatever is not a mortal sin." It is true that we can receive the absolution of venial sin by a good Communion, by a perfect act of charity. It can be received outside of the sacrament, but confession gives particular graces.

These collective absolutions are going to lead necessarily to the suppression of individual confession to a priest. It has already gone down enormously. Yet, holy priests like the

55 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 1, 1984.

Curé of Ars spent their life in the confessional. So were they wasting their time? Wouldn't it have been easier for them just to give general absolution?⁵⁶

All of the sacraments have been to some extent denatured and have become like an initiation to a religious group. That is not what the sacraments are. The sacraments give us grace, make our sins disappear and give us divine life, supernatural life. We are not simply members of a religious group on a purely natural, purely human level.⁵⁷

56 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 1974.

57 Sermon, Poitiers, September 2, 1977.

CHAPTER 2

THE EFFECTS OF A DEFORMATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

1. The Faith in Danger

The New “Creed” of the Priest

When the priest stops proclaiming his faith publicly by his clothing, by his relation to the Blessed Sacrament and sacred things, and starts neglecting sacramentals, he little by little begins to lose faith in the supernatural; he loses faith in grace, and the new theology pushes him to begin doubting the divinity of our Lord and perhaps the Holy Trinity.¹ A new Creed little by little takes shape in his mind: the Creed of progress and social justice; of unions and political action.

¹ Here are the results of a poll of 234 Belgian priests with an average age of 62, practicing some form of ministry, : “How many of these priests still believe in dogmas? 20% declare that they accept all Catholic dogmas as they are presented by the Church. Some do not accept them as dogmas but at the most as symbolic values or else with some other reservation. The others simply deny the dogmas or do not answer the question. 61% believe in the Real Presence in the Eucharist. 25% believe in the virginity of Mary. 62% believe in the Holy Trinity. 44% believe in the resurrection of the body. 28% believe in the existence of Heaven, hell and purgatory” (*Gazet von Antwerpen*, December 4-7, 2006).

Bishops have come up with “permanent formation” to deal with this danger. Conferences, reeducation, seminars, encounters are supposed to be rekindling the faith of their priests; but the ones they ask to lead the meetings are the ones who are doubting their faith and systematically teaching the new religion. Instead of strengthening the priests, they are making them even more disoriented.

This decline of the faith is a tragedy for a priest, whose whole life – even his career if we want to call it that – relies on the faith and has to be an expression of his own faith.²

Deformation of the Catechism

The teaching of the truths of the Catholic faith takes place in particular through the catechism. But this priestly role became difficult after Vatican II on account of the catechisms which were provided to them. These catechisms are imbued with the spirit of novelty. Moreover, the teaching of catechism is sometimes even confided to non-Catholics.

The crisis is also affecting the teaching of catechism. You are certainly able to see for yourselves what kind of catechisms they give you. We can say that all of the new catechisms come in fact more or less directly from the Dutch catechism.³ The same modernist spirit, the same spirit of novelty reigns in the catechisms which have recently been published. This Dutch catechism was examined by a commission of cardinals who formally condemned ten important aspects, fundamental points touching the faith, and asked the bishops of Holland to change, to modify

2 Conference, Archives of the seminary of Ecône.

3 A catechism produced at the request of the bishops of the Netherlands and published in March 1966 under the title: *Le Nouveau Catechisme: Une Annonce de la Foi pour les Adultes (The New Catechism: A Proclamation of the Faith for Adults)*.

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the paragraphs in question. These paragraphs were not modified. They published an edition with a little insert at the end of the book giving the different points that were condemned, but the text was not changed. And that is where our catechisms come from! The new editions no longer even tell what was condemned by the pope.⁴

All of the new catechisms reflect the doctrine presented in the first schema of *The Church in the Modern World*, which you have to admit was not Catholic. The faith, the word of God, the Spirit, the people of God are explained in a modernist, Protestant manner, which is to say in a rationalist manner. Revelation has been replaced by an “awareness,” moved to prophecy under the motion of the Spirit. This “prophecy,” which belongs to the entire people of God, finds expression most particularly in the Liturgy of the Word. Baptism and the sacraments are more expressions of faith than causes of grace and virtue. But we would never come to an end if we tried to point out all of the dangers in these catechisms, all of which take Vatican II as their reference. Equivocal expressions and the whole spirit of the first schema can be found everywhere in the Council and particularly in the document *Gaudium et Spes*.⁵

Not long ago I was reading a study by *The Pilgrim*⁶ which had a questionnaire of mothers of families, asking them what they thought of the new catechism being given to their children, with its new methods and its new teaching. Out of nine or ten answers given, only two were even slightly favorable to the new method and the new catechism. All the other responses of the mothers of families were, “We don’t understand anything anymore; our children don’t know anything anymore; they don’t even know their prayers;

4 Conference, Brest, January 17, 1973.

5 Letter, Rome, June 5, 1970.

6 *Pèlerin*, a French Catholic weekly journal founded in 1873..

they don't know how to go to confession; they aren't getting anything from it." So it really is a serious problem!⁷

It is obvious that this catechism is imbued with the ideas of the modernists and has to be rejected at all cost. To put these new catechisms in the hands of children is a veritable crime and an attack on their faith.⁸

We ask the bishop of Fribourg to protect the Catholic faith and we infinitely regret having to tell what measures he has taken in the teaching of catechism to the children in the Catholic schools of his canton and other cantons of his diocese. Here are the measures he has taken: asking Protestant ministers to teach catechism in Catholic schools alongside the priests. I personally expressed to him my astonishment in a letter and he wrote back, "It is an experiment we are doing." Well, it seems to us that it is not possible for a Catholic bishop to carry on an experiment which is so clearly an attack on children's faith. It is inconceivable that people who do not have our faith would be able to teach the orthodox, Catholic faith to Catholic children. It is an extremely serious responsibility for a bishop to have allowed people who do not have the Catholic faith to teach catechism to the children of his diocese, because it is one of the essential duties of the bishop to transmit the Catholic faith fully and precisely, exactly as it was handed down to him by the successors of the apostles and by the Church of all time. The first role of the bishop is to watch over the faith and not corrupt it or diminish it.⁹

7 Conference, Tourcoing, January 30, 1974.

8 Retreat, Barcelona, 1972.

9 Sermon, Lausanne, July 9, 1978.

2. Priestly Celibacy Under Attack¹⁰

If we lose faith in the priesthood, if we lose the idea that the priest is made for that unique sacrifice which is the sacrifice of the altar, the continuation of the sacrifice of our Lord, then we also lose the meaning of priestly celibacy. There would no longer be any reason for priests to remain unmarried.¹¹

The Protestants have already gone through the experiment. As soon as they had denied the Sacrifice of the Mass and the divine presence of the Victim and replaced them with a meal, a simple memorial, right away they did away with celibacy as well.¹²

This desacralized view of the priestly ministry naturally opens the way to challenging priestly celibacy. There are noisy pressure groups calling for its abolition in spite of the repeated warnings of the Roman magisterium. We have seen seminarians in Holland go on strike against ordinations to obtain “guarantees” on the subject.¹³ I am not going to name all of the bishops who have stood up to urge the Holy See to reconsider the question.¹⁴

10 Between 1964 and 1996, there were officially nearly 58,000 marriages of priests. To that number we have to add all the marriages which have taken place without any request for a dispensation. The total number of priests around the world exercising a ministry was around 420,000 in 1970 (cf. “L’Église au III^e millénaire” [“The Church in the 3rd millennium”] *Savoir et Servir* 65, 2001).

11 Conference, Rennes, 1973.

12 Conference, archives of the seminary of Ecône.

13 According to a poll of 234 Belgian priests exercising a ministry, whose average age was 62, “80% of them are favorable to the ordination of married men; 40% to the ordination of women” (*Gazet van Antwerpen*, December 4-7, 2006).

14 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 55.

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When they see the supposed new equality between priests and the laity, turning laymen into priests and priests into laymen, the priests themselves begin to say, “If we are men like everyone else, if we are no different than they are, then why can’t we get married, too?” So there is a whole atmosphere against celibacy.¹⁵

The struggle is still going on today; there are still many false theologians battling in favor of married priests.¹⁶ No doubt there are even bishops who are happy at seeing a lack of vocations in their own seminary, because they can use it to force Rome to ordain married men and do away with priestly celibacy. Those are diabolical intentions. We are well aware that the different press and television campaigns are aimed at destroying this testimony to the holiness of the Church.¹⁷

The question would not even arise if the clergy still had the sense of the Mass and the sense of the priesthood. For the profound reason appears of itself when we truly understand those two realities. It is the same reason for which the Blessed Virgin remained so: having borne our Lord within her womb, it was perfectly right and fitting that she should remain a virgin. The priest likewise brings down God upon

15 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 13, 1988.

16 The words of Archbishop Lefebvre apply perfectly well today, as we can see from one of the last letters written by Abbé Pierre: “I decided to question all those who, for the last few decades, no longer understand. I asked them what should be done. Groups of faithful, priests, bishops, two cardinals in Rome, all of them said the same thing. Ordain married men as priests, men who are fervent and capable. (...) Brother bishops, recently gathered for a synod in Rome, you still do not want to open that door and offer to the faithful that answer they are anxiously awaiting and which most of them know is out there. Why are you still waiting, when the need is so great? (...) Brothers, let us not be afraid! Let us open the doors of our churches! Let us open the door to those thousands of men of ardent faith, ready to enter this vocation” (Abbé Pierre, “Letter, All Saints Day 2005,” *Le Monde des Religions*, May-June 2007).

17 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, March 14, 1982.

earth by the words he pronounces at the consecration. He has such a closeness with God, who is a spiritual being, Spirit above all, that it is right, just and eminently fitting that he also should be a virgin and remain celibate.

Some people object with the fact that there are married priests in the Eastern rite. Make no mistake: it is only a tolerance. Eastern rite bishops may not marry, nor those priests who hold a position of any importance. The Eastern clergy has a veneration for priestly celibacy, which is part of the most ancient Tradition of the Church and which the apostles observed from the moment of Pentecost. Those who were already married, such as St. Peter, continued to live with their wives, but *knew* them no longer.

It is remarkable that those priests who succumb to the mirage of a so-called social or political mission almost automatically get married. The two things go together.

People would have us believe that the age we are living in justifies all sorts of abdications; that it is impossible to live a chaste life under present day conditions; that the vow of virginity for monks and nuns is an anachronism. The experience of the last twenty years shows us that the attacks made on the priesthood under the pretext of adapting it to the present time are in fact deadly to the priesthood.¹⁸

3. Evidence of Failure: A Church Severely Weakened

No More Seminaries?

There are consequences to denying the legitimate theological principles of the priesthood: a desire to do away with the law of celibacy; the abandoning of priestly responsibilities and even the abandoning of the priesthood

¹⁸ *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 55-56.

itself; the scarcity of vocations¹⁹; a new, false conception of priestly formation, even doing away with the idea of seminaries; the substituting of laymen for priests as professors in theological and philosophical chairs in Catholic universities, and even in pastoral roles.

The false conception of the priesthood has destroyed seminaries and radically modified the principles of priestly formation. Evangelization has taken the place of the sacrifice, even though evangelization can only be understood and justified in relation to the sacrifice. An evangelization which is no longer connected to its proper goal is quickly going to deviate toward other goals than the Redemption and the glory of God. It is going to mutate into an openness onto the world and its spirit of corruption.

How many seminaries, both major and minor, stand out as deplorable examples and are now completely empty! How many are up for sale or have already been sold! We may say in all truth that seminaries were committing suicide the day they broke the altar of sacrifice and replaced it with a supper table.²⁰

When we came here, to Ecône, to ask Bishop Adam for the authorization to open this seminary, he told us, “A year of spirituality is certainly possible; a seminary may be a little bit difficult because we already have three in the Valais: two in Sion and one in Martigny.” The very next year he told us, “You may open your seminary.” A year later, the three other seminaries had closed. What does it all mean? We are not the ones closing those seminaries or wishing they were closed. We would prefer to be able to tell you that the seminaries of

19 Here are a few statistics of ordinations for the diocesan clergy in France: in 1965, there were 646 ordinations; in 1975, there were 161; since 1995, the number has fluctuated between 142 (in 2000) and 90 (in 2004); in 2006, there were no ordinations for 46 of the 99 French dioceses.

20 Conference, archives of the seminary of Ecône.

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Sion and Martigny are full of seminarians. We would like to be able to say it for Holy Church. Do we desire the death of Holy Church? Far be it from us even to think of such a thing! And the facts I have just given you for the Valais are the case in many other places around the world!²¹

Toward a Church Without Priests?²²

Catholics are told that clergy and laity are equal members of the “People of God,” so that lay people designated for particular functions take over the tasks of the clergy. We see them conducting funerals²³ and taking Viaticum to the sick, while the clergy take up the function of the laity: they dress like them, work in factories, join trade unions and engage in politics. The new canon law supports all this. It confers unheard-of prerogatives on the laity, blurring the distinctions between them and priests and creating so-called “rights.” Lay theologians hold chairs of theology in Catholic universities, the faithful take over roles in divine worship which were once reserved to those in clerical orders: they administer some of the sacraments, they distribute Holy Communion and receive the vows at weddings.²⁴

²¹ Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1977.

²² In 2004, according to the latest statistics of the Bishops’ Conference of France (CEF), there were 16,859 diocesan priests (exercising a ministry in a parish), most of them older than 60, as opposed to 37,555 in 1970, which means a decrease of 20,000 priests in 35 years.

²³ “We are no longer to have the Eucharist at funerals, even when a priest is present, in order to avoid any discrimination” (L.T., *Cap Avenir [Sites on the Future]* 4 [review of the diocese of Nantes], 2001, p. 3). “If we ask a team to accompany families in mourning, we cannot accept someone bringing in a priest from elsewhere and thanking more or less politely the team entrusted with the charge. If, on the other hand, a priest comes to the funeral as a friend or a member of the family, he ought to be welcomed. He may wear an alb or even take part in the ceremony, but he has to respect the organization determined by the parish team” (Bishop Noyer, *Rencontre [Encounter]* 40, p. 4).

²⁴ *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 82.

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As if that were not enough, the objective of some is to eliminate the priest entirely, which has given rise to the notorious ADAP [Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of the Priest].²⁵ We can imagine the faithful gathering to pray together in order to honor the Lord's Day; but these ADAP's are in reality a sort of "dry Mass," lacking only the consecration; and the lack, as one can read in a document of the Regional Center for Social and Religious Studies at Lille, is only because "*until further instructions* lay people do not have the power to carry out this act." The absence of the priest may even be intentional "so that the faithful might learn to manage for themselves."²⁶ Father Gelineau in *Demain la Liturgie* [*The Liturgy of Tomorrow*] writes that the ADAP's are only an "educational transition until such time as mentalities have changed," and he concludes with disconcerting logic that there are still too many priests in the Church, "too many, doubtless, for things to evolve quickly."²⁷

25 Vatican II already opened the door to that type of celebration: "Bible services should be encouraged, especially on the vigils of the more solemn feasts, on some weekdays in Advent and Lent, and on Sundays and feast days. *They are particularly to be commended in places where no priest is available*; when this is so, a deacon or some other person authorized by the bishop should preside over the celebration" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 35, § 4).

26 Similar ideas are still circulating today: "The lack of priests should not be considered as a handicap but as a grace" (Bishop Noyer, *Le Courrier Picard*, April 8, 1997). "It is not simply in order to deal with the decrease in personnel that the Church is organizing itself differently. It is also because the world is changing and the Gospel has to encounter the world as it is. (...) It is also because, thanks be to God, Christians are feeling more and more responsible for the life and mission of the Church. That is why we can read and live the changes that are happening not as a way of dealing with poverty but as an indication of renewal" (Xavier Dubreuil, *Cap Avenir* 4, 2001, p. 3).

27 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 25-26.

Observations of a Cardinal and of a Professor

If you saw the little flyer with the conference I gave in Florence, you may have read the words of the cardinal of Cincinnati, an American cardinal who represented all of the English-language bishops at the last synod. Imagine the number of dioceses that represents. So he made a summary of all of the information he could gather on the different English-language dioceses. He admitted himself that there was a very serious crisis of the priesthood and that vocations were becoming scarce everywhere. He attributed it to the fact that priests are losing the priestly sense, to the extent that they wonder why they are even there. It is extremely grave to think that priests are asking themselves such questions, but we can understand when we see how certain priests are living. A priest who is like a layman in his way of dressing, in his way of behaving, in his way of acting, little by little takes on exactly that profane manner of thinking and loses the priestly sense. That is how he starts to wonder after a while who he is and why he is there.

Remember someone else as well, who was a philosophy professor, I believe, about forty years old, from the seminary of Issy-les-Moulineaux, who came through here a year or a year and a half ago. He was in therapy in Montana [in Switzerland] and he came to have lunch with us one day out of curiosity. I heard him say at the table, "I had a nervous breakdown. I am in a situation which gives me a lot of anxiety because I am wondering what I am even doing at that seminary of Issy-les-Moulineaux. I am realizing that the seminarians themselves don't even know. The bishops sent them there, but they don't know exactly what is going to become of them later on, what they are going to be doing, or

even what their status is going to be. A good number of them think that Rome is going to end up accepting married priests after a few years and so they should think about getting ready for marriage at the same time.” It is really unbelievable! And he even added, “I wonder if the bishops know exactly what they are going to do with the seminarians they are sending to Issy-les-Moulineaux. If you asked the bishops: ‘What are we supposed to do with these young men you have sent us? What are you going to do with them later?’ many bishops really don’t know. So I got sick, working in an atmosphere like that. That is why I had a nervous breakdown and now I am supposed to be resting in Montana.” I am telling you, the man was barely forty years old.

You really wonder if you are dreaming when you see them so far gone that they don’t even know what a priest is or why he is there.²⁸

28 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 30, 1975.

CHAPTER 3

HOW DID WE REACH THIS POINT?

How did we get to this point? I think you have to look at the bigger picture. Obviously, you could go all the way back to original sin. We could also trace it back to the devil. He is certainly at work; there is no doubt about it. To have brought about such a situation in the Church, to have managed that auto-demolition of the Church of which the Holy Father speaks,¹ the devil has got to be involved. But I think we also have to trace it back to all those errors which the popes have been condemning for the last two centuries.²

1. Liberalism and Modernism

For twenty centuries the Church has always affirmed the same thing, faithful to Her message and to Tradition. But for three or four centuries, liberalism has succeeded in getting hold of society, and finally in the twentieth century it entered the Church.³

1 “The Church finds Herself in a time of worry, self-criticism, we could even say auto-demolition” (Paul VI, December 7, 1968).

2 Conference, Tourcoing, January 30, 1974.

3 *Against the Heresies*, p. 206.

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The liberals' dream for the last century and a half has been to marry the Church to the Revolution.

For the same century and a half, Popes have been condemning liberal Catholicism. Among their most important documents we can mention the bull *Auctorem Fidei* by Pius VI against the Council of Pistoia; the encyclical *Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus* of Pius IX; the encyclical *Immortale Dei* of Leo XIII against the new idea of rights; the acts of St. Pius X against the *Sillon*⁴ and modernism, especially the decree *Lamentabili*; the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* of Pius XI against communism; and the encyclical *Humani Generis* of Pope Pius XII. All of the popes have refused any marriage of the Church with the Revolution, which is an adulterous union.⁵

St. Pius X, in his encyclical *Pascendi* of September 8, 1907, on the modernist errors, denounces with clear-sightedness an infiltration of the Church which he could already see in progress. This modernist sect was the ally of the liberal sect, both desiring the destruction of the Catholic Church. Here are some passages from the document which illustrate what I am saying:

“What particularly requires Us to speak without delay is that the agents of error are not to be sought for today among our declared enemies. They are hiding – and it is a cause for very sharp apprehension and anguish – in the very midst and in the very heart of the Church, enemies so much the more fearsome as they are less openly enemies. We

4 The Sillon was a social, civic, and even religious movement condemned by St. Pius X on account of its false ideas about liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, the origin of power, and the obedience due to authority. Marc Sangnier dissolved the movement, but its spirit continued to exist under various forms and it came back to life with a vengeance after World War II. See Charles Ledré, *Un Siècle sous la Tiare (A Century Under the Tiara)*, Éditions Amiot-Dumont, 1955, pp. 210-215.

5 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 111.

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are speaking, Venerable Brethren, of a great number of lay Catholics and, what is still more to be deplored, of priests, who, under pretense of love for the Church, absolutely short on solid philosophy and theology, penetrated on the contrary right down to the marrow with a venom of error derived from the adversaries of the Catholic faith, set themselves up, with contempt for all modesty, as renovators of the Church. In closed phalanxes, with audacity, they begin the assault on everything that there is of most sacred in the work of Jesus Christ, without respecting His very person, which they reduce, with a sacrilegious temerity, even to a pure and simple humanity.

“(..) Enemies of the Church, to be sure they are this; and to say that it does not have any worse ones is not to stray from the truth. It is not from outside, indeed, as has been already noted, it is from within that they contrive its ruin. The danger lies today almost in the very veins and bowels of the Church: their blows are so much more certain as they know the Church more intimately. Add to this that it is not to the branches or to the shoots that they have put the axe, but to the very root, that is to say, to the faith and to its deepest fibers. Then, once this root of immortal life is severed, they set themselves the task of making the virus circulate throughout the tree, in such a way that no part of the Catholic faith remains protected from their hand, and that there is no part that they do not strive with great care to corrupt.”⁶

To stay inside the Church in order to make it evolve, such is the keynote of the modernists’ policy: “They follow their path; reprimanded and censured, they go forward, always covering up, under the false-tongued exterior of compliance, a boldness without limit. They hypocritically

6 *Pascendi*, § 2 and 3.

bow their heads, while, with all their thoughts, with all their energy, more boldly than ever before, they pursue the plan laid out.”⁷

Pascendi halted the audacity of the modernists for a time, but before long the methodical and progressive occupation of the Church and of the hierarchy by the modernist and liberal sect began again with a vengeance. The liberal theological intelligentsia would before long hold the highest places in specialized reviews, congresses, the great printing houses, the centers of pastoral liturgy, corrupting the Catholic hierarchy from top to bottom, scorning the latest condemnations of Pope Pius XII in *Humani Generis*.⁸

Those who had been condemned by St. Pius X, and even by Pope Pius XII, tried to invade the Church in order to occupy Her. They wanted to break with Tradition and throw themselves into novelty.⁹ They wanted to put the Church in a perpetual state of “finding Herself,” ignoring the faith of all time, the Mass of all time, the sacraments of all time, in the hope that this ecumenism would bring new life to the Church. Alas! The opposite is what happened.¹⁰

It is indeed modernism that is undermining the Church from within, today as yesterday. Let us again quote from the encyclical *Pascendi* a few typical characteristics, matching exactly what we are going through today:

7 *Pascendi*, § 37.

8 *They Have Uncrowned Him*, pp. 153-156.

9 “You are already aware that among priests, especially those less equipped with doctrine and of less strict lives, a certain spirit of novelty is being diffused in an ever graver and more disturbing manner. Novelty is never in itself a criterion of truth and it can be worthy of praise only when it confirms the truth and leads to righteousness and virtue. The age in which we live suffers from serious errors indeed (...). From this it follows almost naturally that there are not lacking in our times priests, infected in some way by this contagion, who imbibe opinions and follow a mode of life even in dress and the care of their person alien to both their dignity and their mission” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostræ*).

10 Sermon, January 7, 1982.

HOW DID WE REACH THIS POINT?

“The Modernists say that Authority in the Church, since its end is purely spiritual, should strip itself of all external pomp, all those pretentious adornments with which it parades itself in public. In this they forget that religion, while it belongs to the soul, is not exclusively for the soul and that the honor paid to authority is reflected back on Christ who institutes it.”¹¹

It is under pressure from these “speakers of novelties” that Paul VI abandoned the tiara; bishops gave up their violet cassock and even wearing the black cassock, along with their episcopal ring; and priests walk about in lay clothes, often deliberately casual.¹²

2. Tepidity and the Spirit of the World

Liberalism and modernism have been able to influence many priests on account of their lack of a supernatural spirit and the cooling of their spiritual fervor.

The Church already was going through a crisis before the Council, marked especially by a lack of faith in supernatural means. So priests obviously turned toward natural means, as we might have predicted. They tried to organize things, but they tried to do it the way Protestants or any other sect might do, that is to say, without basing it on prayer, on the spirit of God, on the supernatural spirit.¹³

That tepidity was the downfall of the priesthood. You want to be a priest and at the same time you want to be of the world. You want to be able to indulge in everything people in the world enjoy, people who are not clerics or who have not taken the vows of religion. Priests want to be priests and

11 St. Pius X, Encyclical *Pascendi*, § 31.

12 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 124.

13 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 9, 1991.

men of the world at the same time but it is not possible. It is contrary to the essence of the priest.¹⁴ The priest has to be a man who is detached. The priest has to be a man who is poor, a man who is chaste, a man who is obedient.

What ruined priests was not some spectacular event. It was a progressive abandoning of the priestly virtues. There is no point in going into detail. Let us simply realize that, unfortunately, the life which priests were leading before the Council, on the whole, was preparing them for the failures and the falls which were to come.¹⁵

3. Subversive Ideas in the Seminaries

The penetration of new ideas in the clergy was caused not only by priests' lacking the spirit of faith and or their weakening spiritually, but also by the infiltration of subversive ideas in the seminaries.

It is difficult to follow exactly these changes in the idea of the priesthood or all their consequences. We would maybe have to go back thirty years, to the infiltration of seminaries by different subversive ideas concerning the role of the priest and his relations with the world. But we are just going to look at these last ten years, during and after the Council.

Just as with all the other changes that happened during that time, they used the evolution of society to make priests think they had to change their own way of being. It was easy

14 "Priests and sacred ministers should consider themselves apostate, when they cease to consider all the ties and divine commitments which they have assumed with Holy Orders and give themselves over to an entirely worldly life, and profane with insolence the holiness of that religious state of which they have made such a genuine and such a solemn profession" (Jean-Jacques Olier, PSS, *Traité des Saints Ordres*, Éditions du Vieux Colombier, 1953, p. 97). Cf. Lateran II, Lent 1139, can. 4.

15 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

HOW DID WE REACH THIS POINT?

to give a priest a complex of isolation, of frustration toward society. He had to connect with the world, open himself to the world. They blamed his poor formation, his out-dated way of dressing and living.

There was an easy slogan for bringing the priest back in line with the world: “The priest is a man like any other.” Because of it, he should dress like other men, have a job like other men, join a union or a political party like other men, and ultimately he should be able to get married. Seminaries had only to adjust to this “new kind of priest.”

Sad to say, this kind of talk was not only in the mouths of the traditional enemies of the Church but in the mouths of priests and bishops.¹⁶

Unfortunately, the spirit of the Sillon entered the seminaries and infected numerous seminarians who became priests, and some of them even bishops and cardinals. When the Council was convened, one found bishops there quite imbued with the spirit of the Sillon: a false notion of human dignity, camaraderie...¹⁷

So-called Catholic liberalism acted like a Trojan horse in bringing its false principles inside the Church. Liberal Catholics wanted to “marry the Church and the Revolution.” Their efforts made progress and some of the most eminent members of the Church were contaminated, with the help of secret societies and anticlerical, democratic governments: theologians, bishops, cardinals, seminaries, universities were attracted little by little to these universalist ideas, fundamentally opposed to the Catholic faith.¹⁸

16 Priests' retreat, Barcelona, April 1972.

17 *Against the Heresies*, p. 274.

18 Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, *Le Coup de Maître de Satan (Satan's Masterstroke)*, Saint-Gabriel, 1977, p. 20.

PART II

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X AND THE PRIESTHOOD

We have only one desire and that is to make Catholic priests, because the Catholic Church cannot go on without priests.¹ We have no other ambition than to be able to say with our last breath that we helped in building up the Church and not in tearing Her down.²

1 St. Vincent de Paul insisted, "Think as hard as we might, we will never find anything greater to which to dedicate our efforts, than the formation of good priests" (P. Renaudin, *Saint Vincent de Paul*, ch. 5, Éditions Publiroc, 1929, p. 123).

2 Sermon, Châtelperron, August 25, 1977.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X: A WORK OF THE CHURCH

1. The Need to Form Holy Priests

The Society of Saint Pius X was born in the rather unusual context of the Church today, but it was not born from an idea of contestation, an idea of opposition. Not at all! It was born in the way that I believe works of the Church may well be born, that is, from a need which has arisen: the need to ensure the good formation of priests. In the beginning, it was a question of creating a good seminary at the request of the seminarians themselves, young men wishing to receive a formation which would make them into priests and not social animators or what have you.¹

Pius IX speaks of priests in *Qui Pluribus* and reminds the bishops, as the popes have always done, that the first condition for assuring that the faithful receive effective and exemplary instruction is the good formation of priests: “Priests are the best examples of piety and God’s worship, and people tend generally to be of the same quality as their priests.”

1 Spiritual conference, Ecône, October 10, 1977.

The people will be like their priests. There is an adage in the Church confirming this judgment, in a way: “A holy priest will have a fervent parish; a fervent priest, a mediocre one; a mediocre priest, a bad one; and a bad priest will have nothing left.” Always one level below...!

“Therefore devote the greatest care and zeal to making the clergy resplendent for the earnestness of their morals, the integrity, holiness and wisdom of their lives.”

To have a good clergy, necessarily you have to provide for their formation, that is to say, provide for the establishment of good seminaries. That is just common sense; it goes without saying:

“You know that suitable ministers can only come from clergy who are very well trained, and that the proper training greatly influences the whole future life of clerics. Therefore, continually strive to ensure that young clerics are properly molded even from their earliest years.”²

St. Pius X likewise addresses the bishops: “Let your first care be to form Christ in those who are destined from the duty of their vocation to form Him in others. We speak of the priests, Venerable Brethren. For all who bear the seal of the priesthood must know that they have the same mission to the people in the midst of whom they live as that which Paul proclaimed that he received in these tender words: “*My little children, of whom I am in labor again until Christ be formed in you*” (Gal. 4:19).” It is absolutely necessary, then, to provide for seminaries. Priests “are called another Christ, not merely by the communication of power but by reason of the imitation of His works, and they should therefore bear stamped upon themselves the image of Christ.”³

2 *Against the Heresies*, p. 55.

3 St. Pius X, *E Supremi Apostolatus*, October 4, 1903.

St. Pius X exhorts the bishops, “What will be your first concern? The formation of priests!” And this is quite normal: for what would be a Church without priests, true priests, holy priests? We are now much nearer this catastrophe than they were at the time of St. Pius X... Were he to return, he would insist even more strongly! For there are priests without the spirit of the priesthood, who neither preach the Gospel nor teach the true catechism, or else who marry!

Because the situation is worse today than at the time of the holy Pontiff, being myself a bishop and having no official function, I thought that I could do nothing better for the Church and for the restoration of the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Church and in society than to form priests, and thus to open seminaries and to prepare the professors who would teach there.⁴

2. The Origin of the Society

These were the circumstances showing me that I should do something when I began the Society in Fribourg. I told those men who kept pushing me to do something for seminarians and who were urging me to take care of them: “I’m going to go see Bishop Charrière. I want to see the bishops I know. If His Excellency says: ‘Go ahead!’ then I will really see it as a sign of the will of God.” I said all this even though I did not have any desire to commit myself to such an undertaking because I considered I was already getting old and I couldn’t take on that kind of work at my age. At sixty-five, you don’t take on a work like the Society. I said, “Fine; if Bishop Charrière gives me any encouragement, that means I am just supposed to forge ahead. It’s in God’s hands!” And yet I really didn’t know what would come of it all later.

4 *Against the Heresies*, pp. 10-11.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE CRISIS OF THE PRIESTHOOD*

Bishop Charrière told me, “You have to make the foundation. Find something, rent something in town. Take care of your seminarians; do not abandon them. You absolutely have to. Now you know the situation in the Church, the situation of the seminaries. You absolutely have to hold onto the good traditions.” He was in total agreement and encouraged me very strongly. It was the objective sign that I was supposed to act. I think that if I had said at that time, “I want a seminary and I will make it happen because I think it is useful, I think that the moment has come for the Church”; if I had not asked the bishops whom I knew to be well-disposed, whom I knew had the fundamental qualities of men of the Church, well then, I don’t think the Society would have developed the way it has because it would have been my personal work.⁵

The Priestly Society of Saint Pius X was born providentially in the Church and for the Church. It is a work of the Church. We must not forget that it received the official approval of the bishop of Fribourg. It was he who signed the decree establishing the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X in full awareness of what he was doing.⁶ After reflecting on the question for a long time, he gave me that official act which created a priestly society in the diocese on November 1, 1970.⁷

Between that official recognition of the Society and the feast of All Saints, we can see a profound mystical connection, something extraordinary which corresponds perfectly to the goal of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X. It is part of its very essence, to seek after holiness and to do holy things, through its priests.⁸

5 Recollection, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, December 13, 1984.

6 Decree of establishment of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, November 1, 1970.

7 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 26, 1983.

8 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1990.

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X: A WORK OF THE CHURCH

A few years later, after visiting the Roman congregations several times, I received the enthusiastic approval of the Congregation of the Clergy from His Eminence Cardinal Wright, undersigned by the secretary of the Congregation, His Excellency Archbishop Palazzini, now a cardinal.⁹ Those two men in charge of the Congregation of the Clergy congratulated me on the statutes of the Society and expressed their prayers that the Society might develop for the good of the Church. So this Society was born in the Church, with the authorization of the Church and for the good of the Church.¹⁰

This connection attaching us to Rome from our very beginning is what makes the strength of our Society and we should never lose sight of it. All the attacks of the devil to make us disappear come up against this reality. Some people tried to give a false interpretation to the permission of Bishop Charrière, saying it was only temporary. The first five years supposedly prepared for another step, either a recognition by pontifical law or else a confirmation for an unlimited time under diocesan law.

In fact, we are governed by the law of diocesan societies as a priestly society without vows, with the implicit privilege from the Sacred Congregation of Religious to incardinate into the Society.¹¹

When it became necessary to open a real seminary and I had rented the house at Ecône, a former rest-home of the monks of the Great St. Bernard, I went to see Bishop Adam, the bishop of Sion, and he gave me his consent. This establishment was not the result of a long thought-out plan that I had made, it thrust itself upon me providentially. I

9 Letter from Cardinal Wright, prefect of the Congregation of the Clergy, Prot. N. 133515/1 of 02/18/1971.

10 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 26, 1983.

11 *Cor Unum*, July 7, 1983.

had said, “If the work expands world-wide, it will be the sign that God is with us.” From year to year the number of seminarians increased; in 1970 there were eleven entries and in 1974 there were forty.¹²

Our Society is recognized by the Church as a society of common life without vows and as a priestly society, which means it is grafted onto the trunk of the Church and draws its force of sanctification from the most authentic tradition of the Church and from the pure and living sources of holiness, the same way so many other societies recognized by the Church over the course of the centuries grew into new branches, blossoming and bearing those fruits of holiness which are the honor of the Church militant and the Church triumphant.¹³

3. A Society of Common Life Without Vows

The Nature of the Society

We are a priestly society. The essential character of our Society is its priestly nature. That is its end. Even if we have members who are not priests – brothers and religious – their spiritual orientation should be like that of the priests: turned toward the altar, toward the priesthood. They have to have that focus on the sanctification and the influence of the priests. They have to have that devotion to priests as priests and not simply as human beings.¹⁴

The priesthood which is the finality of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X is indeed the Catholic priesthood. We are not going to look elsewhere for some other definition of the priesthood for our priests of the Society of Saint Pius

12 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 140.

13 *Cor Unum*, February 7, 1981.

14 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 29, 1975.

X. That is of primary importance today, my dear friends; it is of essential importance for the future of the Church and the salvation of souls. The doctrine of the Church cannot change. Even if, sadly, there have been many ideas offered on the subject since Vatican II, it does not change anything for the eternal truth of the Church as regards the priesthood. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Priest, willed to pass down His own priesthood and no other. He willed to pass down His own sacrifice, not just any random sacrifice. And He instituted the Church on His cross, that He might give Her that extraordinary treasure of His priesthood and His sacrifice.¹⁵

The priests of the Society only make an engagement; they do not take vows. They are therefore not religious. They commit themselves to living in common, under an authority, in a society. You have a few other congregations of the same kind. They are called societies of common life without vows. The Sulpicians are that way, and the White Fathers, and so on. They have to practice obedience and make a promise to live in poverty, but they remain proprietors of their own goods and can dispose of them as they wish. Their commitment does not bind them in the same way vows would.

Why did I not ask my priests to be religious and to take the three vows? My own experience led me to that decision. Priests, in their active life, in their pastoral activity, have too many occasions to infringe the vow of poverty in particular, and indirectly the vow of obedience. Given their ministry, they often have to spend money for their different projects, for their parish, for their apostolate. They would run too many risks of breaking their vow of poverty. That is why a promise seemed to me to be better than the vows. In that way, our priests are more free to dispose of their goods and

15 Sermon, Ecône, December 8, 1987.

their money for their apostolate. Obviously they should still practice the virtue of poverty.¹⁶

In fact, it seems to me that if the priest really understands who he is and the sublime, unbelievable vocation which he has, the extraordinary functions which God bestows upon him, then it is only logical and natural that he would practice these virtues of virginity and poverty.¹⁷

For you, members of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, who do not take vows of religion but make promises, you are committing yourselves to imitating our Lord Jesus Christ on His cross on Calvary by the very fact that you want to become priests. Would you dare to say that our Lord Jesus Christ does not show us the example of the virtues of religion, the virtues of obedience, poverty, chastity? Would you dare to say that, because you do not take the vows of religion, you are not held to practicing the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience? It would be a failure to understand your own vocation and the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, by the very fact that it is priestly, is essentially meant to be an imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all have to try to attach ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ, to live of Him, of His spirit, of His light.

Let us try to imagine what must have been the atmosphere of the life in Nazareth: Jesus, Mary and Joseph filled with holiness, virtue and union with God; God Himself present in that house of Nazareth. Yes, truly, all of the creatures who surrounded them were for them so many occasions of rising up toward God, uniting themselves to Him. There is no doubt that Jesus suggested to His parents, with discretion and perfect holiness, how to rise toward God through all of the creatures around them.

16 Conference to the sisters, Albano, November 21, 1974.

17 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 28, 1975.

So let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph to help us to be better detached from the things of this world, from all these temporal realities, and to live more fully our life of faith, to live by those spiritual realities, those eternal realities, and to take advantage of all temporal realities in order to draw closer to God.¹⁸

The Works of the Society

What are the works which fall under the definition of the Society? The most important work is obviously the seminaries: forming priests. I think that is truly what the world is most in need of today. The world needs true priests, holy priests, priests who believe in what they do, who believe in the divine reality of the Sacrifice of the Mass, of the sacraments; who believe in the efficacy of prayer; who have faith in the Virgin Mary, faith in the Church. That is why one of the first goals of the Society is the formation of priests.¹⁹

Where can you go today to receive a priestly education? By the grace of God, young men choose a seminary of the Society of Saint Pius X. They place themselves under the protection of this holy pope, defender of the faith, defender of the truth. So they spend their years of formation in one of our seminaries to get ready to become true priests.²⁰

The whole of youth is not corrupted, as some would have us believe. Many of them hold to an ideal; many others are just waiting to be given one. There are boundless examples of movements that have successfully appealed to their generosity; those monasteries faithful to Tradition are drawing them, and there is no lack of vocations from young seminarians or novices asking to be accepted.²¹

18 Sermon, Ecône, March 12, 1983.

19 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 29, 1975.

20 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985.

21 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 158-9.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE CRISIS OF THE PRIESTHOOD*

I also put in our statutes that our different houses should have the desire, the concern to do good to our brother priests. For example, I could imagine one of our Mass centers publishing a little review for priests which would provide spiritual nourishment for their priesthood, to help in their pastoral duties. That would be excellent. I would go a step farther. If older priests who are a little overwhelmed and alone wanted to live in an atmosphere which would foster their faith and their piety and wanted to end their days in our midst, well then, as far as we are able, we ought to welcome them with joy and support them until their last breath. Wherever we are, priests need to sense that they can come to us for support in their priesthood. Priests often feel isolated in their diocese. We have to have that devotion to the priesthood, because our Society is essentially priestly.²²

The whole point of the Society is therefore first and foremost to sanctify priests, to give the Church holy priests. I think that if we were to turn to all the saints and to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who are all now in the glory of Heaven and singing the glory of God and of our Lord; if we were to ask each one of them what was the means, the path of his sanctification during his earthly life, without the shadow of a doubt he would answer us: the path of sanctification is our Lord Jesus Christ and our Lord Jesus Christ crucified. The way of perfection, the way of holiness, is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.²³

We hope that the Society is willed by God so that priestly holiness might still remain in the world. May our Society be a light in the world so that, by the grace of God, all those who, at our side, have understood the necessity of living the precepts of the Gospel, might seek holiness through prayer,

22 Spiritual conference, Ecône, September 29, 1975.

23 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1980.

renouncement, self-denial, and the cross. My dear friends, that is our *raison d'être*. If we lose the path to holiness, we lose our *raison d'être*.²⁴

The Life of a Priory

For priests who have a ministry, who are thrown into this upside-down world in continual contact with souls desperate for help, souls in search of the truth, in search of the faith, it is obvious that the atmosphere in which they are working is dangerous for the grace of their priesthood. We have to say it: the world and its continual temptations are lying in ambush for our priests. They are living in a dangerous, difficult environment.

So what can we do to protect priests in their priestly life and to make their apostolate easier? The solution is for priests to live in community in a priory.

Given the suffocating atmosphere of this world which is decomposing spiritually and morally, if priests do not live in an environment where they can breathe an air of faith, of prayer, of fraternal charity, well then, they are not going to be able to hold on and their apostolate is not going to bear fruit; hence the capital importance, in my opinion, of creating priories for our priests to live in community.

You are going to tell me, "There used to be holy priests who lived alone, such as the Curé of Ars, and many other priests have been all alone and had a wonderful apostolate, absolutely tremendous." Yes, but the circumstances were completely different. They were not what they are today. The Curé of Ars went to confession to a parish priest who lived a mile or two away. There were good priests everywhere, all around him. Priests were supported by the whole diocese,

24 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1988.

with retreats, recollections, priestly meetings, pastoral meetings. Priests were not isolated. They really were part of a structure which still had a spirit of holiness. The priest was supported by that structure. Moreover, priests very often did try to live a certain community life. There were a certain number of rectories where several priests lived in community. So we cannot really refer back to a period which is not the same as we have today. For us, if our priests in their different ministries are far from a priory, they really do live in total solitude.

It is useless having an apostolate if the interior life is gone. If there are no more spiritual resources, the apostolate is going to be pointless; the apostolate is going to be nothing at all. You can preach, you can go to see people, you can give the sacraments and so on, but there will no longer be that particular grace of the apostolate which comes from a priest who prays, from a priest who is fervent. The life of community and the interior life take priority over the apostolate. It is obvious.

The life of a priory for Society priests is the solution for preserving the grace of the priesthood and the fervor of the priest. A priory is like a stronghold in the middle of a battlefield, with fervent priests who are ready to go out to do battle because they are living a life of prayer, a life of contemplation, a life near the Blessed Sacrament, a life of fraternal union.

I think that I can say in all truth, my dear friends, that, if our priories disappeared, there would be no more Society. It would be over; our Society would no longer exist. The existence of the Society rests essentially on our priories, on that life in community; that life which is a little bit cloistered, I would say, a life protected from the world.²⁵

25 Recollection, Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet, May 10, 1988.

I think that the role of our priories is absolutely vital for our Society and that they are the future of the Church, because of the life of prayer that reigns there.

There has to be a life of prayer which finds expression in the recitation of the hours, the way we do it here. Even where there are only two members we absolutely have to pray that way, and all the more so when there are six, seven, eight, or ten. People have to sense and they have to know that our houses are houses of prayer.

They likewise have to be houses where charity reigns among the priests. When visitors, and especially priests, come to one of our houses, they have to sense an atmosphere of gaiety, of simplicity, of concord; of firm attachment to the truth, but also goodness, charity, indulgence, openness of heart toward those who come to visit, in order to bring them closer to our Lord.²⁶

4. A Society both Contemplative and Missionary

The Contemplative Life

The spirit of the Church is oriented toward things divine, things that are sacred. She forms the one who gives those holy things, *sacerdos*, meaning *sacra dans*; the one who performs holy and sacred actions, *sacrificium*, meaning *sacrum faciens*. She places in his consecrated hands the divine and sacred gifts, *sacramenta*, the sacraments.²⁷

The particular spirit of the Society is to live the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Society is truly centered on the priesthood itself and therefore on that absolutely mystical and mysterious wellspring which is the Holy Sacrifice of the

26 Spiritual conference, Ecône, March 22, 1977.

27 *Cor Unum*, June 4, 1981.

Mass. That is where the priests of the Society truly have to find the source of their sanctification, the source of their holiness.²⁸

We have to see everything in reference to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is the synthesis of faith, hope and charity; it is the source of the life of grace. That is also where we find, every day, the source of our sanctification, of our apostolate, of our preaching.²⁹

It is something we have to really long for, that all of the members of the Society might have a thirst for the contemplative life; in other words, that they might have that simple and ardent gaze upon the cross of Jesus; that all of them might acquire that spirit of prayer, of interior life in the image of our Lord Himself who lived thirty of His thirty-three years far from the world.³⁰

The Society is both contemplative and apostolic.³¹ It is contemplative. You are going to tell me, “Not at all! We are not a contemplative order but an active order.” In reality, there can be no apostolic action without contemplation. Contemplation is not necessarily confined to spending your life in a cloister without any outside activity. That is one way of being contemplative, but it is not the only one. Contemplation is part of the Christian life. It is the life of faith, the life of the spirit of faith. Contemplation consists in living all the realities of our faith. What is the great reality of our faith which the members of the Society contemplate

28 Spiritual conference, Ecône, November 7, 1974.

29 Spiritual conference, Ecône, June 1, 1990.

30 *Cor Unum*, January 14, 1982.

31 In this passage, Archbishop Lefebvre is not considering the distinction between active life and contemplative life from the same point of view as St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* (II^a II^{ae} q. 179); he is inviting the members of the Society of Saint Pius X to make the mystery of the Redemption the heart of their priestly life and the frequent object of their contemplation.

most of all? It is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The members of the Society ought to contemplate our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, like the Blessed Virgin Mary who was there beside Him, and they have to see in that cross the climax of the love of God. Love carried all the way to sacrifice of self could be the very definition of our Lord. Our Lord manifested the love of His Father and the love of neighbor even to the supreme sacrifice, even to the last drop of His blood.

So the members of the Society truly have to be contemplatives, that is to say, they have to understand the immense mystery of the sacrifice of our Lord, the Sacrifice of the Mass. *Mysterium fidei*. The Mass truly is the mystery of our faith. The more we contemplate this mystery, the more we will have the intimate conviction that it is the priestly work *par excellence*.

May everything be centered on the cross for the members of the Society, in their studies, in their prayers, in their meditations. The more we live of it, the more we will correspond to what God is expecting of us. The faithful come and gather around us because they know that the priests of the Society truly have as their goal to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass and to make them participate in that sacrifice by the teaching of the faith, by Holy Communion, by the sacraments. It is a very profound attachment and it is very right. So we need to have that missionary spirit but without trying to spend all of our time traveling and seeing people. Certainly, we need to restore the Sacrifice of the Mass everywhere, but our first goal has to be the conversion of souls.³²

We always have to come back to what is essential in our priesthood. That is how we are going to create an environment, an atmosphere of faith all around us. It is

32 Spiritual conference, Ecône, December 2, 1982.

absolutely indispensable for people to see that. Even people who are not Christian are still breathing a profoundly Catholic atmosphere when they come to our houses. Man was made for grace. So when he senses an atmosphere of grace, he starts breathing real air and he is immediately drawn to it.³³

Contemplation is a gaze of love upon Jesus crucified and glorified and it sets the soul in the hands of God. “*Into Your hands I commend My spirit*” (Lk. 23:46). It is something that can only happen through a complete giving over of our own will into the hands of God – that is to say, through a consummate obedience to His holy will. Obedience first to the will signified by God and by those who legitimately participate in His authority and rightfully make use of that participation; and the will of good pleasure indicated by God Himself through the various events which affect us over the course of our life: sickness, trials...³⁴ Let us meditate on these great teachings of the Church and strive to put them into practice in all the circumstances of our life.³⁵

The Society needs to produce holy priests. It absolutely has to. I am not saying canonized saints; that is something for God alone! If you work miracles one day, fine, you are going to work miracles. But you have to work miracles of the conversion of souls, and that is something you cannot see. You have to work miracles in the confessional, miracles through your zeal for the salvation of souls. Then souls are going to have confidence in you and they will be happy to come to you.³⁶

33 Spiritual conference, September 30, 1975.

34 See Dom Vitalis Lehodey, O.C.R., *Holy Abandonment*, TAN Books, 2004 (originally published 1934), 3rd part, ch. 2-6.

35 *Cor Unum*, June 26, 1982.

36 Spiritual conference, Ecône, January 13, 1983.

Apostolic Zeal

You remember that admirable expression of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, when he is speaking of the mystery of Christ: “*Restore all things in Christ*” (Eph. 1:10). I think that, for a priest, there can be no other ideal, no other motto, than that of our holy patron, St. Pius X: “*To restore all things in Christ.*” We have to be practically obsessed by that necessity, by that need to meditate on the mystery of our Lord and to spread His reign. We have no other goal, no other reason for being priests, than to bring about the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, not only will we be bringing spiritual life to souls but we will also be bringing them all the benefits of temporal life, because all true temporal happiness comes from the spiritual life. If there is no spiritual life at the basis of temporal happiness, that happiness is not going to be founded on the virtue of justice, or the virtue of prudence, or the virtue of temperance. But with our Lord Jesus Christ, with His grace, all of the virtues begin to blossom and Christian civilization appears at the same time, which means politics and the economy according to Christian virtue. That is why everything comes from our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁷

A good priest, who had a real simplicity and who was already very old, once told me, “Excellency, your priests should be like as many ‘St. Boniface’s,’ missionaries called to convert souls all across Europe, called to bring souls back to our Lord Jesus Christ.” You can see his priestly instinct, wanting the priests of the Society to be missionaries like St. Boniface.

37 Spiritual conference, Ecône, February 29, 1980.

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That is indeed what you are going to be, even if some day you are put in charge of teaching in a school or in a seminary. You are going to have to have the desire to convert souls, to bring them back to our Lord Jesus Christ, and in doing so you are going to be rendering an immense service to the Church. And one day, through your patience, your humility, your constancy, the Church will do you justice and will recognize the good you will have done all around you.³⁸

It is because we are zealous for the reign of our King that we faithfully hold to all that has been raised up in the Church by the Holy Ghost in order to express and realize that reign. How is it conceivable that what the Church said and did over the course of twenty centuries would suddenly be no longer true or effective, when it is a question of eternal realities? That is what gives an unchanging basis to the work of the Society. We draw our solidity from the Church, who finds it Herself in the one foundation which is eternal: our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁹

38 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, October 26, 1980.

39 *Cor Unum*, "Letter to the Members of the Society," Christmas 1977.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X WEATHERING THE STORM

1. The Society of Saint Pius X Persecuted and Sanctioned

I considered that it was my duty to form true priests, of whom the Church is in need. I formed these priests in a Society of Saint Pius X which was recognized by the Church, and I was only doing what bishops have done for centuries and centuries. I have not done anything other than what I did myself for thirty years of my priestly life, and which caused me to be made a bishop, apostolic delegate in Africa, member of the Central Preparatory Commission for the Council, assistant to the Pontifical Throne. What more could I ask as a proof that Rome approved of my work and found it useful for the Church and for the good of souls?¹

I was given the responsibility of forming priests during my priestly and episcopal career. When I first went to the missions in Gabon, I was assigned to the seminary of Gabon in Equatorial Africa and there I was forming priests. One of those priests has even become a bishop. Then they brought

1 Sermon, Lille, August 29, 1976.

me back to France. Again I was given the responsibility of forming seminarians, in the seminary of Mortain, with the Holy Ghost Fathers. Then I went back again as a bishop to Dakar in Senegal. Once again I was in charge of forming good priests, two of whom are now bishops and one has just been named a cardinal. When I was at Mortain, in France, I formed seminarians of whom one is now bishop of Cayenne. So I have four bishops among my students, one of whom is a cardinal.² I form my seminarians of Econe exactly as I always formed my seminarians, for thirty years. I rather added a stronger, more profound spirituality, because it seemed to me that young priests were lacking a certain spiritual formation, considering that so many have been giving the world an incredible scandal in abandoning their priesthood.³

In thirty years of episcopacy, I do not know how many priests I have ordained. I have ordained hundreds of them! As superior of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, I was asked to ordain priests everywhere. When I was in Africa, they made me go all over as apostolic delegate in order to ordain priests. I ordain priests today just the way I used to.⁴

And here I am all of a sudden suspended *a divinis*,⁵ soon excommunicated perhaps, separated from the Church, a

2 François Ndong, auxiliary bishop of Libreville (1960) then bishop of Oyem (1962-1982), received his priestly formation at the seminary of Saint-Jean in Libreville. François-Marie Morvan, bishop of Cayenne (1969-1998), was a student of Archbishop Lefebvre at the seminary of Mortain in 1945-46. In the cathedral of Dakar in 1949, Archbishop Lefebvre ordained François-Xavier Dione, who later became bishop of Thiès (1969-1986) in Senegal, and Hyacinthe Thiandoum, who was to be his own successor as archbishop of Dakar (1962-2001) and was named a cardinal in 1976.

3 Sermon, Geneva, July 4, 1976.

4 Sermon, Shawinigan, November 8, 1977.

5 A suspension is a censure which forbids a cleric from exercising his office.

renegade and who knows what else? Whereas the work I am doing is exactly what I did for thirty years. Is it possible? Does the work I did for thirty years also deserve suspension *a divinis*? On the contrary, I think that if I had been forming seminarians back then the way they are forming them now in the new seminaries, I would have been excommunicated; if I had taught catechism back then the way they are teaching it today, I would have been called a heretic; and if I had said the Holy Mass the way they say it today, I would have been suspected of heresy. They would have said I was outside the Church, also. So I find it hard to understand. Something truly is different in the Church!⁶

Because we desired to maintain the Church's millenary tradition in creating true priests for the true Sacrifice of the Mass, we found ourselves in opposition to all those who were wanting to change the priesthood and who were wanting to change its sacrifice in order to do so, by introducing a new form of worship into the Church.

Ever since Vatican II, and it still going on today, they have wanted to create a new ecclesiology, a new Church and therefore a new priesthood.

Obviously there was bound to be a conflict, and since those who wanted the novelties had succeeded in conquering the important posts in the Church, they used their authority to persecute us. In a certain sense it is normal and we should not be surprised, but you have to admit that these persecutions have been harsh; they have been severe and relentless, not only from those who are in Rome, but from all of the bishops who are attached to the Council, who are attached to novelties and so cannot tolerate having anyone in their churches who is maintaining Tradition. They want this new type of priest in their churches and therefore a new

6 Sermon, Lille, August 29, 1976.

sacrifice, another kind of sacrifice, which ultimately is not a sacrifice at all.⁷

We are well aware that this is the reason we are persecuted, and particularly by those who have remained in the Church but allied themselves with the enemy. Unfortunately, among those who are cooperating with the enemy, many now occupy important positions and are trying to use those important positions to force us to ally ourselves with the enemy as well, and to try to draw us into compromises which are absolutely unacceptable: compromises which are contrary to the honor of God, of our Lord and of the most Blessed Virgin Mary. That is what we refuse to accept.⁸

2. The Dilemma Between Faith and Obedience

Priests no longer know what to do; either they obey blindly what their superiors impose on them and lose to some degree the faith of their childhood and youth, renouncing the promises they made when they took the anti-modernist oath at the moment of their ordination; or else they resist, but with the impression that they are separating themselves from the pope, who is our father and the vicar of Christ. In either case, what an agony! Many priests have died of sorrow before their time.⁹

That is why we have to keep coming back to the principles which determine our attitude toward the authorities in place – and I realize that it is a very serious attitude indeed! For a bishop to oppose the highest authorities in the Church, for him to be suspended *a divinis*, is something extremely serious, something extremely painful. How could we endure such a thing, if it were not for extremely serious reasons?¹⁰

7 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 26, 1983.

8 Sermon, Econe, May 18, 1975.

9 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 132.

10 Sermon, Lille, August 29, 1976.

This situation invites us to reflect very seriously on the true notion of the virtue of obedience, which depends as much on the authority commanding as on the thing commanded. It is not enough that the authority be legitimate, for obedience to be justified. The object of the command also has to be in conformity with an eternal good, with God. All authority here below comes from God and can only lead to God. No one here below can force us in the name of obedience to perform actions which are going to turn us away from God.¹¹

Authority in the Service of the Faith

All of the authorities of the Church are first and foremost at the service of the faith: “*Peter, strengthen thy brethren in the faith*” (Lk. 22:32). The tragedy which we are living through today is that the authorities of the Church, taken as a whole, no longer understand that primacy and no longer truly teach the faith the way their predecessors taught it. To know whether or not we are in the Catholic Church, we have to see whether we have the Catholic faith. If we do, then there is no doubt that we are in the Catholic Church.

You are going to tell me that there is the question of unity of government. Yes, that is true, but unity of government is at the service of unity of faith. So if unity of government no longer truly appears to be at the service of the faith, we have to prefer the faith over government because the faith gives us eternal life. It is simple, it is clear. We cannot diminish or modify our faith.¹²

And who today can honestly claim that the faith of the people and of all the Church is not seriously threatened in the liturgy, in the teaching of catechism and in the institutions of the Church?

11 Conference, archives of the seminary of Ecône.

12 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1987.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE CRISIS OF THE PRIESTHOOD*

Go back and read St. Francis de Sales, St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Peter Canisius and Bossuet, and you will be surprised to find that they had to struggle against the same errors. But this time the extraordinary tragedy is that these disfigurements of Tradition are coming to us from Rome itself and from our brother bishops. So if we want to preserve our faith, we are forced to admit that something abnormal is happening in the Roman administration. We certainly have to continue to believe in the infallibility of the Church and of the successor of Peter, but we also have to admit the tragic situation of our Catholic faith, because of the mindset and the documents which are coming to us from men of the Church. Satan is reigning by equivocation and incoherence, which are exactly his weapons and which lead astray men of little faith.

We have to remove this equivocation already, with courage, in order to prepare for the day chosen by Providence to take it away officially through the authority of the successor of Peter.

Let no one say that we are rebels or prideful, because it is not we who judge but Peter himself who, as the successor of Peter, condemns what he is encouraging elsewhere: it is eternal Rome who condemns temporal Rome. We prefer to obey the eternal.

We consider in all conscience that all of the legislation promulgated since the Council is doubtful at the least, and we therefore appeal to canon 23 which treats of this kind of situation and asks that we hold to the previous law.¹³

Those are words which some people are going to consider disrespectful of authority. On the contrary, they are the only words which are truly respectful, because authority can only

¹³ “In cases of doubt, the revocation of a preexisting law is not presumed, but later laws are to be brought in line with older laws and, to the extent possible, reconciled with them” (*CIC*, can. 23).

be for the true and the good and not for error and vice.¹⁴

My dear friends, rest assured that you are in the faith. Do not say, "We are with Archbishop Lefebvre." That has no importance whatsoever. I am nothing at all. You are with the Church because, in our seminaries, you only hear the doctrine of the Church. If you want to be sure, you have the libraries at your disposal, you can look in the Fathers of the Church, in the dictionaries of theology, in all the history of the Church; you can see if the doctrine which you are being taught is truly in conformity with that which was taught for twenty centuries. You can see for yourselves; it is not difficult. We guarantee that we are doing everything we can to give you the doctrine which was taught by the Church for twenty centuries. We are truly founded on the solid rock of the Catholic Church. So do not have any fear and give thanks to God. You can never thank Him enough for the grace which He has given you in choosing you to be beacons of the faith in the world, in order to carry on the Church.¹⁵

We ask St. Peter and St. Paul to maintain in us this faith in Peter. Oh, yes! We have faith in Peter, we have faith in the successor of Peter, but as Pope Pius IX says it so well in his Dogmatic Constitution, the pope has received the Holy Spirit, not to make new truths, but to maintain us in the faith of all time. That is the definition of the pope which was formulated at the first Vatican Council by Pope Pius IX.¹⁶

That is why we are convinced that in maintaining these traditions, we are proving our love, our docility, our obedience to the successor of Peter.¹⁷

14 Sermon, October 13, 1974.

15 Sermon, Flavigny, February 2, 1987.

16 "The Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter that by His revelation they might disclose new doctrine, but that by His help they might guard sacredly the revelation transmitted through the apostles and the deposit of faith, and might faithfully set it forth" (Vatican I, 4th Session, July 18, 1870, *Pastor Æternus*, DS 3070; DZ 1836).

17 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1976.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS: *THE CRISIS OF THE PRIESTHOOD*

Blind obedience is not Catholic; nobody is exempt from responsibility for having obeyed man rather than God if he accepts orders from a higher authority, even the Pope, when these are contrary to the will of God as it is known with certainty from Tradition. It is true that such a thing could never happen when the pope engages his infallibility, but he only does so in a limited number of cases. It is an error to think that every word uttered by the Pope is infallible.¹⁸

In the first half of the Fifth Century, St. Vincent of Lérins, who was a soldier before consecrating himself to God and acknowledged having been “tossed for a long time on the sea of the world before finding shelter in the harbor of faith,” spoke thus about the development of dogma: “Will there be no religious advances in Christ’s Church? Yes, certainly, there will be some very important ones, of such a sort as to constitute a progress in the faith and not a change. What matters is that in the course of ages knowledge, understanding and wisdom grow in abundance and in depth, in each and every individual as in the churches, provided always that there is identity of dogma and continuity of thought.” Vincent, who had experienced the shock of heresies, gives us a rule of conduct which still holds good after fifteen hundred years: “What should the Catholic Christian therefore do if some part of the Church arrives at the point of detaching itself from the universal communion and the universal faith? What else can he do but prefer the general body which is healthy to the gangrenous and corrupted limb? And if some new contagion strives to poison, not just a small part of the Church but the whole Church at once, then again his great concern will be to attach himself to Antiquity which obviously cannot any more be seduced by any deceptive novelty.”¹⁹

¹⁸ *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 148-9.

¹⁹ *Commonitorium* XXIII.1; III.1, in *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, pp. 130-31.

Another question arises sometimes among priests and faithful: “How can we possibly be right and everyone else be wrong?” At a press conference, the reporter from *Le Monde* said to me, “But after all, you are alone. Alone against the pope, alone against all the bishops. What is the meaning of your combat?” Not at all! I am not alone. I have all of Tradition with me; the Church exists in time as well as in place. And then, I know that many bishops think like us in their hearts. Today, since the open letter to the pope which Bishop de Castro Mayer signed with me, we are two to have declared ourselves openly opposed to the Protestantizing of the Church. We have many priests with us. And then there are our seminaries, which are now providing about 40 new priests every year; our seminarians, our brothers, our sisters, our oblates, the monasteries and Carmels which are opening and developing, the large number of the faithful who come to us.

Moreover, truth is not in numbers; numbers do not make the truth. Even if I were alone, even if all of my seminarians left me, even if all of public opinion abandoned me, insofar as it concerns me, that would change nothing. I am attached to my *Credo*, to my catechism, to the Tradition which sanctified all of the elect who are in Heaven; I want to save my soul. Public opinion is something we know all too well: it is what condemned our Lord a few days after welcoming Him with acclamation. There was Palm Sunday and then there was Good Friday.²⁰

A Necessary Resistance

I have been reading *Humani Generis* over the last few days, which Pope Pius XII wrote in 1950. That encyclical is none other than the condemnation of everything which has

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

been put in place since the Council. It is impossible to accept what has happened since the Council and at the same time accept that Pope Pius XII was right in his encyclical *Humani Generis*.

As far as we are concerned, our decision has been made. We obey the popes, the popes of all time, and we are convinced that the reigning pope himself has to be attached in the depths of his heart and soul to everything the popes have said before him, all of his predecessors, even if we wish that he would abolish all of these reforms more quickly. In any case, we are convinced that, by our full agreement with all of the predecessors of the present pope (unfortunately I have to exclude his two immediate predecessors), we are rendering a great service to the Church and that we are indeed following the truth.²¹

Let us hold to the conviction that without the priesthood there can be no Christian life; without the priesthood, there can be no Christian families; without the priesthood, there can be no Christian civilization. Everything depends on the priest. God willed it that way. Our Lord willed it. He told His priests, “*Do this in memory of Me*” (*Lk. 22:19; I Cor. 11:24*). It is to them that He confided the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Eucharist, the teaching of Christian doctrine, the sanctification of souls and the direction of souls. That is the priest.²²

Our Lord wants Catholic priests the way He Himself created them. The pope cannot help but want Catholic priests. The Church cannot help but want Catholic priests. That is why I am convinced that we remain united to our Holy Father the pope and to the Church. It is impossible; the pope cannot help but desire what the Church has desired for

21 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1980.

22 Sermon, Ecône, May 29, 1986.

twenty centuries. So it is absolutely false to say that we are in danger of turning into a sect or falling into schism.²³

We are not schismatics, we are not heretics, we are not rebels. We are resisting that wave of modernism, of secularism, of progressivism, which has invaded the Church unjustly and which is trying to do away with everything sacred, supernatural, divine, and reduce it to human dimensions.

We resist and shall continue to resist, not in a spirit of contradiction or rebellion, but in a spirit of fidelity to the Church, of fidelity to God, to our Lord Jesus Christ, to all those who taught us our holy religion; by a spirit of fidelity to all of the popes who maintained Tradition. That is why we are determined quite simply to continue, to persevere in the Tradition which sanctified the saints who are in Heaven. In doing so, we are convinced that we are rendering an immense service to all of the faithful who wish to keep the faith and truly to receive the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴

3. The Society of Saint Pius X Today and Tomorrow

Serenity and Fidelity in the Combat

Today we are all suffering through a huge ordeal, the ordeal of the Church, because you have to admit that the external situation and in a certain way the juridical situation really is not normal – at least juridical in the sense of purely the letter of the law. So we are not in a normal relation with the bishops and the priests around us, who also have their apostolate. Our relations with them are obviously not the relations we should normally have in the holy Church, so

23 Sermon, Mariazell, September 8, 1975.

24 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1980.

we do not have normal relations with the bishop, normal relations with the priests around us, normal relations with the monks and nuns, with a good number of the faithful, or with Rome itself! It is a terrible ordeal, really painful, because all that is completely abnormal.²⁵

In this time of confusion, we have to keep from taking on extreme positions which do not correspond to reality but to preconceived ideas which are going to trouble souls without helping them see more clearly. We have to avoid that bitter zeal which St. Pius X condemns in his first encyclical: “In order that the desired fruit may be derived from this apostolate and this zeal for teaching, and that Christ may be formed in all, be it remembered, Venerable Brethren, that no means is more efficacious than charity. *For the Lord is not in the earthquake (III Kings 19:11)* – it is vain to hope to attract souls to God by a bitter zeal. On the contrary, harm is done more often than good by taunting men harshly with their faults, and reproving their vices with asperity. True the Apostle exhorted Timothy: *‘Accuse, beseech, rebuke,’* but he took care to add: *‘with all patience’ (II Tim. 4:2)*. Jesus has certainly left us examples of this. *‘Come to Me,’* we find Him saying, *‘come to Me all ye that labor and are burdened and I will refresh you’ (Mt. 11:28)*. And by those that labor and are burdened He meant only those who are slaves of sin and error. What gentleness was that shown by the Divine Master! What tenderness, what compassion towards all kinds of misery!”²⁶

That is why we cannot approve the attitude of those who have only bitter words for their neighbor, who judge him rashly and that way sow division among those who are engaged in the same struggle.

25 Recollection, St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, December 13, 1984.

26 *E Supremi*, October 4, 1903.

It is likewise true that we cannot understand those who undermine and dissipate their moral and spiritual energy in minimizing the importance of prayer, of true devotion to the most Blessed Virgin; weak in the spiritual combat, always ready for compromise, preferring to please men rather than God. They are not the heirs of the martyrs but prefer to sacrifice the truth and our Lord Himself rather than displease their persecutors, especially if those persecutors are dignitaries of the Church.

How I long for the Society not to let itself be tempted either by the first or by the second tendency. Let us be Catholics, true Christians, imitators of our Lord who shed His blood for the glory of His Father and for the salvation of His brothers. Let us possess our souls in patience, in gentleness, in humility, and also in strength and firmness of faith.²⁷

We cannot be priests only halfway. We cannot have a hesitant, stumbling vocation. To lead this combat, to lead this crusade,²⁸ we need men with profound convictions, men who have the faith, who have charity. We need men who are ready to give everything in order to help bring about the kingdom and the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You are living in a time when you have to be a hero or nothing at all. You have the choice: either to abandon the fight, or to fight like heroes. You are therefore going to need the virtues of those heroes. You cannot compromise or you are going to be struck down in the first engagement; you are not going to be able to resist the repeated attacks of the

27 *Cor Unum*, letter to the members of the Society, Christmas 1977.

28 "The priest is the most valorous leader in that crusade of expiation and penance to which We have invited all men of good will. For there is need of reparation for the blasphemies, wickedness and crimes which dishonor humanity today" (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

devil. You can see how the devil tries every possible means to divide us, to corrupt us, to diminish our ranks, even within the Society. He is very clever in creating oppositions, divisions, in order to weaken our forces.²⁹

I beseech you to remain attached to the See of Peter, to the Roman Church, Mother and Mistress of all Churches, in the integral Catholic faith, expressed in the various creeds of our Catholic Faith, in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, in conformity with what you were taught in your seminary. Remain faithful in the handing down of this faith so that the kingdom of our Lord might come.³⁰

Moreover, you are priests of the Society, in the Society, for the Society. Be faithful to that Society which has truly been blessed by God, it is clear! It is obvious! God has to have blessed all of those seminaries, all of those priories, all of those schools. So ask Him to maintain the spirit which you received in the seminary. Do not stray from that path if you wish to continue the good fight to which God is calling you. That good fight is going to sanctify you because it is the combat of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, that combat by which He won His victory. You are going to continue that combat for yourselves first of all, for your personal sanctification, and also to sanctify others. There is your rule of life: the cross, placed before our eyes at Mass, which only continues the sacrifice of Calvary.³¹

And so, my dear friends, be faithful. We need you. Our Lord wants you to go and show the example of holiness, to go and preach the Gospel. You have to give faith to souls and all of the other supernatural virtues. Souls are suffering; they are dying of hunger and thirst. We are counting on you.³²

29 Sermon, Ecône, March 27, 1986.

30 Letter to the future bishops, August 29, 1987.

31 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 26, 1983.

32 Sermon, Albano, December 8, 1980.

Throughout your ministry, you are going to be continuing what the Church has always done in every domain: in the liturgy, in theology, in philosophy, in spirituality, in the direction of souls, in the apostolate. People are going to see and recognize that you are priests of the Holy Roman Catholic Church of all time. That is going to be your strength and it is going to confirm the validity of our position.³³

Let us be true sons of the Holy Catholic Church. Let us fear nothing, neither persecutions, nor disdain, nor all of those words which may be uttered against us for being worthy sons of the Catholic Church. Let us not be afraid; God is with us. Our Lord Jesus Christ is with us and so is the most Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us ask the most Blessed Virgin Mary for her help that she might bring us to honor her divine Son as she wishes. That she might make us strong under persecution, in the face of the ostracism of which we are everywhere the object, from our own pastors, who on the contrary ought to be congratulating us and helping us to maintain the Catholic faith.³⁴

***The Fruits of Tradition
and of the Society of Saint Pius X***

Rather than watching the Church crumble around us, so to speak; rather than standing there powerless before the dismantling of the Church, on the contrary we have the immense joy of seeing ourselves surrounded by all those faithful who refuse to resign themselves. On the whole, we have the joy of being surrounded by families, by children, who want to have schools and other good works. For us, that is a stimulation and an inspiration. We are privileged members

33 Retreat, Ecône, June 1, 1980.

34 Sermon, Ecône, June 27, 1986.

of the Church. Whereas the others are unfortunately running toward their ruin, we, on the contrary, are seeing the Church in all Her vigor, advancing nearly in spite of our own efforts and drawing us to act. It is magnificent!³⁵

We cannot imagine the graces which have been spread by the Society of Saint Pius X since its foundation. I cannot help but think of all our houses which are now scattered around the world, where we have our priests, and of those many places of worship which have been opened all around our priories and which are served by our Fathers every Sunday.

When I think of all those who have received a true priest at their deathbed, a priest who came to help them to die well, to bring them the consolation of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, of Communion, of the Viaticum, I say to myself that these souls have been consoled and prepared to receive the grace of final perseverance.

I also think of all those children, in the schools we have been able to open or encourage by the grace of God, who have been preserved from the contagion of the world and who have kept the faith!

Finally, I think of all those families who gather by the thousands around those parishes which are often very much improvised; little parishes of the catacombs, but where the sanctuary light is shining. These little parishes are always well organized and rendered worthy of the holy mysteries which are celebrated there. Everything is beautiful, even in their poverty, thanks to the care which the priests are taking in faithfully maintaining the rites of the Church. The priests are careful to keep their chapels beautiful for our Lord Jesus Christ, for the most Blessed Virgin Mary and for the holy angels who live there.

35 Retreat, Ecône, June 1, 1980.

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X WEATHERING THE STORM

The faithful who enter can feel the grace of the good God, the grace of the Holy Ghost, and they go back home encouraged, convinced that they have received the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in them by Holy Communion, by the Eucharist. And so the Church continues. That is what God has allowed to happen through the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X. My very dear brothers, that is the Society: schools, priories which are ultimately parishes, chapels spread throughout the whole world.³⁶

Finally, let us thank God when we see that the Society of Saint Pius X is not alone in striving to be faithful to the Church, to the faith of all time and to the Holy Mass, but that there is a multitude of priests, monks and nuns, a little bit everywhere, striving to remain faithful as well.³⁷

We are not the only ones. Everywhere, you find priests who have reacted as we have. But I think that the Society is one of the providential elements which God has brought about as a reaction against that demolition of the Church, against that destruction of Christian institutions, and particularly the priesthood.³⁸

In conclusion I would like to read you the few words which the bishop addresses to the priests at the end of his admonition during ordination, and which are a perfect echo, so to speak, of all the years gone by since the beginning of the Society of Saint Pius X. At the same time, they are a preparation for the years to come which God may choose to grant us.

“Appreciate what you are doing, imitate what you are accomplishing, so that by the celebration of the mystery of the death of our Lord, you might strive to put to death in you all vices and all concupiscence. May your words be a spiritual

36 Sermon, Ecône, June 27, 1980.

37 Sermon, Ecône, June 26, 1987.

38 Retreat, Ecône, September 1, 1982.

remedy for the people of God. May the good odor of your life delight the Church of Jesus Christ. May your discourse and your examples be the edification of the house of God so that the Lord might not punish us one day for having admitted you to this ministry, nor you for having been elevated to it, but may He rather reward us. May He grant it to us by His grace. Amen.”³⁹

Looking Toward the Future

In the future, what are we going to become? We are going to be just be the same! We do not have to search for our path. We cannot do anything other than preach our Lord Jesus Christ, teach the truth as the Church asks us to do.

If God wills – and I think that He does will it – He is going to integrate us back into the official Church, just as we are. There is no question of changing, of going to right or to left. We want to stay in the Church. We want to stay what we have always been since the beginning of the Society because we have no other desire than to carry on the Church.

We have believed in the duty of disobedience, if indeed there is disobedience, in order to obey the Church of all time, all of the popes, all of the Catholic Church. We have believed it was our duty to disobey those cardinals who asked us to adopt a portion of the modernist errors, because we do not want to poison our minds and our hearts with errors that were condemned by our patron saint, St. Pius X. We remain faithful to the anti-modernist oath which St. Pius X asks us to take. They are going to have to accept us with this oath in our hands, or else we will simply remain in our present situation.⁴⁰

39 Sermon, Ecône, November 1, 1990.

40 Sermon, Ecône, June 27, 1980.

We would be very happy to reestablish normal relations with the Holy See, but without changing anything of what we are; for that is how we can be sure of remaining children of God and of the Roman Church.⁴¹

We have to pray today in a very special manner for our official recognition because you can imagine how many we would be here if we were no longer persecuted by certain members of the Holy Church. It would not be five thousand, six thousand people, it would be twenty thousand, fifty thousand people benefitting from the graces which God is giving us, which the Holy Church is giving us – whereas now they are dying of thirst, they are losing the faith, they are confused, they have been abandoned. So we have to think of all those souls and hope that these unjust persecutions which have been launched against us might come to an end.⁴²

Though we do not yet see on the horizon a recognition of the wisdom of our work by the Roman authorities, we continue to see the great blessings of God on all those who hold to the Church's past, and sadly we see the auto-demolition of the Church still being carried out by the progressivists and the modernists. Our duty is therefore to pursue the reconstruction and the renewal of the Church by all the means employed by the Church Herself over the course of Her history.⁴³

We want to be missionaries and we wish that everyone might follow the Catholic Church; that everyone might return to the veritable Catholic Church; that the bishops themselves one day might have to say, "Ah! We are forced to admit that the Catholic Church is to be found today in the communities which held to Tradition. We can no longer deny it: our churches are emptying out; our seminaries are

41 Letter of Abp Lefebvre to Pope John Paul II, Feb. 20, 1988.

42 Sermon, Ecône, June 27, 1980.

43 *Cor Unum*, June 13, 1980.

already empty; we have no one left to ensure the future of the Church. The villages are clamoring for priests and we do not have any more to give them. The faithful are clamoring for theology and we no longer even know where to find it. They are clamoring for catechisms that will teach the true faith and we no longer have any. And where can all that be found? In the communities which have held to Tradition.”

We ask that the bishops come to our priories and say, “Ah! You are our sons, you are our children, we recognize you; you are the best of our faithful, the best of our sons.” But let them not hinder us from keeping the faith, from maintaining the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and our sacraments. Not that! One day or another, justice will be done. We have to have confidence. God cannot abandon His Church.⁴⁴

The future belongs to God and to eternal truth. By remaining attached to them with all our soul we cannot go wrong. Modern Rome will once more give way to the Rome of all time, of whom we are the most faithful sons. That is what should unite us profoundly: the great mystery of the faith! Let us leave aside our minor disagreements. The dark hour which the Church is living through ought to give us very different concerns: prayer, sacrifice, humility, zeal for the salvation of souls, in an ever more perfect union with our Lord, with the Virgin Mary, which is the only guarantee that our efforts will have an effect.⁴⁵

For the Honor of the Church

My dear friends, I ask you to save the honor of the Church, to save the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ, the honor of the Catholic priesthood. That is your role now, young men, to

44 Sermon, Shawinigen, November 8, 1977.

45 *Cor Unum*, “Letter to the members of the Society,” Rome, November 18, 1978.

show that there are still here below souls capable of making the commitment to follow our Lord, to be good priests, holy priests, as the Church desires and as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown us.⁴⁶

There is a magnificent undertaking to be accomplished in conformity with the commands of the apostles: “*Tenetæ traditiones. Permanete in iis quæ didicistis.*” “*Keep the traditions (II Tim. 1:14). Stand fast in those things which you have learned*” (II Tim. 3:14).

The old world called upon to disappear is the world of abortion. Families who are faithful to Tradition are also large families and their very faith ensures their posterity. “*Increase and multiply!*” (Gen. 1:28) By keeping to what the Church has always taught you will be ensuring the future.⁴⁷

The day is coming when these precepts will once again be in honor in the Church, we have no doubt, and I am quite sure that it will be from those families who have remained faithful to Tradition that will come the vocations of priests, monks and nuns – genuine vocations and not simply the appearances.⁴⁸

Pray that many seminaries may open, that they may once more follow the path which the Church has always taken to form holy priests.⁴⁹ I believe that our doing so will be the best service which we can render to the Church.⁵⁰

If only there were more priests, more holy priests throughout the whole world, the world would not be in

46 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, February 16, 1986.

47 *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, p. 159.

48 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1975.

49 “What prayer is more likely to be answered as promptly and bounteously as this, which meets so nearly the burning desire of that Divine Heart? *Ask therefore, and it will be given unto you*’ (Mt. 7:7); ask for good and holy priests and Our Lord will not refuse to send them to His Church” (Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii Fastigium*).

50 Sermon, Limburgershof, April 4, 1975.

the state it is today: filled with hatred, struggles, wars, massacres, concentration camps. What sadness to think that, two thousand years after the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ here below, men are still tearing each other apart, hating one another, creating divisions, killing one another, and now killing millions of children! There have to be more priests, more holy priests teaching the Ten Commandments, teaching the charity of our Lord.⁵¹

My very dear brothers, I will end with this. We appear weak. Indeed, what are the few thousand people gathered here when we think of the whole human race which ought to be adoring our Lord Jesus Christ, flocking to the altars of our Lord Jesus Christ to receive His precious body, His precious blood, His soul, His divinity, in order to be transformed into Him? What sadness to think that billions of souls are far from our Lord Jesus Christ!

Yet, even though we are weak, even though we are so few in the face of the mission which God is asking us to fulfill, for that very reason are we strong.

We are strong by the word of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who said, "*I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world*" (Mt. 28:20).

We are strong precisely because we wish to continue the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, to continue the Church. We are strong by reason of that essential, sovereign connection with everything that our Lord taught us and all that He left to His Church. Strong in our union with all of the elect of Heaven and all of the Catholics of the earth who wish to keep their faith, we are certain of victory. Our desire is not to be able to cry victory against those who wish us ill, who persecute us. No, I am speaking of the victory of our Lord against Satan, a victory which He earned by His cross.

51 Sermon, Lausanne, July 9, 1978.

We are convinced that this victory will spread. It cannot help but spread because the Church has to continue and has to persevere.

As a result, if sometimes you are overwhelmed by feelings of discouragement, by feelings of anguish, nearly of despair at the sight of the Church torn apart, suffering, stricken from all sides; if those sentiments are invading your soul, think that our Lord is with you, provided that you keep the words which He taught to us. It is by those sacrifices that the enemy will be expelled one day from the Church. Once She is no longer infested by people who wish for Her destruction, the Church is going to recover all of Her splendor.⁵²

We must not then give way to discouragement, nor slacken the combat we are waging as we contribute according to our means but with all our strength to re-establishing the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ over hearts, over souls, over families, and over nations. And thus will Christian civilization be restored, because He Himself has given us the assurance: "*The gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Mt. 16:18).⁵³

As for you, my dear friends, who are clothed in the priesthood, you should in fact rejoice that you live in this time. When the world was Christian, priests may not have felt so strongly the need to manifest their priesthood, to manifest the light of our Lord Jesus Christ, to manifest that they were the salt of the earth. When the Christian life was everywhere, churches were filled and people pointed the finger at those who did not attend holy Mass; whereas now people point the finger at those who obey the law of God.

The world has completely changed. As a result, your presence as priests in today's society is even more necessary

52 Sermon, Ecône, June 29, 1978.

53 *Against the Heresies*, p. 241.

than before. Understand this usefulness of the priesthood, which has never been greater, and rejoice in affirming it.⁵⁴

Founded on Tradition, putting our trust in two thousand years of Christian faith, two thousand years of experience of a priesthood turned toward this Sacrifice of the Mass and the eternal truths it contains and which cannot be diminished; putting our trust in all those things, the day must come when we will be victorious over error. I may die tomorrow, but if you continue the Tradition, you are going to be victorious.⁵⁵

Slowly but surely the Church is going to be built back up by your hands. You are going to place one stone upon another; you are going to rebuild this beautiful Temple of the Holy Catholic Church, which seems today to be in a process of total destruction. That is the role you are going to have. May God keep you, my dear friends, in these thoughts which you have today, in your faith, in your hope, in your charity, in all of the virtues which you have acquired over the course of your years of formation.

Stay united to our Lord Jesus Christ. Take care not to be devoured by your activity, lest your activity diminish the presence of our Lord within you. Love your exercises of piety, love especially your Holy Mass and everything else that is going to help you to live out your Sacrifice of the Mass over the course of the day. Above all have a great devotion to the most Blessed Virgin Mary.⁵⁶

May God bless you. May God keep you in these thoughts, in that strength, in that combat against the devil and against those who would like to make our Lord disappear from this world. Be the servants of that crusade of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the reign of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.⁵⁷

54 Sermon, Montalenghe, August 22, 1982.

55 Retreat, Econe, September 1, 1982.

56 Sermon, Econe, June 29, 1984.

57 Sermon, Montalenghe, August 22, 1982.

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X WEATHERING THE STORM

Be the sons of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Eternal Priest and your mother. She will be your consolation, your help, your aid, in difficulties and trials, and also your joy and your strength. May St. Pius X also come to your aid in order to keep you always in the truth, in order to help you avoid all of the modern errors, so that you might remain true Catholic priests, the light of the world.⁵⁸

58 Sermon, Zaitzkofen, July 7, 1985.

ADDENDA

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES

ADAM (H.E. Nestor, 1903-1990): A Frenchman by birth, he pursued his law studies in Turin and then entered the novitiate of the Canons Regular of Great Saint Bernard (1922) in the Valais, Switzerland, where he made his solemn profession (1926). He was ordained a priest in 1927 after his theological studies, which were carried out in part at Innsbruck; he was named professor of philosophy and theology at the motherhouse in Martigny, Switzerland (1927), then master of novices and of Gregorian chant (1928) and rector of Ravoire-sur-Martigny (1934), before finally being elected provost of the Great Saint Bernard (1939). As bishop of Sion (1952-1977), he was assigned to the commission for education during the preparatory work for Vatican II and participated in all of the plenary sessions of the Council. In his parish, he created the presbyteral council, the diocesan pastoral council and the parish pastoral councils, founded eight new parishes and presided over the conference of Swiss bishops (1970-1976). He was traditional-minded and a friend of Archbishop Lefebvre and in 1970 allowed him to open a seminary in Ecône, in his diocese, but then ceased his support in 1973. After his resignation (1976), he became prior of Bourg-Saint-Pierre.

ANDRÉ (R.P. Emmanuel, 1826-1903): As parish priest of Mesnil-Saint Loup (1948), a small village in the Champagne region of France, Fr. Emmanuel instituted the perpetual prayer to our Lady of Holy Hope, trained his parishioners in the liturgy

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and created several confraternities or societies. He founded the *Review of the Greek Uniate Church* (*Revue de l'Église Grecque-Unie*) and composed a number of theological treatises. In 1864 he opened in his parish the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Holy Hope, of which he became the first prior and of which he would later be named abbot (1892). In the 1870's he likewise formed a community of Benedictine nuns. The priest who succeeded him found in Mesnil-Saint Loup a flourishing model of a Catholic parish.

BARRIELLE (Rev. Fr. Ludovic-Marie, 1897-1983): Ordained a priest in 1924 in the cathedral of Marseille, Fr. Barrielle entered the novitiate of the Institute of Parish Cooperators of Christ the King in 1942, where he established a close friendship with the founder, Fr. Vallet, and pronounced his perpetual vows in 1944. He came to Econe in 1971 as spiritual director of the seminarians and engaged himself for life in the Society of Saint Pius X on December 8, 1973. The priests formed by him continued all over the world in their own ministry Fr. Barrielle's zeal for preaching the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius.

CASTRO MAYER (Bishop Antonio de, 1904-1991): He was ordained a priest in 1927 with a doctorate of theology from the University of Rome. He was initially assigned as professor of philosophy and dogmatic theology in the seminary of São Paulo and was then consecrated bishop of Campos in Brazil (1949-1981). He then founded the monthly review *Catolicismo* (1951) and published the *Catechism of Opportune Truths Opposed to Contemporary Errors* (1953), a catechism covering questions ranging from liturgy to politics, economics and society. During Vatican II he was vice president of the *Cœtus Internationalis Patrum*, which was meant as a counterweight to the influence of progressivist groups. In 1983 and again in 1986, he wrote with Archbishop Lefebvre an open letter to Pope John Paul II and was present in Econe in 1988 for the consecration of the four bishops of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X.

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CHARRIÈRE (Bishop François, 1893-1976): Ordained a priest in 1917, Charrière was named vicar of Notre-Dame du Valentin, principal church of Lausanne. He studied in Rome from 1921 to 1923 and obtained his doctorate in canon law from the Angelicum. He was director of moral theology and canon law at the seminary of Fribourg (1924-1945) and taught also at the Institute of Church Law of the University of Fribourg (1931-1936). He founded at that time the philosophical and theological review *Nova et Vetera* (1926) and created the Work of Saint-Justin (1927) for students in missionary countries. As ecclesiastical director of the newspaper *La Liberté* (1941-1945), he published articles which he had written himself, in his column *Problems of Today, Truths of All Time* (1945). He was consecrated bishop of Fribourg in 1945 and was the first biographer of his immediate predecessor Bishop Marius Besson. He was responsible for questions of ecumenism and Church-State relations in the Swiss Bishops Conference and led the sub-commission which created the "Document of Fribourg," the first text of the schema on religious liberty. He was a member of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and likewise participated in the creation of the decrees on ecumenism. In 1969, a year before leaving his episcopal see, he granted permission to Archbishop Lefebvre – who had remained his friend since a stay in Dakar (1953) – to open at Fribourg a house for international seminarians; this was to be the first seminary of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X.

CHAUTARD (Dom Jean-Baptiste, 1858-1935): A Trappist monk, Dom Chautard made his profession in 1879 and was ordained a priest in 1884. He was in turn cellarer of Aiguebelle, Abbot of Chambarand (1897) and then Abbot of Sept-Fons (1899). He wrote several works on the interior life and the apostolate, the most famous of which remains *The Soul of the Apostolate*, warmly recommended by St. Pius X, for whom it was bedside reading.

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CHEVRIER (R.P. Antoine, 1826-1879): A French priest ordained in 1850, Fr. Chevrier devoted himself to the poor. He was an apostle of the Eucharist, striving to bring children to receive First Communion and laying the groundwork for what would become the Eucharistic Congresses. He founded the Catholic school for the poor in Lyon as well as the Congregation of the Priests of the Prado. His teaching is presented in his book *The True Disciple of Our Lord Jesus Christ*.

EMMANUEL (R.P.): see ANDRÉ

GUIBERT (Rev. Fr. Joseph de, 1877-1942): he entered the Society of Jesus at a very young age and was ordained a priest at Enghien (1906). He taught spiritual theology at the regional seminary of Lecce and then was assigned as professor to the Gregorian University in Rome (1922). He was famous for two of his works, *A Lesson in Spiritual Theology* and *A Study of Mystical Theology*. Archbishop Lefebvre remained very marked by his classes. (Not to be confused with Bishop Guibert, coadjutor of Archbishop Lefebvre in Dakar from 1950-1960).

KÜNG (Hans, born in 1928): Swiss by birth, Küng studied at the Gregorian University then in Paris before being ordained a priest (1954) and exercising his ecclesiastical ministry in Lucerne. He was then assigned as professor of theology at the University of Tübingen. A *peritus* at Vatican II, he published among other things *The Council and Reunion* (1961), *Structures of the Church* (1964), and *Infallible? An Inquiry* (1971), a book which called into question papal infallibility. Although Rome withdrew his permission to teach (1979), he went on to play an active role in ecumenical dialogue and wrote among other works *My Struggle for Freedom* (2003), the first volume of his autobiography.

LAMENNAIS (Félicité de, 1782-1854): Lamennais was a French writer who translated *The Imitation of Jesus Christ*, among other works. After delaying several times, he was ordained in

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1816 and became the apologist of ultramontanist against the gallicanist elements in the French Church, as well as of religious liberty. He made of his newspaper *L'Avenir* a rallying point for the liberal Catholic youth of the time and wrote the *Essay on Indifference in Matters of Religion* (1817-1823). When Gregory XVI condemned his teaching and his writings in 1832 in the encyclical *Mirari Vos*, Lamennais left the Church and tended toward a mystical, socialistic humanitarianism. (Not to be confused with his brother Jean-Marie, 1780-1860, founder of the Brothers of Christian Schools.)

LE ROHELLEC (R.P. Joseph, 1883-1930): After brilliant studies at the seminary of Saint Anne in Brittany, Fr. Le Rohellec entered the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers. He held a doctorate in philosophy and was sent to the French seminary of Rome (1904) to finish his studies. After obtaining his doctorate in theology, he remained in Rome as professor of philosophy at the Lateran University and at the French Seminary (1909-1929). An excellent Thomist and a member of the Academy of St. Thomas, he wrote several articles in the *Revue de Philosophie*, the *Revue Thomiste* and *Divus Thomas*. He was likewise a retreat master and the confessor of several religious communities and wrote, among other things, two beautiful studies on the Virgin Mary: *Mary and the Priesthood* and *Mary, Dispensatrix of Divine Graces*. He was remembered for his profound and lively intelligence, avid for the truth, as well as for his open and honest character and his modest and devoted charity.

LOIZEAU (Fr. Eugène, 1907-1964): Originally from the Vendée, Fr. Loizeau began his theological studies at the Seminary of Luçon and then at the French Seminary of Rome (1929-1931). He was ordained a priest in 1930 and completed his theological studies at the Catholic University of Angers (1931-1936). He was then appointed private secretary of the Bishop of Luçon, and likewise became his director of ceremonies, noted for his care and precision; he retained these posts until his death. An

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apostle of confession and a zealous preacher, he was asked to preach a number of retreats and days of recollection for various Catholic Action organizations; at the same time, he directed the diocesan review *Semaine Catholique*, for which he wrote an editorial column every week. He worked as a chaplain for circus performers, and beginning in 1946 was the director of an organization for marriage-preparation retreats, to the great satisfaction of his bishop, of parish priests and of the retreatants themselves, and so exercised a considerable influence in the entire diocese. He was appointed as a *peritus* on family questions at Vatican II and participated in the work of the third session, but died prematurely in a car accident.

LUSTIGER (Cardinal Jean-Marie, 1926-2007): Born in a Jewish family, Lustiger was baptized a Catholic at the age of fourteen. He pursued his studies at the Sorbonne and then at the Carmelite Seminary of the Catholic Institute of Paris and was ordained a priest in 1954. He was chaplain and then director of the Richelieu Center, the parish for the Universities of Paris. In 1969 he was assigned as parish priest of Ste-Jeanne de Chantal in Paris then consecrated Bishop of Orleans (1979). As Archbishop of Paris (1981-2005) he cut a figure as an innovator and a reformer of the diocese. Finally created cardinal in 1983, he was a pioneer in Vatican relations with the Jewish community under the pontificate of John Paul II. He was the author of about two dozen books and founded Radio Notre-Dame, the television channel KTO and the Paris Notre-Dame newsletter.

MERMILLOD (Cardinal Gaspard, 1824-1892): Formed at the seminary of Fribourg and ordained in 1847, Fr. Mermillod was named vicar general of Geneva. He was a renowned preacher and criss-crossed France and Belgium preaching missions for Advent and Lent, as well as priests' retreats. Founder and first rector of the parish of Our Lady in Geneva (1857), he became the parish priest and finally the auxiliary bishop of Geneva (1864). An untiring defender of the rights of God and of the Church,

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he was also a bishop of the people and supported the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded by Frédéric Ozanam. The Protestant state deposed him from his office in 1872 but Pope Pius XII named him apostolic vicar and then bishop of Lausanne-Geneva (1883) residing at Fribourg, and finally cardinal (1890).

PALAZZINI (Cardinal Pietro, 1912-2000): Formed in Rome where he was to spend all of his career, Fr. Palazzini was ordained a priest in 1934. He was under-secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Religious (1956) before being appointed as a member of the pre-preparatory commission of Vatican II (1958), then secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy (1962). He was consecrated a bishop in 1962 and made a cardinal in 1973. In 1971, he encouraged Archbishop Lefebvre to found the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X and advised him in the various steps he had to go through in Rome.

PIO (Rev. Fr. Pio Forgione, 1887-1968): Padre Pio entered the novitiate of the Capuchins in Morcone (Italy) in 1903, pronounced his solemn vows in 1907 and was ordained a priest in 1910. The first priest to have received the stigmata, he was often ill and subject to the attacks of the devil. He was also long persecuted by certain churchmen. An apostle of the Sacrament of Penance, he became the spiritual director of many people and created the Prayer Groups. In 1957 Pope Pius XII appointed him lifetime director of the Franciscan third order and of the House for the Relief of Suffering, which Padre Pio had just founded.

TIMON-DAVID (Rev. Fr. Joseph, 1823-1891): A Frenchman by birth, Fr. Timon-David was formed by the Jesuits of Fribourg and by the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. He was ordained a priest in 1846 and took a vow to serve the poor. He was particularly devoted to the care of children, adolescents and young workers and founded the Youth Movement as well as the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (also known as the Timon-David Fathers) to help in this apostolate.

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WRIGHT (Cardinal John, 1909-1979): Ordained a priest in 1935, Wright was consecrated a bishop in 1947. Bishop of Worcester (1950) then of Pittsburgh (1959) in the United States, he was then appointed as prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy (1969). He officially approved the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X by a letter of encouragement addressed to Archbishop Lefebvre (1971). However, pressure from journalists caused him to distance himself from the Archbishop and he eventually participated in the condemnation of the Society.

ZOA (Archbishop Jean, 1924-1988): A doctor in theology, Zoa was ordained a priest in 1950. Made Archbishop of Yaoundé in Cameroon (1961) at the age of 37 at the request of Rome who wanted to give more weight to the African clergy, he was appointed to the Conciliar Commission for Missions and made vice president of the General Secretariat of the Pan-African Bishops Conference. He stood out as a leader of the African bishops at Vatican II, although he frequently adopted the position of the majority.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Acts:</i>	Acts of the Apostles
<i>Apoc.:</i>	Apocalypse
<i>Can.:</i>	Canon
<i>CIC:</i>	Code of Canon Law
<i>Cor.:</i>	Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians
<i>Col.:</i>	Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians
<i>DS:</i>	H. Denzinger & A. Schönmetzer, <i>Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum</i> , revised numbering.
<i>DZ:</i>	Denzinger, <i>Enchiridion</i> , original numbering.
<i>Dt.:</i>	Deuteronomy
<i>Eph.:</i>	Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians
<i>Ex.:</i>	Exodus
<i>Ez.:</i>	Ezekiel
<i>Gal.:</i>	Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians
<i>Gen.:</i>	Genesis
<i>Heb.:</i>	Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews
<i>Is.:</i>	Isaias
<i>Jas.:</i>	Epistle of St. James
<i>Jn.:</i>	Gospel according to St. John
<i>I Jn.:</i>	First Epistle of St. John
<i>Jer.:</i>	Jeremias
<i>Lk.:</i>	Gospel according to St. Luke
<i>Mk.:</i>	Gospel according to St. Mark
<i>Mt.:</i>	Gospel according to St. Matthew
<i>I Pet.:</i>	First Epistle of St. Peter
<i>PG:</i>	<i>Patrologia Græca</i> of Jacques Migne, 1856-57
<i>Phil.:</i>	Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians
<i>PL:</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> of Jacques Migne, 1844-45
<i>Prov.:</i>	Proverbs
<i>Ps.:</i>	Psalms
<i>Rom.:</i>	Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans
<i>Wis.:</i>	Wisdom
<i>Eccl.:</i>	Ecclesiasticus
<i>Tim.:</i>	Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy
<i>Tob.:</i>	Tobias

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